

THE ROLE OF CREATURES IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

To what extent should the Christian love and use the good things of this world, and to what extent should he renounce them? This is the question at issue. It is the problem of the transcendent, supernatural vocation of the Christian and his existential condition in the world on the practical level of ascetical attitudes. It is the problem of engagement and detachment.

We take the term creatures in a dynamic and not a static sense, as objects of human acts rather than entities existing apart from man. Creatures embrace the whole hierarchy of humanistic values, all human goods that are legitimate objects of man's love and effort.¹ We include whatever natural and supernatural goodness that is found in these human values under the one notion of their created goodness and prescind from the controverted question of the objective permanent value in terrestrial realities.²

¹ Created goods are personal, e.g. health, money, love and being loved, or social, e.g. culture, civilization, temporal structures; they include the goods of nature and of art and technology, whether these directly serve the body, like the comforts of climate or furniture, or the mind, like recreation or work, or the human spirit, such as knowledge and love. The classification of these goods and their objective relation to the supernatural economy of grace is the object of the theology of terrestrial reality; our viewpoint, that of spiritual theology, is their subjective repercussions in the spiritual life and ideal attitudes to be fostered toward them. We are concerned only with virtuous use or rejection, not sin as such, and that virtuous activity which best promotes the highest union of knowledge and love of God. Sin may indeed be a *felix culpa*, but only *post factum* and in spite of its evil.

² We take for granted that there is a natural goodness in these realities and an extrinsic, supernatural value when they are oriented in human acts to a supernatural end. The precise objective value of temporal realities in relation to the kingdom of God is the subject of debate among contemporary theologians. Incarnationism highlights the assumption and consecration of all reality in Christ: profane history is moving toward the recapitulation of all things in Christ, and humanistic and technological progress contributes positively to that end. Created realities, therefore, have a permanent value which will last after the Parousia. Eschatologism, on the other hand, sees the temporal order as passing, of no intrinsic value except as a mere framework or ambient in which a man pursues his supernatural destiny. The Cross offers a

The Two Poles of Christian Life

The spiritual life is essentially supernatural and consists in the trinitarian life revealed in Christ and communicated to men in the Mystical Body. By grace a man becomes a new creature and enters into a supernatural relationship to God; this orientation also affects his relationships to his fellow men, and indeed to all creation. The new life is from above and its perfection is charity. Hence it constitutes a vertical relationship in man to the transcendent God.

But this new life, while not of the world, is received by the creature man in the world. Man is part of the universe, and he exists only in relation to the world about him. We designate as horizontal these relationships to himself, other people, and things. The grace of the virtues and gifts gives a new evaluation to these horizontal relationships, supernaturally transforms them, but does not cancel them out. In fact grace can find human expression only by using horizontal relationships. The Christian, no less than the pagan, is not a spirit floating above material reality; he is a body-soul composite, whose every act involves the body and the world in some fashion. For him to function, even in the supernatural order, he needs creatures.

This is to say that the Christian's supernatural acts, which are the expressions of the vertical relationship, remain finite and historical, dependent on the material universe and particular culture in which he lives. This is evident when it is a question of moral acts directed to creatures, e.g. acts of the active apostolate; these involve the vertical relationship because the acts are supernaturalized

set of transcendent values that have nothing in common with cultures or civilizations as such. Catholic thinkers are on both sides of the debate, the majority favoring a *via media* solution. For a brief summary of the debate and pertinent bibliography, see D. J. Forbes, O.M.I., *A Thomist Theology of Temporal Values* (Ottawa, 1961) 10-13; 21-25. This dissertation extract was first published in *La revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, 30 (1960) 185*-206*; 31 (1961) 39*-71*. Obviously the objective value of created goods is a factor in determining affective attitudes and use or renunciation. But we believe we need not take sides in the controversy in this paper; we limit ourselves to the examination of practical attitudes flowing from both tendencies in the broader framework of traditional spiritual theology. A balanced spirituality must integrate elements from both approaches, as is clearly shown by G. Thils, *Christian Attitudes* (Chicago: Scepter, 1959).

and informed by charity. Immediately, however, they are horizontal relationships transformed. But even acts of knowledge and love of God Himself do not escape the limitation and dependency on created reality. Acts of faith and charity terminate in God Himself, it is true, but they employ psychological processes and symbols drawn from created reality as their vehicle. The Christian, therefore, goes to God only through the mediation of this world.³ His every act is rooted in the universe. The vertical relationship, therefore, though transcendent and from above, finds human expression only by becoming incarnate in finite acts, and these always involve horizontal relationships one way or the other.⁴

The consequence of these truths is twofold: 1) creatures are necessary; they are the only way to God, whether it is a question of knowing and loving Him in Himself or of serving Him in His

³ The distinction which some authors draw between a mysticism of interiority (introversion) and a mysticism of elevation, between the attainment of God outside and beyond signs or in the signs of this world, between cosmism and the by-passing of creation seems to be a valid description of tendencies or emphases in given spiritualities, especially in their literary expression. See H. Sanson, *L'esprit humain selon S. Jean de la Croix* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1953) 30-33; 53; L. Cagnet (tr. P. Hepburne Scott), *Post-Reformation Spirituality* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1959) 16, 41, 48-49, 55, 61-62, and *passim*. But the distinction should not obscure the metaphysical truth that the only approach to God is through created reality. Morel's analysis of St. John of the Cross shows that even the Sanjuanist way to God is through the mediation of Christ and the cosmos. All that St. John of the Cross rejects is the unreal aspect of the world, the phenomenal as such, the envelope which contains but is not itself, separated from God, reality. G. Morel, *Le sens de l'existence selon Saint Jean de la Croix* (Paris: Aubier, 1960-1961) 3 vols.; see, for example, I, 38-44, 84, 179-181; II, 43-49; 72-76. Morel's interpretation seems sound. It will help us achieve a more supple concept of these two ways to God, based on interior attitudes of the will rather than the material use or renunciation of created realities. The concepts we shall develop under the terms *via positiva* and *via negativa* show the two approaches to be inadequately distinct, existing together in any spiritual life, with one or the other predominating in point of emphasis.

⁴ The fundamental orientation of one's being as asserted in the individual choices of daily life is beautifully developed by P. Fransen, "Towards a Psychology of Divine Grace," *Cross Currents*, 8 (1958), 211-232. For a more scholastic statement of the same truth, see G. de Broglie, "Malice intrinsèque du péché," *Recherches des sciences religieuses*, 25 (1935), 5-44, especially 16-19. The same theme is developed in the author's two previous articles in the same journal.

children; 2) creatures are, nevertheless, inadequate means, since God is totally Other; they are used by God to reveal His Being and communicate His Will, and they are the human means of fulfilling that Will, but they are not God Himself, the end of the spiritual life. Thus creatures must be used and at the same time transcended. These two factors would be operative in any supernatural economy, including the state of innocence.

But a third factor in the role of creatures must be considered, and this is man's present state of fallen and redeemed nature.⁵ Creatures are the sacraments of God, the means of implementing one's knowledge, love and service of God. But in practice they are ambivalent; they are often snares which captivate and lead one into blind alleys away from God, because they are misused. There is no evil in creatures themselves; the evil is in man, in his pride and concupiscence. These effects of original sin remain after justification and are only progressively removed; the flesh (man's unredeemed self) continues to war against the spirit (his redeemed self) (Rom 8:12-13),⁶ and in this struggle, both flesh and spirit use creatures. Sexual pleasure, for example, is a creature which can be misused by the flesh or used for the growth of grace by the spirit. Every true human good can be used or abused in the same way. The role of creatures, therefore, is ambivalent. The Christian must always transcend them, at times he must use them, and at times reject them.

Three Attitudes

These three acts constitute the Christian ascetical attitudes towards creatures. The first and primary attitude, essential for every

⁵ One might approach the question of the role of creatures through the dogmatic analysis of redemptional grace and the relationship of the death and resurrection of Christ to suffering and death in the Christian life. This would broaden the perspective of the present study, since it would bring into consideration the social reparative aspects of Christian life as well as the need for personal purification for union with God. We are limiting our investigation here to the role of creatures in personal growth in grace; we abstract from the reparative vocation to which all Christians are called in some degree and some holy souls in an heroic degree.

⁶ See the commentary of B. M. Ahern, C.P., "Fellowship of His Suffering," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 22 (1960), 12.

Christian, follows immediately from the transcendence of the Christian vocation. It is "affective detachment." The vertical relationship causes a movement towards God; negatively considered, this very movement is a movement away from creatures, a perfect freedom in their regard, and this is affective detachment.⁷ The other two attitudes, use or rejection, are expressions of horizontal relationships, use a moving toward creatures, rejection a moving against them.⁸

The terms use and rejection refer primarily to the subjective reaction to the created goodness in question, and only secondarily to external or material action or inaction, affirmation or renunciation. When that goodness is appreciated and loved and motivates an action, the *via positiva* is operative; when that goodness is a secondary factor, when one closes one's eyes to the created value and seeks God alone and his will in the action, the *via negativa* is dominant. It can be seen that neither one of these two attitudes excludes the other in an accomplished act; it is a question of an approach to creatures, a predominant emphasis in one's spiritual outlook. Actually the two attitudes complement each other. Comparative studies of these two ways, even when they are considered in their secondary aspects, that is, actual commitment to human tasks or material flight from the world, have shown that a genuine Christian life is always a combination of both attitudes in varying ratios.⁹ Various objective factors, especially historical needs and theological preoccupations, help to explain the predominance of one attitude over the other in given times and persons in the Church.

⁷ F. Paradis, P.S.S., *Renoncement chrétien* (Montreal: Grand Séminaire, 1945) 19, 74. G. Thils' analysis of affective detachment as freedom and disponibility brings out the true nature of this elusive concept: *Christian Holiness* (tr. J. L. Farrand, S.J., Tielt, Belgium: Lannoo Publishers, 1961) 336-341.

⁸ The phrases, moving away from, toward, and against creatures, were suggested by K. Horney's *Our Inner Conflicts* (New York: Norton, 1945), where they are used in a different sense; they are utilized here because of their graphic quality.

⁹ K. Rahner, "Passion und Ascese," *Schriften zur Theologie* III (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1956) 73-104 at 99 and 103; C. V. Truhlar, S.J., *Antinomiae vitae spiritualis* (Romae; Universitas Gregoriana, 1958) 76-128, at 128. Truhlar's chapter originally appeared in *Gregorianum*, 38 (1957) 406-445 and has been summarized in *Theology Digest*, 8 (1960) 154-158.

Our viewpoint in this comparative study of the attitudes is that of spiritual theology. Which pattern of acting is better adapted to the growth of charity and the virtues? Which attitude should receive the predominant emphasis in one's life?

The ultimate answer to these questions is God's will, the way He is leading a particular person.¹⁰ Spiritual theology should assist in recognizing this call of grace, not only by its rules for the discernment of spirits, but by delineating the place of use and renouncement in the normal growth of grace and thereby supplying a basis for choosing between the two attitudes. This paper is an attempt to suggest such a basis. We shall first define each of the three attitudes and then attempt to evaluate them in relation to the stages of growth in the spiritual life.

Moving Away From Creatures

Situating affective detachment as the corollary of the Christian's supernatural orientation indicates its essential role and gives a clue to its meaning.

Both in the objective order and in the dynamism of a soul in love with God, creatures in comparison to the God of revelation are nothing.¹¹ In themselves, and apart from any danger they present to a perfect surrender to God, creatures are in a totally different and inferior order and bear no comparison to God. This comparative evaluation can have only one reasonable affective response, and that is a positive election of God and consequently, always in this comparative perspective, a negative attitude toward the creatures.

To define this negative attitude in its perfect state we should distinguish two moments in affective detachment. The first moment describes the *state* of detachment and applies to the time before a particular choice is made. The state is not pure negation—the desirelessness of Eastern mysticism or Stoic insensibility. Rather, it is a condition of perfect order in one's whole being, with charity dominant. It allows preferences and loves, enthusiasms and repugnances on a lesser plane, but none of these determines the choice

¹⁰ Rahner, *art. cit.* 99.

¹¹ *De veritate* 2, 3, ad 18; St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 1, 4.

independently of the love of God.¹² The detached person is ready and anxious to express his love of God in action, but on God's terms, not his own; he is like a hunter ready for the chase, awaiting the signal for what direction to take.¹³ Affective detachment thus originates in the positive attachment to God's will, and this gives it its religious value. This attitude flows into actions, and these are acts of affective detachment. This is the second moment.

To call the second moment an act is somewhat misleading, since affective detachment is still a mere mode or condition of a positive use or possession of a created good. It is usually defined as a condition of rescindibility, a readiness to abandon a given project or possession if God so wills.¹⁴ The dedicated scholar, for example, remains willing to give up his studies should ill-health overtake him; the rich man does not panic if he loses part of his wealth. The act of affective detachment thus exists implicitly, in *actu exercito*, or it does not exist at all. It is elicited only by a positive virtuous act and it is the obverse side of an ordered possession, use or enjoyment of a creature; formally speaking, it consists in the absence of selfishness in a positive act.

Selfishness cannot be rejected by an act of merely affective and not effective detachment, the will to reject the selfishness but not the object; at best such a will act is a mere velleity. The smoker, for example, who is inordinately attached to tobacco, cannot remove the disorder by the will to remove the disorder without in any way curtailing his smoking. Such a will act is a contradiction. The slave of tobacco wills to be willing to give up smoking, and at the same time he is unwilling to give up smoking. The only realistic action

¹² See the incisive analysis of detachment in terms of three concrete examples in St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, III Mansions 2, in *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus* (tr. and ed. E. Allison Peers, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1946) 2, 224-225. See also K. Rahner, "Spiritualité Ignatienne et dévotion au Sacre-Coeur," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* (= *RAM*), 35 (1959), 147-166.

¹³ Affective detachment is synonymous with Ignatian indifference. *Spiritual Exercises*, n.23; I. Iparraguirre, S.J., compares the dynamic equilibrium of Ignatian indifference to a coiled spring: *How to Give a Retreat* (Westminster: Newman, 1959) 65.

¹⁴ Paradis, *op. cit.* 19, 37.

against the disorder and selfishness of attachments is "effective detachment," the true will to give up the object itself and the actual execution of that will, if circumstances permit.¹⁵ The only valid test, therefore, for affective detachment and the only direct way of overcoming inordinate attachments is the way of mortification, of effective detachment. Growth in charity and the virtues increases affective detachment as a state, i.e., as an habitual disposition that corresponds to the deeper radication of the virtues in the faculties; but only virtuous action directed against the chains or strings that hold a man in bondage in selfish love can break those attachments and free him to move unimpeded to God.

Affective detachment is necessary for perfection; a minimal degree is necessary for salvation, namely, that which excludes mortal sin, in habit or in act. What does perfect affective detachment exclude? It excludes inordinate, i.e., disordered or selfish loves. These vary in gravity according to their objects, their hold (radication) on a person, the sins they occasion.¹⁶ All of them have the common denominator of being selfish loves; they proceed from the old man, the flesh in the Pauline sense, and, therefore, they resist the spirit's penetration into the particular area of activity. They are loves which would remain independent of God, closed-circuit relationships to creatures.¹⁷ The transcendent God's call is to total love for

¹⁵ See St. Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, on the "Three Classes of Men," nn.149-157. The first class does nothing to remove attachments, the second strives to make acts of affective detachment in the sense described above; only the third class, who practice effective detachment, is successful. See also *Exx.* n.16 and J. A. Hardon, S.J., *All My Liberty* (Westminster: Newman, 1959) 49.

¹⁶ J. de Guibert, "Abnégation," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (= *DSp*), 1, 107-108.

¹⁷ The validity of this analysis of "selfish loves" is founded on St. Augustine's distinctions between *frui* and *uti* (*De doctrina christiana*, I, 3, 4-5) and between charity and cupidity (*ibid.* III, 10, 16). N. Camilleri, S.D.B., "Natura et gratia in statibus perfectionis. . .," in *Acta et documenta congressus generalis de statibus perfectionis* (Romae: Pia Società San Paolo, 1952) 2, 324, 326, uses this distinction to describe the Christian use of pleasure. St. Thomas is likewise the authority for the doctrine above: collate II-II, 7, 2 with II-II, 17, 2 ad 2; 19, 6; 25, 7. Among spiritual writers St. Francis de Sales presents a clear exposition of imperfect and perfect affections in his *Treatise on the Love of God* X, 3-5. For modern statements of inordinate attachments as closed relationships, see J. Lindworsky, S.J., *The Psychology of Asceticism*

Him, a love of one's *whole* heart; inordinate attachments reserve part of one's heart for one's self. Creatures are thus seen in isolation and not in the place they are to have according to God's general and particular providence in an individual's life; they are willed according to fallen man's disordered preferences. The result is a self-centered rather than a God-centered approach to reality. Selfish loves, therefore, are the obstacle to the evolution of grace within man.

On the other hand, affective detachment does not exclude an ordered appreciation and love for created values in their objective goodness. It is one thing to wrest this value, which is always secondary and relative, out of its hierarchical place and relationship to God and to love it as an independent end—this is inordinate; it is quite another thing to see a human good in its intrinsic goodness and to love it and cherish it for that objective goodness without distortion or selfish grasping from a disordered self. The second case is the pure love of reality which comes from perfect purity of heart and poverty of spirit, both of these being eminent degrees of affective detachment.

Modern authors have emphatically affirmed this created goodness of things and the legitimacy of an ordered, secondary love of human goods and values.¹⁸ They have scored the exaggerations of an older view which sees creatures only in the perspective of the vertical relationship, without a reality or goodness of their own on the created level. Such an exclusive perspective easily leads to exaggerations in the contempt of the world theme: for example, creatures are despised by a St. Columba because of their intrinsic limitations, their very temporality.¹⁹ There is a legitimate Christian contempt for the world, witnessed by abundant texts in spiritual literature and the liturgy itself,²⁰ but such contempt must be for the world in

(tr. E. A. Heiring, London: Edwards, 1936) 46; E. Brisbois, S.J., "Durée du purgatoire et suffrages pour les defuncts," *NRT*, 81 (1959), 838-845; G. Hughes, "Renouncing the World," *The Way*, 2 (1962), 49.

¹⁸ For example, G. Vann, Y. M. J. Congar, D. von Hildebrand, J. Mouroux, G. Thils.

¹⁹ R. Bultot, "Le mépris du monde chez s. Columban," *Revue de sciences religieuses*, 35 (1961) 359, 363-364.

²⁰ For example, St. Bonaventure, "The Triple Way," 1, 15, in *The Works*

the pejorative Johannine or Pauline sense.²¹ Earthly things are to be despised, but only in the sense that the Gospel tells us to hate our parents (Luke 14:26), namely, as St. Gregory the Great says, "loving in them what they are in themselves and hating them when they hinder our progress to God."²² It is interesting to note that this interpretation of the passage from St. Luke is given by St. Gregory, who is regarded by Congar as an important source of the medieval attitude of looking at creatures as a mere means and not intermediary ends.²³ Excoriation of disordered affections for creatures will tend to obscure but must not exclude a legitimate and beneficent ordered affection for true human values. For St. Thomas an affection that "subjects one to the temporal" is impure; but even irrational creatures can be the secondary object of hope and charity, so that "everything can be loved out of charity."²⁴ The real possibility of perfectly ordered loves, however, before the purifications of the spiritual life, is a question we shall consider later.

Moving Toward Creatures

The starting point for the *via positiva* is a wholesome love of created values. The *via positiva* is the use of created reality as a

of Bonaventure, I (tr. J. de Vinck, Paterson: St. Anthony Guild, 1960) 71: wisdom is achieved "by turning our hearts away from the love of creatures. This we must absolutely do; for there is no advantage in such love; if there were any, it would not be substantial; and if it were substantial, it would not be sufficient. Therefore, all love of creatures, without reservation, must be rooted out of our hearts"; also, Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, I,1; the Roman breviary's blessing for the eighth lesson at Matins, "Doceat nos, Dominus, terrena despiciere. . .," or the oration for the feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

²¹ In this sense the world is the enemy of God, because it is the object of pride or concupiscence. The evangelical counsels and withdrawal from earthly concerns are justified on the basis of actual or potential closed relationships: I-II, 108, 4; *De perfectione vitae spiritualis*, 7-8; II-II, 24, 8. This is not the only aspect of creatures, however, and physical renunciation is thus not the only Christian response. See K. Rahner, "Theologie der Entsagung," *Schriften* cited above, III, 64-65.

²² Cited in St. Thomas, *De perfectione vitae spiritualis* 8, in *Opuscula Theologica 2, De re spirituali* (ed. R. M. Spiazzi, O.P., Taurini: Marietti, 1954) 120, n.578.

²³ Y. M. J. Congar, O.P., *Lay People in the Church* (tr. D. Attwater, London: Chapman, 1959) 385, 400.

²⁴ *De caritate* 7, c. See also the citations from St. Thomas in n.17 above.

ladder to God. But a love for the human values involved is presupposed because a man needs this proximate motivation to dedicate himself completely and perseveringly to temporal tasks. An exclusive emphasis on affective detachment and the *via negativa* is not enough, even for the monk, because he too has earthly tasks inside or outside the monastery walls; like his forebears who united culture and sanctity and civilized as well as converted the Western world, the modern monk can benefit from a right appreciation of true human values.²⁵ But for one who finds God's will predominantly in commitment in the world, a love of things is a moral necessity. How can the layman work tirelessly to provide the material and cultural setting for the proper development of his children, the scholar or scientist spend himself in research, the statesman give himself completely to improving the city of man, if their only meditation is the nothingness of this world and their exclusive supernatural preoccupation the direct fight against the selfishness that creeps into their most noble aspirations? For those who work in the world, laymen, priests and active religious, a positive, this-worldly, wholehearted and enthusiastic love and commitment to temporal tasks is the only realistic approach to the spiritual life. This is a motif of modern spiritual writing.

Love and use of creatures is applied to the apostolate, the duties of one's state, and one's personal life with God. The needs of an apostolic spirituality, particularly for laymen and secular priests, has been a key influence in the creation and development of this positive spirituality. A recurrent theme in apostolic writing today is the principle that the Christian becomes a saint, not only for the apostolate, as in the older perspective, but through his apostolic action. Personal religious life has the same down-to-earth approach of using creatures. Hildebrand, for example, is justly famous for his doc-

²⁵ C. Vagaggini, "Tendenze recenti in teologia e spiritualità monastica," *Problemi e orientamenti di spiritualità monastica, biblica e liturgica* (Roma: Edizione Paoline, 1961) 69-71; R. Carpentier, S.J., "Priestly Vocation and Religious Vocation," *Review for Religious*, 21 (1962) 221. Cf. A. J. Festugière, O.P., *Les moines d'Orient, 1: culture ou sainteté: introduction au monachisme oriental* (Paris: Cerf, 1961); J. Leclercq, O.S.B., *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (tr. C. Misrahi, New York: Fordham, 1960).

trine on the formative power in Christian development of the good, the beautiful and the true through one's positive response to these values.²⁶ The sign-value of creatures is stressed, either as the means to communion with God through the Christian imagination in the arts and in prayer,²⁷ or as the *locus* and index of God's will and the immediate call to action.²⁸ The whole man, body and soul, a social being as well as an individual, is to be sanctified in the Mystical Body. Asceticism, therefore, takes the form of service, fellowship, radiating joy rather than withdrawal into silence and solitude;²⁹ it is a descent to humble service rather than an ascending spiritualization;³⁰ fraternal charity itself is warmhearted, human love, emotional as well as spiritual, rather than a cold, distant, and abstract act.³¹

Even free activities like enjoyment of the arts, sport, recreation are regarded more positively, under God's will, as pertaining to "whatever things are true, whatever honorable, whatever just" (Phil. 4:8); they are to be integrated into a balanced and rich Christian existence. Pleasure is not mere indulgence; moderated, it is a necessity for a *mens sana in corpore sano*,³² culture and refine-

²⁶ D. von Hildebrand, *Liturgy and Personality* (New York: Longmans, 1943) 6-7, 57-65, 74-81; *In Defense of Purity* (New York: Sheed, 1935) 163-175; *Transformation in Christ* (New York, Longmans, 1948) 193-196, 288, 381-383.

²⁷ W. F. Lynch, S.J., *Christ and Apollo* (New York, Sheed, 1960) 7-12; 50-61; C. Pepler, O.P., *Sacramental Prayer* (St. Louis: Herder, 1958) 22-25; B. du Moustier, "A Christian Perspective on Art and Beauty," *Cross and Crown*, 13 (1961) 428-437.

²⁸ This use of creatures is illustrated in writings that emphasize temporal vocation, e.g. G. Thils, *Christians Holiness*, and in those which propose a spirituality of apostolic action, e.g. Y. de Montcheuil, *For Men of Action* (London: Chapman, 1957) or T. de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper, 1960).

²⁹ An impressive collection of papal statements on this point can be found in Congar, *op. cit.*, appendix iii, 444-446.

³⁰ The phraseology here is borrowed from Y. M. J. Congar, O.P., "Theology of Religious Women," *Review for Religious*, 19 (1960) 30.

³¹ R. Voillaume, *Seeds of the Desert* (Notre Dame: Fides, 1955) 311-319; Montcheuil, *op. cit.*, 110-111.

³² G. Cruchon, *De psychologia pastoralis et ascetica* (Romae: Pont. Univ. Greg., 1957, typescript) 36, 43, 73; B. du Moustier, "'Doctor Discretus': Walter Hilton," *Cross and Crown*, 11 (1959) 292-300; J. C. Ford, S.J.—G. Kelly, S.J., "Notes on Moral Theology," *TS*, 15 (1954) 55-57.

ment are not luxuries; the modernization and utilization of technological advances in religious houses and the apostolate are not departures from the Christian spirit. Ascetical writers traditionally allow the offering of pleasurable acts to God, the scenting of the rose, as well as disagreeable acts, the refusal of the rose, but their preference is the act against one's natural inclination because of fallen man's inherent selfishness and powers of self-deception.³³ Christian humanists take a more optimistic view and find the warnings of older ascetical writers negative, inhibiting, and pessimistic.³⁴

The point of departure, then, in this positive attitude toward creatures is the goodness of the world rather than the transcendence of God. The factors that have shaped this approach and stressed its necessity and relevance for our de-Christianized and de-humanized world come from many sources in modern life and thought.³⁵

³³ L. Hertling, S.J., *Theologiae asceticae cursus brevior* (Romae: Pont. Univ. Greg., 1939) n.106.

³⁴ For example, G. J. Lawlor, *Christian Imagination* (Westminster: Newman, 1955) 37-44; id., *The Catholic Dimension in Higher Education* (Westminster: Newman, 1959) 67-75.

³⁵ Modern spiritual writing is characterized by an emphasis on human values, temporal needs, and love and concern for this world. The historical situation makes this necessary, marked as it is by secularism, by the world conflict with Marxism, and by the dominance of technology. Modern theology has responded to these needs by its concern for the terrestrial aspects of Christian existence. See G. Thils, *Théologie des réalités terrestres* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1949) 2 vols., which is a kind of *summa* on the subject, and the numerous studies on history, work, technology, culture and the cosmos. Theology has returned to the sources, especially the Bible, and this has been a gain for a more concrete, positive, historical mystical theology. See A. Plé, O.P., et al., *Mystery and Mysticism* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956) or, from a more limited point of view, C. Pepler, O.P., "The Basis of the Mysticism of St. Thomas," *Aquinas Paper* n.21 (London: Blackfriars, 1953). The liturgical revival, which is directly concerned with communal worship in Christ and the rich symbolism of the sacramental way and indirectly concerned with the human conditions necessary for living the liturgy, has joined forces with apostolic and catechetical movements to promote a realistic, this-worldly approach to the spiritual life. The modern Christian caste of mind—biblical, liturgical, apostolic—is illustrated, for example, in the "Programme for the Catechetical Apostolate" published by the Eichstätt Study Week in 1960: *Clergy Monthly Supplement* 5 (1960) 138-149. Modern psychology and philosophy have likewise made their influence felt in spiritual theology, and, it seems, mainly in the direction of a more authentically human approach to the spiritual life. Their contributions can be seen in studies like *Christian*

What is the validity of the emphasis from the viewpoint of Christian perfection? There is no doubt of its authentic, Christian character. It is an eminently human way to God, that starts with man with his feet on the ground. The *via positiva* is centered in virtuous, moral activity, but charity is its inspiration and its goal; it is the incarnation of the vertical relationship to God on the horizontal level, a human expression of divine charity. The love of created goodness, therefore, is ordained to charity and is an additional motive to facilitate and increase one's dedication to God in the world. Affective detachment, while not a preoccupation of this approach, is a condition and consequence of the ascent to God. The *via positiva* makes constant, effective demands of self-forgetfulness in the "spending of oneself and being spent" for Christ, in facing reality honestly and choosing the true good against the appeals of the world, the flesh and the devil, in submerging oneself to the painful conditions of human vagaries and weakness, in unswerving loyalty to one's commitment, in accepting opposition and failure. These constant acts of self-denial work a gradual purification. Authors who favor the positive approach do not neglect to encourage voluntary penance and periods of withdrawal through daily spiritual exercises and occasional closed retreats.³⁶ But the emphasis of the

Asceticism and Modern Man (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955) or J. Goldbrunner's works, for example, *Cure of Mind and Cure of Soul* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955) 26-36.

³⁶ This is true even in the eminently positive way of Teilhard de Chardin, who sees a very active and human engagement in the world as the instrument of both growth and diminishment, self-development and detachment. Both commitment to action and the acceptance of "diminishment" through evils and failures effect man's purification (*The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper, 1960) 52-55; 57-68) but prayer and penance retain their role (35; 72-74). Teilhard de Chardin does not distinguish, as we do, between the *via positiva* and the *via negativa*; rather, he seems to unite them. The whole human endeavor, in both its positive and negative aspects, is viewed as the existential expression and fulfillment of God's will (31, 35), leading the Christian to a surrender into the hands of God (65). His is truly a God-centered approach but in the clothing of human action. In our interpretation of de Chardin we see our *via positiva* in what he calls "the course of this hard labor . . . the pursuit of an ever widening ideal" which achieves, again in his words, "a preliminary form of renunciation and of victory over a narrow and lazy egoism" (67); we see our *via negativa* in the "cherishing the 'hollownesses' as well as the 'fullnesses' of life." (67) These are man's personal contribution, al-

"new asceticism" is on positive acts of virtue, not only because they are of themselves acts of affective detachment, but also because virtuous activity demands many acts of effective detachment.

Nevertheless, the weakness of the *via positiva* lies precisely in its limitations with regard to affective detachment. The question traditional spirituality raises about this way is this: can the *via positiva* lead to the highest Christian perfection? Can one achieve perfect purification by the affective and effective acts of detachment that are intrinsic to the love and use of creatures, with only a limited rejection of created goods by acts of voluntary mortification? Or must everyone pass through the desert, the way of total, effective abnegation, which is the program of the *via negativa*? Put in terms of the condition of fallen man, the same question reads: is fallen man too weak, are pride and concupiscence too rooted in his being, that he love and use the goodness of this world without falling prey to subtle selfishness in that love and use, no matter how sincerely he tries to love things objectively and use them only according to God's will? Will not his love and use become closed relationships, if the emphasis of his striving is on created rather than uncreated goodness?

The answer of traditional Christian spirituality does not favor the *via positiva*. It makes the way of total, effective detachment a necessity for high sanctity.³⁷ St. John of the Cross, for example, teaches that creatures can be loved and appreciated in perfect order—"according to their truth, their best side, their substance"—only in affective detachment.³⁸ Such perfection is attained, however, only when the movement is from God to creatures, not from creatures to God.³⁹ Purification must precede this perfect charity, and it consists in seeking God alone and rejecting creature loves. This is the essence

ways under grace, for the effecting of "a death, a 'night,' a reversal, an ex-
centration, and a quasi-depersonalization . . . the radical sacrifice of egoism"
(66), which is union with Christ. It seems to us that Teilhard is not opposed
to the thesis of this paper and that he is stating in a profound and original
manner the necessity of both ways in Christian life.

³⁷ DeGuibert, *art. cit.*, 105-106. Total abnegation is "le point exact où leur chemin bifurque entre une vie fervente et une vie de haute sainteté" 106.

³⁸ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 3, 20, 2.

³⁹ *Living Flame of Love*, 4, 5.

of the *via negativa*, as we shall see. St. Ignatius is no less uncompromising on the necessity of abnegation. "He who loves anything for itself and not for God," he wrote, "does not love God with his whole heart."⁴⁰ To love things for God is to seek God alone:

Let him desire and seek nothing except the greater praise and glory of God our Lord as the aim of all he does. For everyone must keep in mind that in all that concerns the spiritual life his progress will be in proportion to his surrender of self-love and of his own will and interests.⁴¹

Danielou sounds a warning in reference to a too facile interpretation of the Ignatian formula of "finding God in all things":

It would be imprudent to believe that one could go very quickly to God through creatures. This is an error of a certain modern humanism. St. Francis of Assisi chanted the *canticle of the sun* but only after having been the stigmatist of Alverno. What St. Ignatius describes to us then is an idea of consummated perfection, of a soul so totally filled with God that everything leads to him. Thus the spiritual itinerary takes place completely between the moment when creatures are obstacles and the moment they become means.⁴²

While we agree with this judgment, we must also beware of exaggeration. It would also be "imprudent to believe" that creatures are means only in the unitive way, or that a cultivation of an ordered love for creatures must wait until perfect order is restored within a man. The spiritual life *is* the possession of God and of creatures in God; it begins the moment one loves God in charity and loves the works of God in the world, however imperfect and selfish this love may be. The question of the two ways, the *via positiva* and the *via negativa*, is one of emphasis and strategy. The *via positiva* accepts gratefully the goodness of the world and the pleasure one finds in it and turns this to a means of growth in the love of God; the *via negativa* closes its eyes to this goodness and pleasure and sets its sights on God and God alone. Externally

⁴⁰ Letter to Martin Garcia de Onaz, June, 1532, in *Letters of Saint Ignatius of Loyola* (tr. W. J. Young, S.J., Chicago: Loyola, 1959) 7.

⁴¹ *Spiritual Exercises*, n.189.

⁴² "The Ignatian Vision of the Universe and of Man," *Cross Currents* 4 (1954) 366. This article originally appeared in *RAM* 26 (1950) 5-17.

the person's life need change little or not at all in either perspective; the two ways are essentially two different patterns of interior activity. This will become clearer with the discussion of the *via negativa*, the attitude of effective detachment.

Moving Against Creatures

Moving against creatures, or effective detachment, is in reality a movement against one's disordered self. It is the rejection of selfish loves, of closed relationships to creatures. But since the object itself must be rejected in order to avoid mere velleity and validate the true will to exclude selfishness, as we have seen, the *via negativa* is a moving against creatures.

The *via negativa* is not a contempt for created values, for example, the true good that is marriage, or personal autonomy, or possessions. In fact, a just appreciation of the goodness of these things is the best disposition for their renouncement. An unhealthy antipathy for sex or fear of responsibilities of parenthood is an unjustifiable motivation, if not morally, at least psychologically, for the vow of chastity. But while the created goodness of things is not denied in the *via negativa*, neither is it necessarily affirmed. Actually it is outside the purview of this way.⁴³ A good is by-passed,

⁴³ The *via negativa* abstracts from the created goodness of the world, but it neither contemns the perfection of creatures, which would redound unfavorably on the Creator (*Contra Gentiles* 3, 69) nor denies their *per se* goodness and usefulness in the spiritual life (see St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul* 2, 16, 4). The *via negativa* takes its stand on a higher level than created goodness. It seeks a radical purification by direct acts of divine charity. A love and use of creatures that is consequent to this movement to God and in accordance with His will is thoroughly consonant with the *via negativa*, as we shall see from the teaching of St. Ignatius. To say that the Christian must "love and be more attached to this world than the pagan" (Hughes, *art. cit.*, 49) or that detachment itself "is a daring, solicitous, warm-hearted, unselfish love of everything" (W. McNamara, O.C.D., "Principles of Christian Humanism," *Spiritual Life* 4 (1958) 328) are paradoxes that can apply to both the *via positiva* and the *via negativa* as we understand them. We agree, too, with Paul of the Cross, O.C.D., who has written that "to follow Christ does not mean, according to St. John of the Cross, that one must in any way withdraw oneself from a system of human values or deny them by a renunciation of mind or senses" ("St. John of the Cross," *Spiritual Life* 4 (1958) 51). Material renunciation or material "affirmation" of the world are secondary aspects of the ultimate Christian attitude to the world,

ultimately because of God's personal call to this renunciation, proximately, on the creature level, because the created good is deceptively attractive and is already or can easily become the object of a closed relationship. The single point at issue, therefore, in the *via negativa* is man's deep and inevitable selfishness. If there is contempt, it is contempt for this disorder.

The *via negativa* is a tactic against selfishness. Whereas the *via positiva* starts with the goodness of the world and endeavors to bring man to God by love and use without direct concern for the aspect of selfishness that is likely to be latent in that love and use, the *via negativa* as such has no direct concern for the created goodness of human values and singles out man's proclivity to disordered love and use for special, indeed exclusive attention. It mobilizes all the spiritual energy of the individual toward the removal of that disorder. The way to God it proposes is as direct as possible: it would seek God above and beyond every creature.

The *via negativa* is thus the by-passing of creatures, in a true sense "a brushing aside of the universe."⁴⁴ Monastic flight from the world is its classic form: certain basic human goods are given up by the evangelical counsels and a man's daily engagements with the world reduced to a minimum. But this material rejection is only the secondary aspect of the *via negativa*, necessary for effective detachment insofar as one's state in life allows it, and no doubt the ambient in which the *via negativa* thrives best. But the primary aspect and the essence of this way is the effective rejection of disordered loves. As a spiritual way to God it is not restricted to the monastery or to contemplative spirituality.

The approach to God in the *via negativa* is the reverse of the *via positiva*, the movement being from God to creatures rather than creatures to God. "A great evil," says St. John of the Cross, one of its most famous exponents, "is to have an eye rather to the

as K. Rahner has shown in his profound analysis of the meaning of Christian asceticism and the relation between *Weltflucht* and *Weltbejahung* in his three essays in *Schriften zur Theologie*, III, two of which have already been cited; the third is "Die Ignatianische Mystik der Weltfreudigkeit," 329-348.

⁴⁴ E. Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1955) 81.

good things of God than to God Himself."⁴⁵ God is all, creatures are nothing; the vantage point of affective detachment is evident. The *via negativa* begins with God, affirms only God, strives to hold fast to God in perfect purity: "Live in the world as though there were in it but God and thy soul, so that thy heart may be detained by naught that is human."⁴⁶ Human loves, therefore, human satisfactions and enjoyment that are not purely for the honor and glory of God are by-passed, at least to the extent of their voluntary acceptance. God must be envisaged in every action, His will must completely dominate, or else the voluntary action in question is disordered, unruly, possessive and egocentric.⁴⁷ The demands of acting purely for God's honor and glory in evangelical perfection are radical:

I wish, therefore, to propose a test. . . . And it is that, whenever a person hears music and other things . . . if his thought and the affection of his will are at once centered upon God and if that thought of God gives him more pleasure than the movement of sense which caused it, and save for that he finds no pleasure in the said movement, this is a sign that he is receiving benefit therefrom. . . . In this way such things may be used, for then such things of sense subserve the end for which God created and gave them.⁴⁸

The voiding of voluntary desires and creature satisfactions, eventually of images and concepts, is the direct way to perfect affective detachment, the counterpart of God's filling the soul with Himself, according to the Sanjuanist law: "Where He dwells with the greatest content . . . is in the soul wherein dwell fewest desires and pleasures of its own."⁴⁹

The process of voiding creature loves is primarily an interior but true act of the will rejecting the object of that love; one cannot renounce materially the matters of one's duty and work, nor the

⁴⁵ *Points of Love* n. 59, in *The Complete Works of St. John of the Cross* (tr. E. Allison Peers, Westminster: Newman, 1953) 3, 232.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* n.61, 4.

⁴⁷ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 1, 11, 2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3, 24, 5. The same test is repeated many times in the third book of the *Ascent*: e.g. 22, 3; 24, 5; 26, 7; 27, 5; 29, 2; 30, 4-5; 35, 6. See also 1, 13, 4.

⁴⁹ *Living Flame of Love* 4, 14.

practice of the moral virtues.⁵⁰ This is to say that one's positive acts must be perfect acts of the virtues; these are necessarily acts of perfect affective detachment, and as such are outside the purificatory process. Sanjuanist doctrine, therefore, is not limited to the monastic setting. Though St. John wrote specifically for contemplative religious and did not develop his doctrine in the context of an active life that demands constant use of creatures, the *via negativa*, according to the best interpreters of St. John, is intended for all Christians.⁵¹

St. Ignatius makes the application of the *via negativa* to the active life. His demands regarding total abnegation are no less exacting than St. John's.⁵² A distinctive feature of his spirituality, however, is the teaching that Trinitarian union, the goal of the spiritual life, can be found, in activity as well as prayer.⁵³ God is

⁵⁰ This is true, of course, even in the contemplatively-oriented doctrine of St. John of the Cross. While he counsels as universal a material by-passing as possible, a "forgetfulness of all things," the proviso is always implicit and sometimes explicit that "these things are not incumbent on thee of obligation" (*Spiritual Sentences and Maxims*, n.76; Peers 3, 226). Thus, one must not "refuse . . . work, even though it appears to thee that thou canst not perform it" (*Points of Love*, n.61, 9; Peers, 3, 233). But St. John does not develop a spirituality of use and action. His teaching with regard to human tasks regards only the aspect of purity of heart, the seeking of God alone in contemplative union and the refusal to stop in any creature. The good of the work in itself, a love for the task, the validity of action for God as well as contemplating Him in solitude as an apt and fruitful expression of divine charity—these truths are outside his perspective. He does not deny them, but neither does he develop their virtualities.

⁵¹ See, for example, Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., *St. John of the Cross, Doctor of Divine Love* (London: Baker, 1940) 17-22; Juan de Jesús María, O.C.D. "El diptico Subida-Noche," in "*Sanjuanistica*" (Roma: Collegium Internationale Sanctorum Teresiae a Jesu et Joannis a Cruce, 1943) 65-66; Lucien-Marie de S. Joseph, O.C.D. (ed.), *Les oeuvres spirituelles du bienheureux Père Jean de la Croix* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1949) xxii-xxiv; G. Morel, *op. cit.*, 1, 220-230.

⁵² V. Larranaga, S.J., "San Ignacio de Loyola y San Juan de la Cruz: Convergencias y divergencias," *Revista de Espiritualidad* 15 (1956) 138-141.

⁵³ J. F. Conwell, S.J., *Contemplation in Action* (Spokane: Gonzaga, 1957) 30-31, 84 and *passim*; M. Giuliani, S.J., "Finding God in All Things," in *Finding God in All Things* (ed. W. J. Young, S.J., Chicago: Regnery, 1958) 7-19; 23-24. This article originally appeared in *Christus* 2 (1955) 172-194 and has been summarized in *Theology Digest* 4 (1956) 93-96.

to be found in all things, i.e., in all one's actions, by union with His will working in the world. Continual mortification in the very activity itself, a constant purification of self-seeking even as one carries out His will, is the price one must pay. Transcendently, and only in the light of this love, are creatures to be loved. Members of the Company of Jesus

should frequently be encouraged to seek God our Lord in all things, setting aside, as far as it is possible, the love of all created things, placing it in their Creator, loving Him in all things and all things in Him, according to His most holy and divine will.⁵⁴

The Ignatian love of creatures, therefore, is a different love from that of the *via positiva*. It is an utterly pure love inspired and directed by God's glory and service; ultimately it is a love of God himself, who is found working in each one's vocation and life:

This [love] is something which necessarily has to do with our last end, which is itself perfect and infinite goodness, which must be loved in all other things. To this end exclusively the whole weight of our love should be directed.⁵⁵

The layman, therefore, following the *via negativa*, need not give up his fortune or his family, because these are part of God's will for him. But he does not utilize their intrinsic goodness, which he may or may not recognize, as a motive for committing himself more completely to using them in God's service, as the *via positiva* would lead him to do; rather he refuses to "stop in any created thing without penetrating beyond it to God," knowing that "Christ will give it a spiritual meaning."⁵⁶ The love of God is the beginning and end of his aspirations, a love that he reaffirms and reasserts whenever lesser loves threaten it. He thus continually purifies his love of God either by the anagogical act taught by St.

⁵⁴ *Constituciones de la Compañía de Jesús*, tercera parte, c.1, n.26, in *Obras Completas de San Ignacio de Loyola* (ed. I. Iparraguirre, S.J., Madrid: BAC, 1952) n.288, p. 436.

⁵⁵ Letter to Manuel Santos, May 18, 1547, in Young, *Letters* 131.

⁵⁶ This quotation is from Jerome Nadal, S.J., early companion of Ignatius and faithful exponent of his thought: "Orationis Observationes" in *Epistolae P. Hieronymi Nadal* (Madrid: Avrial—Lopez del Horno, 1898-1905) 4, 688.

John of the Cross of renewing this orientation when disordered loves are felt, or by the Ignatian way of finding a new dimension, the glory and service of God, in the humblest of human acts.⁵⁷ Such love of God does descend to creatures, embraces creatures in the divine light and love of union with God, and makes them participate in one vast harmonic symphony of praise and service of God.⁵⁸ A perfect love and use of creatures, therefore, are the effects of perfect charity.

Evaluation

The spiritual life on earth is a dynamic process that transfers a Christian from a closed love of creatures to an open love of God and all His works. By faith and baptism the Christian opens his life to God; he accepts the vertical relationship. Under God's grace he now sets himself to the task of making the vertical relationship dominate all his horizontal relationships. Positively he must develop those horizontal relationships that are God's will in his life, for example, fulfilling his temporal vocation, developing himself on

⁵⁷ The analogical way of St. John of the Cross consists in denying a lesser love by affirming the higher love of God, replacing the attractiveness of the creature by the superior attraction of God. See Lucien-Marie de St. Joseph, O.C.D., "Ascesis of Light," in *Conflict and Light* (New York: Sheed, 1952) 188-191. This essay is a translation by C. Hastings from the *Etudes Carmelitaines* 28 (1949) 201-219. On the Ignatian way, besides the studies of Danielou, Giuliani, Rahner and Conwell cited above, see J. LaPlace, S.J., "La formation du directeur spirituel," *Christus* 7 (1960) 58-59 and V. J. O'Flaherty, S.J., *The Spirituality of St. Ignatius and the Layman* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1962) chs. 1 and 2. This doctoral dissertation will soon be available in microfilm at the Catholic University of America. There seem to be only accidental differences between the Sanjuanist and Ignatian ways of finding God at each moment, differences of emphasis dictated by the contemplative or active orientation of the two spiritual masters.

⁵⁸ The dark nights in St. John of the Cross lead towards the dawn when creatures are revelatory of God, though inadequately so (*Spiritual Canticle* 4-5), and eventually the soul enters the bright day of mystical union when creatures are transparent of God and are seen and loved in union with God (e.g. *Canticle* 14, 25-27; 38, 8; *Living Flame* 4, 5; "Prayer of the Soul Enkindled with Love," in *Spiritual Sentences*, n.25, Peers 3, 222). This re-possession of creatures is a gradual process proportionate to the degree of detachment achieved (*Ascent* 3, 20, 2-3). The whole June issue of *Geist und Leben* 35 (1962) is dedicated to love and use of the world and its role in spirituality, but unfortunately it arrived too late to be of use in this paper.

all levels of his being, helping others, transforming the world into a Christian world. Negatively he must reject those horizontal relationships that compete with his total dedication to God's transcendent will; these are sinful actions first, but secondly all voluntary attachments. There is no problem when the choice is black and white, sin or virtue. The problem rises because the very relationships one must develop almost inevitably slip into the second category of inordinate attachments. To say that the Christian must use the world in detachment is true; but it is no solution to the practical question of how to achieve this paradox. Can he use the world without loving it? The *via positiva* says no, and encourages love and use. Can he love it without attachment? The *via negativa* says no, and encourages rejection. No doubt, we are dealing with two complementary attitudes, both of which are necessary in every Christian's life. But which of the two attitudes should be emphasized in one's spiritual life?

I submit that the most important factor in the choice of emphasis is the individual's present stage of growth in the spiritual life. The ultimate criterion, of course, is the personal call of grace. But while God leads each one according to His own mysterious ways, the ordinary law of His providence is that He suits His grace to the existential condition of the soul in given moments in its journey to God. This is a fundamental principle of St. John of the Cross: God, he says, acts "with order and sweetness and according to the nature of the soul itself."⁵⁹ Spiritual theology studies this pattern of God's action in the evolution of the life of grace and strives to establish the laws of growth at each stage along the route. Our comparative evaluation of the *via positiva* and the *via negativa* will be limited to this aspect. We do not deny the relevance of other factors, for example, one's vocation or the social needs of the Church, but for the personal decision on which interior attitude to cultivate we believe the stages of growth offer the best proximate norms.

In this inquiry we are taking St. John of the Cross as guide. This may seem to some to bias the question in favor of the *via*

⁵⁹ *Ascent*, 2, 17, 3.

negativa or a contemplative orientation of the spiritual life. To this I can only answer that St. John is the *doctor mysticus* of the universal Church, whose doctrine according to Pope Pius XI is "a very pure source of the Christian sense and the thought of the Church."⁶⁰ His principles are universal, only the application is particular. The teaching of this spiritual theologian *par excellence* deserves a hearing, if for no other reason than to correct false impressions and show his relevance to the modern scene.

St. John studies the transformation "from the extreme depth of our lowliness to the extreme height of His loftiness,"⁶¹ in the framework of the classical division of beginners, proficients and perfect. His spiritual direction differs for each stage and corresponds to the respective psychological needs and possibilities. A study of his four major prose works reveals he would emphasize the *via positiva* for beginners, the *via negativa* for proficients, and for the perfect neither one nor the other, but the freedom of the children of God; on the Mount of Perfection "there is no way, because for the just man there is no law, he is a law to himself."⁶²

St. John wrote no books for beginners, since these, he believed, existed in abundance,⁶³ but his digressions on the subject are incisive and practical. Beginners are infants at the breast whose food must be milk rather than meat; they travel the way of sensible consolations. Beginners live on the very human level of images and concepts which repel and attract, of distinct love and pleasure in things.⁶⁴ They are, moreover, in the process of conversion, of transferring their thoughts and loves from evil things to good things, from worldly interests to religious concerns. God would gradually wean

⁶⁰ Bull conferring title of doctor of the Church, August 24, 1926, *AAS* 18 (1926) 380.

⁶¹ *Ascent*, 2, 17, 2.

⁶² These words are written across the summit in St. John of the Cross' drawing of the "Mount" in the Beas copy (Ms. 6296, Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid) and are partially reproduced in Diego de Astor's "Mount of Perfection," which serves as a frontispiece in the *editio princeps* (1618) and Peers' edition of the works of St. John of the Cross.

⁶³ *Spiritual Canticle*, Prologue 3; *Ascent*, Prologue 3-4; *Dark Night*, 1, 1, 1.

⁶⁴ *Dark Night*, 1, 1, 2; 1, 10, 1; 1, 11, 4. M. Ledrus, S.J., *Introductio in doctrinam theologicam Sancti Joannis a Cruce* (Romae: Pont. Univ. Greg., 1955) 16.

them away from a worldly existence by the very "sweetness and pleasure" which commitment to Christian values offers, much as a mother moves her child to loosen his grip on a dangerous knife by offering him a more attractive toy.⁶⁵ The first step, then, is to trade false values for true ones, image for image, affection for affection, and the catalyst of this change is the attraction, enjoyment and pleasure one finds in good things. Christian life, both in its active and interior aspects, must be made appealing on the human level, so that "through the sweetness and pleasure they [find] therein, they [may lose] their love for the things of the world and [gain] some degree of strength in God."⁶⁶ The beginner's way is positive and active; he is "to make use of good things which are natural, perfect and exterior, such as hearing sermons and masses, looking on holy things" and "to habituate [himself] to that which is good, by means of considerations, meditations, and reflections of a sacred kind."⁶⁷ The place of mortification is secondary, limited to occasional acts such as "mortifying the palate at meals and chastening the sense of touch by penance and holy rigour."⁶⁸ This mortification in St. John of the Cross, is a consequence of the love of God; the beginner achieves the ability "to refrain to some extent from creature desires" because of the pleasure he now finds in God.⁶⁹

It is easy to see the focus of the *via positiva* in this teaching. St. John's perspective is limited to personal prayer life, but is it not an easy step to apply his way of pleasure and consolation in good acts to every facet of the Christian life? John's "beginners," it must be remembered, include the majority of Christians, the audience most moderns have in mind in their treatises. It should not be surprising, therefore, to find substantial agreement between John's teaching on this stage of the spiritual life and the positive emphasis in popular spiritual literature. It is particularly interesting to see his teaching, which differs so markedly on beginners and the advanced, corroborated by Christian humanists and in agree-

⁶⁵ *Ascent*, 3, 39, 1.

⁶⁶ *Dark Night*, 1, 8, 3.

⁶⁷ *Ascent*, 2, 17, 4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Dark Night*, 1, 8, 3.

ment with certain viewpoints of modern psychologists who question a premature emphasis on self-denial in religious life.⁷⁰

The beginner's way, however, has built-in limitations; these are exemplified in the portrayal of the faults of beginners in the famous chapters of the *Dark Night of the Soul*.⁷¹ The beginners here are excellent Christians, dedicated to a life of prayer and penance (or, might we not add, the active apostolate?) but they are "very weak and imperfect" in relation to the goal. The reason for their shortcomings is very simple, their lack of detachment:

For since they are moved to these things and to these spiritual exercises by the consolation and pleasure that they find in them, and since, too, they have not been prepared for them by the practice of earnest striving for the virtues, they have many faults and imperfections with respect to these spiritual actions of theirs; for, after all, any man's actions correspond to the habit of perfection attained by him.⁷²

⁷⁰ According to Hildebrand, self-development through a genuine response to values achieves a limited self-abnegation and this is to be complemented by the *ecstasis* of complete surrender to Christ Himself: *Transformation in Christ* 390-406. Contemplation is rendered possible, says Boulogne, because of the initial contact with the invisible world through speech and music and it begins only after love has exhausted the contents of words and music. C.-D. Boulogne, O.P., *My Friends the Senses* (tr. J. Howes, New York: Kenedy, 1953) 66. "First, develop yourself, Christianity says to the Christian," Teilhard de Chardin states, then adds: "And if you possess something, Christ says in the Gospel, leave it and follow me." *Divine Milieu* 70-71. But, in line with note 36 above, he observes that the priority here is one of nature "as much as, or more than, a priority in time." Modern psychology suggests with good reason that expression is a greater need today than repression (M. de Corte, "Incarnation and Pseudo-Incarnation," in *Conflict and Light* cited above, 137-153), that commitment must come before self-denial (cf. J. F. Kinnane—C. F. Tageson, O.F.M., "Psychology Can Serve Religious Life," *HPR* 61 (1961) 348), that the natural virtues must be developed before the emphasis is placed on higher supernatural activity. On the last mentioned point Pope Pius XII has given the following directive on the training of Disalced Carmelite seminarians: ". . . si verum est—quod quidem verissimum est—supernaturali gratia perfici, non deleri naturam, evangelicae perfectionis aedificium excitandum est in ipsis naturae virtutibus. Priusquam iuvenis religiosus sodalis praeclari exempli evadet, studeat in ordinariis et cotidianis rebus perfectus homo fieri. . . ." *Magis quam ineuntis*, September 23, 1951, *AAS* 43 (1952) 735.

⁷¹ Book I, chs. 2-7.

⁷² *Dark Night* 1, 1, 3.

The *via positiva*, as we have seen, does urge strongly the "earnest striving in the virtues" and this increases "the habit of perfection." But in John's mind such striving in the virtues is better implemented by the *via negativa*, the direct attack on selfishness. "Solid and substantial" spirituality must replace the "very moral and delectable" ways of beginners.⁷³ As soon as the love of God has gained a foothold, the time has arrived for a change of emphasis. This change need not be violent; on the contrary, it is to be negotiated with "order and discretion . . . and sweetness."⁷⁴ Its total application presupposes a formed and fervent Christian and, in place of all too human loves, a "greater enkindling by another and better love, which is that of the Spouse"; such a love allows the person to set his pleasure in God and gives him the "courage and constancy to deny itself all other things with ease."⁷⁵ On the other hand, the change in approach to God might be so gradual as to be imperceptible, a shift toward more objectivity in one's choices and higher spiritual values as dictated by God's will, increased docility to divine providence, greater purity and unselfishness in one's work and service to one's fellow men. In both cases there is a more complete surrender to the transcendent God, a more simple seeking of Him alone, above and beyond creatures in the sense explained in the previous section of this article. The *via negativa* is the short route, indeed the only route, to the summit,⁷⁶ and until one enters upon it, he remains a child in the spiritual life; the more completely this way dominates his life, the quicker he will arrive at the term.⁷⁷ The *via negativa* is the way to high sanctity.

⁷³ *Ascent*, Prologue, 8.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1, 13, 7; 2, 17, 3.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1, 14, 2.

⁷⁶ In the drawing of the "Mount," especially in the primitive copies (see Noel-Dermot, O.C.D., "The Primitive Drawings of the 'Mount of Perfection,'" *Mount Carmel* 8 (1960) 118-128), only the middle path, the way of the "nada's," reaches the summit; the side paths which are ways of attachment to spiritual or earthly goods, are dead ends.

⁷⁷ The presentation of St. John of the Cross on the *via negativa* in this paper has singled out only certain essential features of his teaching on active purification. We have omitted the practical questions of its duration, intensity, and extension and we have prescinded from the extremely important question of its relation to passive purification and mystical graces. The action of God's

Conclusion

In our attempt to synthesize the teaching of spiritual theology on engagement and detachment, we have endeavored to establish the meaning of affective detachment as the counterpart of charity and to describe two possible attitudes to creatures. One attitude is the *via positiva*, which is the love and use of creatures as a means to union with God; it is a legitimate but deficient way in relation to the term of perfection; it is best adapted to forming good Christians. The other attitude is the *via negativa*, which consists in seeking God first and creatures only in that light, with at best only a consequent love and use of creatures in God; this way characterizes advanced Christians. But in our effort to define clearly these ascetical attitudes we must beware of artificiality, rigidity, and over-simplification. We have attempted to follow, certainly, not dictate, the manifold ways of the Holy Spirit; if our analysis is accurate, the principles we have laid down should be detectable in the most diverse patterns of Christian holiness.

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grace has been presupposed throughout and discussion limited to active, co-operating psychological dispositions that ultimately are the effects of grace. Passive purification is certainly necessary to complement the ascetical effort, but this matter lies beyond our scope.