

THE TRAINING OF THE HEART*

DOM AELRED WATKIN

‘IF I shall be lifted up, I shall draw all things to myself’, said our Lord speaking of the new life to be given to men by his redemption. ‘All things’—every faculty of man, every form of human experience; indeed, everything that man does and is, save for sin alone, is drawn into Christ and into his life. Apart from sin there is nothing which cannot partake in and be an expression of the eternal life of Christ endlessly renewing itself in time and place by the sacraments of his presence. ‘This is the bread that gives life to the world.’ And what is this bread? ‘This is my body.’ The bread is Christ himself. And what is the life? It is his life—‘I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me’. Without Christ there can be no life. Without him all human endeavours must perish in that death which took its origin in human sin. Without him all human hopes are but symbols of death, shadows lengthening towards darkness, desires which can never attain enduring fulfilment. But with him and in him all human endeavours become sacraments of life, pledges of eternal glory, hopes that can never be confounded. ‘Death hath no more dominion over him’, the liturgy says at Easter time, and if not over him, then—as long as we live in him and by his life—not over us. All things have been drawn to Christ and in him have found their meaning, their fulfilment, their purpose.

We have then but two categories of experience. On the one hand there is selfishness and sin which uses all that is in itself lovely and good as food upon which it feeds. On the other hand we have the life of Christ which concerns itself not with what it can receive, of what it can extract from persons and things, but with what it can give, spending itself in carrying out the work of Christ in the world.

There are, then, but two categories of experience: life and death, love and selfishness, giving and grasping, grace and sin. I emphasize this point at the start because it seems to me that any discussion upon love—and that is what the heart stands for—often tends to be confused by the introduction of a third factor. For sometimes

* A paper read at the Conference of Catholic Colleges, Easter 1957.

we find ourselves speaking as if the world of nature—the world of everyday human experience—exists as a kind of *tertium quid* in the battle between grace and sin. And of course at first sight this is what it seems to be. But I think that if we reflect more deeply, we shall see that, though the world of nature provides the battle-ground, it cannot itself become a combatant. If, for example, as we say speaking loosely, we sin by 'being led away from God by human beauty', it is not natural beauty that has led us away from God, it is we who have misused natural beauty by employing it to feed our self-indulgence. For us it is tainted, because we have made it so. But in itself it is what it always was, a loving creation of God and fair because it reflects Beauty itself. Indeed, because all in itself is holy and sin misuses and perverts holy things, all sin must partake of the nature of sacrilege.

As there are not three categories of experience, equally there are not three loves—charity, something wholly supernatural; natural love, something merely emotional or biological; and lust, something wholly turned to self-indulgence. There are but two loves—the love of Christ which seeks to give itself to God and to men and the love (if we may call it so) of self which tends to use men, and even God if it could, to feed self-indulgence and selfishness. These are the two lives, the two cities, of St Augustine: '*Amor Dei usque ad contemptum sui*' and '*Amor sui usque ad contemptum Dei*'. For the Christian, love is either supernatural or it is not love.

You may wonder why I have been so insistent about what may appear so obvious—but it is because there has been a growing tendency ever since the later Middle Ages to complicate our thought by the evolution of the doctrine of the 'secular'. If once we base our thoughts about love and charity upon the notion that (apart from sin) there are for the Christian two kinds of love, supernatural love which is good, and natural love which is 'indifferent', we find ourselves in difficulties of every kind. If we lose the consciousness of loving God and man in one and the same act we soon lose our bearings. Take a concrete case: A loves B. Granted the notion of 'natural', 'indifferent' or 'secular' love, where does A find himself? Either, if he be on the pathway to perfection, A will tend to think of loving B *for* God, or, if he be less serious in his search for God, he will love B as it were directly and think of God and his Church merely as a factor in

the background restraining perhaps this or that sinful impulse. But what has happened? Either A has loved God as it were directly and B more or less at second-hand, or A has loved B directly and God as it were at second-hand. In both cases supernatural charity and human love have but an accidental connection with each other. The natural emotional feeling of A for B is not identical with A's love of God.

Or let us put it another way. God loves all men with an infinite love and God can neither deceive nor be deceived. Therefore all men must be limitlessly lovable. Now, in order to enable A to see this lovable quality in others, God has given him a natural intuition (which usually starts in the senses) which enables him to see B as he or she is. A, though in a glass darkly, is looking at B as God sees him or her. A can either correspond with this insight, can love him or her with God's love or charity, or he can use this insight for purposes of selfishness. A can either give himself to B in charity or he can use B to feed his self-indulgence and thus extinguish charity and, indeed, in the end even natural feelings, for no human being, seen in the light of selfishness, is ever sufficient to fill the maw of man's self-indulgence.

Therefore I would make the words of the poet Blake my own:

'Everything that lives is holy,
'Life delights in life.'

All love (real love), all life (real life), is an expression of the life of Christ living in the depths of the human heart and love is therefore holy: 'the love of God poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit living within us'.

Having, as I hope, cleared the ground, I now turn to the actual question before us, the training of the heart. We hear a great deal about intellectual formation, the training of the mind, but we seldom hear or read anything about what is surely of equal, if not greater, importance, the training of the heart, teaching the young how to love. Love has perhaps even more enemies than truth. There is the self-indulgence, jealousy and possessiveness inherent in fallen nature and there is today the totally fallacious romantic attitude to love which is in the very air we breathe. Can we be surprised that so many marriages come to grief when engaged couples come only too frequently to the altar with almost no understanding of the nature of love, of where its happiness lies and how it is to be achieved and retained? In what

way are we to teach the children under our charge how to love? It is surely a matter of immense seriousness and responsibility.

I think, to start off with, we must face facts fairly and squarely. Love—emotional love—is something that certainly plays a part in the lives of those at school. It does not play a part in the lives of all, but a very considerable number of those under our charge have to battle with these problems. Indeed, attachments are frequently formed which are more vivid and more deeply felt than those of later life when the edge of human emotion tends to be dulled. We have all seen it in one way or another. In boarding-schools emotional friendships, accompanied by feelings of great intensity, are not uncommon; in day schools (and to some extent in boarding-schools) boys can feel for girl-friends emotions as profound as any experienced in later life. All this is a fact, and if we do not face up to it it is either because it raises problems that we hesitate to face or we are unaware of what is going on before our eyes.

The difficulties facing us need no stressing. We are dealing with the young and inexperienced, we can only too easily see the dangers of the situation and the responsibility for any moral disasters must, to some extent at least, lie at our own door. What in fact should we do?

It seems to me that here we are faced with a challenge which demands from us a positive response. Many of these affections in the eyes of the mature observer deserve the epithet of 'silly', but they are not foolish to the principals themselves. If we treat them with unsympathetic coldness, if we strive to suppress them by a policy of rigorous repression, or if, with condescending amusement, we speak lightly of 'calf-love', we shall not only alienate those whom we should be trying to help, but we shall be providing the added spice of the dangerous and the forbidden. Our pupils will not consult us in their difficulties and the whole thing will go underground with the consequences which can so easily follow.

'Yes', you may well say, 'but if our pupils comes to us in such a situation, what shall we tell them? Do you mean to say that we should encourage what may well be self-indulgence at the best and immorality at the worst?' It is a pertinent question and one that must be answered.

Let us begin from a point upon which we must all be agreed,

namely, that any relationship which is either a definite occasion of sin or is very certain to be so is one that must not be allowed to continue. I should say in passing that by sin I do not necessarily mean sexual sin, but sinful self-indulgence. Emotional friendships between boys of very different ages or between boys and girls whose characters give serious and founded grounds for misgiving are cases in point. Here there is little or no reason to suppose that any enduring and constructive relationship can be expected. In the one case, apart from anything else, disparity of age must in nearly every case forbid it; in the other there is every reason to believe that the character of at least one of the parties makes it extremely unlikely. In such cases—and we should not be ready to multiply them—we can surely point out (but not unsympathetically) that the justification for such a union is lacking, that love must have as its object the building up of a real union of minds and hearts and that the circumstances make this almost impossible. That the using of other persons to feed our own-self-indulgence can never be an exercise of the love of God or of man, for love (which is the same thing as charity) and self-indulgence are utterly opposed. We can further point out that it is a fact of human experience that, when someone is attracted by the personality of another, there is a moment when he or she can either 'let go', as it were, and fall in love or they can retreat. We should teach the young to recognize this moment and to realize that with God's grace this is the time when it is not only possible but usually comparatively easy to hold back. In short, our attitude should not be one of negative repression or scandalized horror, but that of a sympathizer pointing out that love does not lie along that road and it is love alone which can fulfil and satisfy the human heart; our attitude should be that of a person of experience pointing out in the name of God that certain attachments can only end in the degradation of oneself or of another.

So much, then, for relationships which should not, in our mature judgment, be entered into. But what of friendships between boys of more or less the same age and between boys and girls whose characters give us no reason—and we should not be quick to find it—for misgiving?

There is nothing so searching to the human spirit as love, for love seems to reveal men for what they really are. Sometimes, people seem to imagine that love creates jealousy or possessiveness,

but in fact all it is doing is to reveal what is already latent in the human heart. It is inevitable, then, that love brings with it urgent problems that have to be faced. Let us look at one or two of these problems and we shall see that they all spring from the fact that love—or charity—wishes to give itself while selfishness wishes to receive and measures success in emotional relationships by what it has got out of them.

The first stages of such relationships seldom cause much difficulty. These are times of discovery, of getting to know another person better, each meeting tends to bring the parties closer, each new intimacy seems to mark a victory. If, as we say, all goes well, a time comes when a person will say to himself, 'I love and I am loved'. To him it seems probably the peak of attainment, but we know that it is just here that difficulties tend to multiply.

One of the most pressing of these difficulties is commonly jealousy. Sometimes jealousy is founded in fact, but more often it is not. The jealous person tends to demand that the whole time and interest of the person he loves should be directed to himself and he often suffers agonies if he sees the loved one engaged in close conversation with another. And he will tend to act in one of two ways. Either pride will step in and he will affect indifference, he will say to himself, 'I am not going to let B hurt me', and will take refuge in aloofness, though with an aching heart. Or, perhaps more commonly, he will become restless, he will brood upon what B is doing or to whom B is talking; he will cross-question B when next he sees him or her. He will be down in the depths of depression at one moment and will then rise to the heights of elation on being reassured that all is well. Unfortunately the scene tends to repeat itself again and again, and only too frequently the wear and tear of such a jealous and possessive relationship will kill it and both parties will go on their way thinking themselves wiser, but in fact only being more cynical. Each of them will tend to blame the other.

Now this is a very common problem which has to be faced especially where the young are concerned. It is not much good if all we can say to someone suffering agonies of jealousy is merely: 'Don't be silly, pull yourself together'. True enough, of course, but hardly helpful. Surely we can provide some more positive approach to the problem? To begin with, we can point out that jealousy is not to be wondered at, indeed it is almost to be

expected. Here is poor fallen nature with all its selfishness having to cope with love which of its nature cuts right across self-indulgence. In fact it is bound to hurt, it would be surprising if it did not. Well, then, accepting the fact without being surprised or dismayed at it, how is it to be dealt with? In the first place jealousy often arises from ignorance of a truth which is not realized until it has been pointed out—the truth, namely, that love being a spiritual faculty is not like a material thing, what is given in love to one is not take away from another. It is only the material expressions of love that cannot be given simultaneously to one and to another. Time, presence, conversation—all of these of course, must be given to one at one time and to another at another, but love itself knows no such limitation.

No, surely it should be made clear that as each human personality is unique, so each relationship between persons must be unique. As *such*, no love can cut across another. A concrete example I have often found useful is to point out that because A loves B it does not mean that he loves his own mother less. Therefore no other person can threaten love itself, but can only appear to threaten the material accompaniments of love. It follows, then that basing ourselves firmly upon the real nature of love and that perfect love and jealousy cannot co-exist, we should stress the fact that one who loves must learn to give, to allow reasonable freedom in material things to the person he loves. I say reasonable freedom—for the freedom will depend upon the circumstances; what would be no infidelity among friends could be one among married couples.

'Charity is patient, charity is kind . . . seeks not her own, is not angry, thinks no evil.' To sink our own desires in what makes another happy is of the essence of love. Happiness and fulfilment will be found in accepting the pain of jealousy, in trying to overcome the selfishness which creates it and in loving more as each challenge to love comes up. It is this perfect love which will cast out fear and the perfect giving of oneself is the pathway to receiving. It is giving all to gain all.

Possessiveness is closely allied to jealousy and must of course be fought with the same weapons. Too frequently, possessiveness comes from a sense of insecurity and it may well be worth our while to stress that a sense of security in the relationship with another person can only be acquired in the measure with which

we cease to rely on tangible assurances. Tangible assurances of affection, however valuable they may be in a love that is already proved and established, are no guides to the presence of love. In short, they cannot assure. To obtain real assurance there must be, as it were, a leap into the dark, a complete trust which is forgetful of possible rebuffs or disappointments, a giving of oneself without regard to what may be expected in return. It is only when that step has really been taken that a sense of security is attained. Again, it is a case of giving all to gain all, but the giving must precede and must as far as possible be forgetful of the gain. Once real security has been acquired (and it has to be acquired by sacrifice, it does not come naturally) it will usually be found that possessiveness, like jealousy, will gradually disappear.

I have time but for one final problem, and it is a real one: what of the physical expression of love and the possibility of its becoming an occasion of sin? It is almost impossible here to speak in general, for persons and situations differ so much from each other that what might be good advice for one would be courting disaster in another. I would only make a very few tentative suggestions. I think we must be careful not to be too narrow in our views. It is easy, indeed it is a commonplace, to say that such physical expressions can become occasions of sin; but, then, almost anything in life pursued to excess can become such an occasion. But it is equally true that here we may easily be dealing with one of the most demanding of human passions and, unfortunately, the conventions of a non-Catholic society are no guide to us at all. What I feel we can and should stress is that these physical expressions are ordained by God to display love, and therefore his love, for others. They are therefore something holy, something not to be tainted. The full physical expression of human love is the complete handing over of each other's bodies in matrimony; the physical expression of love outside matrimony must therefore be proportioned to and restrained by the nature of a relationship which must primarily be that of minds and hearts. We should train the young to think, not in such terms as 'Will it be wrong if I do this?' but rather, positively, 'Am I doing this to display a love which is the love of God?' In short, is what I am doing an act of love or an act of self-gratification?

And here, surely, all that we have been saying about the sacred character of real love must come in. It is because we rate it highly,

rate it supernaturally, that we teach the young the necessity of self-restraint, the restraint of selfishness. It is because we regard it as holy that we urge the importance of reverence and respect. But all this is far from inculcating coldness of heart and frigidity of behaviour; is because we wish for love to grow, to become ever stronger and—I do not hesitate to say it—to to be more vividly felt that we guard it from the frustration of mere passion or the day-dreams of ineffective sentimentality.

I have touched upon one or two of the problems here. Others will immediately leap to the mind—the pangs of unrequited love, for instance—but I think that we shall find that most of them can be dealt with on the lines that I have tried to indicate. Some will perhaps feel that I have taken the loves of adolescence and youth too seriously. But they exist and they are of immense moment to the participants. Psychologists may account for the existence of the phenomena, but in the concrete the fact remains that they provide situations with which the young have to cope. Are we going to waste what are, after all, opportunities? To love perfectly one must be a saint, and it is inevitable that youth and inexperience should tend to be all at sea in new and powerful emotions. Very few of these loves will last throughout life, but the persons and the problems will. Can we not use the opportunity to teach the young how to love, how to cope with jealousy and possessiveness, how to use these fore-runners of the mature loves of later life so that they learn something from them? Having coped with jealousy in one love, they will be better fitted to deal with it later on. Our young people today are infected with the romanticism of Hollywood—a romanticism which regards love as a kind of blissful feeling which descends upon men and women and to which they are passive. The Catholic teaching is that such feelings, when not totally inappropriate, are sent by God to form, as it were, the raw materials of a building that must be shaped to house him. Love is not something that merely happens to men, it is something that must be made, something that requires great self-sacrifice and patience, something that means active and selfless participation.

Surely, therefore, we should not waste these opportunities but use them to make our pupils realize that faith, hope and charity in God have their counterpart in belief in, trust in and love for, men and women. That no emotion, no feeling, which is directed

towards what is good lies outside the scope of grace, outside the life of Christ. That by taking young love seriously and sympathetically we are not encouraging self-indulgence but urging a deep, if rewarding, asceticism. That all loves are—if taken in the right way—preparations for that love for another in matrimony, which is the total physical expression of human love, or for that higher than physical love, given to all without thought of return which must be the love of the priest and of the religious. We must teach them that God has drawn all things to himself and that his sacred heart is an abyss of love which, poured forth upon all and in all, will—if we correspond with it—make our poor, fragile, human loves pure, selfless, untainted, intense and unafraid.



THE PERSON IN EDUCATION*

HENRY ST JOHN, O.P.

THE title of this address may sound to you a little *tough* and abstract, yet it is a good subject for this afternoon's meeting because you are all parents, and each parent has a person, often several persons, your children, in whom you are deeply interested, and for whose welfare and education you are personally responsible, since God has chosen you to co-operate with him in bringing them into being, and in preparing them for their independent life as persons in the world.

Now, I am not a parent and it would be impertinent for me to try to teach you your job as parents in detail. What I want to do this afternoon is to remind you of certain basic principles underlying the true notion of education. Principles are important; without them we can never really understand any problem, and this is a problem it is supremely important to understand thoroughly. The principles I am speaking of are of course Christian principles; they are laid down by the Catholic Church in its teaching. This teaching is notably summed up in the Encyclical

* An address given at the inauguration of the Parents' Association of the Assumption Convent, Richmond, Yorks. June 21st, 1957.