

WE ARE NOT ALONE

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LONELINESS was not always the problem that it is to the modern world. There have been times at high points of civilization when solitude was considered by many as quite necessary to happiness. These who have found great happiness in our times still think so. But even though often identified, solitude is not exactly the same as loneliness. A man can be lonely without being alone. One can have what is called a full life, and yet be lonely. Life can be full on the outside, empty within. That is what loneliness is.

REASONS FOR THE PROBLEM

Loneliness is a modern problem because there is nothing specifically modern that can fill the interior emptiness. Modern civilization offers only escapes, not answers. It holds out and shouts loudly about material things, and as long as men can be distracted from their inner selves the hoax will work. But sooner or later the modern din and rush becomes tiresome and the natural tendency is to turn to solitude and to oneself in search of rest and peace. Here the tragedy begins, for peace demands order and rest requires an end of seeking. But the chaotic confusion of modern thought makes interior peace impossible. And the emptiness of contemporary "fulness" permits of little rest, since it is itself a cause of restlessness, of endless seeking.

The modern pattern holds no answer to this modern problem. There is little hope of tearing out the roots of loneliness if one does not turn to something that is above and beyond the limitations of strictly modern ideas. These modern attitudes of mind are themselves the roots of loneliness: on the one hand liberalism—a high sounding defense for the selfishness and disguised narrowness of individualism; on the other, rationalism and the cult of humanism—the near-sighted philosophy of men without vision, without Faith. With these ideas men of a century ago forged the tragedy of modern life. They called it the defense of human personality to proclaim the unrestricted liberty of individual desire. They held that it was an affront to human reason to acknowledge the Author of Reason; that it was absurd to talk of a Personal God Who is Love Itself. But with the passage of

time men have come to the realization that to be free and independent of God means also to be alone. And men who were taught that the human mind could eventually discover all truth have come to suspect that the truth they are looking for is not the one still to be discovered, but the One Truth that was left behind and denied.

THE ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM

In their loneliness men have begun to understand that to go forward now means, in a sense, to go back. There is only one way to find what has been lost, one way to the peace of dependence, to the comfort of leaning on someone strong. That is the way back to God. In Him men find the answer to the problem which their mistakes have created. In Him they find the peace and rest which are at the heart of Truth.

God is the real, the ultimate, the only reason why no one can be alone. For wherever a creature can be found, there also of necessity will its Creator be found.¹ As a child in the womb could not live without the life of its mother, so neither could anything exist without receiving its being from God. No one thinks of the beginning of life without motherhood. If all men had the advantage of understanding life itself they would know with much deeper certitude that all creatures must live in their Creator. And just as a child in the womb is a distinct being, so all creatures are distinct and separate from the God in Whom they live. There is, however, one important difference in the parallel, namely that whereas the child remains in the womb for a short time, the creature must remain in its Creator as long as it exists. Thus it is true to say that we all live in the bosom of Our God, for God is the Source, the Cause of all being even as the mother is the cause of human beginning. Indeed motherhood is a reflection of God in creation, a small shadow giving testimony to His life-giving activity and His intimate nearness to all His creatures.

Whether we realize it or not all that we are, all that we have depends upon God. "For of Him and by Him and in Him are all things."²

REASONS BEHIND THE FACT

These words of God's revelation, the foundation of Faith's unshakable conviction, are echoed by the certitude of human proofs. These are metaphysical, yet simple, based as they are on common

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 8.

² Rom. xi, 36.

sense. Christian philosophers and saints, following the mind of the Church, have annexed them and made them part of Christian thought as a preliminary to the Faith, a help in the ascent of the mind to God.³

To understand these proofs one need only begin with the three very evident facts of birth, life and death. Everyone knows that, even were this world to last forever, he is still a passing thing as far as this life is concerned. He knows that once he was not; that someday he will cease to be, at least as a creature of body and soul. With equal certainty, however, he can say here and now: I am. From these three facts proceed three positive conclusions. First of all it can be deduced that man's being is not a necessary one; that this or that man need not always have existed. Then immediately it follows that his being at all is a contingency. Finally, when here and now someone actually exists, there must be some cause to explain how that happened. The answer is to be found in explaining the words: I am.

To begin with, there are two distinct ideas expressed in the statement. The first is *what* a man is, and this is implied in the pronoun "I." The second is the fact *that* he is, and this idea is contained in the verb "am." It is sufficient to explain how something came to be what it is by tracing it to its immediate causes.⁴ It is not so easy, however, to explain the fact *that* something exists, that is to explain where the *being* comes from. The answer to this question depends on one's understanding of a commonly accepted adage, "Everything operates according to and within the limits of its nature." Acorns are expected to produce oaks, but not elms; and although men may be said to work like horses, that is but a figure of speech. Because reproduction is an operation within the limits of human nature, men can beget other men. They cannot, nevertheless, give being to others. Why? Because this is not within the power of their nature—men do not possess being by nature. If being were natural to human nature, if men *were* being, instead of just *having* being, there would never have been a time when they did not exist. On the contrary, we know that all men have had a beginning. Consequently, that operation whereby being is given to the human individual is not from man because it is beyond the capacity of human nature. Since, then, everything operates according to its nature, the being which men and all things receive must come from someone who is being by nature, and thereby capable of giving being to others.

³ St. Thomas, *op. cit.* q. 1., a. 5 ad 2.

⁴ *ibid.* q. 45, a. 5 ad 1.

This Someone is God, the same God Who, in revealing Himself to Moses, said: "I Am Who Am."⁵ God is He Who always was, is now and ever shall be; on Him depend all things that come to be, have being and pass away.

GOD'S INTIMATE PRESENCE

Many modern thinkers, though admitting these truths, would destroy half their beauty and value by insisting that God is not a personal God. They would rather think of Him as giving being, setting things in motion and then leaving them to themselves. Or at best they regard God as a great artist who stands off, brush in hand, critically reviewing His creation. Such a thought of God as being far away, running the universe by remote control, is a harmful and depressing mistake. The power by which God gives being and life to creatures is not something which stands between God and us as does an artist's brush between him and his painting. God's power is not something distinct from Himself. All God's perfections are one in Him, because He lacks all disunity and composition.⁶ All things, therefore, because they live by the power of God, live side by side with Him. There is no distance between God and us. We cannot touch Him, it is true, but He is always touching us, holding us in His hand, never letting go, never letting go even of those who will not acknowledge their complete and absolute dependence upon Him. The truth, however, is unalterable: man's most basic and constant need is his need for the nearness of God, and God is never found wanting. The loneliness that is born of self-sufficiency is based upon the most absurd of impossibilities.

Perhaps it is this very impossibility of success that leads inevitably to the fall that always follows after this proud self-sufficiency. "All things betray thee who betrayeth Me." The loss of all that a man loves, followed slowly by the cold, crushing feeling that there is no one left who cares, brings about the swift descent into despair. This state of desolation is the most bitter of all loneliness. Not only is it poison to the mind, it is poison to the heart as well. It is the loneliness that crushes, that is its own executioner, that heaps upon itself its own misfortunes. This was the last perfidy of Judas, and it is the plague of modern society. But it is founded on a lie.

ONE WHO ALWAYS CARES

Long ago, when men were seeking a name for the Supreme

⁵ Exod. iii, 14.

⁶ St. Thomas, *op. cit.* I, q. 3.

Being, the Giver of all being, they gave Him the name *Theos*. The root of this Greek word means "to look out for," "to care." It is common to name things according to their most distinguishing qualities. What all thoughtful men found to be most obvious about God was that He cares for us.⁷ All nature gives evidence to that fact. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow."⁸ This truth of God's loving care requires no greater effort of concentration than that. "Consider the lilies of the field." Notwithstanding, some men, for reasons that are often very strange, run the labyrinth of their minds trying to escape the answer to their anxieties. Once, however, the self-deception stops the answer is inescapable—God cares.

All the things that happen, all the things to which God gives being, depend upon Him; and that means that they are loved by Him. If we want a task done perfectly we entrust it to someone who not only knows how to do the work well, but who also loves it deeply. No one works more poorly than the man who hates his work; the perfect work is the labor of love. God has done all things perfectly. "And God saw all the things that He had made, and they were very good."⁹ For ages men have looked upon the heavens, have studied all the varied wonders of the universe and have never ceased to marvel at what they have found. The order, harmony and concord of the world that lie beyond man's abuse, are unquestionable proof of a Workman Whose Love knows no bounds.

Man, because he has sinned and in sinning has corrupted for himself and in himself the beauty, order and harmony which God created, does not see God's goodness and love as clearly as he might. As a result, some, because of the pain and suffering that have come in the wake of sin, have gradually come to doubt that all-abiding love. In the ever deepening blindness and disappointment that engulf men as they fall deeper into sin, they sometimes think that because they have lost so much they have lost all; that since nothing they loved returned their love, there is no love that has not betrayed them.

AN OBJECTION OFFERS PROOF

But the pain and suffering that follow sin are no argument against God's love. They only prove that sin is bad. God's love, however, is not overcome by evil. He overcomes evil with good, with love. God does not turn aside even from the sinner whose hatred of God

⁷ *Ibid.* q. 13, a. 3.

⁸ Luke, xiv, 27.

⁹ Genesis, i, 31.

rings out from the depths of his soul and sentences him to the punishment of hell. That punishment is not an abandonment. No, not even the soul in the depths of hell can say: God does not care. The love and the mercy of God extend to all things, nor is hell an exception.¹⁰ In creating hell God has still been merciful, for even if man cannot imagine anything worse, God could.

No matter how great the sin, God's love forgives whenever possible. It is only unrepentance, man's obdurate refusal to accept God's mercy and love, his perseverance in hatred of God and love of his own will and desires, that condemn a man to hell. And perhaps, seen in the light of this obstinacy, hell itself is convincing proof of God's abiding presence and all-embracing love. Because one who hates is tortured by the presence of the one he hates, one of the greatest punishments of hell may well be the stark realization of how near God is. But the greatest torment, which is the pain of loss, is intensified by the very nearness of the Goodness and the Love that was lost forever.

THE WAY BACK

This pain of loss is also the principal ingredient in despair, which for that reason can make life seem like the gateway to hell. But, thank God, it is not always so in fact, for it is this sense of loss, as many converts testify, which can set men searching, often without any idea of the object of their search. This is a *coup de grace* permitted by God, which often marks the beginning of the soul's ascent from the depths. It may come as the humiliation that follows a climax of folly which by the grace of God becomes a beginning of wisdom. Or, it may come as the sense of guilt that leads to the fear of God, and a plea for mercy. Whatever the case, once God touches the heart and removes the blindness from the soul, the search is over; that which was lost has been found; what was empty will now be filled. This rediscovery of God is the beginning of a new and far happier life, a life that is the beginning of heaven on earth, a mingling of joy and sorrow, but of a sorrow that stops short of harm because of the Joy that no man can take away, and the Peace that the world cannot give.

With this new beginning there is always the awareness of God's love. All life will take on new meaning as soon as man begins to return the love which is always being spent on him. And through this expended love, which is the grace of God, God will rebuild within the heart a part of the Paradise which sin has lost, the Paradise in which Adam walked and talked with God and knew that he was not alone.

¹⁰ St. Thomas, *op. cit.* I, q. 20, a. 2; q. 21 a. 4.