

Amid this vast diversity the individual finds a unique place, based on that act of the divine will that called each one into being, giving each an everlasting destiny. Characteristic types may be found in this individuality. Looking at individual experience, one can make certain generalizations. Just as we sort out elements, stars, or animals by classifying them according to size, shape, composition, or density, or by a great variety of standards, so in a more revealing way can we classify human beings as to what they expect when they journey toward God. These classifications are not discrete like animal species or tables of metals, but like all psychological classifications of human functioning, they are related to each other as colors of a rainbow. One shades into another. I have called these the "four voices of God" to simplify a profound and ancient philosophical teaching.⁵

The Four Voices of God

To respond to God in one way does not mean that we are responding to Him in all possible ways. The essential relationship of the Christian to the divine life in which the individual knows God, the triune life, is a result of the revelation of Christ, the Incarnate Word. Before we come to that key relationship originating with the Godhead itself, however, we must consider human beings according to their subjective response to God.

A general look at great spiritual persons reveals the variety of ways in which they have perceived God. The terminology used here to describe this perception of God is based on an analysis of divine being rooted in the scholastic tradition and going back to Greek philosophy. This philosophical tradition may be more useful in studying the types of response to God than one drawn from Sacred Scripture, for the Bible tends to evaluate persons simply in relationship to their positive, partial, or negative response to God, thus categorizing them as the saints, the lukewarm, or the lost. Western philosophy suggests that human beings know and seek God as the *One*, the *True*, the *Good*, and the *Beautiful*. If you analyze yourself or those you know well in terms of the spiritual life, you will notice that most people fit rather well into one or perhaps two categories. Some examples from the lives of great Christians may be helpful.

GOD AS ONE

God known as the One, the Supreme, and Living Unity will attract a person whose life is an intellectual and emotional pursuit of integration.

Usually such a person has always been aware of internal contradictory or opposing forces which threaten to tear the self apart. These forces threaten the very balance necessary for useful functioning as a human being. God will then be seen as bringing unity into experienced chaos.

St. Catherine of Genoa, the great lay mystic of the fifteenth century, is described by von Hügel as a person of such powerful and contradictory inclinations that she had but one choice: surrender to the call of God or fall apart.⁶ She used her tremendous energy and talent to seek a spiritual life and at the same time to direct one of the largest charitable institutions in the world. She was responsible for beginning the effective reform of the Catholic Church. If you read her life, you come away with the impression of a continuous effort to focus all her personality in pursuit of divine love. Catherine could have led a life combining Renaissance-type indulgence with pious respectability. She simply found this depressing and impossible. After several years of chronic neurotic depression, she resolved to turn all her attention to the love of God and of neighbor. So powerful was her unity of purpose that she managed to reconcile her total dedication to God with a strong affection for her husband, family, and friends.

The contemporary French writer, Jean Genet, is a quite different example of a person in conflict. He made a mockery of all things spiritual and then complained that the prison chaplain did not speak of God. Genet attempted to find unity in a total commitment to evil. He tried to bring to this pursuit of evil the same purity of heart which characterizes the life of a mystic. He was even called the devil's saint. However, since evil can never totally satisfy, his life deteriorated into ever greater conflict. Genet represents those who have not been able to find that unity which would bring them peace because the pursuit of evil, of its nature, leads to disintegration of personality. My own experience with members of Alcoholics Anonymous has shown that it is not unusual for persons seeking psychological equilibrium to find that the scars of a difficult life bring them to their knees before the one God.

If you feel drawn to God as One, you should accept this aspect of your spiritual life rather than fight it. One of the anomalies of wounded human nature is that we do not accept the very answer we seek when it is given because we have become so accustomed to pain and confusion. Many such people seem to say: "I am my real self only if I am in conflict with myself." True, there is a finality in the total surrender to the One which leads to the integration described in the Sermon on the Mount. For those who are called and pay the price, there is a peace that the world can never give. One must not be afraid to find it.

GOD AS TRUE

Next in the spectrum are those who are called to God as the True. A passion for truth often subsumes other passions so that seekers of the truth are usually more calm, methodical, and curious than others. They love to question and delve. They delight in discussing their insights with others. Such people feel called by God as He is ultimate reality, Truth itself, unlimited Being, that which simply *is*. They are not so different from the seekers of the One as we might expect, but they tend to be more placid and less in conflict. However, they, too, are driven. Not finding truth, they may become disheartened, skeptical, or cynical.

St. Thomas Aquinas is certainly an example of one of those summoned by the truth. Not only does his personality fit the description of this type, but he succeeds in his search. He comes to the truth beyond rational speculation. In the magnificent crowning moment of his life, he accepts a personal revelation of truth before which he falls silent, the ultimate statement about Truth Itself. "Such things have been revealed to me that all I have taught and written seems quite trivial to me right now."⁷ But there are sad examples of those who have come seeking an intuition of the truth and have turned away. Bertrand Russell, always a passionate seeker after subjective certitude, was apparently once touched by the divine truth.⁸ Having turned away from it, he lived and died an equally passionate enemy of religion and faith. One hopes that such passion may at least have a redeeming element.

The great spiritual danger for those drawn to God as the True is not that they will turn aside. The danger is that they will tarry on the way, getting involved with this side road or that. Modern scholarship, with its great number of published theories, many of them of some interest and merit, offers a labyrinth of ideas wherein to hide from the Living Truth. Unfortunately, the institutional Church with its profound insight into the unity of philosophical, theological, and revealed truth, has accidentally provided the leisure not only for academic study but also for intellectualization which dulls the voice of Living Truth. The simple prayer of St. Francis, "I wish to know You so that I may come to love You," is a good antidote for the persistent temptations facing seekers of the truth.

GOD AS GOOD

The other half of the spectrum is occupied by two other types, closely related to each other, but rather different from the first two. They are the seekers of God as the Good and as the Beautiful. Those who seek Him as the Good are at once the most beloved and affectionate of human beings. They appear to have very little of the defensiveness which

marks the inner struggle of most men and women. Consequently, they are usually cheerful, compassionate, and gregarious. But they suffer much in a wounded world. They are often manipulated, deceived, and even betrayed. Others enjoy taking advantage of them, almost in spite of themselves. The sins of the good are unplanned and often the result of manipulation, weakness, or naïveté. Those drawn to the Good usually encounter disaster if they deviate from the unworldly pursuit of God as the Good. On the other hand, if they remain faithful to the pursuit of the Good, they become spontaneously involved in a life of generous service.

St. Francis was such a person. Bonaventure describes him as generous, cheerful, and compassionate even as a youth.⁹ Few people would call his experience at San Damiano the conversion of a sinner, as he persisted in referring to himself. It was, rather, the logical development of a very good life. But Francis's life was a story of betrayal, manipulation, and sorrow. He had more of the simplicity of the dove than the wisdom of the serpent. The election of his worst enemy as general of his order during his lifetime is a sad commentary on how a fallen race may treat such people. But somehow, like Francis, the seekers of the Good look through their tears and find the Good God everywhere. At the same time they experience a constant penitential sense that they have not served Him as well as they might have.

A danger for such seekers of the good is a kind of stunned disillusionment. They may even be tempted, as the Curé of Ars was, to run away from it all. Or they may comfortably settle for less than the Absolute and hide from all that is ugly and damaged. With good reason did St. Francis keep his eyes on the horror of the Crucifixion. It taught him that goodness in this world will be rejected and vilified; therefore, one must glory only in the Cross.

GOD AS BEAUTIFUL

Finally, there are those who seek God under the aspect of Beauty. They are a complicated group, indeed, because beauty can be deceptive. As the Greeks knew and as Plato taught, we find unfailing and infinite beauty only if we pass from transitory beauties to essential beauty.¹⁰ Since beauty and pleasure, however, are two sides of the same experience, there is always the temptation for the seekers of Divine Beauty to settle for less.

The best example of the seeker of Divine Beauty is the young Augustine. Later, as a bishop, his complex personality extended to other directions, but for the Augustine of the *Confessions* God was "Beauty, ever

ancient and ever new." The following passage illustrates the response of the call to beauty.

But what is it that I love when I love you? Not the beauty of any bodily thing, nor the order of any seasons, nor the brightness of light that rejoices the eye, nor the sweet melodies of all songs, nor the sweet fragrance of flowers and ointments and spices; not manna or honey, not the limbs that carnal love embraces. None of these things do I love in loving my God. Yet in a sense I do love light and melody and fragrance and food and embrace when I love my God—the light and the voice and the fragrance and the food and embrace of the soul. When that light shines upon my soul which no place can contain, that voice which no time can take from me, I breathe that fragrance which no wind scatters, I eat the food which is not lessened by eating, and I lie in the embrace which satiety never comes to sunder. This it is that I love, when I love my God.

Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved Thee! For behold Thou wert within me, and I outside; and I sought Thee outside and in my unloveliness fell upon those lovely things that Thou hast made. Thou wert with me and I was not with Thee. I was kept from Thee by those things, yet had they not been in Thee, they would not have been at all. Thou didst call and cry to me and break open my deafness; and Thou didst send forth Thy beams and shine upon me and chase away my blindness; Thou didst breathe fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and do now pant for Thee; I tasted Thee and now hunger and thirst for Thee. Thou didst touch me, and I have burned for Thy peace.¹¹

There are great dangers for the seekers of beauty. From Michelangelo, who said his prayers regularly, to Oscar Wilde, who said them only when in trouble, there are all sorts of seekers of the Divine Beauty who get stuck along the way. Almost every fiber of the human being cries out for some pleasure or beauty. The lover of divine beauty has to be constantly vigilant. He or she also has to be prepared to fall and rise again. Therefore, along with the seeker of the Good, he or she will be intuitively aware of the need for penance and a divine reassurance of pardon. If these are taken away, he or she escapes into a mindless religiosity or unreligious hedonism, becoming a sad clown whose smile is a mask for the tears within.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CALL

The first step toward understanding one's spiritual life is to recognize what beckons us: the One, the True, the Good, or the Beautiful. Our Savior assures us that "He who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, it shall be opened" (Mt. 7:7). The Hindus wisely say, "What you desire,

that you become." We are all led by the divine and by one, or perhaps two, of the four voices of God, although the others are never entirely absent. The danger always is settling for less. We seek Heaven, but we play with things which will ultimately lead us either downward and away from our eternal destiny, or at best leave us suspended between Heaven and Hell. This is, after all, the description of Purgatory. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:21). When the heart is divided, progress is slow and painful; life is purgatorial. It should be clear that psychologically divided loyalties, such as the serving of two masters, are a kind of neurosis. The goal of the study of spiritual development is to identify, understand, and overcome by grace the neurotic tendency to settle for what is less than God when He has called us.