

thing. The integration of the soul—that is, the gathering together of all its powers and forces under the influence of grace, and directed towards the supreme and eternal values—is the end and steady aim of the whole spiritual combat. When that is achieved, everything is achieved. For the man who has arrived at that point knows that by the grace of God, seconded by a constant and faithful correspondence on his part to grace, he has found his soul. Then can he say with St Paul: *I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me.* (Phil. 4, 13.)



RELIGIOUS VOCATION—A MOTHER'S PART

E.B.

WHEN our Lady consented to bear the Christ Child, conceived by the Holy Spirit, in the natural order of things she was in many ways no different from any ordinary mother. The child must grow in the womb, be born, and then, as a helpless babe, and for long after, be fed and cared for. Although there is always a very special relationship between mother and child, partly physical, partly spiritual—the two are inextricably interwoven—and in a lesser degree between the father, the child does not *belong* to either parent. The parents cooperate with God and the result of their union is another human being, quite unique, entrusted to them by God, and in trust for God. Our Lady and St Joseph knew this very well, and although no comparison can be made with them since they were singled out by God to care for his incarnate Son, nevertheless they serve as the pattern for the ordinary human family.

Nowadays more and more of this parental care is taken over by the state with a corresponding lack of a sense of responsibility by the parents. Unless there is a very strong bond of affection between members of the family, and this again is founded in a deep love of God and in membership of his Church, the family unit disintegrates, with disastrous results. Much has been written about this and there is no need to go into it here. If it does not disintegrate it sometimes happens that it is held together by a subtle tyranny—the tyranny of the possessive mother—and this is more likely to happen in the small family of today.

No parent can *demand* love from his or her children. No parent has a right, in the name of love, to wield power over them. Real love, unselfish love, always wants to *give*. Hence those parents who love their children in this way, want them to fulfil the potential character of their personalities in the way that is right for them, in the way that God wants them to fulfil it. This may mean, and often does, a complete physical severance from the home after maturity, and it is just at this point that the mother can choose to co-operate or oppose.

Mothers are past mistresses at self-deception where their children are concerned! They can always think up a number of very good reasons why Jane or John—particularly Jane—should not leave home for good and ‘enter religion’. It needs a degree of real love and of self-honesty, acquired at the foot of the Cross, to realize that God may want her to make the sacrifice of Jane to him, and that she does not *want* to make it (at first) but that she will *because* he asks it and because it seems to be his will for Jane. Later on, with the help of the Holy Spirit, she may come to see that she is again co-operating with God in the birth of her spiritual daughter, meaning in this sense a daughter who has a ‘vocation’, as we say, to the religious life. This co-operation in itself is a very high privilege and a ‘vocation’ in its own right for mother, or at least it can be if the initial sacrifice is accepted and Jane’s religious vocation fostered and encouraged—though not forced or persuaded into any particular channel: that is for the Holy Spirit to reveal in due course. Marriage is looked upon as the *natural* vocation of any daughter and most mothers look forward to this with mixed feelings, it is true, but certainly for the most part with joy. The *supernatural* vocation of marriage to Christ is so often, nowadays, looked upon with dismay. It is thought of as *unnatural* (which in a sense it is, only because it is above nature), that it warps personality and is frustrating and so on. No thought of the joy (yes, *joy!*) of giving a daughter to God seems to cross her mind, only her loss (which is no loss): no thought of the great grace which is given to both her daughter and herself and the privilege of being asked by God for the greatest gift that she can give.

The worldly life offers so many and varied superficial attractions and comforts which we take for granted nowadays and look upon as necessities. It seems that so much must be given up

by anyone who embraces the religious life and all of us tend to lay undue emphasis on the having, or not having, of material things. We forget the war years when we cheerfully and easily did without so much and were none the worse for it. Mothers tend to fuss over their daughters: she will not get enough to eat, she will be home-sick, she will be wasting her talents and her training (forgetting that she may just as easily be 'wasting' these in marriage!). But such an attitude as this is unworthy of her calling as the mother of a postulant; she must 'cast her cares upon the Lord' and trust him. She must give up *absolutely* all claims upon her daughter, she must renounce any desire to persuade the postulant into trying her vocation in an order for which she herself may have a preference, she must be prepared to stand aside and let God's will be manifest through the promptings of the Holy Spirit. She will not find this hard to do so long as she is not thinking of herself in all this but only of God's will.

Lastly, she will not *lose* her daughter, who will be bound to her with *far stronger* bonds of love, and of the spirit, because the two of them will be united in the common bonds of love for our Lord and in service for him, in a higher degree than might otherwise be the case.

Therefore, just as our Lady had a special responsibility entrusted to her as Mother of our Lord, which she knew of and accepted together with St Joseph, so also has the mother of a would-be postulant. It is not to be taken lightly, this responsibility. The religious orders have great need of vocations—the big Vocations Exhibitions that we stage, try to bring this truth home to us. That is the significant word—'home'. But it is unlikely that our Lord's call 'Come, follow me' will be heard first at an exhibition, which will stimulate great interest and thought, plant a seed which may germinate and then flower in the heart later on at home. It is there that the mother must accept her part, and as we have seen it is a *crucial* part (*crucial*—Latin *crux*—or cross—you see the Cross comes into everything!) and nurture as a tender plant this silent call from our Lord until this call develops into a strong commanding voice and a true vocation opens out into full flower. Until this is realized by mothers in general, many vocations may be lost.