



TELEGRAMS

"MONASTERY, ROS CRE"



MOUNT SAINT JOSEPH ABBEY.

ROS CRE.

4 December, 1953.

Dear Father Louis,

About a year ago your book "Ascent to Truth" was read in our refectory, and a passage in it caught my attention particularly. Re-reading the book recently, my impression is confirmed and with Rev. Father Abbot's consent I would like to discuss the point with you.

Let me begin by assuring you that I raise this matter in no spirit of criticism, but simply with a desire for information and with a view to clarifying a point of spiritual theology about which, it seems, there is already too much that is not so clear. Also - allow me say that I quite realize how difficult it must be for you to find time for everything - being Master of Scholastics and professor of Dogma here myself and having to do a few other small jobs, my days are more than full. The mere thought of having to write innumerable books on top of all that makes me shudder! I think I can understand your having too much to do by "a certain connaturality". Be that as it may, if you can find time to reply to this and clarify the point at issue I will be grateful.

The passage in question is on p. 206-7 of the "Ascent to Truth" (Clonmore & Reynolds, Dublin Ed.), that is, about the middle of Chapter XVII - The Loving Knowledge of God. It begins - "The exact teaching of modern Thomists...." and includes seven paragraphs ending just before a quotation from John of St. Thomas on the Gift of Wisdom.

You analyze at some length what, you say, "some writers call 'acquired contemplation'". It consists, if I mistake not, in "a rejoicing in the knowledge that we love and are loved". "It is our love we contemplate". You go on to affirm that whatever be the views of the theologians you cite regarding the nature of this contemplation "they agree that contemplation which produces a real supraconceptual sense of the presence of God and which therefore most writers would agree in calling mystical, consists in something more



than resting in the knowledge of our own love."

The points I would like to raise are the following:-

(1) To whom do you refer as "some writers"? While my knowledge of mystical writers is not very wide, I cannot recall any who explain this matter as you do here. Let us agree that the question of terminology is secondary - what matters is the "thing" - the state of prayer in question, whatever it be called. Now the condition you describe here seems much more like a reflex act of consciousness - the soul contemplating its own love - than a state of prayer. Surely in any kind of contemplation - acquired or infused - the object of contemplation must be God, even though in the lower degrees (i.e. in what Fr. Gabriel, O.D.C. calls acquired contemplation) the soul may not realize this? But perhaps you are not, in fact, dealing with a state of prayer here?

(2) It seems to me that your using the term "acquired Contemplation" here as you do leads to difficulties. While the question of terminology may not be finally settled, it is true, is it not, that the term "acquired contemplation" at least bids fair to be generally accepted as describing "beginner's contemplation" - i.e. that described by Fr. Gabriel, O.D.C., in his book "Acquired Contemplation"? (in "St. John of the Cross, doctor of Divine Love and contemplation", pub. Mercier Press, 1946). You may reply - No - many Thomists do not accept that terminology at all. Granted - but surely they discuss the reality behind the term anyhow - "a contemplation which produces a real supra-conceptual sense of the presence of God". You say most writers agree in calling this mystical. Again - granted. But is not this, or at least a degree of it, what at least some writers e.g. Fr. Gabriel, O.D.C., calls "acquired contemplation"? But your use of this term seems to describe something quite different.

Now, while it may not be incorrect to use the term "acquired contemplation" to describe the state in which we "contemplate our own love" does it not seem to be confusing the whole question to an unnecessary extent? While in relation to your whole book this point is a small one, in itself it seems to be fraught with consequences of not a little import - more especially when we consider the vast public reading your books.

Perhaps I could put it this way. For want of better terminology let us divide contemplation into "beginners'" and "advanced". We have here two realities - distinct, at least in degree, and for the purposes of direction etc. requiring quite different handling. Now some theologians, while admitting the difference in direction etc. hold that





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both states must be called "infused". Others say - we prefer to call one "acquired" and the other "infused". So far the difficulty is not great - provided we note what each means by the terms he employs, we can follow the various writers without trouble. But you appear to bring in a third state ("contemplation of our own love") which you call by the name "acquired contemplation" - quoting "some writers" as your authorities, without naming them. Now, I suggest, Father, that the average individual reading that, who has read some other works on Prayer, will conclude that the "some writers" to whom you refer, include the very well-known theologians like Fr. Gabriel, O.D.C., whose books are more or less "popular". Now, it seems to me that that cannot but lead to confusion, since in fact the Carmelites (whom I take as the protagonists of "acquired contemplation" and as represented by Fr. Gabriel) do not explain the matter as you do at all.

Consequently, I think the passage in question is somewhat misleading, at least. It would appear to be necessary either to quote the writers to whom you refer, explaining that you do not take the term "acquired Contemplation" in its usually accepted sense, or else revise your analysis of it. I fear this is all very roundabout and badly put - but the point does seem of sufficient importance to write you, and I would greatly appreciate a reply. Perhaps I have misunderstood you - or others writing on the same subject.

Please accept my fraternal good wishes and prayers for the success of your work. Allow me also send greetings from my scholastics to your own charges. God bless you all.

Yours fraternally in Christ,

*L. W. Mivard. O.C.D.*