

the practical Basil and the dreaming Gregory of Nyssa, drawn together again by Evagrius and Diadochus and the consequent monastic developments of the fifth century, which Cassian brought to the West to be inherited by St Benedict, and alongside this the powerful mystical elements of Denis in the East and Augustine in the West, leading to a complete body of spiritual teaching at the end of the patristic time. In the East the contemplative spirit continued to be gathered together by the monk John Climacus (†600) and the important work of Maximus the Confessor (†662), who summarized the teaching of the Eastern masters with a new particular emphasis on the Person of Christ, who unites all things in himself, as the Church unites many within herself (*Mystagogia* I; PG 91, 664-5).



THE PERFECTION OF RELIGIOUS

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THERE are three kinds of religious. The first refuse their senses nothing. If they are cold, they warm themselves; if they are hungry they eat; if the thought of some diversion comes to mind, they take it without deliberation; they are always intent on self-satisfaction, and do not know what mortification is in practice. They perform their duties without any interior spirit, without relish and without fruit.

These are in danger of mortal sin. Sometimes they are in a state of sin without realizing it, because they never seriously enter into themselves and their examination of conscience is extremely superficial. In this state of inattention innumerable objects pass through their mind each day, their heart is carried away and seems intoxicated with the turmoil of exterior matters; it is ceaselessly deceived by the illusions of nature and the devil, and it blindly follows their impulses.

Such religious can often be in greater danger than layfolk. The latter know very well that they sometimes fall into mortal sin and so they distrust themselves; their very fear makes them cautious. But religious trust to their state of life, they rely on the false presumption that mortal sin is very rare in the religious

life, and they live in a false sense of security which makes them fall without realizing it. To charm away their own remorse of conscience they spin a tissue of lies which flatter them in their error. This state of mind is dangerous because they do not realize they are in sin.

The second kind of religious avoids the excesses of the first; they refuse themselves satisfactions they consider unnecessary, but let themselves be deceived by the appearance of good. They make plans in accord with their own inclinations, and then look round for virtuous motives to colour their choice and justify their conduct. They appear to accomplish their duties carefully, but they have little interior application and recollection, they give their senses too much liberty, and neglect to be vigilant over their thoughts and desires. They are full of imperfections and venial sins and are often in danger of mortal sin. Because they are weak and draw little strength from their life of prayer, they allow themselves to be overcome when it is easy to be victorious, provided a proper vigilance is maintained.

The third kind of religious are perfect: they are stripped of every kind of desire and are detached from everything: they are therefore content with everything and will only God's good pleasure. They unite exterior exactitude with interior application, they are vigilant over their thoughts and desires and keep their peace of soul, they practise recollection as much as obedience allows them. They receive three special favours from the Holy Trinity: from the Father an almost invincible strength in action, sufferings and temptations, from the Son rays of resplendent truth which shine ceaselessly in their souls, and from the Holy Spirit an attractive fervour, sweetness and consolation.¹

There are four kinds of religious: first of all the perfect; then those who are evil and proud, vain and sensual and opposed to all regularity; thirdly there are the tepid who are relaxed and careless; lastly there are the virtuous religious who are tending to perfection even if perhaps they may never reach it.

The most holy religious Orders as well as those which are relaxed can contain religious of these four kinds, but with this difference: in an Order which has fallen from its first fervour the

¹ The preceding paragraphs are from P. Rigolevc's notes of P. Lallemand: what follows is from P. Surin's.

majority are tepid, and the remainder is composed of several who are evil, a small number who try to acquire perfection, and extremely few who are perfect. But in an Order where religious observance is still in full strength, the bulk of the community consists of those who are tending to perfection, while the remainder includes several who are perfect, a few who are tepid, and a very few who are evil.

An important observation can now be made. A religious Order is falling into decadence when the number of the tepid begins to equal that of the fervent, that is to say, those who try each day to make fresh progress in interior prayer and recollection, in mortification, purity of heart and humility. Those who do not care for such things must be considered tepid even if they avoid mortal sin, because they infect many others and are very harmful to the whole community. They themselves moreover are in danger either of not persevering in their vocation or of falling into interior pride or some other grave sin.

The duty of religious superiors is to act in such a way that by their admonitions and good example, by their prayer and private conversations their subjects remain in the class of the fervent who tend to perfection; otherwise they themselves will be punished for it and their punishment will be terrible indeed.

Four things are prejudicial to the spiritual life, and on them are founded those evil maxims which creep into religious communities. They are:

- * Esteem for natural talents and purely human qualities.
- * Anxiety to make friends for merely human considerations.
- * 'Political' conduct based on human prudence alone, a crafty spirit contrary to the simplicity of the Gospel.
- * Superfluous recreations through conversations or reading which give the mind merely natural satisfaction.

Three worldly kinds of evil desire are easily found even in well-regulated religious Orders:

- * *Ambition* through desire for promotion in outstanding obediences and offices,
- * *Avarice* through desire for acquiring and accumulating learning,
- * *Impurity* through desire for ease and bodily comfort, and through sensuality.