

that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as gold or silver . . . but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled.' (1 Peter 1, 18, 19.) Secondly, he was called 'the Lamb' on account of his meekness: 'He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer and he shall not open his mouth'. (Is. 53, 7.) And thirdly because of the various and profitable uses made of lambs: 'Lambs are for thy clothing'. (Prov. 28, 26.) They serve both as clothing, in which sense we read: 'But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 13, 14), and as food: 'The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world' (John 6, 52). We read also: 'Send forth, O Lord, the Lamb, the ruler of the earth'. (Is. 16, 1.)



## OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN

GREGORY OF NYSSA<sup>1</sup>

**W**HEN the great Moses undertook to initiate the Israelites into the Divine mysteries which had been inaugurated on Mount Sinai, he did not consider them ready to receive the theophany until he had ordained the purification of the people by chastity and the sprinkling of water. But even so they did not brave the manifestation of the Divine Power, but were struck down by all the apparitions, the fire and the darkness, the smoke and the trumpets. So they turned back and asked the Lawgiver to be their mediator of the will of God, seeing that they were not fit by their own power to draw near to God to receive the Divine manifestation. But when our Lawgiver the Lord Jesus Christ is bringing us to Divine grace, he does not show us Mount Sinai covered with darkness and smoking with fire, nor does he strike fear into us by the meaningless sound of trumpets. He does not purify the soul by three days' chastity and by water that washes dirt away; nor does he leave all the assembly behind at the foot of the mountain, granting only to one the ascent to its summit, which, moreover, is hidden by a darkness

<sup>1</sup> This article is an excerpt from a translation made by Miss H. C. Graef of St Gregory of Nyssa's homily on the *Our Father*, shortly to be published in the series of Ancient Christian Writers (Newman, U.S.A.). It is here printed by kind permission of the publisher and translator.

completely concealing the glory of God. But first of all he leads us, not to a mountain, but to heaven itself—which he has made accessible to men by virtue. Secondly, he gives them not only the vision of, but a share in, the divine power, bringing them as it were to kinship with the divine nature. Moreover, he does not hide the supernal glory in darkness, making it difficult for those who want to contemplate it; but he first illumines the darkness by the brilliant light of his teaching and then grants the pure of heart the vision of the ineffable glory in shining splendour. The water he gives us for sprinkling does not come from alien streams, but wells up in ourselves, whether we understand by it the fountains of tears streaming from our eyes, or the pure conscience of the heart. He does not legislate on impurity resulting from the lawful intercourse between husband and wife, but on that springing from a nature entangled in material passions, and thus leads us to God through prayer. For this is the force of his words, that we should learn by them not to pronounce certain sounds and syllables, but the meaning of the ascent to God which is accomplished through a sublime way of life.

But now it is fitting that we should learn the divine discipline through the words of the prayer itself. *When you pray*, he says. He does not say 'When you make a vow', as if one ought first to accomplish a vowed promise before approaching God in prayer. Now what is the difference in meaning between these words? It is this: a vow is the promise of something consecrated to the service of God; whereas prayer is the offering to God of a supplication for good things. Since, therefore, we need confidence to approach God with the request for the things that are profitable for us, the performance of a vow must necessarily come first. Thus, when we have accomplished our part we are confident of being made worthy to receive in return the things that are God's to give.

Therefore says the Prophet: *I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and Vow ye and pay to the Lord your God.* And this meaning of 'vow' can be seen in many places in Scripture, so that we should know, as has been said, that a vow is the promise of a thanksoffering; whereas prayer signifies our access to God after the fulfilment of the promise. Hence the passage teaches us not to ask something from God without first having offered him an acceptable gift. Therefore one must first vow and then pray; first the sowing, then the fruitbearing, so to speak. Hence we must first

cast the seed of the vow, and thus reap what has grown from this sowing, receiving grace in return for prayer. Since, then, there can be no confidence in relationship with God unless he has been rendered accessible by vow and the offering of gifts, the vow must precede the prayer.

Assuming therefore that this has already been done, the Lord says to his disciples: *When you pray, say: Our Father who art in heaven. Who will give me wings like a dove?* says the great David somewhere in the Psalms. This I, too, would say, boldly using the same words. Who will give me those wings, that my mind may wing its way up to the heights of these noble words? Then I would leave behind the earth altogether and traverse the middle air; I would reach the beautiful ether, come to the stars and behold their orderly array. But even there I would not stay but passing beyond them would become a stranger to all that moves and changes, and apprehend the stable nature, the immovable Power which exists in its own right, guiding and keeping in being all things, for all depend on the ineffable will of the Divine Wisdom. So first my mind must become detached from anything subject to flux and change and tranquilly rest in motionless repose, so as to be rendered akin to him who is perfectly unchangeable; and then it may address him by this most familiar name and say: Father.

What spirit a man must have to say this word; what confidence, what purity of conscience! Supposing a man should try to understand God as far as possible from the names that have been invented for him and so be led to the understanding of the ineffable glory. He would have learned that the Divine Nature, whatever it may be in itself, is goodness, holiness and joy, power, glory and purity, eternity that is always absolutely the same. These and whatever other things thought could learn about the Divine Nature, whether from the divine scriptures or from its own meditation, he would consider—and after all that, should he dare to utter such a word and call this Being his Father? For if he has any sense he would obviously not dare to call God by the name 'Father' since he does not see the same things in himself as he sees in God. For it is physically impossible that he who is good by essence should be the Father of evil, nor the Holy One of him whose life is impure. No more can he who is changeless be the Father of a man who is turning from one side to the other, nor can the Father of life have as his son someone whom sin has subjected

to death. He who is wholly pure cannot be the Father of those who have disgraced themselves by unseemly passions, nor he who pours out benefits of him who is self-seeking. In short, he who is seen to be pure goodness cannot be Father of those who are wholly involved in some evil. If therefore on examining himself a man finds that he still needs to be purified because his conscience is full of vile stains and sores, he cannot insinuate himself into the family of God until he has been purged from all these evil things. The unjust and impure cannot say 'Father' to the just and pure. For this would mean calling God Father of his own wickedness, which would be nothing but pride and mockery. For the word 'Father' indicates the cause of that which exists through him.

Hence if he whose conscience accuses him of evil calls God his Father, he asserts precisely that God is the cause and origin of his own wickedness. But there is no fellowship of light with darkness, says the apostle; but light associates with light and justice with what is just, beauty with what is beautiful, and incorruption with the incorruptible. For a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. If then someone who is dull of heart and seeks after lying, as the Scripture says, yet dares to use the words of the prayer, he should know that he does not call the Heavenly One his Father, but the infernal one, who is himself a liar and sin, and the father of sin. Hence the apostle calls men who are subject to the passions children of wrath, and one who has fallen away from the true life is named the son of perdition; someone who is lazy and effeminate the son of the deserting maidens. In the same way, conversely, those whose consciences are pure are called children of light and day, and others who aspire to the Divine strength are sons of power.

If therefore the Lord teaches us in his prayer to call God 'Father', it seems to me that he is doing nothing else but setting the most sublime life before us as our law. For Truth does not teach us to deceive, to say we are what we are not and to use a name to which we have no right. But if we call our Father him who is incorruptible and just and good, we must prove by our life that the kinship is real. Do you see how much preparation we need, and what kind of life we must lead? Do you realise how ardent must be our zeal so that our conscience may achieve such purity as to be able to say 'Father' to God with confidence? For if you make such prayer with your lips while you are intent on money

and occupied with the deceits of the world, while you are seeking fame among men or are enslaved by sensual passions—what, do you think, will he say to it who sees your life and knows what your prayer really is? It seems to me that God would say to such a man something like this: ‘Do you, whose life is corrupt, call the Author of incorruption “Father”? Why do you defile the pure name with your polluted word? Why do you belie this word and insult the undefiled Nature? If you were my child, your life would be marked by my own qualities. I do not recognise the image of my Nature in you. Your characteristics are the exact opposite of mine. What communion has light with darkness? What kinship has death with life? How can there be intimacy between pure and impure? The distance between the Giver of good things and the man who is covetous is great indeed. There can be no intercourse between him who is merciful and him who is hard. The evils that are in you have another for their father; for my offspring are made lovely by the goodness of their Father. The child of the Merciful and Pure is himself merciful and pure; the corrupt is not related to the incorrupt. In a word, good comes from good and just from just. But as to you, I know not whence you are.’ Therefore it is dangerous to dare to use this prayer and call God one’s Father before one’s life has been purified.

But let us once more listen to the words of the prayer, if perhaps, through frequent repetition, we may be given to understand some of its hidden meaning. *Our Father, who art in Heaven*. That one must win God’s favour by a virtuous life has been made sufficiently clear through what has been said before. But the words seem to me to indicate a deeper meaning, for they remind us of the paternal country from which we have fallen and of the noble birthright which we have lost. For in the story of the young man who left his father’s home and went away to live after the manner of swine the Word shows the misery of men in the form of a parable which tells of his departure and dissolute life; and he does not bring him back to his former happiness until he has become sensibly aware of his present plight and entered into himself, rehearsing words of repentance. Now these words agree as it were with the words of the prayer, for he said: *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee*. He would not have added to his confession the sin against heaven, if he had not been convinced that the country he had left when he sinned was heaven. Therefore this confession gave him

easy access to the Father, who ran towards him and greeted him with a kiss on his neck. (Now this signifies the reasonable yoke which had been placed on man through the mouth, that is to say, through the evangelical tradition, after he had thrown off the first yoke of the commandment by shaking himself free of the protecting law.) And he put on him the robe, not another one, but the first robe, of which he had been deprived by his disobedience, when he had tasted of the forbidden fruit and seen his own nakedness. But the ring on his hand, because of the carved stone, signifies the regaining of the Image. But he also protects his feet with shoes so that if he approaches the head of the serpent he may not be bitten into his naked heel. Thus the return of the young man to his Father's home became to him the occasion of experiencing the loving kindness of his Father; for this paternal home is the heaven against which, as he says to his Father, he has sinned. In the same way it seems to me that if the Lord is teaching us to call upon the Father in Heaven, he means to remind us of our beautiful paternal country. And by thus putting into our mind a stronger desire for these good things, he sets us on the way that will lead us back to our original country.

He who has commanded us to say 'Father', has not permitted us to pronounce a lie. He, therefore, who lives in a manner worthy of the Divine nobility, has the right to look towards the Heavenly city, calling the King of Heaven his Father and the celestial beatitude his Father's land. For what is the purpose of this counsel? That one should think of the things that are above, where God is. There should be laid the foundations of the house, there the treasures should be stored, there the heart should be settled. For where the treasure is, there the heart is also; and if we look always at the beauty of the Father, the beauty of our own soul will be formed on it.

There is no respect of persons with God, says the Scripture. Let your beauty also be without blemish. The Divine is pure from envy and from all stain of passion. Therefore let no such passions defile you, neither envy nor vanity nor any of those things that would pollute the Divine Beauty. If such is what you are, you may boldly address God by a familiar name and call the Lord of all your Father. He will look upon you with the eyes of a Father, he will clothe you with the Divine robe and adorn you with a ring; for the upward journey he will put upon your feet the

sandals of the Gospel and will restore you to the heavenly land, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.



## THE SPIRITUAL WRITINGS OF EDITH STEIN

DONALD NICHOLL

READERS of this review will already be familiar with the name of Edith Stein—or Sister Benedicta, as we prefer to call her (*cf.* the May 1949, February and April 1950 issues of *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*). Of her life something has been said, and the translation of her biography should soon be available in English. We are now able to enter more deeply into her thought through the publication of her works. In 1949 Schnell and Steiner Verlag of Munich published some of her essays on woman's vocation under the title *Frauenbildung und Frauenberufe*. Meanwhile Dr Gelber of Louvain and Fr Romaeus Leuven, o.c.d., have been preparing an edition of her complete works, which are being published jointly by Herder Verlag of Freiburg and Nauwelaerts of Louvain. Some eight volumes are envisaged of which two have appeared in 1950. The second, *Kreuzeswissenschaft* ('The Science of the Cross'), can be described here along with the earlier work on woman's vocation.<sup>1</sup>

The essays on woman's vocation date from the time before Edith Stein entered Carmel, while she was a lecturer at Münster and being constantly invited to lecture on this theme in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Most of the suggestions which they contain are inspired by a very practical desire to see that young women should be educated according to their natures. Sister Benedicta points out, for instance, that there are large areas of a woman's life over which she needs the help and guidance of another woman. It is naïve to assume that such questions can be treated in a detached scientific way which will free them from personal connotations. It is equally naïve to believe that the young women receiving such instruction from a priest easily appreciate the distinction between the office and the person. Therefore the need for women in the teaching profession and sharing in the

<sup>1</sup> The editing of the works is in itself a moving instance of the devotion which Sister Benedicta has inspired; it is brilliantly done—though I have noticed several misprints.