

The problem of loneliness by J.B. Lotz SJ

MAN REDEEMED.

In the few foregoing pages we have shown that Christ incorporates the fullness of healing solitude and therefore is the source of every conquest of isolation. This fullness *He offers to all men* because as our Redeemer He rules among us. However He allows His grace to flow freely upon us in that He gives Himself without stint to us. This happens first in our Baptism, through which Christ begins to live in us; it is further developed through the Eucharist which unites us even more profoundly with Christ. Above all else these two Sacraments make us one with Him, as the branch is united to the vine and the limb to the body. Thus we are freed from the destructive grip of isolation and surrounded by healing solitude. This takes place the more powerfully in each individual the nearer he approaches to the "stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph., 4, 13), and the more it may be said of him: "I live, and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me." It is true that the isolation of the Head, which has been described above affects the members too, but these sufferings work together to their redemption, not to their destruction. The strength to bear them without breaking under the strain is to be found in healing solitude, above all in union with God.

Insofar as Christ has become man, man is one in Him with the Son and through Him one with the Father and the Holy Ghost. "We shall come to him and make our abode with him" (Jn., 14, 23). The arms of love stretched out by the triune God to man and by man to God form a bridge by which man may cross the abyss of isolation; man steps across this bridge from the distractions of his daily life into the inmost heart of healing solitude whose mark is the love of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. So God accords His presence to man: He lets him come to Him and be united with Him; He calls him away from the clatter of earth to contemplate His inmost mysteries. In Christ we may again "draw near unto God" (Hb., 7, 25); we may say with the trust of a child, "Our Father". All this is crowned by communion and companionship at its most intimate: "I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me" (Apoc., 3, 20). The man who enters this inmost chamber of solitude is forever cured of isolation.

Here again G. von le Fort has spoken about this with the special language. She is talking about the Church:

"For he from whom we went forth has followed us, and he from whom we scattered has gathered us to himself!

He has gathered us together in the fold of our exile and has made us humble in Thy hands.

He dwells in the wine of Thy chalice and in the white bread upon Thy altars.

He dwells in our yearning and upon our hungry lips.

He dwells deep in the heart of our solitude, and it is to him as unlocked gates.

The dust of the atoms drifts together for the silence of eternity is stronger than the storm.

We are of one body and one blood!

We are the life-giving flame.

You alone show us the world as it really is."¹

Here already we have the one-in-all, all-in-one concept which we have previously discussed: for men are one with God in Christ and similarly in Christ are they one with each other. As branches of the same vine, as members under the same Head they are freed from their exiled state and united by that common source of life. The pattern and source of this union is the triune God, as Our Lord has put vividly into words in His high-priestly prayer: "And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as We are One, even as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee" (Jn., 17, 22). This union is nourished by the Eucharist: "The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body: for we all partake of the same bread" (1 Cor., 10, 17). This union finds its concrete expression in the Church, which binds all men in the unity of the same Holy Spirit. Once again our poetess can bring us closer to the unfathomable mysteries when she speaks to the Church:

"Thou spreadest thy tent over the scattered ones as the blue canopy of heavenly love is spread over all creatures.

Thou flowest from soul to soul as the golden stream of sunshine over the plains.

Thou art an ever-flowing stream, an embrace in eternal realms of blessedness."²

The deeper men penetrate into this inmost realm, that is to say into the Christ who lives through them, the more clearly do they experience that at the inmost point, all are one. There they grow away from all that separates them and the walls which have enclosed them break down; the gates are opened and those until now in isolation find each other in the healing influence of solitude. This influence is itself radiated by those who have been transformed by it. This last is especially true of the saints. On this topic too our poetess has some thoughts for us when she speaks of the rôle of the saints in the Church:

"For thou uncoverest the spring of our talents and bringest them to light as gems from the rock.
 Thou leadest us from the wilderness into love and from silence to awe.
 There is none neglected within thy gates as in the dwellings of men.
 Those who deny thee are vanished and thy poor bring thee costly gifts.
 The prisoners are freed and the sacrifices are raised to life again.
 The lonely are set free from their loneliness; in thee is victory over the bondage of the soul!"³

As has already been seen in the case of the saints, the *redemption of Christ* is effected throughout all the realm of nature. Through the guilt of man, creation was "subjected to the bondage of corruption" (Rom., 8, 20) and thus estranged from its incorrupt God — cast into isolation. Creation was to a certain extent estranged from man also in that he no longer felt it as the friendly provider of security but as a collection of threatening and inimical forces. Thus creation 'groaneth and travaileth together in pain until now'; but there lives in it an earnest expectation' (8, 19) and the 'hope that the creation itself shall also be delivered from the bondage of corruption' (8, 21). This, however, can only happen through participation in the liberty of the glory of the children of God' (8, 21). In that inmost chamber of the soul where men are one with God and each other, they are also one with the whole creation. The more they find their way to this point through the redeeming power of Christ, the more they discover creation and penetrate to the heart of it. So the speechlessness of their isolation is taken from God's creatures and through healing solitude they are given speech. This is what made St. Francis of Assisi regard all things as his brothers and sisters and what made all the powers of nature bow before the saint, so that he accomplished even miracles. Here at its most profound is the power of man to make the world really his world, the means of fulfilling his vocation: "all are yours: and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor., 3, 23).

From this we see that all conquest of this evil of isolation stems ultimately from the blessed solitude of Christ. He has condescended to our sinful isolation so that He may transform it and bring us home into His heavenly solitude. He is *the* way by which we may pass from one to the other.

1 G. VON LE FORT, "Hymnen an die Kirche", 1936, p. 31.

2 G. VON LE FORT, "Hymnen an die Kirche", 1936, p. 29.

3 G. VON LE FORT, "Hymnen an die Kirche", 1936, p. 24.