

to the hungry. If you who are rich in virtues recognize another who is wanting in them, if you do not spurn your own flesh in him, which is a reminder to you of your former weakness, but draw him to your heart with arms of compassion, you have opened the door of your house to the needy. Approach, counsel, console, soothe him whom you see exposed to temptations and you have covered the naked. A man purged by such fasting, recreated by such almsgiving, enters the inner room of his own heart, closes the door of all his corporal senses, and pours out his soul, and then crosses over into the place of the tabernacle, leading the way to God's house amid cries of joy and thanksgiving, and all the noise of holiday. For the great festival is celebrated not only with men but with angels, not with the sound of the mouth but with jubilee of soul, not with carnal delights but with spiritual feasts. Therefore, by fasting we macerate the body so that through the fruit of good works we may be refreshed in soul. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



## DETACHMENT

By E.B.

**I**N that most helpful little book by Fr Bede Jarrett, *No Abiding City* he gives us the key to what is meant by 'Detachment'. We are pilgrims in this world, travellers; 'here we have no abiding city', and so we must 'travel light', as the saying goes. There is a great temptation in the modern world to accumulate more and more things—they all seem necessary somehow, and the advertisements in any paper or periodical that we open try to persuade us that we *must* have this or that—and so perhaps we get it and then persuade ourselves that we cannot possibly do without it.

Or if we are not attached to 'things', we may become attached to sitting in a special chair, a special way of doing things, a special seat in church. We can become attached to our comforts and our food. In religious life, we can become attached to some devotion,

some particular way of singing the Mass, or to some 'feelings' we experience when taking Holy Communion or saying some prayer, and then one day the feelings are taken away and we realize that it was the 'feelings' to which we were attached and which were so important, and not Holy Communion or prayer.

Or we may become attached to some idea—we cannot give it up, and it means so much. Anyone who does not agree with that idea is wrong, or deliberately obstructive, and so on. Attachment to the idea means more than the idea itself—more than what it stands for. For instance, we might become so attached to the idea of Temperance or Anti-Vivisection, that were they to come about universally, we should be at a loss until we had found some other idea to become attached to!

It is perhaps necessary to state here that there is no reason why we should not have some possessions, or prefer one seat to another in church, but we must not become inordinately fond of them, must not make them *extensions of ourselves*, because if we do that then our heart is centred in them and not in God. A very succinct description of detachment appears in the *Catholic Encyclopaedic Dictionary* which is worth quoting in full: 'True detachment consists not in a negation of affection for creatures (all of which have their part in God) but rather in an enlightened and just sense of proportion; it is exercised in respect of material success, wealth and good fortune, not because these things are not good in their kind and degree but on account of their difference in kind and relative unimportance in the destiny of the human being as a whole. But detachment of will is the hardest, most necessary, and most meritorious detachment: the fully detached person leaves *himself* unreservedly in God's hands, "not as I wilt but as Thou wilt": he asks nothing and refuses nothing.'

The core of the matter seems to be, then, a sense of proportion, a realization of the 'relative unimportance in the destiny of the human being as a whole' of the whole gamut of things to which we can become attached, and the supreme *importance* of being wholly attached to God and to his will.

For ordinary people, and most of us are that, this is not easy. It involves, first of all, an act of the will, a conscious and deliberate 'letting go'. We can start in a small way by giving up some favourite habit, or forgoing some pleasure. But it is very important to know *why* we do it. It must not be for any negative

reason, but in order to 'travel light', to centre our hearts and minds and wills on God and not be side-tracked by all these attachments which tend to hold us back from that. Christian poverty has the same end in view—how hard it was for the rich young man in the gospel, he was too attached to his wealth to 'sell all and come and follow me'. Christ knew, only too well, how the possession of worldly goods tended to hold men back from following him. Over and over again in the Gospels he drives home this point.

Undue attachment to people—our friends, our children, our counsellors—can be the source of so much suffering. It must be stressed again that detachment in this theological sense, does not mean not *caring* for people, not loving them, but our caring and our loving must be disinterested and quite detached from self. Who has not heard of the possessive mother, who cannot 'let go' her children, who still thinks of them as 'hers' and not people in their own right? If only she could detach *herself* from *them* she would find that they are 'hers' in a very much more real sense. And the same is true of friends.

In this connection it is helpful to think of our Lady and the wonderful—perhaps supreme—example we have in her of this detachment. From the very first, when she knew she was to bear God's son, she had to be completely detached from herself and even her own body. She was to be his chosen vessel, she was to have the supreme grace of bearing, within her womb, God's child. I think all women, when they are carrying a child within them, must share to some extent Mary's detachment. They do, in a lesser degree, have this wonderful sense of being used by God for a purpose far greater than the mere fulfilment of their own desire to have a child. But this feeling becomes obscured and is eventually lost. Mary could never forget it—her son was in trust, as it were. She had all the great love that a mother has for her first-born, as keen as, if not keener than, any mother throughout the ages; yet she was called upon to see him suffer in a way no other mother has ever been called upon to do. Her supreme detachment of *self* from her love of him was shown in her willingness to share, right up to the very end, in all his sufferings. If her presence could give him comfort, then she would be there, whatever it cost her. If she had thought of herself at all, then she would have said, as any woman quite understandably might have done, 'I cannot bear to see him suffer so, I will stay away.'

Thus we come back to where we started: we are pilgrims in this world, 'here we have no abiding city'. This knowledge should give us freedom—that freedom of heart and mind and will to be centred in God, freedom to fix our gaze on things eternal and thus come home in the end and possess all things in him, our Abiding City.



## A SHORT CONFERENCE ON THE OCCASION OF A NUN'S FIRST PROFESSION

ADRIAN DOWLING, O.P.

*Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come; my dove in the clefts of the rock.*

CANT. 2, 13.

**G**OD gives us a very beautiful image here, the image of the dove invited to fly to him, its white wings straining, soaring upwards. We are to fly to Christ. 'Draw me'—make me fly to thee. But the dove shelters in the clefts of the rock. We are clogged down, seeking refuge in the good things of God. Things outside us: outward possessions and attachments, ties holding us earthbound; things inside us, other loves than God, our own selves, our own will.

Today you engage yourself to Christ. This service is for a bride of Christ. It is your aim ultimately to be wed to Christ, to know no other love. But today is, as it were, the day of your engagement. We come to witness that and to pray that you may be faithful. The vows you are about to make are not negative things. They are not inspired by a hatred of God's gifts, but by a desire to go beyond them to the giver. That is not an easy road to take. On the contrary, it is an impossible road without God's mercy, and you have just admitted that. You have told us you seek God's mercy. That must be your aim all the days of your life. If we would presume to leave the clefts of the rock it is to God we must fly, we must find shelter under the wings of his mercy. (Ps. 90, 4.) Christ your Spouse is the Suffering Servant: you must think of that each day you put on your black veil.