

by right to him alone. Man knows his limitations. If someone had promised the happiness of knowing and joyfully experiencing God for which the angels even are scarcely fitted, he would hardly have dared hope for it, unless he had been shown the worth of human nature, which God so highly prized that he became man to redeem it. So it is, through his taking flesh, God has given us the hope that even we may reach union with him in blessed happiness.

Knowing now the value of his nature, which God has seen fit to assume, man ought not to subject his heart to any creature: neither through idolatrous worship nor by submitting himself exclusively to material things. How unworthy it is that man, so lofty in God's estimation and so close to him that he willed to become one, should blindly enslave himself to things less than God.



## ON BECOMING ONE

BR DOMINIC, T.O.S.D.

**W**E know exactly as much as we have suffered; neither more, nor less. If it were not possible to suffer with, and even for other people, what follows would not follow, since it is these to whom it is addressed who are suffering directly. But if these lines contain any value it is only in so far as the writer has been able to suffer with, and for, those suffering directly, who are in need of sympathy and comfort. Should they, in fact, be born of illusion and shallow sentiment they are worthless and will fail to stir any deep longings, in which case may they at least do no harm.

I can scarcely have been the first Christian who has stood beside the entrance to a tube station in the heart of London during the evening rush-hour and been moved in spirit at the sight of all these people careering along, each of them with an eternal destiny, each of them at every moment of

time making the choice of heaven or hell, business-men, shop-girls, students and office-boys, the aged, the infirm, and those in the strength of their young bodies. What mystery there lies in such moments: the calls of the barrow-boys and the quick passing of a half-remembered face.

How should a Christian react to such a scene? Not, one trusts, by naming it 'the world', by letting the shutter of one's judgment fall down over one's eyes, leaving 'the world' to darkness and perdition, taking it upon oneself to pronounce the *anathema sit*. Nor should there arise even the faintest inclination to stand up before these crowds on a soap-box and start preaching to them, whether by demanding to know if they are saved or giving them doses of Papal Encyclicals. Tub-thumping may have its place, but not here. In the presence of crowds our Saviour's impulse seems always to have been the same: he had compassion on the multitude. Compassion at the beginning of life, compassion to the end of our days; without such compassion our oneness in Christ becomes marred by a lie running across it. Amongst the multitude which daily circles around the centre of this vast emptiness, one group in particular calls for our compassion.

These are they who at first sight seem in no need of it. Self-assured, smartly-dressed, knowing where nylons are to be had, they thread their way through the streets with all the confidence of long practice, and when they speak, their voices are metallic, like the click of their high heels on the hard pavements, like the mechanical winking of neon lights. 'Self-sufficient': that is the term for 'the modern miss'. But it is only a half-term, expressing only a half-truth, and the rush-hour does not last all day. The self-sufficiency so often cloaks a hidden misery. In the evening they eat the dry bread of loneliness in rooms where they are homeless, where the only voices are the hard voices of strangers brought by the radio from a distant world. As the night draws in they pull on the curtains and sit down waiting. Waiting for what? They do not know. For years they have sat there, waiting, and they will go on doing so until they realise there is nothing to wait for. And just as in former times they had turned into their narrow beds, gazed at the ceiling and

listened to the dripping water in the landlady's bathroom, so now, in the moment when they realise that they have waited in vain, they turn their faces to the wall. Perhaps they are not buried immediately, but they are already dead. Another human being has come to an end.

These are they who were meant to be mothers, whose whole being is one longing to be a mother, to give birth to children. For that end their bodies were formed, shaped in nerve and limb by the Creator so that they might be mothers, their ears to listen for the cry of children, their hands to caress them and their breasts to nourish them. Their souls also were shaped for the same purpose, since the soul is the form of the body, the body-in-act. Yet they go down to the grave without giving birth to another human creature; they are barren women.

I am not the first Christian who has been moved by this apparent frustration of God's work in creation, and the seeming waste—even cruelty—of it all. 'It's not natural. Maybe men were meant to have more than one wife', the person speaking brought out all his sincerity with his deep Northern accent. Easy to refute as his theology may have been, it would have been impertinent to give a quick answer to this undogmatic soul who simply went about doing good. A more considered response was given during Hitlerite days in Germany when the soul-destroying myths of National Socialism caused single women to bow their heads in shame because no young man had looked with favour upon them. The effect of the ostracism which they endured did not end with Hitler; bruised hearts are not so easily mended, and the habit of looking down on single women does not easily die. Fortunately courageous women were not lacking who took their sisters' shame to their own hearts and poured out consolation from the deep sources of Christian sympathy. Gertrud von le Fort, Edith Stein, Ida Görres and many others, fought to save their sisters from despair, and their effort cannot have been fruitless. At the same time, no one of those whom I know has given the direct answer to the needs of barren women in the modern world, the only answer which is ultimately of any consolation to those who were created to be mothers and are childless. It is the

answer which is wrung from you as you watch the multitude; there is no consolation for someone who *is* not what they are meant to be; one can only hope to show them that they *can* be what they are meant to be, that they *are* truly mothers.

How can a virgin be a mother? Is this not just the cue for another escape from reality into some kind of flight of metaphorical fancy? If the modern mind in its conceited toughness reacts to the question in that way, it is because modern men have hardened their hearts and are stiff-necked like the children of Israel. When the Psalmist spoke of how the Lord would make the barren woman the joyful mother of many, the children of Israel understood it to mean that the Lord could bless Sarah, Rachel or Anna with children of their wombs, even when men would have deemed it impossible. For them the Lord's promises were to be realised according to a fleshly mode, and any other mode they would have regarded as metaphorical. But the very first moment of the new dispensation saw the fulfilment of the Lord's promise through the Psalmist in a new and wonderful way. The new creation begins with the Virgin-Mother who is Mother and Queen of all creation. She is *really* a Virgin and *really* a Mother, not just metaphorically. To how many is she Mother? No one could count them; her children are as the stars in heaven or the sand on the seashore. All of us in the new creation stand at her feet and look to her as our most gentle Queen and Mother. She is Virgin-Mother, and henceforth all virgins through her can be mothers in the new creation, just as all mothers can pass through her motherhood into a deeper, surer virginity. She is the model for both virgins and mothers who is herself perfect Virgin and perfect Mother, the wedding of Motherhood and Virginity.

Holy people could, no doubt, draw unfailing nourishment from exegesis of the title 'Virgin-Mother'; to them I leave the task, but in case the above interpretation should seem 'spiritual' to the degree of 'metaphorical' one need only look at parts of the Gospels to see that any other interpretation fails to do them justice. When the woman says to our Lord, 'Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the breasts that gave thee suck', and our Lord replies, 'Yea,

rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it!’, no one can reasonably suppose that our Lord is excluding our Lady from this blessedness—he is including in her blessedness all who hear the word of God and keep it. He is telling us that she is at the height of blessedness because she most faithfully heard and kept the word of God. And by his words he is still trying to soften the Israelite heart which would have seen in fleshly motherhood the height of blessedness. How ultimately linked blessedness is with this motherhood in the new creation comes out just as strikingly in the incident when our Lord is speaking to the multitudes. Someone tells him that his mother and his brethren are outside. In his reply our Lord says, ‘Whoever shall do the will of my Father, that is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother’—once more, motherhood is a result of doing the will of the Father, and it is *real* motherhood that is the reward of doing the Father’s will, a motherhood that shall never be taken away. They are truly mothers who are truly virgins, whose souls are intact, wholly ready to give birth to the Word, perfectly receiving the message of the Father.<sup>1</sup>

If we look again to the Gospels for the source of motherhood, the final moments before the death of our Lord on the cross provide us with a theme for meditation to which one could never weary of returning. But the truths to be seen in these moments when God said to his Mother, ‘*Mulier, ecce filius tuus*’, and to his beloved disciple, ‘*Fili, ecce mater tua*’, though they are meant for all of us, can be expressed by few. But though we are unable to formulate the deep convictions which stir in us whilst we meditate upon those moments, it is worthwhile, as a substitute for our own silence, to refer to a passage from a modern work which admirably illustrates the eternal application of these

<sup>1</sup> This statement is thoroughly intelligible so long as we remember Kierkegaard’s profound remark that every human being is feminine in his relations with God. What Kierkegaard had in mind was the inability of finite man to make any movement, of his own initiative, towards God, who is Infinite. Man does not *grasp* God; man *receives* God, man is passive towards God, man says, ‘Be it done unto me according to thy word’—man is feminine towards God.

meditations upon Motherhood in the Gospels.

In C. S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, the author and George McDonald, his guide to the realm of Spirits, meet a procession of Spirits, at the end of which comes a lady in whose honour the other Spirits are dancing and scattering flowers . . . 'only partly do I remember the unbearable beauty of her face.

"Is it? . . . is it?" I whispered to my guide.

"Not at all", said he. "It's someone ye'll never have heard of. Her name on earth was Sarah Smith and she lived at Golders Green. . . ."

"And who are all these young men and women on each side?"

"They are her sons and daughters."

"She must have had a very large family, Sir."

"Every young man or boy that met her became her son—even if it was only the boy who brought the meat to her door. Every girl that met her was her daughter."

"Isn't that a bit hard on their own parents?"

"No. There *are* those that steal other people's children. But her motherhood was of a different kind. Those on whom it fell went back to their natural parents loving them more. Few men looked at her without becoming, in a certain fashion, her lovers. But it was the kind of love that made them not less true, but truer, to their own wives."

How admirably the author of those lines has illustrated the true teaching of Motherhood, and summed up for us both the intimacy which a Christian woman should feel for all creation if she is to be a true mother, and the attitude of reverence which should be inspired in us whenever we see Sarah Smith getting into the underground for Golders Green. If there is any truth in what we have been saying so far the direct answer to the cries of the barren woman in the twentieth century is there; and it is a joy for those of us who are convinced that the mental anguish they go through is often pleasing to Satan rather than an offering to God simply to go about trying to relieve that anguish. The Gospel teaching on motherhood does not provide a narcotic but salvation, saving us from the narrow dusty rooms in which Satan would like to confine us and opening our hearts to

the needs of the multitude, to the orphans, the widows and the fatherless.<sup>1</sup> The sight of London tube stations need no longer drive us almost to despair; every thing and every person in God's creation can be as they are meant to be. They are not, it is true, but that does not breed despair so long as our compassion deepens; since despair is the sin against hope, and compassion is the mingling of hope and suffering. Let us hope exuberantly.

Perhaps the implications in this view of motherhood may be summarised by saying that it shows spiritual relationships to be superior to fleshly relationships, superior in the sense of more enduring. Nor does this contradict anything which we learn from the Gospel where our Lord tells us how in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven we have to be prepared to break all fleshly ties, and how there is neither marrying nor taking wives in the resurrection. Furthermore it is in accordance with the obvious fact that whilst those who are united in Christ (even though they have no fleshly bond between them) can never be divided, fleshly ties cannot guarantee endurance. In other words, it is possible (if the word means anything) for one human being to be in hell (which God forbid) whilst someone with whom they have fleshly ties is in heaven. Water is thicker than blood if it is the water of baptism.

This superiority of spiritual relationships can be given a much wider application in order to comfort others in the same way as the true doctrine of motherhood might help barren women. But before suggesting such applications one caution needs to be made, which is that fleshly relationships are not to be disparaged. Any attempt to seek in spiritual relationships the treasures which are meant to be found in those of the flesh could only result in disaster; there would in that case be neither true fleshly relationships nor true spiritual relationships but only an all-pervading selfishness which allows for no true relationships at all. The normal development of spiritual life is through the bodily condition

<sup>1</sup> It seems reasonable to suppose that visits to the widows, the orphans and the fatherless should not be made solely to satisfy their material needs—plenty of widows are rich, in any case—but in order to stand in the places of those who are dead or missing.

to which we are committed, and through the duties which go with it.

But, the caution once made here, in brief are some of the suggested applications. They are intended as a guide towards deepening our life in Christ, to enable us to see the play of Christ in every limb and member. No more than the fumbblings of a tyro they may persuade the experts to present us with a surer guide.

What, in the first place, of the two types of women not already considered, who are nuns, and mothers of families? Is it not true that the nun's vocation is primarily a call to share in the Motherhood of the Church, through being mothers with Mary, the mother of us all? Surely we should see this more plainly if our traditional spirituality had not almost come to ignore the truth that God is our Mother. When we accept this wonderful formulation of our relationship to God we are accorded a vision of the divine motherhood flowing through Mary, the Church, and all those who share in Mary's vocation. All may share this vocation, it is true, whether male or female, for St Paul was doing so when he brought the word of God to birth in those to whom he preached; they did, indeed, become his children, as all of us are children of Mary who carried the word to us. Nevertheless, there is a special sense in which the virginity of nuns is for the sake of motherhood, and in which they are made like to the Virgin Mary. Nuns are mothers indeed. Perhaps the glorious nature of their vocation has not always been brought out through failure to insist on this truth. How otherwise can one explain the atmosphere of distrust which sometimes arises between teaching orders and their pupils? It may be because the pupils do not recognise that the nuns are truly their mothers; sometimes it may happen that the nuns forget how truly the pupils are their children in Christ. Yet these consecrated virgins have already received a promise that they will be rewarded a hundredfold for what they have given up on earth, and we know that at the end of time when all things are made plain they will be revealed as the mothers of many. We shall realise how, during all the years of their life in religion, they were bringing souls to birth in Christ. Does it not follow that what will come to



glorious light in heaven must on earth be cherished, though in the hiddenness of faith? A nun is truly the mother of many; may the fact be a constant joy to her.

To write about mothers with families with any assurance presents innumerable complications, and it will have to be sufficient to repeat what has already been said: through Mary the mother of a family deepens her virginity. Of course, the sentence is meaningless if, by 'virginity', we simply refer to the state of a body. However, if that is all that we mean by 'virginity' the whole discussion is reduced to the level of biology or biography. But in its truest sense, virginity is a perfection of the soul which is achieved in a greater or a lesser degree according to the striving for perfection in the person concerned. Common observance should be enough to prove that many women who are physically virgins betray the utmost promiscuity in the rest of their behaviour; it would be deplorable if nuns were to be promiscuous in this way by poking their noses into other people's affairs, but the same bad habits, in the form of gossip, do equal harm to women in the world. Such promiscuity can only be killed when it is cut off at its root in the soul's first movements; unless it is cut off at the root there can be no permanent remedy, and the degree of virginity must necessarily be slight. Under normal conditions this uprooting is more easily performed by a Carmelite than by someone running a household, but there is no absolute obstacle to prevent the mother from doing it successfully. The more perfect a mother, the deeper her achievement or virginity. The Virgin-Mother is the mediatrix of *all* graces.

As happens all too often in outlines of spirituality the discussion so far has ignored a third of the world's population, the men. Could it not be maintained that men also are called to be fathers, and that their vocation may equally be realised in three states: as fathers of families; as consecrated fathers (i.e. priests); and as bachelors (who can realise their fatherhood in countless ways)? Once more it all depends upon the initial vision of God as Father dispensing light, and of others being brought into the relationship of fatherhood so as to perform the office of dispensing light and food. God is our Father as well as our Mother, and all who have

the vocation of fatherhood are called to do his will. How deep this relationship thrusts into the being of the world is demonstrated by St Thomas (commenting upon St Paul) when he says that this relationship of paternity continues to exist in heaven. He goes on to point out how the different ranks of angels function after a paternal fashion, dispensing the light from the Father of lights. Looking first at the office exercised by the father of a family one scarcely knows where to outline the orientation of soul appropriate to his state. One cannot easily discover any writings intended to guide the father, although endless pamphlets are available on the duties of motherhood. This is a gap in our spiritual literature urgently in need of being filled. Actually much may be learned from studying what St Benedict has to say in his Chapter on The Office of Father (i.e. the Office of Abbot, the words meaning the same, as we remember when reading St Paul's phrase, 'whereby we cry Abba, Father') for St Benedict himself has rightly been given the title, 'Father of the West'. But a tyro should not take it upon himself to comment on the Rule, and for the moment we limit ourselves to indicating how the father of the family should regard his office.

Clearly his family will never be able to attach the meaning they should to the title of 'Father' as applied to God until they have had some experience of what a good father does for his children. In this sense a human father has the awful responsibility of standing in the place of God our Father, and, in a measure, has to care for the welfare of his children, as God cares for us, who has numbered the hairs of our head. God is our Father; everything which he allows to happen to us his children is Providential; similarly the human father must provide for his children, planning for them with all the prudence he can muster, for prudence is the virtue analogous to Providence. The office he occupies, then, is not a spectacular one—even a Catholic Film Society would have difficulty in filming the story of someone whose outstanding virtue was prudence—and a good father, like St Joseph, must almost inevitably be hidden, working in the background, reserved in speech but mighty in his works.

No more spectacular is the main task he must perform,

the one in which his fatherhood is most like to God's actions: he must give his children bread, bread to nourish their God-given bodies. Again the job never attracts many of the Romantics, because it is so humble, so of the earth, earthly. What the Romantics fail to realise, and this accounts for their ultimate frivolousness, is that one can only come to the Lord from heaven through acceptance of our earthliness; earthliness is not the end, but it is the beginning, an essential beginning for any human end. There is a deep continuity between ministering the bread of earth and the bread of heaven; humans must eat the bread of earth if they are to eat the bread of heaven; both are gifts from the Father, and in administering earthly bread the human father is preparing his children for heaven. Here on earth we cannot receive the light from the Father of lights in all its nakedness, which is why it has to be given to us in the form of bread, of something we eat.

We must pause if we are to see into some of the depths of this mystery. Light is given as bread. Why? Because in heaven the very sight of God means perfect possession of God; no rift whatsoever lies between seeing and perfect possession; therefore in seeing we shall receive light perfectly. On earth we are only capable of perfect possession in one mode, which is the mode of eating—we make ours what goes in through our mouths. There is a gap on earth between seeing and perfect possession, between seeing and eating. (How many of our emotions are explained by this fact. We *hunger* for beauty; we desire to possess beauty completely on earth, and we cannot do so; but this very longing to eat what we see as beautiful is itself a token that we shall come in the end to perfect possession.) But God does not leave us hungry, nevertheless; he gives us the Light of the World in the one mode in which we are capable of receiving perfectly, the mode of eating—he gives us bread. One surely need not be a 'mystic' in order to see this continuity between bread and Bread, or to appreciate the office performed by the father of a family in dispensing light in bread. He is, in fact, performing a priestly office in respect of his family. No other word so aptly sums up what we have been saying about the fatherly office as this—he is, indeed, a priest.

The pattern of developing spiritual relationships should now be sufficiently discernible for us simply to allow the role of the consecrated priest to manifest itself. Just as the consecrated virgin shares in the motherhood of women with families, and herself shares her virginity with them, just as they are bound together by the tender knot of sisterly love, similarly the consecrated priest is paternally bound to the fathers of families; with them he shares his priesthood, and with them their fatherhood. Reverting, as always, to practical applications, how wonderful when a layman addresses a priest as 'Father', and that single word is used with such meaning that it becomes a prayer! 'Father': the very sound of it in the English tongue sends up a chorus of praise to God, the Father, especially when it comes from the lips of a gnarled old layman who has nursed his children's children and it is addressed to some shy young priest fresh from the seminary. Again, the word should not be used metaphorically since it is at the hands of the priest that we receive our daily Bread; every priest whom we meet is related to us in fatherhood and we are his children, the first fruits of the hundredfold reward given to the consecrated. The priest is, indeed, a father.

The third state of fatherhood contains all who are bachelors and whose office is by this time obvious enough. They share in dispensing light from the Father of lights. Even apart from the peculiar vision in which we have tried to display it, the status of bachelor must have struck many as a means of fatherhood when they remembered their school teachers and their university tutors—or, in the case of working lads, when they remembered craftsmen who nursed them in their trades. Light, however, seems somewhat insubstantial to man *in via*, and so many would be inclined to expect that a bachelor who transmits something so intangible has merely been brought into the pattern in order to complete it. Such suspicions would never shake the present writer's convictions, however, if only on account of several incidents which he recently observed. On each of the occasions in question a layman absent-mindedly addressed as 'father' had been helping the other layman in what was fundamentally a spiritual conflict, and the absent-minded use

of the word 'father' gave unconscious testimony to the relationship which had been established. One had been dispensing to the other light from the Father of lights, a function which all bachelors can perform whatever their occupation, whether social workers, school-teachers, craftsmen, foremen or politicians. The bachelor, also, is called to fatherhood.

Probably none of the above thoughts are at all original; they will have occurred to many who fulfil the functions we have been discussing. On the other hand, they are not often brought together, even in this sketchy form. And even now they need to be brought into a coherent whole by reference to two other insights, the first insight concerning the male-female principles within each human person and the second concerning the bearing of all this on our longing to become one for ever in heaven.

From the witness of the poets one was familiar with the notion that each human person embodied a male and a female principle even before Jung found it such a fruitful hypothesis in his psycho-analysis. Animus and anima fructify each other in the human person; both have their function in a healthy soul. Perhaps it has not always been noticed that both these principles are mentioned in the account of the Creation. 'God created *man* in his image . . . male and female created he them'—that might very well mean each human person is both male and female. This interpretation not only accords with the intuitions of the poets, the exigencies of Jungian experiments and modern theories on the balance of hormones, but it shows us clearly how each human being is made in the image of God, our Father, who is also God our Mother. It has the further advantage of showing that the fact of being male and female does not, as it were, record an accident which will be remedied in heaven (where there is neither male nor female—taking the words severally); the inherence of male and a female principle within each one of us is a positive gift whose richness we shall appreciate in heaven, where both these principles will be given full play. There will be neither male or female only in the sense that the limitations of sex will be abolished in order to bring the male and female principles into perfect harmony. Nothing of the richness will be lost, and the harmony will

be such as to make it impossible to tell whether the richness comes from male or female, and the distinction need never arise.

Since each human person acts as male and female in different respects, each human person may enter into every one of the relationships discussed above, according to the persons with whom they are brought into contact. For instance, a Dominican reviewer some time ago spoke of the way in which Miss Caryl Houselander, through her writings, became a mother to her readers; his intuition harmonised with the experience of others, and one learnt how an unmarried woman could become a mother—even, one imagines, a mother to archbishops. Readers of another Catholic authority have sensed the growth of a father-relationship between writer and reader. Many school-children, furthermore, not only receive light from their masters, who are thereby fathers, but they often receive from them a warmth and tenderness which their homes do not afford—and to them their masters stand in the mother-relationship. There is no end to the richness of human relationships so long as they are ordered to the will of the Father.

That is the final point, the ordering of these relationships so as to avoid promiscuity. Is there not a danger of being led astray if one is thinking continually about them? Certainly there is; but the danger is slight if one sees them in perspective and stops thinking about them continually. One can be a brother or a father without even being aware of it, but it often helps to know exactly what one is doing; blind performance of a function may be efficient, but to make it conscious and responsible renders it truly human, and those who accept their brotherhood and sisterhood grow daily in compassion and humanity. The actual ordering of one's behaviour towards sisters and brothers, children and fathers, presents few difficulties if one ignores the complications, seeing it all in a simple everyday image, the image of light flowing through a prism. Light is invisible, but is broken into visibility by the prism which unfolds the richness and variety of colours contained by the invisible. The range of colours within the spectrum corresponds to the range, variety and beauty of human relationships which are displayed

when the love of God is broken upon the jagged edges of this world and we become our Lord's mother, brother, sister. The movement of our own lives should be to follow multi-coloured relationships back to their source, never fearing lest we should lose any of their richness in the pure light of God for he allows nothing to be lost. Sometimes the movement seems too slow and we try of our own initiative to bring the colours into one—as in that cry of longing, *Soror mea sponsa*—or in St Teresa's '*Yo muero porque no muero*'; but always God is drawing us into the one light where all longings are fulfilled, the source of all happiness. It is towards that source that all those one meets in the rush-hour are hurrying, lonely women and busy men, students and spivs, for tube stations full of folk will also join in the chorus of thanksgiving and victory, 'Thus was it well, and thus was it well'.



## THE STRUCTURE OF RELIGIOUS CHASTITY

OSWIN MAGRATH, O.P.

**A** CERTAIN obscurity seems to surround the idea of religious chastity (manifest even in the various names given to it, chastity, perfect continence, purity, virginity), and there is a tendency to envisage it in a negative manner, as chiefly the exclusion of sex and marriage. On the other hand, many recent studies have emphasised the positive richness of the idea and the many elements involved in it. It may therefore not be out of place to try to give a synthetic view of the whole. Basically it is a special kind of temperance called chastity, balanced between lust and insensibility, and supported by the sense of shame and modesty, and by the attraction of a spiritual beauty. Its specific difference as religious chastity comes