

asked for a sign: 'I will give a sign in you.' (September 20th, 1920.)

Many have experienced the therapeutic effect of the words of Christ spoken to the little Spanish Sister for the good of souls. In all submission to any future judgment of the Church I think it safe to say that in these pages our Lord appears to have unveiled to us his heart, the Sun of Justice, and that there is healing in his wings.



## RELATIONSHIP<sup>1</sup>

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**Y**OU may have wondered why this title consisted of the word relationship in the singular, instead of relationships, in the plural. There is a significance in it. The baby is born into one relationship, that with the mother, and ends up, if all goes well, in one relationship, that with God. All that happens in between is a development from this first simple relationship and at the same time a preparing for the very different sort of simple relationship in which we all hope to end, and for which this life on earth is a preparation. It is intended today to examine the psychological development of relationship in this life in the light of its function in preparation us for the final relationship in the life to come, with special reference to the position of young students in their last few years at school.

The relationship of the blessed is a simple relationship, but it is different from the simple relationship between child and mother, as it contains within itself, not potentially, but actually, relationships with all the members of the mystical body. The blessed in heaven love God with one simple, vital, act, but the simplicity is that of richness and comprehension. In the first place they are caught up into the life of the Blessed Trinity, the life of the three Persons who are one God. In the second place the love of the blessed extends to all God's friends, but not apart from or separate from or additionally to their love of God. In their one vital act of love towards God, in their union with God, is included their love towards and their union with all God's friends.

<sup>1</sup> The substance of an address given on April 10th, 1958, at The National Conference of Religious Assistants and Chaplains of The Young Christian Students.

When a baby is baptized it receives the gift of charity, and if it dies immediately afterwards it will, by virtue of that gift, be able to love God and all the members of the mystical body, as do the rest of the blessed in heaven. We are in a better position than that baby, because we have the opportunity of developing, and we can be prepared by God's grace to love him with a much greater love than if we had died immediately after our baptism. The whole of our life here on earth may be regarded as the development of our capacity to love God.

St Paul tells us that invisible things are to be understood from the things that are seen (Rom. i, 20), and although he is speaking rather in terms of reasoning to knowledge about God, the same thing applies to the way we learn to behave towards God. Our Lord appeals to his hearer's knowledge of the love between children and parents when he points out to them (Luke xi, 11) that on a purely natural level they have the goodness to give their children what they need, and do not hand them stones when they ask for bread, or snakes instead of fish. It is not a question of abstract knowledge; he is appealing to their experience of trusting their parents, and is ready to take their capacity of trusting, learned through their natural responses to their parents' loving care, and to raise it, if they will, by grace, into the supernatural power of being able to trust God.

Without the relationship between parents and children we should be unable to think of God as our loving Father, or to develop an attitude of trust towards him. When St Paul talks of the fatherhood of God, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and earth is named (Eph. iii, 14), he is explaining that human fatherhood is a reflection of the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Blessed Trinity. That comes first, and all human instances of fatherhood are a reflection of it. Knowledge works in reverse; only because we already have experience of our relationship with our parents can we be taught about the Father and the Son in the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. We could not rejoice at being God's adopted children did we not first know the joys of relationship on the human level.

There are two ways of loving, and two kinds of relationship which it is necessary for a person to learn in order to be able to love God; the sort of relationship which obtains between superiors and inferiors, and the sort of relationship which obtains between

equals. The love between parents and child is different from the love between friends, or the love of marriage. Both kinds of love have to enter into our love of God, and so we need to experience the two kinds of relationship in which these two kinds of love arise. We have with God a relationship of inequality, because we are created by him, and are his creatures. This relationship never ceases or loses its point; however much we are caught up into the life of the Blessed Trinity, we shall always remain God's children, dependent on him, and owing him the loving adoration of a creature. But we are also to have with God a relationship of equality. He has called us not servants, but friends (John xv, 15).

The relationship of inequality comes first in time, but the relationship of equality is higher. A man must leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife: we are God's servants first, and then raised to be friends. In heaven these two kinds of love will be fused into one, but living as we are in time, and having to do one thing after another, we have to think of God more or less at one moment as claiming our adoration and obedience, and at another as inviting us to friendship. When we come to consider the human relationships which help us to learn how to love God, we find that they are even more sharply divided. God's perfections are reflected in this world by being broken into many facets, and his loveliness is no exception. It is from different people that we have to learn the different aspects of God's goodness, and with different people that we have to learn the two kinds of relationship that we need to know, that of trusting loving dependence, and that of equality and choice.

It is in the relationship of inequality that we learn the different elements which enter into the capacity to love. Respect can only be learned, in the first place, in a relationship with someone who is evidently bigger, stronger and better. Self-respect can only be learned, in the first place, by being valued and cherished by someone greater than oneself. The nature of affection can only be discovered through responding to the signs of affection given by another. And only by loving someone, first, as the provider of those things that one needs, can one go on to love that person as good in himself or herself. Only in relationship with someone who has already experienced these things, someone who knows how to demand respect, and to show it, to give affection, and encourage the response to it, can the child learn to love.

At first the tiny child has no sense of people as people, and its first beginnings of relationship come from its associating various experiences with the person who is most in contact with it, usually its mother. Once it can in some sense distinguish its mother it is ready to start developing a relationship with its father too, and so grow up in intimate relationship with an adult of either sex, a normal preparation for adult life. The presence of the father prevents too exclusive an attachment to the mother, which might result in the child's first relationship being also its last, and the child grows up always having known, as it needs to know, that relationship between parents is deeper than that between parents and child.

This development of our natural capacities is assisted by the virtues infused at baptism, and at the same provides us with the experience we need in order to develop a supernatural relationship with God. The gift of faith is infused at baptism, but the flowering of this gift is normally dependent on the child's being taught, by human means, the truths of faith to which it has the supernatural capacity to give assent. So, too, with charity. The coming into act of the virtue of charity infused at baptism normally depends, among other things, on the development of human relationships.

The gospels give us an illustration of the way in which grace works through human circumstances, in the story of the centurion. His life was lived, he told our Lord, in a setting of authority (Matt. viii, 9; Luke vii, 8). No doubt he had learned to command by first learning to obey, but it seems to have been his authority over others, rather than his own subordination to his superiors, which led him to recognize the supreme authority in our Lord. He knew by experience what it was to exercise power; he knew that if he told one of his soldiers to go somewhere, that soldier would go, that if he gave an instruction to his servant, that instruction would be carried out. In this way he acquired, by grace but through human relationships, an understanding and respect for authority, which formed not only part of the preamble to his faith but also a preparation for his trust in God's mercy and the admission of his own unworthiness before God.

At first sight the centurion's attitude seems rather exaggerated. It seems to us, perhaps, a little curious that he did not want God to come into his house, especially as we make his words our own

just when we are inviting our Lord to come to us in holy communion. But it falls into the pattern of things if we consider that relationships which are in themselves simple have to be split up and divided in order that we may understand their fullness. The centurion may be seen illustrating for us the relationship of inequality, in which God is seen as our Creator, while the illustration of the love of friendship is left to others. Mary Magdalen and St John show us the intimacy which God invites, while the centurion shows us the submission which God demands.

As these two aspects of our love for God are illustrated by different people in the gospels, so they have to be prepared for by relationships with different people in our lives. One cannot grow out of the other: the love of friendship cannot arise spontaneously within the family; there exists within the family neither the equality of status nor the opportunity for choice which are necessary for learning how to exercise this kind of love. Once the capacity for the love of friendship has been developed, it can be referred back to the family to enrich the relationship between parents and child, but it has to be learned, in the first place, outside.

When children go to school they find themselves among a number of others of roughly the same size and standard of attainment, treated by the teacher without any obvious discrimination. This is in sharp contrast to the situation at home, where the status of each member of the family is proclaimed anew each evening by the order in which they go to bed. How could a small girl presume to treat as an equal the sister who is allowed to stay up longer? How could she want to treat as an equal a baby who has to go to bed first? At school the members of one form are treated as of equal status, and are free to approach one another, and to respond to or withdraw from another's approaches as they please. They begin tentatively to apply to their equals those elements of respect and affection which they themselves learned by responding to the initiative of an older person. It is the beginning of the love of choice, which permits us to enter into a relationship in which love will be freely received and freely given, the foreshadowing of our free choice of God. For God, who has a right to our love, since he made us, has so arranged things that by means of the freedom of our will we are invited to give him freely what is already his by right, so that we may add the

freely-given love of a friend to the dutiful love of a child.

In the beginning these friendships with other children do not go very deep, and the child lives in a setting of family relationships, and relationships with other adults. Gradually the balance changes, and the young student, during her last few years at school, may seem more interested in her friends than in her family. Friendships become more intense, and sometimes such exclusiveness is shown that it is necessary to remind the students of the need for a more general friendliness. Too exclusive a friendship may deprive the student of the opportunity of mixing freely with others, and prevent her from learning to discriminate, but on the other hand a student who gets to know what real personal friendship means is laying a better foundation for her future life, social and spiritual, than a student who is friendly with all but friends with none. Both the power of discrimination and the capacity for forming an affectionate relationship with one person will be needed when she comes to choose a partner for marriage.

Marriage is the perfection of friendship in the natural order, and is the type of the love of equality. It has always been taken as signifying the union of the soul with God. Without what we know of human lovers, we could scarcely form any conception of the soul's spiritual desire to please God and to find her delight in him. Marriage is the type of the love of equality, as the family is the type of the love of inequality, but in a different way. It is the usual thing to learn the love of inequality within the family, and every effort is made to provide the best possible substitute for those who are deprived of the care of their own parents, but the same thing does not apply to marriage. Some are called by God to forgo marriage for the sake of something better. They are called by God, as it were, to take a short cut, and to enter into the love of friendship with God, not only on the basis of their own experience, but also on the basis of the experience of other people.

Religious and married people each have something particular to contribute to the understanding of charity; by her joy in her husband and children, her constancy and patience in the vicissitudes of human relationships, her willingness to sacrifice herself to care for those she loves, helped in all things by grace, the married woman is co-operating in her own sanctification, and at

the same time providing the religious with the knowledge about human life that she needs. The indebtedness of those who have given up marriage for Christ's sake to the experience of those who have found in marriage their vocation is evident in the writings of the mystics, from St Paul onwards. In her turn the religious is a living reminder of what our love for God will be like in heaven. The religious is called by God to begin here already on earth, publicly and in principle, to love people expressly for God's sake.

This distinction has some bearing on the sort of encouragement or advice to be given to young students on the question of personal relationships, and especially with regard to what they are expected to understand in practice by the love of charity. It is not helpful to allow them to regard charity as an alternative to natural love. If a student is having difficulty in keeping on good terms with her mother, the suggestion that she should try to love her mother for God's sake may carry the implication that the mother does not deserve the natural love she has a right to expect from her daughter. An over-insistence on the need charitably to consider her mother's difficulties, or her father's lack of education, may lead to a pity or condescension incompatible with the love appropriate to daughter and parents. Full advantage should be taken of the students' desire and capacity to serve God and their understanding of the mystical body, but to allow them the impression that their actions spring directly and solely from the love of God when their love of God is not yet sufficiently developed to provide a direct motive for such actions, is to confuse their motives in their own minds, and is hardly likely to induce a healthy spiritual development or a successful apostolate. Simply to counter selfishness with an appeal for unselfishness, or to suggest that their desires and satisfactions might be replaced by activity in favour of other people is also unhelpful, and could lead to harm if their motives for action were thereby confused. An over-emphasis on giving, without a corresponding stress on their need to receive, might make it more difficult for them to acquire that humility which is a necessity in any apostolate.

What is necessary is that the students should be helped to see their duties and their lawful aspirations in their proper setting, and to see charity as a personal love of our Lord, overflowing onto all natural relationships, purifying, strengthening and supernaturalizing them. They should be helped to see their feelings and

desires as right and natural, but disordered by the fall, and so needing God's grace for guidance and direction, and where necessary, restraint. In their last years at school they are growing out of the dependent relationship of childhood, but are not yet ready to base their lives on the ability to make relationships of equality, which is the mark of maturity; it is possible that a more explicit awareness of their position in this respect might help to make the transition smoother.

Whatever their vocation in life may be they will have to learn to choose God above all created things. It is this that is prefigured by marriage, which is the choice of one man or woman, as against all the others in the world. For those called by God to give up human relationships for his sake this choice of God above all created things means a life of direct service to him instead of marriage, but for those whose way of life leads to sanctification through relationships with other people the choice of God above all created things means the subordination of all other relationships to the relationship with God. For this reason the two ways of life should not be confused in the students' minds. They cannot learn to subordinate their human relationships if they have come to think that they are in some way irrelevant.

Learning to subordinate all relationships to the relationship with God is not made easier by the current attitude to marriage, and it may be that present conditions call for a more explicit awareness of the natural and supernatural implications of relationship than has been necessary in the past. If this is to be done two things are necessary; an understanding of the place of human relationships in the student's life, and the beginning of a personal love for God. Once the student has been enabled to see, by grace and from her knowledge of human relationships, that charity is relationship with God, in which one loves and is loved, and from which all charity towards others flows, her idea of human relationship will be ennobled and strengthened to withstand the strain of modern life, and her relationship with God will become more conscious and better able to submit all things to itself.