

FR. PETER SEMENENKO, C.R.

## SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

with a foreword by

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## **FATHER SEMENENKO'S SYSTEM OF ASCETICISM**

In a memorial eulogizing Fr. Semenenko after his death, Father Kalinka stated:

Father Semenenko, a penetrating judge of souls, was an excellent confessor and a superb conference master; once an individual sampled his spiritual direction, he could not easily settle for any other. After one had completed a retreat under his direction, he could be satisfied by no other. His conferences made an enormous impression--a lasting impression; no mere passing fancy. This effect was not the result of eloquence; Father Semenenko was not at all eloquent. It was the ideas themselves that struck home, held one enraptured, and found favorable reception in the soul. One felt that his words contained no exaggeration, or flights of poetry, but truth pure and simple.

What then -- was Father Semenenko presenting something new? In the teaching of the spiritual life, as in the teaching of faith, there can be nothing new; for the spiritual life is based on revelation, and revelation was completed and concluded by Christ. However, in the course of centuries, that revelation, that revelation has been developed and clarified. St. Vincent of Lerins, in speaking of the progress possible within the Church, sounds this warning:

...may that which was formerly believed with difficulty be made, through your interpretation, more understandable in the light. May posterity, through your aid, rejoice in the understanding of things which, in old times, were venerated without understanding. Yet, teach precisely what you have learned; do not say new things even if you say them

in a new manner. At this point, the question may be asked: If this is right, then is no progress of religion possible within the Church of Christ? To be sure, there has to be progress, even exceedingly great progress. For who is so grudging toward his fellow men, and so full of hatred toward God, as to try to prohibit it? But it must be progress in the proper sense of the word and not a change in faith. Progress means that each thing grows within itself, whereas change implies that one thing is transformed into another. Hence, it must be that understanding, knowledge, and wisdom grow and advance mightily and strongly in individuals as well as in the community, in a single person as well as in the Church as a whole, and this gradually according to age and history. But, they must progress within their own limits, that is, in accordance with the same kind of dogma, frame of mind, and intellectual approach. The growth of religion in the soul should be like the growth of the holy, which in the course of years develops and unfolds, yet remains the same as it was. Much happens between the prime of childhood and the maturity of old age. But--the old men of today who were the adolescents of yesterday, although the figure and appearance of one and the same person have changed, are identical. There remains one and the same nature, and one and the same person.\*

Therefore, in the teaching of the spiritual life, as in all other things, there must be progress - progress not by the addition of something new, but by the development and explanation of the old. Today, when men are acquiring such vast sums of knowledge in all spheres of learning, a deeper penetration into the science of the spiritual life is also called for. The mind which is accustomed to investigation cannot restrain itself. Questions of religion, questions dealing with the interior life, since they are most vital, must inevitably confront the soul. The soul cannot leave these without an answer; it feels obliged to form clearer concepts

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\*Vincent of Lerins, The Commonitories, trans. Rudolph E. Morris ("The Fathers of the Church"; New York: Fathers of the Church, 1949, VII, 308-309).

about such things. Let us take, for example, an explanation of the passion of the Lord. There are souls for whom its simple presentation suffices to awaken within them love for and gratitude to Christ, because he has suffered so much for us. But there are others, who in the course of their meditations on the passion, will be disturbed by the doubt: did Jesus really suffer? For, they tell themselves, people who suffer for some idea, or for love of another, bear such suffering with ease - either without feeling the suffering at all, or even finding a certain relish in it. Now the Savior undoubtedly loved his Father infinitely; he suffered for the salvation of the world - such was the exalted work that he was to accomplish! In such circumstances, could he possibly feel the severity of his sufferings?

Souls that are somewhat advanced in their knowledge of the catechism will ask themselves: how could Christ suffer if, during his lifetime, he was endowed with the beatific vision, such as is enjoyed by the blessed in heaven? The happiness which one experiences in the sight of God blots out all suffering. Hence, such souls need to enter more deeply into the reasons for Christ's passion in order to understand that it was precisely the vision of God, and the love of God, which increased Christ's suffering beyond measure and made it impossible for any mortal to suffer as much as he suffered. Father Semenenko, in like manner, presents nothing new; but he does enter more deeply into certain truths of the spiritual life.

There are certain truths, universally promulgated and accepted by all, which nowhere receive a solid basic explanation. As a result, these truths are regarded by many merely as methods of expression, as figures of speech, devoid of any real meaning. Among the first of such expressions we might cite our "misery," and the "corruption" in which we are born. All of us are convinced that this misery is in us; and, what is more, theology teaches us that this is so. Anyone who does not consider that he is full of misery and evil inclinations is ill thought of and considered conceited. In the world, it is even a part of good etiquette to speak of oneself in very humble tones, and never to ascribe any good to oneself.

The saints cannot find words adequate to express their condemnation of self; they consider themselves to be the

greatest of sinners. How do they arrive at such a conclusion? Must we say, perhaps, that their mind was not in agreement with the words they spoke? Or, that sanctity so clouded their reason, that they were unable to view themselves as accurately in the light of grace as in the light of natural reason? Humility is regarded as the basis of all virtue; without it no virtue is pleasing to God. But what is humility except the voluntary acknowledgement that one is miserable and corrupt?

Yet, despite this fact, does the acknowledgement of our misery usually find an adequate place in the teaching about the spiritual life? Is it the basis of our teaching on the spiritual life, as it is undoubtedly the basis of that life itself? Much is said about sin and sinners. We find frequent descriptions, e.g., of the proud man, or the one who is given to impurity, etc. But it is not usually said of every man - even of him who cannot be accused of pride or of leading a dissolute life, etc. - that he has within himself the inclination to all these evils, and that these inclinations continually make themselves felt within man. About this we hear little or nothing. Father Semenenko gives this knowledge of self first place. He shows that we are not dealing with a mere figure of speech, a method of expression: "that we are miserable, corrupt, full of evil inclinations," but that this is the strictest truth.

Coupled with our misery is our nothingness. St. Paul says: "For if anyone thinks himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Gal 6:3). To know that man is nothing, says St. Augustine, is the height of wisdom. "Hoc est tota magna scientia, scire quia homo nihil est." "O unknown nothingness!" cried Blessed Angela of Foligno, "I tell you that no knowledge that the soul can acquire is more valuable than the knowledge of its own nothingness." How do we understand this nothingness? Again for us, it is just a way of speaking; for we usually speak of ourselves as something. As a rule, we do not go deeper than that. And it is here that Fr. Semenenko steps in - not with something new, but with a truth recognized by all, repeated by all - he applies this truth to life. On it he bases his whole ascetical teaching.

Closely associated with our nothingness is our weakness. We can do nothing of ourselves. Jesus himself told us so:

"Without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). St. Paul also states: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor 3:5). And yet, only infrequently is this weakness of ours taken into account. In our meditations we are told we should make our resolutions as far reaching as possible, without inquiring whether or not these are within our power to fulfill. Fr. Semenenko considers this self-activity, that is, doing everything by ourselves, as though we could do anything of ourselves, as the greatest enemy of the interior life. He interprets self-activity as the source of all the difficulties and confusion which we experience. He claims that self-activity is the result of a lack of love of God, and urges us to fight it as our principal foe.

Is there, then, nothing but evil in us? And if there is some good in us, are we not permitted to look upon it at all, or take any delight in it? Indeed, many writers regard such activity as a very dangerous thing, and warn us to close our eyes to these good qualities. Fr. Semenenko was not of this opinion. According to him, self-knowledge should never be one-sided; to shut our eyes to what is good in us can, as a matter of fact, throw us into the clutches of pride.

The life of Christ in us has never before been explained adequately with such frequency and perseverance. Sacred Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, and books dealing with asceticism speak of this life; but in the minds of many, this is only a figure of speech, sheer poetry. Fr. Semenenko regarded it as an absolute reality. What can be said of the relation of our acts to the acts which Christ performed in the course of his lifetime? We read in meditation manuals: "See how much you have contributed to the sufferings of Jesus by your whole life; " or, "My sins scourged him, crowned him with thorns, struck him and spat upon him, nailed him to the cross, and put him to death! Hence, there have been times in my life when I have cried with the deicidal Jewish mob: Sentence Jesus to the cross; let Barabbas live!" Again, "I should say to myself: Look, this is your work! It was you who, by means of the hands of the executioners, scourged the flesh of Jesus; it was you who covered it with blood and wounds." They say to the dying: "Join your agony with the agony of Christ, and it will be easy for you to die!" Is all of this nothing more than poetry, figures of speech? Fr. Se-

menenko regarded this relationship of the life of Jesus to our life as something most real.

From what we have said, it can be seen that the ascetical system of Fr. Semenenko - what was new in it as regards the presentation of the spiritual life, what he especially highlighted in it and that in which he synopsized his whole teaching - embraces three points: 1. a deeper knowledge of self; 2. a condemnation of self-activity; 3. the life of Christ in us, and our life in him.

It is a dogma of faith that, after original sin, misery and concupiscence remained in us. The Council of Trent, in condemning the doctrine of Luther, who regarded concupiscence as sin, stated that while concupiscence is not to be identified with sin, it derives from sin and leads to sin. Saint James ascribes all temptations to concupiscence: "But, everyone is tempted by being drawn away and enticed by his own passion. Then when passion has conceived, it brings forth sin; but when sin has matured it begets death" (Jas 1:14-15).

Concupiscence is considered here in its broadest sense: as the inclination to all of the evil that has remained in us after original sin. Since sins fall into three categories according to the three faculties in man, intellect, heart and will (Cf. S.T. 1, 2, q.78, a.1, c), the inclination to evil in us will also be threefold. St. Thomas calls these inclinations "wounds inflicted by the sin of Adam." And so, we have the wound of ignorance in the intellect, the wound of concupiscence in the heart (the appetite), and the wound of wickedness in the will (Cf. S.T., 1, 2, q.85, a.3, c).

Fr. Semenenko likewise distinguished our misery according to these three spheres of life. As to the extent of evil which remains in us after original sin, there is a variety of opinions among theologians. There are principally two schools of thought: one holds that man was deprived of the supernatural gifts, but that nature remained intact; the other holds that man was affected in his nature as well in the sense that the heart conceives desires, now no longer at the command of reason as before, but contrary to reason (S.T., 1, q.95, a.1, c); and the intellect was deprived not only of supernatural light, but now shows an inclination to falsehood (Cf. S.T., 1, 2, q.85, a.3).

Fr. Semenenko interprets this, stating that in things to which we are indifferent, i.e., about which we are not concerned that they should be this way and no other, things which do not involve the heart, as e.g., mathematics, astronomy, etc. - here the intellect sees clearly. But, where our emotions enter in, our interest, there usually we seek falsehood. We work hard to arrive at the goal of falsehood, and in the end we come to regard falsehood as the truth.

Fr. Semenenko, in offering a deeper explanation of our misery and corruption - this was the principal topic of the retreats he gave - did not touch upon theological controversies; he did not even cite Scripture or the Fathers of the Church. He analyzed the whole matter from a psychological standpoint. He demonstrated what goes on in man, in his soul, the internal process through which man passes. He described all this so clearly, so accurately, those who made retreats under him testify, that throughout the whole time of the conferences (and he had ten full-hour conferences) they sat as it were on pins and needles. It seemed to them that Father was reading their souls, and relating their deeds. He presented man's misery in all its horror; he penetrated right to the heart of the matter. "We must despise ourselves," he would say, "for our nature is no better than that of a public sinner, at whom men point their finger. The proof of this is to be found in the temptations we experience. At times the intellect is plunged in darkness and the heart wavers. God permits this to show us what we really are. Let us profit from these experiences, and let them serve as the basis for our self-detestation."

"What is the heart," he asks, "in which man searches after glory? Abomination, deserving of aversion. And that pretence? It is contemptible and vile. Man of himself, in the depths of his consciousness, is all that we call vile. He deserves no honor, but rather all dishonor. And what is our integrity, our honor? Outside of God there is in us only our own misery. At the bottom of this misery is shamelessness and baseness. Who, after he has examined himself more carefully, will not discover in himself some such base instinct?"

He asks: "Can anyone say that in him there is no trickery or scheming?" And he answers: "We would not be men if there were not in us at least the roots of such evil. Even



murder is not beyond us; its seed is present within us." He goes on to say: "Have we never felt (at least in the form of a temptation) hatred for someone, and experienced either the wish that he did not exist, or displeasure and anger because he does exist? For he gets in our way; we find him distasteful. Several considerations: human respect, our better, polite, training, but especially the grace of God, keeps us from actually taking steps to get rid of such a person."

"Such is the basic human wickedness," cries Fr. Semenenko. "We must know it well, and despise ourselves as a result of such knowledge." Self-detestation, hatred of self - such was the end of the retreats give by Fr. Semenenko. He wished to excite his hearers to despise themselves, and therefore he unmasked the comedy which man continues to act out; he demonstrated how everyone clings to some image, some figure, which he dresses up, adorns with flowers, feathers, and radiance that accord with his desires. He would like to be such an individual; but especially he wishes to be regarded as such in the eyes of men. He sees himself thus adorned; he recognizes, honors, and admires himself. It is immediately evidently that he is occupied with himself; he thinks about himself and, simultaneously, about the impression he is making on you. You feel that he is posing, that he is comparing himself with that ideal image that he has in his mind. Father was merciless in disclosing human weaknesses, and when he got down to specific manifestations of human vanity, he proceeded in such a masterly fashion that one was forced to laugh at the foolishness and ridiculousness of man, even while he wished to hide himself in shame, since he recognized himself in these descriptions.

The reproach was sometimes made to Fr. Semenenko that by such disclosure of the misery of man he could easily discourage some, depriving them of the courage to work. Such critics said that it was better to leave man with the good opinion he had of himself. But, is it possible to achieve holiness without a knowledge of self? We know that, on our part, prayer is the principal active ingredient of holiness. But what will be the prayer of one who does not know his own misery? At most his would have to be a prayer of thanksgiving that there is no evil in him. This would be the prayer of the Pharisee whom our Lord condemned. For what would he pray? For what would he ask? If one asks for help in time of temptation, it

is because he feels that he is weak, inclined to evil. If one asks for love, it is because he sees that he is lacking in love. The more acutely one feels this lack in himself, the more fervent his prayer becomes. But if he sees no evil in himself, he will not pray sincerely; and without prayer, how will he resist in time of temptation? How will he acquire virtue? Besides, without a knowledge of self, he will manifest a lack of understanding in relations with his neighbors - he will show a certain contempt, like that of the Pharisee for the publican.

### BOGDAN JAŃSKI

How did Fr. Semenenko achieve such a profound comprehension of human misery? Where did he acquire that vivid conviction of the reality of this misery, of the need to understand it, as well as of the need to make it known? He had to observe it in someone; someone had to be his master in this study. True, he could have studied it in himself; for he knew himself well, and he was severe in his judgments of himself. In his spiritual notes for the year 1836 he says of himself: "After examining my conscience well, I doubt whether I have ever performed any work in which pride did not take a hand."

A few years later he writes again: "Having reached the conclusion that pride continually draws me away from you, O Lord, I sought refuge in humility; but I could discover no humility in myself. I discovered my vileness, and was convinced of it. I was convinced also that I was proud, for this was all so manifest that I could almost reach out my hand and touch it. But I found no humility. Indeed, in my soul I found bitterness because I was so vile and so proud; but you see, my Lord, that even this bitterness stemmed from pride." Such an understanding of self was the result of work upon himself, to which it would seem someone else had aroused him and pointed out the way. This "someone else" could only have been Bogdan Jański.

Jański kept a diary in order to keep a check on himself. This diary was known to his disciples, or at least it became known to them after his death, for Fr. Kajsiwicz writes in his Memoirs: "Jański's notes dealing with the future of the

Congregation and the needs of individual souls bear witness to the depth of his foresight and understanding." But even during his lifetime, those who were close to him must have known that he kept a strict watch on himself, for they lived in close intimacy with him, especially Semenenko, whom Jański had converted, and whom, as Fr. Kajsiewicz writes: "he tamed with his gentleness, while making a deep impression on the proud young man with his learned and interesting conversation." Semenenko lived with Jański for several months after his conversion: "He rarely left the house, except to go to church. He spent his time in fasting, in prayer, and in the reading of Catholic books provided for him by Jański to correct his false concepts."

It would be true to say that in this time Semenenko was making a retreat under the guidance of Jański. Getting back to our original line of thought, Jański, in his diary, was checking on himself continually, finding an abundance of misery in his every deed, thought and intention. In reading the diary, one senses a kind of weariness and discouragement. In this person before whom men bow their heads, whom they regard as a saint and call an apostle, against whom no reproach can be brought unless it be that he is too kind, that he takes too little thought of himself - in him one looks for some perfection, some pre-eminence, something extraordinary. But no, he is a man like other men: full of vanity, seeking himself in everything, seeking his own pleasure and glory - a man without character.

And we need not think that humility causes him to exaggerate, or that he is speaking only in generalities. No, he is continually catching himself in the act, narrating facts. Only when you consider that it is he himself who reveals all this evil, when you appreciate the depth of sorrow and humility with which he turns to God in every instance, when you realize that while we are wearied and discouraged by reading this journal, he was not discouraged, nor did he grow weary of such a life, or tired of continually checking on himself - only then can you appreciate his excellence. At the same time you get an inside view of how Jański understood the spiritual life: he regarded self-knowledge as the principal condition and basis of perfection. Jański saw the evil in himself, and continually acknowledged it. In fact, he was so imbued with

the sense of his own misery and wickedness that he asks himself: "Do I despise myself enough?" And he answers that he needs, even finds indispensable, a continual sense "of contempt for, and fear of myself."

Fr. Semenenko was a disciple of Jański. It is inconceivable that Jański should not have provided him with an explanation of the need for this self-knowledge, about which he himself was so strongly convinced. At the same time, he made him aware of his weaknesses. We saw how severe Semenenko was in accusing himself of pride. Jański accused him of the same fault, warning him that "a head that is too big will lose its balance" Duński wrote that during his studies in Rome, Semenenko "surpassed all others in intellectual pride;" that he was "a stubborn disputant, challenging others with difficulties." In this same time Jański was warning him "to guard against manifesting his intellectual superiority; to seek rather to be superior in love." When he came to Rome, he grieved over him: "What has happened to this Peter? I cannot recognize him!" He administered fraternal correction, which Semenenko received with great humility and gratitude, praise and love for Jański.

In a letter from Rome, in 1838, Semenenko confides to Jański: "I continue to be full of myself, complaining about the uncircumcision of my mind and heart. It is extremely difficult for me to enter upon the practice of humility, simplicity and self-abnegation, especially where it concerns the intellect. Dear Bogdan, pray for me. I have great confidence in your prayer because, as compared with me, you enjoy a special place and significance in the sight of God. Forgive me for all of my past foolishness." In another letter to Jański he says: "Do not forget about the brethren who are separated from you, and who sorely need fervent intercession for them with God. Bogdan, you are especially aware of the need of him who writes this; therefore, do not forget him."

In that same year, when the brethren in Rome chose Semenenko as their Superior, he wrote to Jański: "They have already written to tell you about their decision concerning me. It was up to them to justify their choice, for as regards me, you know your Peter." "If I seemed to be teaching you," he writes in 1839, "forgive me, my dearest and always senior brother; for I wish to listen to you as a child, respect you

loved and respected him in this way always.

When he published his "Philosophical Discussions" [Biesiady Filozoficzne] in 1859, he introduced Jański as the principal character, as the leader, as the Socrates. For his was "truly a superior intellect," he wrote in the foreword, "a man eminent in every respect. Although he passed through the darkness, he was, nevertheless, the first to greet the dawning light. And then he himself began to shine with the light of a star. It is true he did not carry the torch long in his hand; yet he did hold it long enough to show the way. How many men were found to rally about him immediately! How many men were able, in him and through him to catch a glimpse of the heavenly light! Upon how many did the peace of God descend by way of him! They hailed him as a messenger from on high. They followed him as an angel sent to guide them."

Among these followers of Jański was Fr. Semenenko. Since he had such words of praise for him, it is natural that he should have followed in his footsteps. And it was undoubtedly from him that he learned to be aware of his own misery. Janski could be an example to him in this, and he did actually help him to do so, as we have seen. It is possible that the "Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius" edited by Fr. Bellecius, and published right at that time, may also have been a factor in his determination to put self-knowledge in the first place.

## THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF ST. IGNATIUS

St. Ignatius Loyola, in the Directory for his Spiritual Exercises, states: "He who make a retreat must first of all endeavor to acquire a most exhaustive knowledge of self by investigating the causes, sources, and roots of his bad habits. He must also seek to acquire a recognition of his own wickedness and baseness, and to remain keenly aware of it." Father Bellecius, one of the outstanding editors of the Spiritual Exercises, i.e., the Retreat of St. Ignatius, describes man's misery and corruption as follows: "It is manifest that there exists in the soul: 1. perversity; 2. inclination to all manner of evil; 3. impotence as regards any good work... Pictures and images of evil and vain things stick in the memory as in a place proper to them; Satan and concupiscence also disturb it without limit. In the mind there are blind-

ness and darkness, plus many false judgments and principles which are the result of deliberate ignorance, often purposely cultivated. Malice reigns supreme in the will... Besides this, there prevails in the soul an incredible inclination to every form of evil, a disposition which draws the whole soul into the abyss, so that, if it were not held back by the merciful hand of God, it would be led by its own momentum to fall into a variety of crimes in each moment... And not only does there exist in the soul this incredible inclination to every evil, but also a complete impotence with regard to every good."

Father Bellecius urges meditation on this misery, and he explains why St. Ignatius demands that so much time be assigned to its consideration: "So much time and labor is set aside for the attainment of self-knowledge because an accurate knowledge of our own misery leads most certainly to humility and to hatred of self. At the same time, it removes the greatest obstacle preventing us from achieving the fundamental indifference which will permit us to serve God as he wishes to be served. For it is impossible that one should come to a full recognition of his misery and malice without coming simultaneously to hate and despise himself.

Fr. Roothan, the Superior General of the Jesuits, an eminent interpreter of the text of St. Ignatius' Exercises, was Fr. Semenenko's spiritual director after he came to Rome with Fr. Kajsiewicz to pursue their studies there. There can be little doubt that Fr. Roothan would have strongly recommended the Exercises of St. Ignatius to them, for it was just at this time that the edition compiled by Fr. Bellecius was published in Turin. That the Exercises appealed to them very much is evident from the intention of Fr. Semenenko to translate them into Polish after 1845. It is true that he could not complete this work; but Fr. Alexander Jełowicki made good for him, publishing the Polish version of Fr. Bellecius' edition of the Exercises in 1851.

Fr. Semenenko, intellectual genius that he was, must have observed immediately upon reading the Exercises that very little, almost nothing, is ever said about that misery, the knowledge of which St. Ignatius considered so important. We have said already that much is written in ascetical books about sin and sinners. Authors go into minute detail to describe the slaves of concupiscence, i.e., sinners. They do

this in order that the very ugliness of the sins and the consequences of surrender to them might frighten people away from imitation of the sinner. If there is ever any mention of misery, it is usually spoken of as something which we must avoid, something which we should not allow to touch us, rather than as something which is in us. Nothing, or very little, is said about this: that every man, even one who cannot be accused of sin, has within himself the inclination to every form of sin; every man feels this inclination within himself.

Fr. Semenenko regarded this as a serious lack. From his experience, both personal and that acquired in the confessional, he must have become constantly more convinced of the great harm suffered by souls because there is no one to help them to acquire this basic knowledge of their misery. Therefore, he tried to fill this need. Hence, his constant insistence on the need for recognizing one's own misery. Such is the reason for his solid and thorough presentation of the subject.

#### QUALITIES AND MERITS

Is there nothing but evil in us? And if there is any good in us, are we not permitted to look upon this good and take delight in it? Some say that to do so is to court grave danger. Man is so prone to conceit and pride that it is hard to say how far he will go in idealizing himself on the basis of the least good which he espies in himself.

Fr. Semenenko was not of this opinion. Knowledge of self can never be one-sided, according to him. In making this statement he appeals to St. Thomas, who pairs the virtue of humility with the virtue of magnanimity; the function of this latter virtue is to see what good there is in us, consent to it, and tend to it (S.T. 2, 2, q.129, a.3, ad 4).

How much heroism, self-sacrifice, and nobility there is among men! In our own selves, how many fine sentiments, noble impulses, beautiful thoughts, pure desires! True, these are divine graces; but did we not at least sometimes, cooperate with such graces? Have we not achieved the good, which in that case was the fruit of mutual activity, ours and God's? Seeing the evil which is in us, the very strong inclination to evil, and recognizing that somehow, in spite of it, we

have stood up, we come to the conviction that this could not have developed without struggles and victories. It is certain, therefore, that undeniable merit goes hand in hand with inherent qualities which were freely give to us.

The viewing of this good in us, the recognition of it, not only does not lead us to pride, says Fr. Semenenko, but quite the contrary, closing our eyes to what is good in us may be a sign that we attribute this good to ourselves, and it can thus lead us to pride. We retain a kind of general conviction that there is something very good in us, and that this is of our own doing, since the fear that we might pride ourselves because of it prompts us to hide it from ourselves. On the other hand, if we inspect this good more closely, it will become evident: first, that what good there is in it does not come from us, and then that, for our part, we spoil the good which God gives us by seeking in it only our own benefit. We seek to exalt ourselves in our own eyes, if not in the eyes of others; we seek pleasure and satisfaction.

Whence it follows that the recognition of the good that is in us can actually be for us a motive of humility, and can confirm us in humility. St. Francis of Assisi humbled himself most, saying that he was the greatest sinner, when he considered the gifts and graces which he had received from God. When he was asked how he could in all sincerity call himself the greatest sinner, he replied: "As I see it, if God had given the graces with which he endowed me to the greatest criminal, that person would be more faithful to him than I am."

We possess gifts, qualities, e.g., the gift of eloquence in preaching. Are we to deny this, and proclaim everywhere that we do not know how to speak? And as we make our denial, will we ourselves believe what we are saying? And Will such statements shield us from pride, and win humility for us? Everyone knows that this gift is purely a divine grace; it is a talent for which we must one day give an accounting. Therefore, we must know of it, and we must use it for the glory of God and the salvation of souls; it was given to us for that purpose. Let us consider how we use this gift. Do we not seek our own pleasure in it? Do we not use it to display ourselves, for our own glory? Are we not more concerned about the impression we make, the applause we receive, than



about the good of souls? The same holds true, e.g., for the gift of prayer (if we have it) which, because it gives us pleasure, we use for our own enjoyment; and we are ready to sacrifice works of obligation rather than miss prayer.

Concerning merit... How many battles, how many victories - as we have already stated - were necessary to achieve the state in which we now find ourselves? Knowing this, can we boast of our achievement, or be proud of it? A man who knows himself well, knows that if he depends on nature alone, he will always fall; and that when he falls, he will tumble all the way down. Therefore, if we have resisted temptations and conquered them, this was not due to our own strength, but to the grace of God. "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor 15:10). If we know ourselves, we know this well. True, we must also take into account the fact that we did not cooperate. This was necessary; for grace would cease to operate if there were no cooperation on our part. But how weak this cooperation of ours usually is!

At times we are not even aware of our victories, for they humble us rather than flatter us. We did fight, it is true - but how weakly! Here again, when we inspect our victories, we find only new reasons for humbling ourselves; for our part of the good which has taken root in us is only misery. God attracted us to good by means of his grace, and we allowed ourselves to be drawn. But how many delays, how much disinclination, laziness, lack of decisiveness, obscure motives, even ill-will! God, by his grace, was drawing us away from evil. We permitted him to draw us, true. But even then, how often did we desire the evil; how unpleasant and difficult it was for us to forsake it, and how we longed for it!

How little we usually we give to God! But God treasures even the little that we give him; he treasures it infinitely. In his eyes this little has great value. Why? Because to every effort of ours God joins his own activity. He regards as one: our activity, and the grace by which we cooperate. And his activity is great, holy, and powerful. To others, to those who cannot see or recognize our interior motives, who do not distinguish God's activity from our own because they are unable to do so - to these men our activity must seem great, holy, noble. They look at the result, and

the result is really such, since God's activity sanctifies our cooperation.

## APPLICATION TO LIFE IN SOCIETY

It would seem that there is nothing simpler than to know oneself, and nothing more difficult than to know others. For we actually witness - we see what goes on in ourselves. Our thoughts, feelings and desires are not hidden from us. On the other hand, we cannot see the thoughts, feelings, and desires of others. We know something of them only insofar as such persons make them known to us (and we know how diligently and skillfully men hide what is not to their advantage; we know how constantly they dissimulate). Nevertheless, the fact is that we do not usually know ourselves at all, and we know others very well. We are quick to detect the slightest weakness in others. Jesus confirmed this fact when he said: "You see the mote in your brother's eye, but you do not see the beam in your own" (Mt 7:3).

How is it that we do not know ourselves? Why is it that we fail to see what is so clearly visible, and, on the other hand, see what is so difficult for us to perceive? The cause which produces this astonishing result must be very powerful. It must reside deep within the soul, since it exerts such a definite influence on man, blinding him so incredibly.

Should we not seek the solution to this psychological puzzle in the fact that we do not regard the evil that is in us as evil, and the evil we do as evil? We do not regard it as evil because it is in us, because we do it. We justify everything on the basis that it is ours. It is good because I did it. It is right and just because I did it. In others, the same action can be wrong, bad, unjust - especially if I am involved, or if the action is harmful to me.

Can we admit anything like that? This would simply be a repetition of the words the Tempter spoke to our first parents: "You will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad" (Gen 3:5). These words continue to ring in the ears of the children of Adam, continually urging them to regard themselves as gods because they are basically good, infallible. Everything must serve them; and whatever serves them is in order, it is good. Whatever does not serve them, whatever

opposes them, is evil. A savage was once asked what he regarded as good, and what as evil. Our answer to that question would be reasoned, learned; the reply of the savage was perfectly sincere and natural. He said: "It is good if I attack my neighbor, conquer him, slaughter his household, carry off his cattle and his wives. It is evil if he does the same thing to me."

Isn't this exactly the law that governs international relations? The interest of the State, the interest of the nation, sanctions every means. There is no injustice, no crime, which is not permitted if the interest of the State or of the nation requires it. Everything that can be regarded as national - even vices and bad habits - must be esteemed, honored and loved because it is "ours." The fact that it is "ours" justifies everything. It should not be necessary to prove that such blindness cannot, in the final analysis, result in anything good for society. Therefore, even society must know itself.

Someone put it beautifully when he said: "Nations are curable, says Sacred Scripture. But if one is to work effectively for the cure of his nation, he must know its weaknesses, and the sources of these weaknesses. On the other hand, we must also recognize our national virtues, and count up our vital forces, in order to derive from them the greatest possible benefit for the country." It is necessary, then, that society to know its vices if it is to be cured of them. These vices must be known, not only that we might rid ourselves of them, but also that we might retain a certain humility, a humble estimate of ourselves, without seeking the cause of our misfortune in others. We need to be patient with others, for patience enables us to survey our situation calmly. It protects us from the hatred which blinds us, disrupts our equilibrium, and ultimately destroys us.

Fr. Semenenko applied the need for self-knowledge to the whole of society. The principal social contribution made by him and his associates concerned itself with ridding the society which they served of its vices. In working toward this goal, they showed courage, continually reproaching society with its faults. Fr. Semenenko himself was not an eloquent preacher, but often, in his conferences, he would call attention to these national failings. Thus, for example, speaking

of distractions, he says: "Each of us Poles has more or less the same sickness: daydreaming. This is due to a faulty training among us in Poland, which permits the imagination to develop without relating these imaginings to reality. Each of us, then, ought to work at this, and seek to correct this failing. In fact we should establish this as one of the principles whereby we guide our lives. It will devolve upon us to correct this fault in others as well, for it is a basic fault of our society, in which a lively imagination combines with an emotional heart. The life our society lives is guided by the heart - with which the imagination is closely associated - more than by reason. This is the root of many of the public calamities from which our society suffers."

In the pulpit Fr. Semenenko was redeemed by Fr. Kajsiwicz, his faithful friend; the words of Fr. Kajsiwicz reflected the thought of Fr. Semenenko, for they agreed in everything. Count Tarnowski said of them: "Kajsiwicz manned the oars while Semenenko sat at the rudder, fixed his eyes on the heavens and the stars, and from time to time pointed out the way." In 1838, Kajsiwicz wrote to Jański that he agrees with Semenenko in everything: "I wish to be subject to him in Christ as I am to you. He is my companion, my master. He is my hands, my eyes, and everything, wherever needed. May God reward him!"

It was that way always. They rendered this service to their country as a duo, and for a time they alone performed this service. Theirs was an ungrateful task, for no one is eager to listen to those who reproach him with his faults. They had to suffer much as a result. Fr. Kajsiwicz presented his warning for the first time at a moment when, in the words of Count Tarnowski: "our adoration of self was reaching its loftiest expression; when Krasiński was in the midst of preparing the most exalted apotheosis of Poland. At that time Fr. Kajsiwicz was alone in urging that same Poland to penance and amendment."

It was even worse when he spoke out once more in 1863. At that time, again, he was the only one who dared to point out the evils in existing society. His action aroused a great storm against him; but it did not terrify him. As Fr. Semenenko then wrote in defence of his friend: "Certainly somebody has to tell the truth." Fr. Valerian Kalinka also, in

his history and from the pulpit, bravely took the stage to confront society with its faults. Were these voices crying out in the desert? Fr. Kalinka stated that when he was writing the "Sejm Czteroletni" [The Four-years Diet], he thought they might stone him for his work. The opposite actually happened: he gained in popularity. "This is evidence," he said, "that society has matured and is ready to improve; for the first sign of improvement is this: that one permits another to tell him the truth without being enraged by it."

## *Self-activity*

### OUR NOTHINGNESS

"Our nothingness," Fr. Semenenko used to say, "is one of those vital truths which we must establish as the cornerstone, the foundation of our interior life." He often spoke about this nothingness in his conferences, for from it flows our absolute impotence. We need to recognize, know, and admit this impotence, in order that we might accommodate ourselves to it. Jesus says: "Without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). Nothing! To rush into action depending upon ourselves alone (self-activity), instead of acting together with Christ, is to commit what Fr. Semenenko regards as the greatest error. He devotes a separate chapter of the Mystika to this "self-activity," and in that chapter he demonstrates that on the supernatural level, in our relationship with God, the one great evil is self-activity.

Our misery is one thing, our nothingness quite another. Misery is the inclination to evil which is to be found in us, and which is in us as a consequence of original sin. Nothingness existed even before sin; it is a condition of creation that is unavoidable.

God described himself as "I am who am" (Ex 3:14); therefore, he is Subsistent Being. We answer the question "What is God?" by saying: "He is his own essence; his essence is to be." Therefore, we are not "Being;" otherwise we also would be gods. We should know this. God told St. Catherine: "My

daughter, do you know what I am, and do you know what your are? You would possess eternal blessedness if you understood that I am that which is, and you are that which is not."

It is true that, in creating us, God gave us being. But, he could not give us being in such a way as to make it our very own, so that we could say of ourselves: I am who am. While conserving in us the being which he placed in us originally at creation, he must continue to give it to us: in every moment he must, as it were, continue to create us. St. Thomas explains this in almost identical words: "Conservation in being is continuous creation." Hence, we say that we are nothing; but our nothingness is not to be considered only in the abstract. Let us examine it in detail, in its manifestations, or rather where it is wanting.

Life is the manifestation of our existence. Life, in turn, manifests itself by means of sensation, thought, and desire. There are three vital potencies in us, three faculties: heart, intellect, and will. They are called potencies because they enable us to feel, think, and desire. But actually, to feel (to be in the act of feeling), we must feel something. To be actually thinking, we must think about something. To be actually willing, we must will something. Now this "something" is neither in us, nor from us. It comes to us from outside ourselves. In a word, the object of our life is not something that we have in ourselves.

It is not enough to exist. and to live a kind of life. Our life, and hence our existence, must be true life. The requirements of this life must be met and satisfied. They cannot be denied; there cannot be constant cleavage, for this is death. However, not even the potency to such true life exists in us. Our heart must live by feeling - by such feeling as would satisfy it completely and forever. We clarify this when we say that our heart desires love; for love, attachment to a another person, is what fills it most. We need to love, and to be loved. But, is this in our power? Moreover, our feeling is not aroused only when it is needed. Even though its object is present, we may remain cold. On the other hand, we fall into a true slavery to the feeling, and sometimes find it difficult to struggle against it. Or, feelings which torment us may take root in us, violently tearing

at our hearts. We find ourselves unable to banish these feelings: antipathies, prejudices, grudges, jealousies.

The intellect needs thoughts; but they must be the kind that satisfy it: noble ideas, beautiful thoughts, of which truth is the source. The fullness of its life is not complete when it admires truth, is enraptured by it. It also requires that the intellect become the image of that truth, that the truth be reflected brightly in it, that it take on the beauty of the truth, that it has meaning. Is this in our power? And, even though the object of thought may be within our grasp, we still may not know how to occupy our mind with it, or it may not interest us. Further, as often happens, our thoughts may be vicious or impure, thoughts of despair and even suicide, which trouble us, and which we are unable to banish from our minds.

Finally, the will requires that the object of its desire should exist, and that it should be able to attain this object. What horrible suffering we endure if what we desire is not realized! Our will, our desire, has an object; but does it depend on us alone to possess it? There are times when of ourselves we have neither the energy nor the strength to decide what it is we want; or, on the contrary, not to want what we cannot have. A certain writer once said that whether a man is happy or not depends on him. All he needs to do is: not desire what is impossible, and accept willingly what he cannot avoid. If only a man could bring himself to do this!

"Therefore," says Fr. Semenenko, "nothingness is the expression of our existence - it is what we are. We must acknowledge this nothingness, see it clearly, resign ourselves to it, and enter into this truth with our whole being. It must become the cornerstone of our spiritual life."

## BOGDAN JAŃSKI

The question we asked when speaking of the knowledge of self is repeated here: How did Fr. Semenenko reach this understanding of our nothingness? How did he become so profoundly and totally imbued with the sense of our impotence? And how did he reach the conclusion, which follows logically from the preceding, that we need to avoid self-activity?

First, he experienced this impotence within himself. In 1837, while still attending College Stanislas, he included the following in his retreat notes: "My God, how have I spent this school year? How did I behave with the children committed to my care during this time? What happened to all the principles of dealing with them purposefully and lovingly - principles that existed in mind, but not in deed when it came to their daily application? ... As I recall, when I assumed this duty I began it with you, my Beginning and End - and for some time everything went well. But in the case of the first difficulty, which you permitted to test me, I stupidly confided in my own strength instead of having recourse to you, my refuge. As a result, the punishment for my stupidity fell upon me, and I was forced to bear its burden in dryness and distress of soul."

Another day he wrote: "Upon the advice of the retreat master I reviewed last year's resolutions. Spun out of my mind, they looked fine on paper; but I doubt whether I fulfilled a single one of these resolutions even once." Nonetheless, once again he sets down many resolutions in writing; and three years later realizes how impotent he was to fulfill them. He cries out: "Only you can cause results to follow from this invitation, this impulse. My dear Jesus, I assured you in the beginning that I was ready for anything, even to crushing myself; but it is myself that I fear, my softness and imbecility. You alone, O Lord, can provide the remedy. I fear. I am filled with fear. I have so much reason to fear!" Therefore, he was well aware of his impotence; but undoubtedly it was Bogdan Jański who helped him to acquire this knowledge. The latter was also undergoing great trials, in the course of which he wrestled with his nothingness. The conviction that we can do nothing of ourselves is expressed by Jański at every step in his diary. Once again, he does not speak of his impotence in generalities, using conventional expressions of humility. No, he catches himself in the act; he cites facts.

Janski could detect his weakness even at that early date when he lost his faith while still in his native land. On the one hand, he writes of himself, he had "fanciful notions of the strength of my own will, and of my influence over others, a sense of an extraordinary mission and of greatness;" while on the other hand, "despite my pride and a sense of personal



power, even the slightest adversity would stagger me completely."

Having become a follower of Saint-Simon, Jański fell under the spell of a kind of religious pantheism. At this time he exclaims: "I wish to live in the temple of the great God; to that temple I must call all mankind. I wish to live in the temple of God, that is, the universe (everything)... The opinion of unbelievers does not concern me. They will judge me, and I will judge them. I must accomplish my mission. And I will accomplish it... This conviction, the guiding principle of my whole life, shall govern all its manifestations as well. My life shall be nothing more than a true expression of it." He is constantly making resolutions: "What I need to do immediately is to establish a definite program for myself to cover the activity of a single day, or perhaps two days. When these days have passed, I must render an account to myself of how they were spent, and then once more arrange a program beforehand to govern my thoughts and actions."

He makes an effort to fulfill his resolutions. He draws up a program for himself; but he has to check himself continually for lack of will and lack of perseverance. "Lord, how shall I ever accomplish my mission? Eight days ago I judged myself to be strong. I thought that I had reached the stage where my religious charity would manifest itself in my life always and everywhere. But what have I accomplished in this week? Nothing! I find myself at a lower level than I was before. I have fallen back."

In another place he says: "What a change for the worse from what I was! When I wrote the above, I was sure that I was finished forever with unsettled emotions, weakness of will, imprudence in my behavior. Must I always be unsettled, weak, imprudent? Is my future to be, like the past, a loss to me, to mankind, and to the glory of God? ... How often did it happen that I would find myself inspired momentarily by the noblest emotions! How frequently did the most sublime thoughts pass through my mind! How often was I animated by the most practical and generous intentions! Yet, as I look back over the past, how many such experiences have I had, and how lacking I still am in improvement! He continues to accuse himself in this way: "Once more a week has passed without completing the project upon which I embarked with such strong

decision!" He is disappointed with himself: "Not so long ago I thought and felt: No more anxiety or weakness of will! From now on there will always be hope, quick decisions - always something to keep me occupied!" But this was no for long! A month later he writes: "Last month I told myself the same thing, and did not keep my resolution for even a single day!"

Even after his conversion, Jański continues to accuse himself of acting contrary to his resolutions, acknowledging that he has neither the strength nor the will to fulfill them. Therefore, when he was already a Christian, he makes such resolutions, and hastens to add: "Lord, receive them; and give me the strength and the will to fulfill them." "I depended upon myself and not upon God" he writes, "for, being aware of my weakness, I did not pray with faith to rid myself of it. I am quick to throw myself into whatever promises an increase in personal power, without stopping to consult God. Beforehand I do not seek assistance through prayer; instead, I have recourse to my own combinations, and my apparently inexhaustible cleverness."

He teaches himself this lesson - as undoubtedly he also taught his disciple Semenenko: "When a good thought comes to mind, some project, even the holiest, before you reach a decision relative to its execution, be filled with fear that your motive may be tinged with personal interest, pride, or selfishness. Next, remind yourself of your sins. This thought should humble you, and remove every motive for self-love. Finally, humble yourself before God. Ask him whether it is his will that you should undertake this project. If it is, beg God most fervently to guard you from pride and selfishness in its execution."

It was not by words alone that Jański could teach Semenenko about his impotence, the need to avoid self-activity and how harmful it is to us. He could also point to himself as the clearest proof of the result of purely human activity. Jański was extremely active, a prolific thinker, and had a flair for organization. As a result, he initiated many projects. However, nothing succeeded for him; everything crumbled and fell apart. Jański himself saw this. Toward the end of his life he wrote: "Thank God! For some time now I have enjoyed peace of soul, undisturbed by the upheaval of individualistic projects, and particular feelings or ideas..."

Whatever has resulted from my life and labors up to this time seems to me to be obviously unsatisfactory, vain, and practically useless... Consequently, I experience a feeling of general discontent with myself."

At another time he writes: "I experience a sense of immense weariness and discontent with myself. I consider myself incapable of any activity, and all of my activity as vain. I even feel a disinclination to speak.... My recent experiences should convince me that I am incapable of directing others... I took persons under my direction and care, but later abandoned them... Ultimately, while they wished to be occupied, I did not know how to occupy them. They wished to follow orders, and I issued none." It is a fact that, of the works undertaken by Jański, none remains except the religious Congregation in Rome - and this one was not planned beforehand or conceived in the way it later developed. It is impossible that Semenenko should not have noted this, for in all these projects he took an active part.

The merit certainly belongs to Jański that, in time, God did direct events in such a way that Semenenko and Kajsiewicz went to Rome and stayed there. By every means available to him he assisted the work which was beginning to take form in them and through them. He himself lived amid difficulties, in great poverty; yet he thought only of his companions in Rome. "Only Rome. Always Rome. On bended knees I commend these to your remembrance and your mercy," he wrote to Zaleski. "Whatever you give there will cheer and comfort us spiritually, almost as though we needed nothing ourselves."

The original idea with which he sent them out had more of the political about it; but once he understood that God wished to fashion from them a formal religious Community, he forbade them to become entangled in any other affairs, and ordered them to concern themselves only with their studies and the work of sanctification. He acted in this way, for he had convinced himself that of himself he could accomplish nothing; only a work begun by God could endure. His main concern, therefore, was to keep from spoiling the work by self-activity. Semenenko apparently inherited this fear of self-activity from Jański, since he writes these words from Rome to set the latter at rest:

Thank God, we are of the conviction that we can do nothing of ourselves - that it is even impossible for us to do anything of ourselves. We leaven all activity to God! He will arrange events. He will indicate the individuals. he will dispose hearts. We will do whatever work presents itself to be done. To run around, knocking on doors, seems to us wholly improper. We have left everything in the hands of God. In this way everything will be done more quickly and better. Join with us, therefore, in setting your heart at rest. You can count on us, with the reservation that we are sinners who, even before this day is over, are capable of committing all kinds of evil.

## THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF ST. IGNATIUS

As was true in the question of knowledge of self, so also in dealing with self-activity, we are of the opinion that the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius might have exerted a profound influence upon Fr. Semenenko in forming his views on this subject. St. Ignatius begins his Exercises with the meditation on the end of man. In the third point of that meditation he says:

We must serve God in the manner in which he wishes to be served. Why do you hesitate? What doubts do you entertain on the subject? The farmer does not permit his servants to work in a manner different from that which he has marked out for them. Why, then, should God alone be compelled to tolerate similar conduct? No one rewards a service which has been performed contrary to orders. Why, then, should God reward such services? Even acts of kindness cease to please when they are not done in conformity with our desires. How much more displeasing, then, services which are our due? The very holiest works become empty and valueless when not performed agreeably to the divine wishes. "I have no pleasure in you" (Mal 1:10), said the Lord to the Israelites. And why? Because "in the days of your fast your own will is found" (Is 58:3). Their actions were the result of caprice, and not

of a desire to do God's will, and the Lord, in consequence, abominated their sacrifices. From this we perceive, even with the unaided light of natural reason, that it is our duty to serve our Creator, not in whatever manner we ourselves choose to do so, but in that manner which is pleasing to him. Let us ponder well on this fundamental truth, and let it be deeply graven in our hearts (op. cit., p.30).\*

From this need, this necessity of serving God in the manner in which he wishes to be served, follows also the need for that famous "holy indifference" of St. Ignatius. For, since we must serve God in the manner in which he wishes to be served, it is not up to us to choose the kind of service, nor even to desire to serve by our own free choice. Therefore, what God calls or destines us to do should make no difference to us: e.g., how long he permits us to live, whether he asks us to work or to suffer, to do this work or something else. At the same time, we should not hasten to begin a work by ourselves, before we have ascertained whether or not God wants this of us. Neither should we initiate some project all by ourselves. We should make an effort to discover what it is that God asks of us, as well as the manner in which he wants us to do it. It was because of this third point that St. Ignatius considered this first meditation so important that he called it the foundation of the whole spiritual life, the principal meditation in the whole of the Directory.

St. Ignatius very properly places before the other meditations this one which he calls "The Foundation," since, as the Directory says: "It is the basis the Spiritual Edifice. And as the foundation supports the entire building, so the influence of this truth is felt throughout the Exercises, and more particularly in what concerns the choice of a state (or of a more perfect life), as this election

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\* The text used throughout this section is that with commentary by Fr. Bellecio: Spiritual Exercises, According to the method of St. Ignatius Loyola, by Fr., Aloysius Bellecio, S.J., translated by William Hutch, D.D., London, Burns & Oates Limited, 1883.

almost entirely depends on it" (Directory, Ch. 12, 1 & 7). For, since a true emendation of life consists in electing to serve God in whatever manner is most pleasing to him... (Ibid., p.35ff).

Therefore, says Fr. Belleccio, St. Ignatius "does not assign any fixed time for this meditation, nor does he limit its duration. as in the case of the others, to one hour, thus giving us to understand that we should occupy ourselves with it so long as is necessary to imprint deeply in our souls the truth which it conveys" (Ibid., p.37). He tells us further:

Without this indifference, we shall never arrive at the perfection of charity, which consists in the conformity of our will with the will of God, by virtue of which we always wish that which God wishes, and in the manner in which he wishes it. For the manner in which the Lord of all wishes us to serve him, and to which we ought to be indifferent, consists in this, that we do what he wants and as he wants it. Thus he who is not indifferent will never do what the Divine Majesty desires, and as he wants it. Therefore, he will never be perfect.

The same thought is found frequently repeated in the Exercises of St. Ignatius:

It must be borne in mind, nevertheless, that we are to labor for the attainment of this end, namely our own and our neighbor's salvation, not according to the individual wish of each one of us, but after the manner in which God shall appoint; that is, by those means, and in that manner, by which, and in which, His Divine Majesty may wish us to attain it ...The will of God ought to be the only goal of our actions and the limit of our desires. Outside of it there exists nothing save error and ruin (Ibid., p. 49ff.).

It is not at all easy to reach this state of equilibrium or indifference. Therefore, Fr. Belleccio strives to support the assertion of its necessity with many arguments:

Since the necessity of this indifference is so great, that without it the entire spiritual edifice of the Exercises would go to ruin, in the same manner as a house would fall if its foundation were undermined; and since, on the other hand, it is a virtue extremely difficult to acquire as being diametrically opposed to our self-love I have resolved on putting forward a few arguments to persuade you to it. (Ibid., p.58).

The indifference demanded by St. Ignatius as regards what we are to do, and the manner in which we are to do it, is what Fr. Semenko calls renunciation of self-activity. Why doesn't he use the word "indifference"? Perhaps because it might seem to some that we must be indifferent to what God wants even after we have recognized his will. I must be indifferent, and ready to do this, that, or any other thing which God requires me to do. But since I already know what God wants me to do, I can no longer be indifferent to this. Perhaps, too, someone might think that in my feelings I must achieve absolute indifference to all things, which is impossible; for our nature will always draw us to what agrees with it. Such indifference is also unnecessary, for our merit is precisely in going against the demands of nature in this struggle with nature.

This foundation: that we must serve God in the manner in which he desires and the consequent principle of indifference to the kind of service, St. Ignatius considered as so important that he saw the lack of this indifference as the reason for the fall of the angels, and of the first man (Cf. Exercises, pp.78. 82-83), and in this he is in complete agreement with St. Thomas Aquinas. For St. Thomas asks: "Did the angels and our first parents desire to be equal to God?" His answer is: "No." They could not desire this. They only desired to be like God. They desired the likeness to which God had destined them, and therefore, they wanted what God wanted for them. In what, then, did their sin consist? Their sin consisted in this, that they desired to achieve this likeness not in the way God desired that they should achieve it, that is, not by corresponding to the movement of grace, but rather by means of self-activity (Cf. S.T. I, q.63, a.3; 2,2, q.163, a.2).

Therefore, self-activity was the reason for the fall of the angels and of the first man. Fr. Semenenko regards it as the chief obstacle to - and as almost the sole evil - in the spiritual life, which shows how well he understood, and how deeply he had penetrated into the Exercises of St. Ignatius.

## ON THE LOVE OF GOD

The fall of Adam, we saw, was the result of self-activity. Fr. Semenenko is right, then, in considering self-activity the root of all evil in our relationship with God. But he adds immediately that Adam fell through lack of love for God. "In the garden, and now, in this vale of tears," he says, "the crux of the problem was and always remains, how will man respond to the question: God, or man? That is, is it to be God or myself?" (The Passion and Death of Jesus Christ, p.17). In the first and second temptations (i.e., in what draws us away from good, as well as in what attracts us to evil), at the very bottom we encounter one and the same reason, which is the ultimate reason for both. It can be expressed in this one simple question: Which of the two? Is it to be God, or man? Is it to be the will of God, the law of God; or the will of man, the law of man? In a word, is it to be God or self?

Whether the temptation acts upon our nature by way of attraction or by way of aversion, the conquest of the temptation does not depend upon either the attraction or the aversion. Even in the case of the strongest attraction Adam could have conquered, just as in a similar temptation Christ actually did conquer. In the face of the strongest aversion, it was not Adam but Christ who scored a decisive victory. And after him, countless numbers of people have conquered temptation together with him. In the struggle with temptation, our fate does not depend upon how it will act on our nature. It depends on what happens deep within the person, when temptation penetrates there, and confronts our person with the same basic question which the Tempter asked of Adam: "Why has God forbidden you to eat?"

This question is repeated successively to each of us: "Why has God commanded? Why has he forbidden? We are challenged to respond to that terrifying: Is it to be I, or God?"



Hence, the outcome of the struggle between us and temptation depends upon the individual, that is, upon his answer to this question: Will it be not God, but I? Or, will it be not I but God? What can save the person and give him strength to conquer, in spite of the almost overpowering pull of nature, with all of its laziness, unwillingness, and weakness, and even in the face of all its fears and alarms, its dread of suffering and death? What? Something miraculous: love! But grace as well: Love together with grace, and grace together with love. Only love can say: Not I, but God! It depends on a person's love. On that love depends whether a person will venture to speak the final word: Not I, but God!

Therefore, according to Fr. Semenenko, on the one hand it is self-activity, and on the other hand, it is a lack of love for God which is the chief source of all evil in our relationship with God. How are these two related to one another? Not God, but self! This is self-activity - the assertion of our own will and our own activity. What is important is not what God wants, or how he wants it, but what I want, and how I want it; for what matters is not God, but self. This is, at one and the same time, a denial of love for God, and an assertion of self-love. Self-love is the love of self above all things. It involves becoming enamored of self, and so, the desire of preferring self always and everywhere, instead of loving God and preferring him above all things. Self-activity, therefore, finds its explanation in a lack of love for God. Adam sinned through self-activity, precisely because he did not give preference to love for God.

St. Thomas teaches that Adam sinned by self-activity; but he immediately gives the reason, the ultimate explanation for this self-activity in the first man. He asks whether man was deceived by Satan into accepting the forbidden fruit. St. Augustine says that to regard what is true as false is not natural to man as created, but is a punishment of man as he is condemned (Cf. 1, q.94, a.4). If this is so, how could man have been deceived before he committed original sin? And yet man believed the words of the Serpent! Yes, he believed. But he did so, says St. Thomas, insofar as he sinfully raised himself above what he was. Falling in love with his own power he confided in himself. In a word, he sinned by pride. Pride is the motive for all sin; it is at the bottom of all sin

(Cf. 2, 2, q.162, 1, 5, a.7). Pride is a denial of love, because it turns us away from God.

Before the fall, the first man was not yet confirmed in the love of God, and hence he could be tempted in this manner and so fall. But there was nothing in his nature contrary to the love of God. In fact, in essence his nature was turned to God. Naturally he loved God above all things, i.e., more than himself or anything else. However, already in our nature there is opposition to the love of God (non-love), a consequence of original sin. We now experience within ourselves the inclination to love ourselves, not God, above all things. This means that, as a result, we experience the inclination to self-activity. Therefore, before he sinned, man did not need grace in order to love God above all things naturally; but he did need God's help to move him to love. After sin, not only does he need that movement from God which in the present economy we call "actual grace," but he also needs sanctifying grace to heal his fallen nature (Cf. 1, 2, q.109, a.3).

After original sin, man is an egotist, seeking himself in everything, and loving himself above everything. It is only under the influence of grace that he does anything disinterestedly (Cf. St. Bonaventure, II Sent. Dist. 26, a.1, q.1). It is for this same reason that Fr. Semenenko considers self-activity to be the greatest evil in the spiritual life; for it is a consequence of this opposition to the love of God (non-love). As a further and necessary consequence, it follows that, after original sin, there is an absolute necessity for doing battle with our nature and putting it to death by way of self-denial.

"Before the fall, natural life was only the lower level of human life, a kind of reflection of that higher, supernatural life which was, in its turn, an elevation of natural life. After the fall, natural life became the enemy of supernatural life. The struggle between the two became a matter of life and death. One or the other exists only at the expense of its adversary. Therefore, after original sin, there can be no question of entering into any kind of treaty with the depraved nature which is our inheritance. There is no room for constructive reform or elevation of this nature to a higher level. What we need now is not an elevation, but a

transformation of our life, i.e., the extermination of the natural, and the beginning of a supernatural life" (Mistyka, p.20).

Before original sin, there was no need for that renunciation of self of which the Gospel speaks (Cf. Lk 9:23); but after sin, once man had uttered the words: "Not God, but I," these same words continue to re-echo within us. In order to eliminate this disorder, we must deny ourselves every moment, that is, we must deny ourselves in order to confirm God: "Not I, but God!"

## *Self-activity*

### *Theory and Practice*

#### MERITS

Actions which we perform without grace - here by "grace" we understand actual grace - possess no worth in relation to eternal life, i.e. they are not meritorious for eternal life. For, as we have already seen, according to St. Ignatius "our holiest actions have no value unless they are performed according to the will of God." However, acts performed according to the will of God are, at one and the same time, acts performed with divine grace; for there can be no doubt that God gives his grace, offers his assistance, to do whatever he wants done. This grace accompanies man to do what God wants done, and in the way he wants it done. God does not give his grace to man, nor does he help him, when it comes to actions which he does not will man to do, or which he does not will man to do in such a way. We have already cited the words of St. Thomas who maintained that the likeness of God, and hence what God wills for man, is attained by the grace of God and according to the order established by God: by divine assistance and according to the disposition of God.

However, not all theologians agree that only actions performed in virtue of actual grace merit eternal life. There

are some who hold that it is sufficient for man to be in the state of grace, i.e., that he possess sanctifying grace. St. Thomas discusses this question in a separate article of the Summa Theologica: "Whether one who has already obtained grace can, of himself, and without further help of grace, do good and avoid sin?" (S.T., 1, 2, q.109, a.9). Let us see what answer he gives to this question.

As usual, St. Thomas begins by stating the difficulties, to which he gives the answers only after he has explained and proved his position.

It would seem that whoever has already obtained grace can, by himself, and without further help of grace, do good and avoid sin. For, grace would be either useless or imperfect if it could not fulfill what it was given for, i.e., that we may do good and keep from sin. Further, by grace the Holy Spirit dwells in us... Now since the Spirit of God is omnipotent, he is sufficient to ensure our doing good and to keep us from sin. Finally, if a man who has obtained grace needs yet another grace to live righteously and to keep from sin, with equal reason he will need yet another grace, and so on to infinity, which is impossible.

Having stated the difficulties, he turns to a consideration of the question, and offers this explanation:

On the contrary, Augustine says that as the eye of the body, though most healthy, cannot see unless it is helped by the brightness of light, so neither can a man, even if he is most perfectly justified, live righteously unless he is helped by the eternal light of justice. But justification is by grace, according to Rom 3:24: "All men are now undeservedly justified by the gift of God." Hence, even a man who already possesses grace needs a further assistance of grace in order to live righteously.

And now he proceeds to offer a solution to the question placed at the head of the article:

In order to live righteously, a man needs a twofold help of God: first, a habitual gift, whereby corrupted nature is healed, and after being healed is lifted up so as to work deeds meritorious of eternal life, which exceed the capability of nature. Secondly, man needs the help of grace in order to be moved by God to act. Now, with regard to the first kind of help, man does not need a further help of grace, that is, a further infused habit. Yet, he needs the help of grace in another way, i.e., in order to be moved by God to act righteously; and this for two reasons: first, for the general reason that no created thing can put forth any act unless by virtue of the divine motion; secondly, for this special reason: the condition of the state of human nature. For although healed by grace as to the mind, yet it remains corrupted and poisoned in the flesh, whereby it serves "the law of sin" (Rom 7:25). In the intellect, too, there remains the darkness of ignorance whereby, as is written (Rom 8:26): "We do not know how to pray as we ought"; since because we do not know ourselves perfectly, we cannot fully know what is for our good, according to Wis 9:14: "For the deliberations of mortals are timid, and unsure are our plans." Hence, we must be guided and guarded by God, who knows and can do all things. For this reason also it is becoming in those who have been born again as sons of God to say: "Lead us not into temptation," and "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and whatever else is contained in the Lord's prayer pertaining to this.

Finally, St. Thomas answers the objections which head the article:

Reply to the first objection: The gift of habitual grace is not, therefore, given to us that we may no longer need the divine help; for every creature needs to be preserved in the good received from him. Hence, if after having received grace, man still needs the divine help, it cannot be concluded that grace is given to no purpose, or that it is imperfect, since man will need the divine help even

in the state of glory, when grace shall be fully perfected. But here grace is to some extent imperfect, inasmuch as it does not completely heal man, as was stated above. Reply to the second objection: The operation of the Holy Spirit, which moves and protects, is not circumscribed by the effect of habitual grace which it causes in us; but beyond this effect he, together with the Father and the Son, moves and protects us. Reply to the third objection: This argument merely proves that man needs no further habitual grace.

St. Thomas, therefore, very clearly requires actual grace, a movement from God, for every action meritorious of eternal life. However, some theologians ask: Isn't it possible that the movement from God of which St. Thomas speaks is nothing more than what philosophy calls "concursum divinum," the usual movement required for every human act in order that it be possible? Careful reading of the entire article will surely reveal that St. Thomas is speaking of a movement from God by means of grace; he intends to prove the need for the help of grace, which means, undoubtedly, actual grace. Besides, he says elsewhere:

God, as the Universal Mover, moves man's will to the universal object of the will which is the good. And, without this universal motion man cannot will anything. But man determines himself by his reason to will this or that, which is a true or apparent good. Nevertheless, sometimes God moves some specially to the willing of something determinate, which is good; as in the case of those whom he moves by grace, as we shall see later on (S.T., 2, q.9, a.6, ad 3).

Therefore, the divine concursus does not move man to a specific, determinate supernatural act; the grace of God does this. Further, that no creature proceeds to act without first being moved by God is not the only reason adduced by St. Thomas to prove the need for actual grace. He offers a second reason also: After original sin our human nature is corrupted; hence, man does not do what is good for him, and is attracted to what is contrary to his good, according to the words of St. Paul: "I see in my body's members another law at

war with the law of my mind; this makes me the prisoner of the law of sin in my members" (Rom 7:23). Therefore, man needs divine guidance to show him what he ought to desire, and help from God to actually desire it. By this argument St. Thomas manifests that the movement from God of which he speaks is not the divine concursus, but the movement to a specified, determinate good - actual grace.

The point which we are making here is a very important one. For, especially when we consider the consequences, it is of no small concern for us to know that, if our acts are to be meritorious of eternal life, they must be performed with the help of actual grace, i.e., that the grace of God must move us to perform these acts. Then God is first to act in us; for he moves us to act, to a determinate act, and we only cooperate. Hence, the initiative, the beginning of the action - of what we are to do, and how we are to do it - does not come from us, but from God. It does not depend on us, but on God.

To admit this as a certain principle requires a complete change in our outlook on both the interior and exterior life. For, if actual grace is not necessary to render our action meritorious of eternal life, if sanctifying grace alone suffices, then, so long as our action is good in itself and performed for God, whatever we do in this state will be meritorious of eternal life. Then man will be able to give free rein to self-activity; he will be able to arrange his interior and exterior life according to this own will, choosing whatever mortifications and pious practices appeal to him. But, if actual grace is also required, then man depends on it entirely. He needs to ascertain, first of all, whether he has this grace. He must watch for it, ask for it, and rely on it. In that case, in what a new light the need for self-denial presents itself! It assumes much wider proportions. For we must renounce not only what is evil or imperfect in us, but also our own activity, our own initiative, our own projects.

## THE OPERATION OF DIVINE GRACE

The operation of divine grace in us confronts us with no small difficulties. Opinions on this topic have varied.

Among the heretics, Pelagius said: "It is not grace, but I who act." Luther said: "Not I, but grace." Among Catholic theologians, prominence is shared by two schools: Molinists, who say: "I act with grace;" and Thomists: "Grace acts through me." St. Paul's formula is: "The grace of God with me," (Cf. Theologia Universalis, P. Hilarius, Vol.I, p.75).

The first difficulty we encounter stems from the fact that grace is, at one and the same time, divine activity and our own proper activity. If good thoughts and good desires exist in us, these thoughts and desires are not just the result of the operation of divine grace, they are grace itself; they are the divine activity. (Cf. Mazzella, De Gratia, 1880, p.102). However, this activity is ours as well; for, can anyone be aroused to think and desire unless he himself actually thinks and desires? (Ibid. p.90). It is our activity, even though it is indeliberate (Ibid. p.87). This same difficulty is encountered not only in explaining the operation of grace, but also with reference to all indeliberate acts. There are thoughts, sensations, desires in us which exist at times even though we do not wish to have them, and in spite of our efforts to get rid of them. And so they are ours, and yet not ours.

The next difficulty is this: not only does grace move us and operate in us, it also cooperates, i.e., our cooperation with grace is also the operation of grace. For when we accept grace, our very acceptance is a grace. As St. Paul says: "It is God who, in his good will toward you, begets in you any measure of desire or achievement" (Phil 2:13). St. Thomas says: "God does not justify us without ourselves, because while we are being justified, we consent to God's justice by a movement of our free choice. Nevertheless, this movement is not the cause of grace, but the effect; and hence the whole operation pertains to grace" (S.T., 1, 2, q.111, a.2, ad 2). How are we to understand that free will is preserved despite the fact that, when the will consents to grace, it is also moved by grace? Let us see what the theologians have to say about this.

The Thomists explain: The will is, of itself, indifferent, i.e., not determined, not committed to a single line of action. Such determination, such set determination, is impossible, for in that case the will would cease to be free.



Neither can it determine or direct itself, for it is only a potency, and not an act. Therefore, God must direct or determine it to something. Indeed, if God did not so determine or direct it, if the will determined or directed itself, then the act which was meritorious of eternal life, considered in itself, in its entirety, would not belong to God or to his grace, it would belong to the will, and man would thereby become the first cause of his own salvation. But this, say the Thomists, is impossible. However, then we ask: In such a case where is free will, if the will in all events is directed by God to a single line of action?

The Molinists explain the matter differently. They reject any determination of the will. As they say, free will depends upon a free choice, and upon being able to act or not to act. If the will were committed antecedently to a single course of action, it would be left with no choice, and it would not have to act. (Cf. Mazella, op. cit., p.501). This is very true. But here we ask: In such a case, how is it that an action performed by virtue of grace can be principally attributed to grace, and not to man, whereas it is the will which determines and directs itself? Ultimately, we will end by ascribing salvation to ourselves.

We are confronted by a mystery. That we cannot understand it is not strange: a mystery is "above reason." But the mystery, as explained either the one or the other school, seems to involve a contradiction, i.e., it seems to be "contrary to reason." It follows only that these explanations are inadequate.

Fr. Semenenko had developed his own explanation. He was of the opinion that the controversy between the Thomists and the Molinists would never be settled, because it has its roots in the philosophical theories held by the opponents. The antagonism, the dualism, cannot be removed except by the introduction of newer and more complete philosophical theories. He attempts to do this himself. Let us see, then, how Fr. Semenenko explains the problem.

We have seen that good thoughts, sentiments and desires are not simply evoked by grace, but are the very operation of grace, i.e., they are the grace itself. They are ours insofar as they are realized within our faculties (Cf. Mazella, op.

cit., p.87). The very desire for such thoughts, sentiments and desires is itself also a grace. As we have already seen, this is not to be understood in any sense comparable to what happens in natural activity, where God gives man the desire for good in general; man in his turn directs himself to this or that good, to a true good or to a good that is only apparent, and therefore actually evil. Our understanding here is that it is God who directs man to desire a particular and determinate good (Cf. S.T., 1, 2, q.9, a.6, ad 3).

What is there that is proper to us, our own, in an act that is free? For, if the Holy Spirit moves the will to act freely, St. Thomas says the will must at one and the same time be the cause of the action (Cf. S.T., 2, 2, q.23, a.2, c). In what, then, does freedom consist? In what way does the movement of God become truly our own? For, we need not act, i.e., we need not accept the divine movement. The Holy Spirit, continues St. Thomas, does not move the will to act in the way a man moves an instrument. For although that instrument is a principle of the action, it cannot act by itself; neither can it not act. Thus, e.g., although a pen writes, to write or not to write does not depend on the pen. If the will were only such an instrument, its freedom would be taken away, and merit excluded (Cf. Ibid.). The Council of Trent has declared that, when a man accepts divine grace, this is an act on his part, for he could reject the grace (Sess. 6, cap.5). Ours, then, is the acceptance or non-acceptance of the divine movement, and in this way the freedom of the will is preserved.

But how is the will free to act or not to act, since it is already acting under the influence of divine grace? For we have seen that God communicates to man the very desire for a specified thing. Is it possible for the intellect not to be enlightened, or the will not to be inspired by God, when the mind has already been enlightened, and the will inspired?

To explain this difficulty, Fr. Semenenko has recourse to the scholastic distinction between person and nature. He writes (Mystika, p.13): "We need to distinguish man's nature from his person... In the Holy Scriptures it is written 'You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind' (Mt 22:37). We must distinguish therefore, between heart, soul, mind, will - and the

person to whom these belong, whose they are. The Savior also orders us to hate our own soul; the soul, therefore, must be distinct from the one who should hate it."

Therefore, once the will is in operation, it cannot not act. If it desires something, it cannot at the same time not desire that thing. Once the intellect is enlightened, it cannot not be enlightened. If it is already thinking about something, it cannot not be thinking about that something. However, the person can reject this operation, this desire. He need not accept this enlightenment, these thoughts; and, as long as the person does not accept the desire or the thought, they are not free, and the person does not have to answer for them. The person accepts the desire which is in the will and makes it his own; in doing so, the person desires. How, since the desire was a movement of grace, the person desires in virtue of grace. Then, and only then, is the act of grace an act of our will, and this act is distinct from the acceptance of the grace by us. In our cooperation with divine grace, the person is the one who cooperates, while nature, or the will, is that by which man cooperates: the person is the principium quod, and the will is the principium quo. Because our nature has been elevated by sanctifying grace and is already subject to the operation of the Holy Spirit, we, together with grace, are co-causes of an act which is meritorious of eternal life; for we, acting together with the Holy Spirit, are two agents; but the effect of our action and the action itself is due to grace.

It follows from this that, since the grace of God operates first, and I only cooperate with it, there can be no question of "I with grace," or "grace through me," but rather "grace with me." Therefore, I should act only when the grace of God acts in me. As a result, Fr. Semenenko puts this principle in the first place, establishing it as the fundamental principle of his Mystika: "In the supernatural life we ought not to undertake anything at all on our own" (p.27). In this way, once again, the need for condemning self-activity becomes apparent.

## APPLICATION TO LIFE IN SOCIETY

Does such a presentation of self-activity as our greatest enemy in the spiritual life - does the principle stated above: "In all things go only where the grace of God leads you," logically lead to the complete abandonment of all work upon ourselves and for others? We will reply to this shortly; but first, let us investigate another question: Can we possibly know when it is the grace of God which works in us, and when it is our nature, i.e., self-activity rushing out ahead?

The answer to this question covers the whole teaching and practice of the interior life. It studies the discernment of spirits in order to discover whether it is the grace of God or nature which is operating in us. Fr. Semenenko in his Mystika (p.127ff) explains at length the signs of self-activity, and adds to that instructions concerning when we are to act. Whenever God demands something of us, he also gives us the grace necessary to accomplish the task. He demands that we fulfill our obligations, and avoid sin. If he makes any special demands of us, he also makes this known to us in some way. "God does not command what is impossible," says the Council of Trent, "but, when he commands something, he requires that we do what we can, that we ask for help to do what surpasses our capacities, and he himself helps us to accomplish it."

If, then, you are able, set to work, for you have his grace. For example, you feel the inclination to forgive an enemy. You are moved by love for God. You find it easy to obey, and to humble yourself. Recognize, then, that God is granting you a grace. Thank him for it and, influenced by it, proceed to perform the corresponding acts. If you see that you are experiencing difficulties, and cannot bring yourself to forgive; if you feel no love in yourself, and find it difficult to humble yourself and obey - ask for grace, and believe, trust, that God will give it to you immediately if the matter brooks no delay.

If God does not grant the grace immediately, continue to ask until you receive it; when you have received it, proceed to act. Prayer is one of the principal elements in our cooperation with divine grace. In fact, our entire activity

can be synthesized in prayer, that is, prayer in the general sense of the elevation of our mind to God, as an entreating glance that is turned to God. Fr. Semenenko resolves all of our interior activity into prayer. This is one of the characteristics of his ascetical system; and if we do not devote a separate chapter to this subject, it is because neither the principle itself nor its application, can be regarded as anything exclusively his own. He borrowed it from St. Alphonse Liguori.

St. Alphonse based our cooperation with grace on prayer. Graces, according to him, are conditioned by prayer: in the usual order of things, God gives his grace to those who ask for it. He does not permit anyone to be tempted beyond his strength. If he permits us to be tempted, he also gives us corresponding graces; but he orders us to ask for them. He gives to those who ask him. "Pray that you may not be put to the test" (Lk 22:40). Therefore, we "must pray always and not lose heart" (Lk 18:1). According to Pope St. Gelasius, the angels fell because they did not pray. St. Thomas held that the same was true of Adam, and St. Augustine made a similar statement of St. Peter.

But don't we need God's grace in order to pray? Yes, answers St. Alphonse; but God gives this grace of prayer always, and to everyone. The Holy Spirit constantly urges us to pray: "The Spirit too helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be expressed in speech" (Rom 8:26). "The proof that you are sons of God is the fact that God has sent forth the spirit of his Son which cries out "Abba!", "Father!" (Gal 4:6). That is, the Holy Spirit arouses us to prayer. He prays in us, and draws us after himself to prayer - naturally on the condition that we consent.

But does the practice of which we are speaking have any application to our exterior activity? Doesn't such anxious expectation, such watching for grace, or, what is the same, for the will of God, rather impede progress in spiritual development? Isn't it an obstacle in our work? Such difficulties result from misunderstanding: interpreting cooperation with God's grace as something entirely passive, a kind of waiting in complete inactivity. Quite the contrary, it is an

intensely active cooperation, presupposing only the acknowledgement that it has its beginning and strength from God.

Those who misunderstand usually judge that such a surrender to God robs us of all strength and energy. The opposite is true. First, because there is no time and energy wasted on projects which do not trace their beginning to the will of God, and which ultimately accomplish nothing of good. Secondly, because divine activity knows neither neglect nor delay. It moves forward constantly, step by step, according to the saying of St. Gregory: "the grace of the Holy Spirit does not admit tardy and negligent efforts." (Cf. Mystika, p.128). We see how much the saints accomplished. St. Vincent de Paul never undertook a project until he was sure that it was what God wanted. And yet, did anyone ever undertake and accomplish more works than he did? Was there ever another whose works bore greater fruit or lasted longer? And, since we are speaking here of Fr. Semenenko, let it be said that he was unswervingly faithful to his principle of avoiding self-activity, even in his exterior activity, without any detrimental results.

This was demonstrated most clearly at the time of the founding of the house and school at Lwów. Fr. Valerian Kalinka, an unusually active and practical man, was in charge of the foundation. Fr. Kajsiewicz jokingly described him as a man who first calculated, planned, and decided every move before he asked God to help him. And so, two men had to work together on the foundation: Fr. Semenenko as Superior General and Fr. Kalinka who, as a subject, had to be obedient to him. Fr. Kalinka, whose outlook on things differed radically from that of Fr. Semenenko, charged that the latter was not doing enough for the Lwów foundation: he was not giving it enough thought. He wrote in despair: "This is, perhaps, the last chance to save the house; and it will not be saved by edifying words!"

At another time in presenting various plans whereby the Lwów House could be placed on a sounder footing, he wrote: "I pray to God that these words of mine may find their way into Father's heart, so that Father will be impressed with the need for strengthening our house; for, having survived many trials, it has now begun to meet with favor and assistance on all sides, except from our own."

Fr. Kalinka himself ultimately acknowledged that this was true. In the history of the Lwów foundation he wrote the following words: "The restless and over-solicitous mind of Fr. Kalinka was constantly darting ahead of the moment at hand. He was constantly tormented by the thought that personnel and funds would be lacking. He was constantly seeking, plotting, bustling about, almost always in vain. Should this Lwów house survive and develop in the future, then in all truth it may be said that no one else but God was its founder." Fr. Semenenko's "inactivity" had more results to show for itself than Fr. Kalinka's self-activity. In fact, without a doubt, if it has not been for Fr. Semenenko, the project would have been abandoned.

Is it possible to apply these principles further to an activity that is entirely social, to public life? The Church has always had to be a militant organization. In every country Catholics have to fight for their rights, for the freedom of the Church, and to preserve Christian life in society. Surely no one can doubt that God gives his grace to accomplish these goals in society, and that we ought to cooperate with that grace. But won't such solicitude for grace weaken activity? The contrary is true; it can only increase its strength.

God himself acts in souls; but it is his wish that even this activity should be subject to direction by the Church. The Church judges whether the activity in a soul is that of God or not; and each and every one of us is obliged to submit our judgment and will in obedience to the Church. If this is the case with reference to the direction of souls, then it must be the case even more so in matters which pertain to the visible rule of God on earth. Christ not only gives us his interior grace, he lives in the Church, directs the Church by means of the Bishops, and principally by the Pope, whom he has commanded to feed (that is, to lead) his sheep.

We must accept the leadership of the Pope. Because he is our head, he must think for us and direct us. In governing the Church, and in directing souls, Bishops, and even the Pope, can make a mistake; but we cannot make a mistake if we listen to them. When speaking to his apostles Jesus said: "He who hears you, hears me. He also said: "Seek first (the Father's) kingship over you, his way of holiness, and all these

things will be given you besides" (Mt 6:33). Men will disappoint us; God will never disappoint us. Therefore, if we do what he wants us to do, i.e., if we obey those whom he has commanded us to obey, and seek first his kingship over us - his divine dominion, and therefore the will of God - God cannot refuse to keep his promise, and give us even that added portion: triumph for a just cause here on earth.

If it happens that Papal directives are not always productive of good results, it is usually due to poor acceptance on the part of Catholics, lack of complete submission, and a search for something else first, in place of the kingdom of God. What must our obedience to the Church and to the Pope be like? For us, no matter what kind of obedience we receive, it must be the will of God, for it is God's will that we obey the Church and the Pope. Consequently, he will always give us his grace to fulfill these commands, even in situations where such commands might be neither opportune nor prudent, as long as no sin is commanded.

Mechanical obedience does not suffice. Obedience must involve both the intellect and the will. We should strive to execute commands in accord with the mind and intention of him who gave them. We should submit our reason, striving to understand the command as just, good, and reasonable, and make every effort to enter into the mind and reasons of the one who gave the command. We need to submit our will. This means we should want what the Church and the Pope want - and want it to be realized exactly as they want it. If everyone would truly unite themselves in this way with the Pope, as the Head of the Church, How strong the Church would be! Their actions would assure the triumph of the Church on earth. There can be no doubt that grace is active in us, and that it urges us to such obedience; for, in the eyes of the Church, this is the only true obedience.

If there is anything harmful to society, it is surely the injection of human activity, that is, self-activity, in religious affairs. Nothing brought greater harm to the Church and society than lack of obedience to the Head of the Church. The Holy Father's counsels and warnings go unheeded. There is an attitude of: "We need not listen to him. He should listen to us. We want to direct him rather than have him direct us." We hear constant complaints against the Pope. Discontent,



ill-will and suspicion are the order of the day. There have always been such people in the Church. Today they are called Liberal Catholics. Currents of independence bear the name of Americanism. What is Liberal Catholicism, or Americanism? It is nothing more than self-activity interjected into the life of the Church. But, to repeat: Is there anything more harmful to the Church and society than precisely this kind of self-activity?

## Christ's Life in us

### CAN JESUS AS MAN ABIDE IN US?

Jesus said: "I am the vine, you are the branches. No more than a branch can bear fruit of itself apart from the vine, can you bear fruit apart from me. He who lives in me and I in him, will produce abundantly, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:4-5).

Does this text refer to Jesus dwelling in us as God? A consideration of the entire text makes it clear that such is not the case. In the words of St. Augustine, "Christ could not refer to himself as the vine unless he were a man." St. Hilary adds: "It was precisely for this reason that he assumed a body, that we might be joined to him as branches." Therefore, Jesus is in us as man. But how are we to understand this?

We meet here with a difficult problem. Jesus, as man, can be present in only one place localiter, that is, as occupying a definite place. He is present in this way only in heaven. Even in the Eucharist he is not present localiter, locally, but in an entirely different way (Cf. Billot, De Ecclesiae Sacramentis, 1900, p.320). We cannot imagine this presence, for our imagination cannot represent for itself something without dimension of form. Therefore, it knows only one mode of existence: local. Therefore, Christ does not "descend" upon the altar at the consecration; nor does he "reproduce" himself, for in that case he would be in many places at the same time, and this is impossible. Further, in the Eucharist he would be deprived of his natural dimensions, and

in the division of the host into small pieces he would fit into a single piece. Thus, he would have one mode of existence in heaven, and another in the Sacrament - and between the two there would be an abyss, separating him from himself (Cf. Billot, Ibid., pp. 322, 455). Briefly, the presence in the Eucharist would not be that of Christ, but of something else (Ibid., p.321).

Jesus is in the Eucharist in such a way that the substance of the bread is transubstantiated into the substance of the body of Christ, which is present in heaven, which does not cease to be in heaven, and which is neither diminished nor increased. Jesus begins to exist upon the altar insofar as the accidents of bread, after transubstantiation, contain the substance of the body of Christ (Ibid., p.322). Because the substance of the body of Christ under the species of bread is not separated locally from its place in heaven, where Christ was, and continues to be, and because we cannot separate Christ's substance from Christ, therefore the whole Christ is present in the Eucharist concomitantly, i.e., mediately.

As God, Jesus is everywhere; as man, he exists locally only in heaven, but sacramentally under the Eucharistic species. Theology recognizes no other mode of existence for Christ. Therefore, if we say that Christ as man abides in us, we become suspect of accepting the ancient heresy which claimed that Christ, as man, was omnipresent, since he is joined to the divinity and his person is divine (Cf. Franzelin, De Deo Trino, note to thesis III).

Yet, we cannot deny that in ecclesiastical tradition we meet constantly with the assertion that Christ as man abides in us. What we need, therefore, is an orthodox interpretation of this assertion. St. Thomas teaches that only God himself can deify us, i.e., make us partakers of the divine nature; but he does this through the humanity of Christ which is, as it were, an instrument of the divinity (Cf. S.T. 1-2, q.112, a.1). The Council of Trent, for its part, adds that Jesus, as the head to the members, or as the vine to the branches, continues to pour out his life-giving power upon his faithful followers (Sess. VI, Cap. XVI). This teaching clearly identifies the manner of Christ's existence in us: He is there by his influence, by his activity. Fr. Semenenko

explains this.

## HOW DOES JESUS ABIDE IN US?

In his Credo, When he speaks of the Eucharist, Fr. Semenenko cites the words of Cardinal Cienfuegos on the presence of Christ in us. He praises the Cardinal's view as "probable, even certain" (Cf. Credo, Lwów, 1885, p.324). According to this theory, once we have received Jesus in Holy Communion, he remains in us "by his soul" even after the Eucharistic accidents have disappeared.

This theory cannot be justified theologically. The soul of Christ is in the Eucharist mediately because the substance of his flesh is there; and the flesh is vivified by the soul, because the body of Christ is alive. When the Eucharistic species cease to exist, the substance of his body is no longer present under the species, and therefore the soul also is no longer present there. The same reason which excludes the possibility of the local presence of the body in many places at one time also rules out the presence of the soul. It is true that the soul, being a spiritual substance, does not occupy space; the soul is where it acts. But a created spirit cannot be everywhere. It does not occupy space, but it must be in a place definitive, i.e., in a definite place according to the language of theology. An angel cannot by his operation be in two places at the same time. Further, we have seen that, besides local presence, we know of only one other presence, made known to us by revelation, that which comes about by the change of one substance into another. However, this presence is connected with the Eucharistic species. When the species disappear, presence also ceases.

Although Fr. Semenenko praises and exalts the theory of Cienfuegos, he had his own theory about the matter, a theory which he did not consider developed with sufficient clarity for a secure presentation. The theory of Cienfuegos appealed to him insofar as it asserted the presence of Jesus in us even after the disappearance of the Eucharistic species. This theory's position on the soul was understood by Fr. Semenenko according to his own ideas, i.e., Jesus remains in us by his influence, by his activity. What, then, was Fr. Semenenko's theory?

Asked once to define "supernatural," he replied: "It is Christ living in us. His heart is grafted into our own as a knot in a piece of wood. His mind is in ours; his will is in ours. He is in us dynamically." The Council of Trent, as we have seen, uses the phrase "virtutem influit", i.e., infuses power. The result is similar to that produced by one who influences another by magnetism - the term hypnotism was still used only infrequently in his time. The subject will feel, think, or will, only what the operator thinks or wills. In the course of a retreat which he conducted in 1870, Father explained Christ's dwelling in us as follows: "Christ always dwells in us as a person, but the influence of his humanity is explained as follows. He is present really and sacramentally in the Blessed Eucharist; however an effect of his presence always remains. Therefore, he is in us effective, i.e., effectively; for Jesus performed all acts for us, eminently and virtually, in his human body.

Thus, each of these acts is in us effectively, i.e., actually, really, vitally. We complete this act, for it lacks the counterpart of our cooperation. A distance of eighteen centuries makes no difference. The influence emanating from the activity of Christ after five years, or after two thousand years, is the same. Time alters nothing. The radiation emanating from the action of Christ is united with our act to constitute a common action. This should not amaze us. We know, for example, that, on the spiritual or psychological level, we can imagine a past activity so vividly that we experience the effects of that action as if they had taken place just now. This is all the more true on the supernatural level."

The above words of Fr. Semenenko were written down at the time of their utterance. Perhaps they are not absolutely exact, but they render his thought sufficiently well, as a comparison with a passage from the Mystika will illustrate. "Everything supernatural ought to be rooted in Christ, and rely on him. If grace is the force which operates in us, then Christ is a co-cause of our activity, a common source, but always occupying first place: 'Without me you can do nothing' (Jn 15:5). Christ assumed a human nature in order to accomplish all those acts in it which we ought to have accomplished but could not, and cannot, but also to engraft all these acts in us. Christ is the head of us all, the source of divine

life in us. From him emanate all supernatural influences. He is the source, the author, of faith, as well as its consummator. Whatever we ought to offer or do for God, Christ did in the name of mankind. St. Paul represents Christ as vivifying the whole body of the Church. This body is one with the body of Christ. We are all members of this body, and Christ is the head and source from which flows the life that is diffused in us.

As the head of the body, Christ performed acts for the whole body. It could not be otherwise, for the head has to know what the other members are doing, and control these actions. Christ foresaw each one of us, felt each of us within himself, and even then began whatever he was to accomplish in each of us. This relationship of Christ to us is not some conjecture, theory, or stretch of the imagination; it is a reality. We must be vitally united with Christ - share the same thoughts, the same emotions, the same life: 'In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ' (Col 1:24). We complete his actions with our own; not because his actions are imperfect, but because, since he did them for us, they lack this other side, our cooperation. They lack what belongs to us and what depends on us. There are two sides to this cooperative activity: what Christ did for us, and what we are called upon to do. St. Paul declares that Christ's mystical body, of which he is the head and we are the members, grows (Col 2:19). We must apply ourselves so that it would grow in us 'to form that perfect man who is Christ come to full stature' (Eph 4:13." (Cf. Mystika, Kraków, 1896, pp. 71-72),

The metaphor of the ingrafted tree used by Fr. Semenenko is also used by St. Thomas. He says that in Holy Communion, which unites us with Jesus, real contact is established with him, and his humanity becomes as it were rooted in us: "Like a good branch grafted onto a wild tree removes the tartness of the fruit and causes the tree to bear good fruits like its own, so the body of Christ, being grafted onto our own, roots out our vices and shares its own goodness with us, giving us the power to produce fruits of holiness similar to the fruits which it produces" (Opusc. 51, c.20).

The example of magnetism, or rather hypnotism in the terminology of today, which Fr. Semenenko used to illustrate

the activity and presence of Christ in us, illustrates how he understood that presence. With the help of hypnotism, people so dominate other people, if they consent to be hypnotized, that they think the same thoughts, want the same things, do what they are told to do. In a sense it can be said that the hypnotist, by his activity and his influence, is present and lives in the hypnotized person. In like manner, Christ begins to live in us to such a degree that St. Paul can say: "The life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me" (Gal 2:20).

But, there always remains the difficulty that Christ as man is present only in heaven and in the Eucharist, and that he cannot act as man in many places at one and the same time. As God, he is present everywhere. Thus, he can act in us only as the divine person, but not as man. This demands further development.

## THE LIFE OF CHRIST IN US

We have said that Jesus is in us by his influence and by his activity. But, Christ no longer lives on this earth as man. Therefore, we must suppose that he acts in us by virtue of such acts as he performed previously, and that he applies this activity to us. He is in us by way of those acts which he performed previously. This was Fr. Semenenko's understanding of the question. St. Augustine interprets the words of St. Paul: "In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ" (Col 1:24) as follows: "All the sufferings had been completed, but in the Head. There remained the sufferings of Christ in his body. But, you are the body of Christ and his members." There was nothing lacking in the sufferings of Christ or in any of his actions, for they were all complete and perfect in themselves. However, our cooperation was lacking. Christ did everything for us and in our name, so that later we could do the same things. Even when Christ "intercedes for us at the right hand of God" (Rom 8:34), "since he lives always to make intercession for us" (Heb 7:25) to the Father; yet he does not do this otherwise than by applying the sacrifice which he offered up for us on Calvary.

Fr. Semenenko says that the life of Christ was not just a lesson, example, illustration for us. Neither was it just an encouragement, motive or attraction. Rather, it was power, strength, an effective force. "Why did Jesus pray, continuing all night in prayer to God (Cf. Lk 6:12), and why does the Holy Spirit in the Gospels constantly point to this prayer? Christ prayed purposefully, to exemplify not just external prayer, but internal prayer as well" (Mystika, p.72). In his Spiritual Exercises (1864), after reviewing the various mysteries of the life of Christ, and applying them to the inner needs of the soul, Fr. Semenenko adds: "From beginning to end, the whole life of Jesus must be repeated in us. The moments of the life of Christ follow one another successively, and each and every one of them must be repeated successively in us." When the Gospel states that, "Jesus, for his part, progressed steadily in wisdom and age and grace before God and men" (Lk 2:52), even though it is certain that he possessed all knowledge and grace from the beginning, the Fathers of the Church explain that these words mean he advanced and grew in wisdom and grace inasmuch as he performed acts of wisdom and grace for us (Cf. John Damascene, Fid.Orth., 1,3, c.22).

All agree that Christ did not have to pray, but that he prayed for us. St. Augustine says he did not have to be tempted, but he was tempted in order that we might have the strength to overcome temptation. For, would Christ do all this only to leave us an example? This would be unworthy of Christ, for this would mean that he performed all his actions for show.

Theology teaches us that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is one with the sacrifice offered on the cross. Not only is the same Christ present on the altar as man sacramentally, but he is likewise the same victim, together with the effect produced and the power that was radiated. However, there is a difference. In the Mass, the victim and the offerer is not just Jesus, but all of us in union with him. There is co-operation on our part. "I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ." The actions of Christ were salutary for us, not just by meriting grace for us, but also as distributing those graces (Cf. S.T., 3, q.8, a.1).

Therefore, we need to unite our actions with those of Christ. The Church recommends that we pray: "Lord, in union with the intention by which you praised God while on earth, I bring you these praises." On the other hand, we inflict suffering upon Christ by our sins. Today, Christ can no longer suffer. Therefore, we must have afflicted him together with the Jews. "They are crucifying the son of God for themselves and holding him up to contempt" (Heb 6:6). "In his own body he brought our sins to the cross" (1 Pt 2:24). Thus, our good works, as well as our sins are intimately related to the life of Christ upon earth. How can we explain the relationship that exists between the Christ's life on earth, and our life in the present day? Is it possible that words, thoughts and actions accomplished many centuries ago can have an influence upon us today? Something similar has been discovered in nature, and it has been put to practical use. Words spoken at some time in the past are repeated at any moment in the present by means of a phonograph. The words are not spoken again, but they are heard again; and any number of phonographs can capture the same words.

But, why go so far afield? We have an example on the psychic level. We heard Fr. Semenenko say that "in the realm of the spiritual, the psychological, it is possible to imagine a past event so vividly that we feel the impact of this action as though it had just occurred." The thoughts, words, or actions - even the whole life of an individual - can exert such an influence upon us that they remain as a constant echo within us, making themselves heard at any particular moment. When they do so, they console, encourage, fortify, and strengthen us. So deeply can they implant or grant themselves upon our soul, that they can change us into a completely different person.

You have heard it said: "He lives on in his students." Or, "A mother or father lives on in his\her children." But, adds Fr. Semenenko, this is even more true on the supernatural level, for there is a vast difference between the life of one such individual in the life of another, and the life of Christ in us. The words, thoughts, or actions of another individual exist and operate in us insofar as at one time they produced a profound impression upon us, as we gazed on them, and as the image of them remained fixed in our memory. But Christ is God. His person is divine; therefore he is present



everywhere. And so, he who once taught, worked and lived on this earth as God, lives now in us, even after the Eucharistic species by which he is humanly present in us have disappeared; and he continues to act in us, sharing with us the life he once lived. It is in this sense, by his human activity, that he is in us as man.

Let us not examine how Fr. Semenenko applies this theory to practical life. "Only Christ knew the nature of God, and understood his majesty. Of ourselves we cannot honor God properly; but, in union with Christ, we are able to make our prayer worthy of him. Only Christ could adequately appreciate our nothingness, understand its whole abyss. At the same time, he was aware of the majesty of God, thus causing the contrast of our nothingness to stand out even more glaringly. Hence, only he could duly humble himself for us; and only he can cause such humility to take root in us. Christ saw our misery in all its ugliness, and he accepted the sight, sensation, and consequences of it. He who was without sin took our sins upon himself, and chose to experience the horror, opprobrium, and detestation of them. Therefore, if we wish to appreciate our own misery, we can do so only when, united with him, we penetrate its complete loathsomeness and go down into its abyss.

Finally, only Christ expressed sorrow for sin. He was not, and could not be, guilty of sin; but he took upon himself the form of a sinner and felt sorrow for the sins of the entire human race. He shares that sorrow with all. Alone, a person can arrive at remorse, detestation, but none of us can achieve genuine sorrow by ourselves. Thus, it is only by way of uniting ourselves with Christ that we are able to achieve true sorrow for our sins" (*Mystika*, p.73).

We must ask Christ "to realize, and repeat, in us the thoughts which he had on this subject. For, what he thought about things is what we should think about them. His human knowledge and his human thoughts must gradually penetrate our minds. This should be the object of our prayer: to possess not other knowledge or thoughts except those of Christ. Our goal is to attain to the judgment and convictions of Christ, for in him these are identified with the truth. Unfortunately, we have our own thoughts and our own knowledge of things, purely natural thoughts. We have our own judgments of things,

and this is very fallible. Therefore, we must pray that this judgment will no longer be ours, but rather Christ's. In this matter we encounter a constant need to catch and humble ourselves, and to beg God to work this transformation in us" (Mystika, p.74).

"We abound in sentiment. Here too, we must constantly catch and humble ourselves, even while we beg Christ to replace our sentiments with his own. How often we experience inordinate affections, antipathies, prejudices, grudges, ill-will, envy! Our own strength is not sufficient to overcome these sentiments. And even if we were to succeed in ridding ourselves of them, it would profit us but little to experience absolutely no feeling in our hearts for our neighbor. We need to replace such negative feelings with something positive. We need divine sentiments. Therefore we must ask Christ for the sentiments toward our neighbor which he himself felt.

"There is in us a constant turning in upon ourselves. We are forever seeking our own will. During his lifetime, Christ sought only the will of God... Christ has already done everything for us. It remains for us to unite with his actions. Only in this way can we transfuse his will into our own" (Mystika, p.74).

## OUR TRANSFORMATION INTO CHRIST

As we said, Jesus acts in us through grace, in virtue of what he accomplished once long ago. Consequently Christ's activity is both human and divine: human, since he re-creates his own thoughts, feelings, and desires in us; divine, since he who acts is one of the divine persons. He is God. Because in Jesus humanity is united with divinity, his activity is salvific. We made this point before. When we cooperate with him, we unite with him in a single action, and at the same time we are transformed into him. According to St. Thomas, grace unites us with God, since it makes us similar to him. (Cf. De Caritate, a.2, ad 7).

God has "predestined us to share the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29), and we suffer St. Paul tells the Corinthians, "so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our mortal flesh"

(2 Cor 4:11). To the Galatians he writes: "You are my children, and you put me back in labor pains until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19). This transformation is our final goal. It is the principal effect of receiving the Eucharist, which is the soul's nourishment - not in the sense that, like ordinary food it is changed into us; rather that it changes us into itself.

The sacramental effect must also consist, proportionately, in the refreshment of the soul through a kind of spiritual change or transformation, not, however, a transformation of the one who receives it into Christ who is our spiritual nourishment. Man's spiritual life cannot be perfected by the heavenly bread being changed into his substance; the exact opposite is true. Moreover, as St. Albert the Great observes, whenever two beings unite in such a way that one must be changed into the other, it is the stronger which always succeeds in changing the weaker into himself. Hence, since this bread is much more powerful than they who eat it, it spiritually transforms them into itself. It is for this reason that St. Augustine puts these words on the lips of Christ: "Neither shall you change me into yourself, as you might the food of your body, but you shall be changed into me." (Cf. Billot, De Eucharistia, p.504).

In his mystical spiritual exercises (1869), Fr. Semenenko describes our transformation into Christ as follows: "Our life must now be lived in and by the supernatural, in Jesus our Lord. We have a life in common with him: He in us, and we in him, with the help of this super-nature. What are the conditions of this life? We know what this super-nature is. It is given to us, to our person, for our use. Yet, we need to recognize, first of all, that of itself it is nothing. It is only a capacity, and a capacity does not possess either object or means in itself. Thus, the eye has the capacity to see; but unless there is an object to be seen, it sees nothing. If there is not light, the means of the medium, even if an object is present and the eye is capable of sight, the eye will see nothing. In like manner, we also need an object. For us, this object is Jesus. Next, we need a medium, a means, or better, a power. The holy Spirit supplies this. Yet, even

though in Baptism the Spirit provides the capacity for faith, hope and love, it is still necessary that he move this faculty to act. Thus, although the power, the source, already exists in us, its use still always depends on the Holy Spirit - and therefore, once again, on Jesus Christ.

The second point to note is this: We should not grant to ourselves what we do not possess, nor, of our selves, use what does not depend on us. This includes both the object and the power. The object is Jesus: his truth, his good, his will. Our first great blunder consists in trying to fashion these in our own way. The power is the Holy Spirit and his grace. Jesus confers this on us. This power challenges and draws us. However, to wish to respond to it in our own way, by ourselves, proceeding to act even when it is not there - this is a second great blunder.

A third point that requires our attention is this: The first cause and principal agent, of the supernatural life in us is Jesus Christ. "Without me you can do nothing." We ourselves are only co-causes, cooperators. Externally, Jesus provides us with the object of the supernatural life through the Church (its teaching, and the sacraments). But the Lord must do this internally as well, granting us true understanding, as well as correct concepts and feelings. The person who is not thus moved internally, and yet goes ahead on his own, exposes himself to grave danger. The object he pursues will always prove false in some way. Our Lord, for his part, confers grace upon us, and acts in us, through the Holy Spirit. This is how union with Jesus is accomplished.

An essential condition for union with Jesus requires that we rid ourselves entirely of self-activity, and also of any claim to independent existence. Self-activity forever rashly anticipates divine activity; it disturbs and hinders the possibility of life and activity in union with Jesus. Therefore, we need to deny ourselves. The "Ego" must cease to be the principle, the source, of our own independent activity. This self-denial does away with individualism on two counts: externally, it puts an end to egotistic activity; internally, it eliminates selfish and independent existence, without, however, destroying the person. Individuality and person need to be distinguished: The person is the "I" who exists; individuality makes me what I am.

We achieve transformation into Jesus by means of our union with him. Each of us corresponds to the divine idea. Each of us, in his own way and under a different aspect, expresses the image and likeness of Jesus. Jesus, the Word of God, wishes to realize his idea - one in essence, but different in the manner of its expression in each of us. In certain respects, this divine idea is the reflection and repetition of his own life - of his mind, heart and will. Jesus takes the initiative. He presents himself to us, to our minds, in the way in which he desires to be loved. We might also say according to the expression of his idea in us, or according to what we are in his mind.

St. John says: "When he appears, we shall be like him." And so, he too shall be like us. When we look upon Jesus in heaven, we see that he is like what we ourselves shall be. We see ourselves mirrored in his countenance. Therefore, it is necessary that we cooperate with Jesus beforehand, in order to change our thoughts into his thoughts, his understanding, his view of things, his judgments, his conviction - so that, of himself, he might lovingly suggest thoughts to our mind which, as it were, have already been changed into his own. In this way, beginning with the mind, we hope to accomplish the transformation of our being into his being. Such is the goal of love: union and transformation. "He abides in me, and I in him."

We all belong to God - we are his possession. In a special way, we are the object of God's, of Jesus' delight - naturally only in principle, in potency, in the plan of God; for love demands that we become his possession willingly and freely. We must offer ourselves to Jesus with our whole heart as his possession, for his delight and pleasure. We must surrender our affections to Jesus. He, in turn, must change these into his own, and further implant his own in us, until, finally, we possess no other affections but those of Jesus - his own heart. Every one of our affections must become a repetition, as it were, of his own.

Finally, we are all children of God, the object of his love. As a consequence, we must live as children of God, awaiting final and complete transformation into Jesus, when we shall become, like him, sons of God. "When he appears, we shall be like him." This life, like that of the Son of God,

is accomplished by way of complete union of our person with that of Jesus, by means of love. Love makes us one. Our being is nothingness, constantly in need of loving: with a holy intensity when it loves well, and with a frenzied intensity when love goes astray.

The love of God, or more immediately the love of Jesus, for us, summon us to love. When his love touches our person, it fans the fire glowing beneath the embers into a great flame. Our love is prompted by his. "We, for our part, love because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). Hence, it is necessary to offer ourselves to Jesus now: 1) in order that we might find in Jesus the complete fulfillment of our being: its source and outlet, the beginning and the end, as well as all that lies in between. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last;" 2) in order that all of our interior acts may become those of Jesus, "so that all of our prayers and works may always begin with You, and through you be likewise ended."

We hope in this way to achieve a union, and a common existence, a common life and activity, until we reach a complete transformation, a common life of two persons who have but one individuality. One individuality because: 1) what is in each is the same - they are constituted in like manner; 2) the two persons correspond to one another - our person mirrors that of Jesus; 3) as such they enjoy a common existence - they are related to, and bound up with, one another, indissolubly and eternally one. Then, I no longer exist; there is only Jesus in me. "The life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me" (Gal 2:20).

#### FATHER LOUIS LANEAU

After we had investigated the first two points of Fr. Semenenko's ascetical system, we asked the question: Does this knowledge of self, this teaching concerning self-activity, have any practical application for the generality of people, or is it simply a deeper insight into the spiritual life reserved for those who are especially called to it? Even more so now, when we are discussing the life of Jesus in us, we must ask the question again: Is it possible for all people to participate consciously in this life of Jesus in us, or is it

reserved for mystics, who might understand it and make it the object of their mental prayer? For, in itself, this truth seems to be too subtle, too profound, and too mystical to be shared by all.

Each person can answer this question for himself after reading what has been explained above. Realizing that this matter can be somewhat difficult, since it is out of the ordinary, and we hear or read little about it, we shall try to facilitate its understanding by quoting from another author whose teaching is the same as that of Fr. Semenenko. However, he will present it in his own way, and the language in which he expresses it will be different. One point needs to be noted: His precise concern is to apply this doctrine to all people.

In 1887, shortly after the death of Fr. Semenenko, a book entitled On the Deification of the Just Through Jesus Christ, was published in Hong Kong. The author, Rev. Louis Laneau, was the first Vicar Apostolic of Siam. Fr. Laneau died in 1696, and up to this time his work had existed only in manuscript form. The doctrine contained in it is the same as that of Fr. Semenenko. We will cite a few excerpts in order to illustrate.

Writes Fr. Laneau: "Surely there is no one, even one with a very elementary knowledge of the Scriptures and of faith, who has not heard often that the faithful are members of Christ. This is preached from the pulpit; doctors of theology teach it in the schools. There is no other doctrine that is heard or spoken of so often. But it is possible that there are people who do not fully realize the importance or sublimity of the words they speak. For they think that these words should be understood only in a moral or metaphorical sense. Others, with keener insight, feel that such an explanation, or rather such a distinction, does not adequately render the sense of the words of Scripture; yet they accept it, lest they be forced into difficult and troublesome investigations. And finally there are some who know the true meaning of these words, but put off explaining to the faithful what they themselves see and feel, because they regard the common person as too immersed in matter, and as incapable of understanding a matter so profound. Despite all this, I cannot convince myself that any more suitable or more effective means exists

to arouse people, learned and unlearned alike, to the love of Jesus Christ than the practice of setting before our eyes, reflecting upon, and entering deeply into this ineffable doctrine of our incorporation into Christ: union, and as some doctors did not hesitate to say, identification, with him."

"It is not my intention to establish principles and precepts to be followed by pastors of souls and ministers of the word of God. However, I earnestly beg and entreat them not to be niggardly and sluggish in preaching Jesus Christ, and in explaining the mystery of Christ. For, while they do instruct children and simple souls in the mysteries of our faith, the knowledge of which is necessary for salvation, they keep silent about Christ. They preach sermons about virtue and vice; and they should do so. In order to imbue their listeners with a love for virtue and a hatred for vice, they gather a whole mass of arguments, they stir up and encourage, without neglecting a single opportunity, and this is to their credit. Yet their efforts often fail to produce results."

"To use the words of St. Augustine: 'They conquer, but they do not convince.' Why? It may be precisely because they do not include Christ in their teaching as they should. The apostles and their disciples acted otherwise. They too were intent on instructing the faithful in virtue; yet they always preached 'Christ crucified,' not coldly or indifferently, but in such a way as to make it understood that Christ alone is 'the power and the wisdom of God.' (1 Cor 1:24), and that all virtue is to be sought in him. For the purpose of the preacher can be none other than that Christ be 'formed' in his hearers (Gal 4:19), and that they might 'grow to the full maturity of Christ' (Eph 4:15).

Therefore, when the apostles wrote about virtue and vice, they did not have recourse to select sayings of the Stoics, or search for reasons and wisdom in Plato. Instead, they cited reasons and motives drawn from the mysteries of Christ, namely: we are children of God, members of Christ, the Church, and the Holy Spirit. If we read their letters attentively, we see that they do not deal with virtue and vice as divorced from the mysteries of Christ, but rather, in Christ and through Christ. Thus, e.g., when St. Paul strove to withdraw the faithful from evil sensual habits and encourage them to chastity, he first discarded considerations to



be gleaned from the books of the philosophers, or from human reason alone: "Do you not see that your bodies are members of Christ? Would you have me take Christ's members and make them members of a prostitute? God forbid! ... You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within - the Spirit you have received from God. You are not your own. You have been purchased, and at a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:15, 19-20).

Where, I may ask, can we find stronger or more effective motivation to encourage people to chastity? When he sought to arouse married people to mutual love and peace, he said: "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church... This is a great foreshadowing. I mean that it refers to Christ and the Church" (Eph 5:25, 32). When he wished to encourage the faithful to charity among themselves, he said: "So too we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Rom 12:5). St. Peter urged patience, saying: "Christ suffered for you in just this way and left you an example, to have you follow in his footsteps" (1 Pt 2:21). Once again St. Paul counseled mortification: "After all, you have died! Your life is hidden now with Christ in God" (Col 3:3); and to humility: "Your attitude must be that of Christ" (Phil 2:5).

"Therefore, if you wish to acquire a particular virtue, e.g., humility, and to make it the subject of your meditation, do not consider the virtue of humility in the abstract; consider, instead, humility as it existed in Christ. Reflect upon the cause of Christ's humility, its consequences, circumstances, etc. Moreover, if these considerations are to be conducive to your greater perfection, do not be content to ponder only the humility of Christ during his life on earth, but seek rather that humility which Christ living in you desires to practice in you, and through you, i.e., seek the particular way in which Christ desires to continue his humility through your humility. For Christ's personal humility and the humility which he effects in his members are one and the same. However, it does not yield the same external acts and results in everyone."

"People who practice good works and abstain from evil works in an effort to imitate Christ, yet do so of themselves and by their own choice, are still far from what is most

important for the imitation of Christ. It is not enough for us to perform good works as Christ did. We must also perform them in dependence on Christ, and in the same way that he performed them. In this way we become conformed to him both internally and externally, so that, wholly possessed by him and animated by his Spirit, we might continue the life which he lived on earth; or rather that we may merit to have Christ living in us, complete his likeness in us, and continue to live his life in us and through us as his vital instruments."

"The members of a body depend upon the head, not just when they move, but even when they are in repose. In like manner, we must depend upon Christ whether we are active or inactive. Of course there is a difference: Members of a body have neither the capacity nor the will to move without the head. On the other hand, we have the capacity to act, even apart from a special movement by the Spirit of Christ; but we should not do so. We can act, for our Creator has given us whatever we need to act, and God himself concurs in our activity. We possess a free will and other faculties which are ready to reflect upon and execute whatever we desire. We can act, but we should not; for from the time when we were grafted onto Christ, we surrendered our will and our freedom to him, so that now we no longer exercise these except at the command, and according to the will, of Christ our head."

"Consequently, we are left, as it were, without will, judgment, or the faculty to reason and act. In all of those who are in Christ, there should no longer be many wills, but only one will: that of Christ, which is responsible for both willing and acting in us. Would it not be a monstrosity to have as many wills as there are members of a single body? Therefore, as long as Christ does not infuse his Spirit into us, or move us to act, we must refrain from determining and initiating any activity purely on our own. Otherwise, impelled by pride, we would actually be usurping the office and the authority of Christ our head."

"We cannot defend ourselves by insisting that what we want is good, and not evil. For the members of a body cannot act in just any way. They have to be moved by the power and force which derives from union with the head. This must be so if their acts are to be vital, rather than convulsive or unnatural. Thus it often happens that acts which might other-

wise be good and praiseworthy, proceed, in fact, from some purely natural instinct, for they are not executed in dependence on the Holy Spirit. Such acts are dead in the sight of God, for they lack the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit."

Father Laneau asks himself: "What is the foundation of this dependence on Christ?" He answers: "There are many who think that they give themselves to Christ sufficiently when they refrain from drunkenness, theft, murder and other similar grievous sins. These people pay little or no attention to other faults. There are others who are more enlightened: They avoid venial sins, as well as the more obvious imperfections, for they realize that such things cannot be reconciled with genuine submission to Christ. Yet, because their light is not strong enough, they go no further; consequently, it can rightly be said of them that they serve partly Christ and partly themselves. However, one who aims at perfection cannot be satisfied with only partial dependence on Christ. Such a person's dependence must be complete and universal."

Can anyone who avoids actual sins and imperfections for the sake of Christ, but in other things does as he pleases, really believe that he is depending entirely on Christ? As the head, Christ acts with us by way of the interior influence of his Spirit, through internal inspiration and secret movements of the heart, without any visible sign, for he wishes to exercise control over his body. Thus, he wishes to move the members of his body as his vital instruments by means of his life-giving Spirit. He wishes to move these members according to his will, and he prompts them to act in order to continue the life which he once lived on earth. Therefore, he is not satisfied when we perform good works for him, or on account of him; He wants us to act as moved by him, and in dependence on him.

Christ wishes us to be holy, not just in him, but in dependence on his Spirit. It is in this way that he is able to continue his life in us and through us more easily and more fully. Since we know and realize that we no longer belong to, or depend on, ourselves alone, we should not think anything as of ourselves, or reach decisions by ourselves on any work, no matter how good it may be in itself. To act otherwise is to offer an affront to Christ who is our Lord and our Head. We do this when we dare to claim as our own

what rightfully belongs to him. We must wait patiently until we are able to conclude, with all probability, and in good faith that God is arousing and moving us to action. It is such people that can justly be said to be 'dead and buried' together with Christ, for in their own estimation they really are and can do nothing without him. As a result, they are careful to avoid haste in initiating any undertaking lest, by not waiting for the movement of the Spirit of Christ, they cause a former way of life and action, now dormant, to re-awaken in them; and lest, having ceased to act with due dependence on Christ, they seem to wish to rise without him."

"The last mentioned way of proceeding is a noble one, but it is also difficult and burdensome. Consequently, it does not appeal to all. Does anyone really wish to die to self completely? Is there anyone who will agree to the cessation of his own life, feelings, and activity in order to conform to Christ in all things? It is human for a person to wish to control all the arrangements of his life: to plan, decide, and execute them as absolute master of his own soul and faculties. It must be clear to everyone that if such a tendency is a part of a person's nature, we can expect to encounter great difficulty in trying to curb it. Yet, however difficult the task, it is not impossible for loving souls. One who makes a firm decision for Christ, having determined to take up arms against one's self and one's nature, will discover that God has generously consented to offer his help. Comforted daily by this divine assistance, we grow stronger steadily."

"But," Fr. Louis asks, "what should one do if one lacks or does not experience being moved by Christ? Since not all are granted the experience of being so moved, we must explain the procedure to be followed in such circumstances. First, if an action is neither necessary nor useful, abandon it; otherwise we shall be reclaiming the freedom we once had when we surrendered to Christ. On the other hand, if the action is genuinely necessary or useful, the fact that we are not moved by Christ should not prevent us from acting. However, even then, instead of acting strictly on our own, we should appeal to Christ for guidance."

"But what if Christ does not answer our appeal? Then we must do what we judge to be more pleasing to Jesus, at least

what we judge is not displeasing, and always with the desire to depend on Jesus in everything." Fr. Laneau explains elsewhere how this is to be understood. "Our guiding principle should be: to refrain from a work that is not prescribed or necessary, even if it is licit, unless we are in some way moved to do it."

"On the other hand, duties must never be neglected, whether or not the inspiration is there. In any given case, lack of any interior movement is to be supplied by permission, which should be sought humbly from the Holy Spirit. This principle, which applies to matters of precept, can be extended safely to matters which, though not of precept, are either very useful or necessary, and in accord with reason. Everyone agrees that the Holy Spirit prompts us by special illuminations and inclinations to what is more noble and more perfect. For that which is commanded is clear and evident. We do not need any extraordinary inspirations of grace to recognize it; ordinary grace is sufficient."

"But perfect works are hidden from us. No one can conceive such things in his mind without very special help from the Holy Spirit; nor can anyone aspire to them without his help. I regard as perfect works not only such as are extraordinary or of great value, for example, the choice of a state of life, or the undertaking of some great work for the glory of God, but also a great number of other works which, although they are not so important, by reason of their frequency involve tremendous treasures of grace and holiness if they are well done."

"Such works are often neglected simply because they are regarded as of little or no significance. But the Holy Spirit, who always provides for our needs, is constantly active. He arouses us to various acts of mortification and humility which may seem insignificant. He draws us away from diverse pleasures, warning and rebuking us for the slightest faults, and encouraging us to do penance for them. He keeps us from speaking even a single idle word, looking upon some object with vanity, reading even a few lines out of idle curiosity, or eating a few choice morsels just for pleasure's sake. In any number of similar acts he never ceases to manifest his love, encouraging, or discouraging, us as the situation may require."

"The care of the Holy Spirit is truly admirable. He watches over us with the intention of weaning us from the external, and converting us to the internal. No Master of Novices has ever shown such great care in providing for the spiritual welfare of his disciples. 'Here I stand, knocking at the door' (Rev 3:20), to teach, reprove, command, forbid. The more love the Spirit has for someone, the greater tasks does he assign to such a person, and the more severely does he reprove or punish him or her. As a result, they whom God loves more than others are, as it were, chained to the Holy Spirit. They cannot take a single step or speak a single word at their own pleasure, for the Holy Spirit will immediately reprove them, and strike their hearts with a kind of inner hammer, accusing them of infidelity."

#### EPILOGUE: ON THE MOTHER OF GOD

Did Fr. Semenenko have any special thoughts to offer on our relationship to the Blessed Virgin? Such as he had follow from his theory about the life of Christ in us. According to the unanimous teaching of theologians, all divine graces pass through the hands of Mary. She is the Mother of Divine Grace. If, when speaking of the trials he bore in preaching and ministering the sacraments St. Paul could say to the Galatians: "You are my children, and you put me back in labor pains until Christ is formed in you," (Gal 4:19) how much more can this most Holy Virgin be said to give birth to us anew, and to form Christ in us! Therefore, she is a true mother to us all - not only because she once bore our Savior, but also because, as the one through whose hands God's graces pass and who forms Christ in us, she also gives birth to Christ in us. In the Rule of the Congregation, where Fr. Semenenko speaks of a new life by resurrection with Christ, he says: "In this life we must rely on Mary, and go to Mary, so that, through Mary, the true Mother of the living, this new life may be developed and extended upon earth."

Fr. Paul Smolikowski, C.R.

# SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

FR. PETER SEMENENKO, C.R.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

FIRST DAY.	1. The goal of a human person. 2. The goal of other creatures. 3. Remarks concerning false goals. 4. The goal for a religious.
SECOND DAY	1. Sin in general. 2. Personal sin. 3. The roots of sin. 4. Venial sins and infidelities.
THIRD DAY	1. Death. 2. Judgment. 3. Confession. 4. Hell.
FOURTH DAY	1. The prodigal son. 2. Two masters. 3. Temptations. 4. Three kinds of servants of God.
FIFTH DAY	1. The imitation of Jesus Christ. 2. The birth of Jesus. 3. Prayer (1). 4. The hidden life of Christ.
SIXTH DAY	1. Jesus is tempted. 2. Jesus teaches and acts. 3. Prayer (2). 4. Jesus in the presence of adversaries.

SEVENTH DAY

1. The trial of Jesus.
2. Jesus is reviled.
3. The passion of Jesus.
4. Jesus dying on the cross.

EIGHTH DAY

1. The Resurrection.
2. The Holy Spirit.
3. Holy Communion.
4. The Mother of God.