

THE UNION OF LOVE

BY

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OVE of Christ, like all other love, tends toward union, only more powerfully since the spring of it is grace and is the perfection and summit of love. This is the mysterious fact, mysterious in its manner rather than in its accomplishment. In the Mahayana form of Buddhism all men are supposed to be called to a kind of union which merges their whole personality into the divine being, a kind of union which goes even beyond the hypostatic union in which the manhood of Christ was united to God in the divine Person of the Son. This Eastern conception has great attraction to some Western minds as an interpretation of Christ's personality and our uplifting. They say he acquired unity with God at the Baptism in Jordan, as though a man became God, and not God became man; that we too in our measure could be caught up into this unity. But this is heresy.

Christ was always God from his conception, that is from the instant his human soul was created; nor shall we ever lose our personality by becoming one with God. This, apart from being heresy, can be shown to be unreasonable. There would be sheer waste; for God, if he is God, is already complete and perfect. He can receive no addition. Consequently these people only say in effect that we cease to be, without any gain in God. Whereas God made us as an act of his love, and he loves his immortal creatures to the end; we are of our nature indestructible, so that 'the end' means eternity. Where then does love's union come?

In the case of Christ our Lord, had the Mahayanan idea been realised, had Christ been a Bodhisattva, his human Personality would have had to be destroyed; which thing is inconceivable. Perhaps it was to safeguard this great truth of the Incarnation that our Lady conceived still a Virgin. It was to show that though Christ had all things human, yet there was something divine, even at his birth. He was not just a normal child and then at thirty, after ascetic living, transformed.

We are not joined to God in our personality; that we retain. To lose it would be to cease to exist. Nor do we cease to have our nature. Thus the Christian answer to how we are united to God differs *toto coelo* from the Mahayanan. By grace we lose nothing; what was there is transformed, as the stained glass in a church window is transformed by sunlight, when before it was grubby, dull,

dead; as words are transformed by rhythm, as verse by music; as dead things by life. When grace enters the soul, when Christ takes a share in our life, he does not stultify our minds and our wills. Grace in the soul of man is something created; it is not the Essence of God himself acting, as it were, instead of the soul. By grace we become *like* God. When St Paul speaks of Christ living in us he does not mean that Christ occupies the soul in place of something essential in us. Grace is not Christ, it is a quality, a likeness to Christ in us. God, become man, gives us as near as may be a resemblance to his own divine and human union by giving us grace. The more we trust in the fact of having this new strength the more we may say that we are allowing Christ to live in us.

The union of love between us and God is the deepest or highest mystery, but some light has been given by the mystics and the theologians. We must follow St Thomas and St John of the Cross. By grace our minds are transformed so that they can truly know God, and knowing is our wonderful way of getting into touch with the outside, by which we create within us an image and not merely an image, we re-create reality in a spiritual, unextended way. We know things and people, they are mysteriously reproduced within us, not just as pictures but as beings. By grace, which is a likeness to God in our very life, we have a likeness to God in our life's most fundamental powers, those of knowing and loving. Our minds then have the power of knowing God in a god-like way, as he knows himself, not by hear-say, nor by remote images, nor through his creation, but in a real likeness to his very nature. The joy of this vision is reserved for the future life as until then all our knowing is indirect through and in the senses; they act as a kind of dark curtain, the glass through which we catch only glimmerings. Afterwards 'we shall see him as he is', we shall 'see him face to face', because we shall be 'like to him', 'partakers of the divine nature'. So much we know by faith; but what glory and joy that will give us we cannot conceive; 'eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard'. The mystics cry out in pain even at the touches that they have been allowed. Moses when he came down from the mountain was transfigured so that no man dared gaze upon him, his countenance shone with so unearthly a radiance. The return to this world after reaching to the seventh heaven is to all of them like coming into a living death. They would all wish to be dissolved and be with Christ. Even the sublimest thoughts seem to be as straw, worthless.

All this is the experience of the few, and its fullness is reserved for heaven that is to come. The union of love is for now. We love God

with a love of desire; and this is somewhat satisfied for we have God within us and specially so at Holy Communion. We also love God not just as a result of the urge for our own happiness finding its proper object in God, the infinitely good, but quite simply because God is in himself most lovable. But still we have not analysed this union.

The difficulty is to explain what the mystics mean by their language when describing the union which results from this love. As St Thomas says when speaking of the phraseology of St Augustine's devotion to the Platonists, 'certain people if they were not aware of this might be led into error by his words' (II-II, 23, 2 ad 1). According to him, the prince of theologians, grace is neither God in us, nor Christ in us, but a quality as it were created in the essence of our souls by God; likewise, that charity is a supernatural quality flowing from us, though a gift of God. The following is the language of St Thomas. He is answering the objection that 'just as the soul gives life to the body, so God gives life to the soul, and as it is written in Deuteronomy, "He himself is thy life" (c. 30, v. 20). But as the soul vivifies the body directly, therefore nothing comes between the soul and God. Therefore there is no need for a created grace in the soul'. His reply is as follows: 'God is the life of the soul as an efficient cause, but the soul is the life of the body by being its formal cause' (I-II, 110, 1 ad 2).

'Just as a man by his intellectual power shares in divine knowledge through the virtue of faith, and by his power of willing in the divine love through the virtue of charity; so, likewise, in the very essence of his soul man shares, by a kind of likeness, in the divine nature by means of a certain rebirth or re-creation' (I-II, 110, 4c).

'The gift of grace exceeds every power of created natures, since it is nothing else than a certain share of the divine nature, which exceeds every other nature. And so it is impossible for any creature to cause grace. It follows then necessarily that only God can deify, by communicating a share of the divine nature by a certain sharing by likeness; just as nothing else than fire can set fire to a thing' (I-II, 112, 1.c).

As for the humanity of our Lord, this is how he, St Thomas, explains its part in the work of grace: 'The humanity of Christ, is as it were "an organ of his Divinity" as St John Damascene says (*Orthod. fid.* b. III. cap 15. à med.). The instrument does not do the work of the principal agent by its own power, but by virtue of the power of the principal agent. Consequently the humanity of Christ does not cause grace by its own power, but by the power of

the Godhead to which it is linked, and on account of which the actions of Christ's humanity have saving virtue.'

On the subject of charity St Thomas pursues the same point: 'The movement of charity does not come from the Holy Spirit in such a way that the human mind is utterly passive and in no way a source of its own movement, as when some body is moved by an extrinsic mover. This is against the very nature of the will, the spring of whose action must be within itself. It would indeed follow that to love would not be voluntary, which is a contradiction in terms, since love of its very nature is an act of the will. Likewise neither can it be maintained that the Holy Spirit moves the will to an act of loving as an instrument is moved, which, although it now is a source of the action, still is not within its power to will or not as it likes; that also would eliminate the freedom and therefore the merit of the act, for charity is the root of merit. But if the will is moved to loving by the Holy Spirit, it is also important that the will itself should effect the act. No act is perfectly produced by any active power unless it is within its capacity by reason of some quality of its nature, which will be the source of that act. Therefore, God who moves all things to their rightful ends, to each thing he gave a nature by which it is inclined to tend towards that end, preordained for it by God; and thus "he disposed all things wisely" (*Sap.* 8, 1). It is clear, however, that the act of charity exceeds the nature of the will. Unless, then a new quality (*forma*) is added to the natural power, by which it will be inclined to an act of charity, this act would be less perfect than the natural acts and those of the other virtues; nor would it be easy or delightful. Which is clearly false, for no virtue has such an inclination to act as charity has. Therefore it is especially necessary that for the act of charity there should be in us some permanent quality (*forma*) added to the natural power, inclining it to the act of charity, making its performance easy and delightful' (II-II, 23, 2.)

The general conclusion to be drawn from this is that the union through grace and charity is not in the essence nor in the powers of the soul except in so far as there is in both cases a unity of likeness.

So there is a union between us and God, by his presence within us; by grace which is a close likeness, and by faith which gives us a reproduction of God in our minds, which feeble now, will be a glorious vision in heaven, stripped of the heavy veil of images and ideas. But all these are as nothing compared to the union of Love and Charity in the will. All these prepare for this, are essential prerequisites. In the love of hope, which, seeing what God is, longs for him as the only being capable of slaking our insatiable appetite

for good, we wrap him up in our own personality, consider him as part and parcel of ourselves. We wish all good for God, just as we do for ourselves. We do this not exactly so as to get something out of God, but, having made that initial judgment: that we were meant for God and God for our happiness, it follows that our destinies are locked; God's goodness is lovable in itself, because now we are united to him, his good is our good. It is in that way that the person loved is said to be in the lover.

But in the case of a creature's love of his God, it is the approach of the imperfect, the partial thing, to the whole and perfect and infinite Being. There is no thought at times of self but a relish of the mind, an entrancement of the soul, unable to help itself, before the unending beauty and goodness, perfection and glory, of God. This is perfect charity. The will goes, as it were, out of itself to God.

En una noche oscura
 Con ansias en amores inflamada,
 Oh dichosa ventura!
 Sali sin ser notada,
 Estando ya mi casa sosegada.

It is no longer a drawing of God into our puny orbit, but an approach, a sallying forth, a pilgrimage into the realm of God. We try and make our will, our desire, our vital movement, conform to God's will; it is a union of intention of action, not by unity or absorption, but by co-operation, a going hand in hand, a walking with God in the cool of the evening. So that, as we live by God's will, it is his will that we do; and he, unbelievable though it seems, does ours. The whims of the saints are done despite the frequent insignificance of their requests, as for instance when Soeur Thérèse in her sweet simplicity asked for falling snow and got it.

'Now over and above this likeness of faith, there is another likeness of love in the soul of the lover and it is in the will. In this, the likeness of the loved person is drawn in such a way and so closely and so vividly, when there is a union of love, that it is true to say that the loved person lives in the lover, and the lover in the loved one; and love gives such a likeness by the transformation of the lovers that it may be said that each is the other and that both are one. The reason is, because in the union and transformation of love the one gives possession of himself to the other, and thus each leaves himself and exchanges himself for the other; and thus each one lives in the other and the one is the other, and the two are one by transformation of love. That is what is meant by St Paul when he says: "But I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me". For by saying "but I live, now not I", he meant that although he lived, it was not now his life, because he was transformed into

Christ, and because his life was now more divine than human; and therefore he says that it is not he that lives, but Christ in him.'

This transformation that takes place is in the life of the Christian rooted in his substance. We mean that this transformation into the life of Christ—our activity, our vitality, our expression—the more it is submissive to God, the more his it is. We become the *willing* instruments of God, he acts through us. St Paul did not say, 'now not I *am*, but Christ *is* in me', but he used the key word 'live'. Thus we preserve our being and our will but our acts become God's, though our acts also, because we have become God's. As St John of the Cross says: 'For they, transformed in God, will live the life of God and not their own, and yet even so their own life, because the life of God will be their life' (loc cit: §8). The consummation of this will come only in heaven, and even St John of the Cross does not venture to describe its ineffable nature.

Even on earth this love is in a category on its own. It has nothing of self in it, but is a clear choice of the intellect, of our mind. Behold the goodness of God, immense, unfathomable, gentle and strong, so all-embracing as to leave nothing to be desired. Blindly by faith, we now know this, and in faith we wish for the blessedness to continue, and we place ourselves into the plan devised by Love itself. Christ, our God, too loves in return, with no gain to himself, but in all benevolence. '*Deus caritas est.*' He is the Son sent by a loving God.

Thus the Incarnation makes love between a creature and its God possible. God is here, so that we may converse together, and know each other's will; God is here in human form so that we may dare to think he cares for these little human things. In us we have this gift of grace, this God-likeness, so that our loving and knowing God become no idle boast or vain desire, or wishful thinking; God is now within our grasp. Thus comes the likeness in us of God, not the mere footprint of God, the distant echo in far off valleys, but true likeness of nature, and so of the thing known. From this springs a love that is insatiable, that sends men to the uttermost corners of the earth, and to complete burnt offerings of all else, including themselves, to gain nought else but God. Then finally, beholding so much splendour, even the darkness, the dawn of the sunrise, the human heart goes out towards that Dawn, goes to the love that has known no limit, the love Christ had for us, and joins itself to Christ and submerges itself in the Will and Perfection of God, happy to share even in a tiny way in the movement of the spheres, in the rhythm of God's love expressed in his Creation. 'Come, Lord Jesus.' For Christ is God, and God Love.