

# I AM AFRAID

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We are told in the Bible narrative that our first parents were placed in the Garden of Paradise, where they were very happy. Adam was ordered to dress and keep the garden. The only restriction imposed on Adam and Eve was the prohibition from eating the forbidden fruit, and they were informed that if they did so they would surely die. There are several conclusions which we can draw from these statements. In a state of continual happiness one would necessarily be free from pain, worry and fear, and it was evidently the desire of the Almighty that man would in some degree merit both earthly and heavenly happiness. To retain the happiness already given him two things were necessary on the part of man; firstly obedience, and secondly work. Work, therefore, is an essential part of the happiness for which our soul hungers. Man's time is not to be spent in idleness, but in doing those things pleasing to God. From the account given us it follows that tranquility of soul depends upon obedience to the will of Almighty God and the rational use of the talents given us. It is unnecessary for us to be delving into modern psychological explanations of the principles of pleasure and pain. God Himself laid down what constitutes happiness in His dealings with our first parents, and it was their disobedience which brought misery and death into the world. Until that disobedience took place neither of them knew what fear was, but immediately the fatal act was done they were afraid and tried to hide themselves. From then on fear became a part of man's nature. At the bottom of his heart every man experiences fear and in many cases his whole attitude towards life depends almost entirely upon his mode of reaction to it.

Consideration of the conditions under which the primitive races still live seems to show us that when Adam was driven out of the Garden of Paradise he was deprived of the supernatural knowledge he possessed, and he and his descendants were compelled to acquire laboriously the new knowledge of how to produce those foodstuffs necessary to keep them alive.. By the sweat of his brow Adam had to obtain his daily bread. Care and worry became the lot of mankind. The beasts no longer recognised his domination and fear of all kinds took possession of him. Not the least of these fears was the ever-present one of death, which man knew was part of the punishment of Adam's disobedience. Dangerous situations constantly arose, and it is not difficult for us to imagine how man eventually began to react to the many threats to his security. Fear of all kinds can be met by any one of three reactions: (1) The threatened individual may run away from the danger; (2) he may lie still, hiding himself, hoping that the danger will pass; (3) he may face up to it. As man familiarised himself gradually with the threats to his peace of mind he became more capable of dealing with them and experience has shown him that facing up to fear is the best method of dealing with it. With this method man has made much material progress, and it can help also in the spiritual progress of all of us. Fear, therefore, has its compensations, and it can lead us to higher and better things. It is here pointed out that fear of offending God is quite a different matter from a craven fear of God Himself.

We can have at the same time an awe-inspired reverence towards Almighty God and His perfections without abjectly fearing Him.

## FEAR IN EARLY LIFE

The new-born child shows signs of fear if it feels its support being suddenly removed from under it. Fear is thus instinctive; it is born with the child and it leads to an immediate physical reaction. We know quite well that the baby has had no previous experience which would en-gender fear. Yet, fear is shown at once when its security is threatened. From the very beginning fear is going to influence the child's life and a very great measure of responsibility for its healthy upbringing is thrust upon its parents, because its whole life pattern is formed in its first few years and that pattern is woven to a large extent by the influence of the parents. The child's brain at birth may be regarded as a clean sheet of paper upon which the parents write with indelible ink. Every happening in the world about it imprints itself on the child's brain, and the manner in which the child reacts and gradually adapts itself to its environment forms the ground-work upon which its future personality will be built. Unless these foundations are of a desirable kind fear and unhappiness may become the lot of the little one. To the young child the parents appear to be omnipotent, because they provide him so readily with all his needs and give him the protection which he seeks, and when they fail in any

way the child's inherent faith in them is shaken and fear enters his mind.

You have often heard it said that problem children have problem parents. This statement is in many cases perfectly true. Bitterness and intolerance between parents have a searing influence on the young child. Quarrelling, emotional storms, and broken homes cause confusion in the child's mind and lead to loss of his sense of security. Children brought up in such an atmosphere readily develop fears of every kind.

On the other hand, timidity in a child is quite natural, but it can be increased only too readily by the parents over-protecting and coddling their offspring. It is unwise to prevent the little ones from meeting the mischievous next door youngsters and new and unexpected experiences for them should be encouraged rather than avoided. Fears are to be allayed by reassurance and the child should be induced to face up to anything that appears to be of a terrifying nature. By this means the child soon recognises he is in a position to overcome the apparent threat and becomes confident of his ability to control the adverse situation. The self-confident child will have no difficulty in facing life's problems at a later period.

The young child delights in acquiring new information and absorbs myths and fairy tales so readily that they become part of his world of actuality, and as his vocabulary increases, he too begins to indulge in flights of imagination. The romancing of children is a normal process and must be distinguished very sharply from deliberate lying. The first lie told by a child is evidence that the parents have failed in some way, because it is always the result of fear and in the great majority of cases the fear is of punishment. Lying is no part of a child's nature, and his natural artless simplicity is the characteristic which so captures our affection for him. Why, then, does he lie?

I am very much against the modern idea, although it is being outmoded very rapidly, that children should not be restrained or punished in any way. The sense of justice in a child is very quickly developed. He inherits the tendency to disobey, just as we did, from our first parents, and that tendency should be checked, as soon as the child is capable of understanding why disobedience is always followed by some penalty. The punishment given must not be of a severe kind and it must not be accompanied with an angry outburst on the part of the parent, who must also forget immediately the naughtiness of the child. Praise for a child when warranted should never be withheld. Intentional lying is the result of unjust or over-severe punishment, and it is due to the child's fear of his parent. It might be said in passing that shutting a child in a dark cupboard for punishment may have a disastrous effect on his mental integrity.

Parents should show affection for their children without favouritism. It is common enough for parents quite unthinkingly to shower their love on the latest addition to the family to the exclusion of an older one. Jealousy results, and the displaced child may give way to stealing or other wayward conduct which is really intended to bring himself under notice.

Happy the child who has been reared in a truly Catholic home because fear will not enter into his relationships with his Creator, provided his upbringing has been planned on sound lines. When he reaches the age of reason such a child will have no difficulty in adding obedience to God to the obedience to his parents, which by now is part of his nature. He has already learned the simple truths of his religion, he has been taught to love God, Who made him, and he has gained some appreciation of the crucifixion and his childish affection has been poured out in his love of Christ's Mother.

At this stage let us consider just how much the boy is capable of assessing the religious doctrines he has been absorbing, and in doing this we must be careful to make every endeavour to see things as the boy sees them, and not as our more mature adult judgment presents them to us. The whole teaching of the Church is founded on the first article of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God." That is a statement founded on cold intellectual assent. From the very fact that I am here existing in this world, from the design I see about me, from philosophical arguments and proofs if I wish to probe further, I come to the conclusion that man's existence is not meaningless and that a supremely intelligent and powerful cause brought life to this planet. In other words, I believe in the existence of the Creator. That belief is the foundation of my religion, and, quite apart from the revelation which God has made to man, my knowledge of Him and of His attributes follows from the rational use of my intellect.

It is accepted that the child reaches the age of reason somewhere about the age of seven years. From a medico-legal viewpoint a child of this age does not possess sufficient judgment and reasoning power to be held to be legally responsible for his actions, and if his intellect developed no further he would probably remain always incapable of

maintaining himself as an independent member of the community, In order to stand on his own feet as a fully responsible individual, a man must possess an intellectual capacity which is the equivalent of that possessed by a normal child, ten to eleven years of age. In other words, the faculty of reasoning is not fully developed within a short period, and the child's religious beliefs are founded mainly upon emotion, and upon his reliance that his parents and those in authority will guide him aright. It would be foolish of us to expect the little lad of seven to deduce the existence of God from his own intellectual powers. An important duty which, if carried out without due thought, may be fraught with grave consequences is thus imposed on those who have the guidance and training of the child. This duty is the teaching of the truths of the Catholic religion in such a way that the child's expanding intellect can grasp them fully. The purpose of his existence is now to be made plain to him and he is taught to know, love and serve God so that he will ensure his eternal happiness. Fear should form no part of this education.

Provided he has been given a sense of security in his home relationships, the young boy has no fear of his parents; on the contrary, he loves and looks up to them as patterns of what he would like to become. So, too, with his heavenly Father, Who at this stage is frequently regarded as some kind of super-parent. The boy should be taught to approach Him with all the confidence he does to his earthly parents, and it is not difficult to get him to see how reasonable it is to love and obey One Who has been so good to him. On the other hand, the child's mind is still too immature to grasp the logical necessity of eternal punishment for those who mortally offend the Creator. Further, his conception of what constitutes grave sin is still very defective, and he tends to exaggerate the seriousness of his simple peccadillos. It seems to me that mortal sin must be a rarity in children until long after they have gained the use of reason, so that any undue emphasis on punishment is not called for. If a youngster of seven gets it into his head that he may go to hell if he steals an apple, there is something seriously wrong in the method of his instruction, because in such a case the child's conception of God must be that He is an unjust and tyrannical Being who delights in the chastisement of offences of a minor kind. It is quite natural for such children to become fearful and apprehensive in later years. The early know-ledge of God should be concerned with Him as the Creator, infinitely loving and infinitely merciful. Nothing is more disastrous to the spiritual and mental well-being of children than the endeavour to frighten them into a compliance with the Will of God.

A prolific cause of fear is the completely unsuitable instruction sometimes given in preparing children for the first Confession and Communion, as a result of which some of them go to these Sacraments in fear and trembling. Surely, if ever we sought for evidence of Christ's love for us, it would be found in His institution of these channels of grace which will undoubtedly lead us to heaven if we make use of them, and with what gratitude and thanksgiving should we seize the opportunities offered us 'through the generous love of the Saviour for men. Yet thoughtless instruction of the young with admonitions and dire threats of what is entailed in making bad Confessions and Communions is sometimes given without regard to possible consequences and without any consciousness that the child may be quite incapable of evaluating just what a bad Confession or Communion consists of. Indeed, this very problem sometimes torments the minds of adults. We may be quite certain that it was furthest from Our Lord's intention that we should be fearful of approaching Him for mercy or of participating in His Divine banquet. The child therefore should be taught that in kneeling in Confession at the feet of the priest he is approaching the Minister of Christ Himself, and that he is there to forgive him, provided he is sorry for any offence he may have committed in disobeying the commands of the good God. He should be told that Christ is never angry; on the contrary, He is greatly pleased when people tell Him they are sorry for their offences, that He Himself said so repeatedly, and that He forgave the greatest of sinners when He looked into their hearts and saw there, sorrow and a wish to please Him. The basis of these early instructions should be the desire to love Christ, to be pleasing in His sight, and to remain in this state. "Suffer the little ones to come to Me," said the gentle Saviour, and He rebuked the Apostles for putting obstacles in the way of their approach to Him. "Christopher Robin saying his prayers" is not the poem of a Catholic. Yet, I am sure that Christ smiled when it was written. Listen also to this statement of the Redeemer: "Unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood you shall not have life in you." Yet, who of living men is fit to do so? In spite of that, we are warned that we must go to the table of the Master. It is His infinite love for us that invites us. Infinite love means for us absolute freedom from fear. So must I instruct my child and teach him to ask Mary to take him by the hand and lead him lovingly to Her Son. Further, I must advise him that he must endeavour to be as good as possible in the eyes of God so that he may be

worthy in some degree to receive a gift of which the angels are envious. The rest we can leave, because with increasing age the child's judgment and reasoning power begin to mature, and as he absorbs the principles of his religion he will come to see, at least in part, the enormity of serious sin and the justice of severe punishment for those who remain obstinate enemies of Divine Providence.

During the years preceding adolescence, there is little cause for worry, and if the boy has been prepared carefully to face future spiritual demands, it is not likely that difficulties will arise. These years are still ones of questioning and habit formation, and wise guidance by the parents is all that is required. Over-strict discipline is to be avoided, and the boy should be encouraged to match against others his skill in sport and outdoor exercises. A healthy existence should be aimed at, and he is a wise parent who interests himself in all of his boy's activities. The habit of attending Mass and the Sacraments should be by now an accepted part of the boy's spiritual life and so woven into his very being that it forms an important element in his character formation. On the other hand, a too severe discipline enforced rigidly in every direction may lead to disaster. How many young people who have been reared in a puritanical home environment drop out of their later life all consideration of their relationships with God. Their fears continually played upon by their elders have led them finally to reject God, Who appears to them to be so tyrannical and so ready to threaten them with eternal misery.

### **FEAR IN ADOLESCENCE.**

During the period of adolescence the young boy or girl gradually changes into an adult person. It is usually accepted that, because this is the time of life at which the sexual activities begin, the attainment of manhood is due to this new development. Actually, such is not the case, because adult stature and activity can be reached without any development whatever of the sex functions. Nevertheless, the awakening of functions hitherto dormant does exercise an enormous influence on the whole remaining life of the individual and raises for him immediate problems, doubts and difficulties. In addition to this, many other difficulties arise, in many cases so vivid and fraught with fear that they are avoided and the individual so acting remains at the childish level of judgment throughout the whole of his life.

Adolescence is the most important period of life, because three great decisions must now be made. Life is taking on a different tinge. The period of questioning and of acceptance of the views of others is passing rapidly, and the youth is beginning to form his own opinions and to mould his conduct accordingly. His future is heavy with responsibility and depends in a large degree on the answers he gives to these questions which are now arising in his mind. The questions concern his religion, his vocation in life and his attitude towards the opposite sex.

This is an age in which every effort is being made to mould youth by means of some form of "ism". Most of these "isms" are either indifferent to morals or atheistic in their foundations. In the present form of society it is impossible for youth to avoid the impact and the influence of current opinions and beliefs. He himself is beginning to question the truth of much which he has hitherto accepted, and the danger is that having little or no experience with which to test anything presented to him he may very easily come to wrong conclusions. In doing so, although he does not recognise the fact, his emotional outlook, rather than considered judgment will determine his line of conduct. Such being the case, it is easy to see how fear of any kind may be a predominating factor in his decisions. Again, one reverts to the enormous influence the early years of life exert on this and succeeding periods.

Everyone is familiar with the devastating effect intense emotion may have on a person's conduct. We are all aware of what happens when panic takes possession of a crowd. A cry of "fire" in a large building will in a very short period choke up the exits with a struggling mass of human beings who, if they were capable of unemotional thinking, would calmly walk out of danger. But a much smaller degree of emotion also has its effects, and worry of any sort may be sufficient to obstruct and confuse the working of the intellect. What is frequently not understood is that fear, hidden deep in the memory and not apparent to the individual may have a similar effect. Fears of this kind may have had their origin in early life, and they readily link themselves to any set of circumstances which tend to revive these early memories. Hence it is that youth's conception of God may be coloured to such a degree by early unfortunate impressions that rational and coldly intellectual conclusions become impossible. Added to this, the problem of pain and suffering, one of the things which now tend to disturb his peace of mind, seems to present an insuperable obstacle to one already prejudiced by a foolish conception of God founded on illogical, ill-advised and sometimes wrongful teachings concerning Him. Thus it is that when parental control is lessened and finally removed, it is not uncommon

for young people to drop all religious practices and to disavow any belief in the existence of the Creator. This profession of atheism is entirely superficial, because no man can escape or evade what is printed on his heart. All men civilised or uncivilised know in their hearts that God exists, but when fear predominates it is not unusual for men to run away in the hope that the one problem which demands full attention may be ignored or forgotten. Refuge may be sought in some current theory, usually put forward as having a scientific basis and accepted by the young fellow because of his in-capacity to review in a critical way the assertions of people who have no hesitation in usurping the place of God Almighty in His relationship to the universe.

With the advent of the sexual manifestations which characterise this period, many worries and problems may disturb the young man, and to understand these difficulties some little knowledge of these manifestations is necessary. The Popes have laid it down that it is the duty of parents so to instruct their children at puberty that they will be fully prepared to meet these difficulties. The necessity of such instruction has become urgent because of the increasing paganism of the population and its indifference to spiritual matters. It should be given plainly and reverently, otherwise it is not unlikely that fears and scruples may arise and be a source of continued worry. Outside the Catholic Church the virtue of purity has lost much of its spiritual nature, and where it is advocated, the main stress seems to be laid on the necessity of avoiding possible disease and not on the wisdom of endeavouring to please God, promiscuity being almost accepted as inevitable.

Puberty brings with it the knowledge that one now possesses sexual feelings. Emphasis must be laid on the fact that these feelings have a purpose and that they have been implanted in man's nature by God Himself in order to ensure the propagation of the human race. The young man must know that there is nothing to be feared spiritually from the knowledge he has now acquired. Sexual feelings, like all other emotions, must be controlled until such time as the purpose for which they were given us can be put into operation, that is until after marriage. These feelings arise at the same time as the beginning of the production in the body of the sexual elements necessary for conception to take place. In the male the seed as it is formed is stored within the body in reservoirs which from time to time automatically empty themselves. This recurring action is beyond control; it usually occurs during sleep and it is in no way sinful. On the other hand, any action by an unmarried person deliberately intended to cause the sexual elements to be discharged from the body is gravely sinful. So too are impure thoughts deliberately encouraged and sought after for the pleasure they can arouse. Here let it be emphasised strongly that any thought of any kind can enter the consciousness unbidden and without any foreknowledge on the part of the person concerned. In our bodies there are many organs of whose existence we are not aware, although they are doing an extraordinary amount of work for which they were designed. If anything goes wrong with the efficiency of such an organ we may become quite conscious of its existence because of pain or some other symptom of disorder. Some organs can be affected by mental processes, a great fright, for example, may cause the heart to beat more rapidly and so forcefully that we can feel it thumping. At a still higher level of sensitive reaction thought itself may activate an organ which is quiescent. This occurs when impure thoughts activate the reproductive organs. It can be seen therefore that these latter organs can be stimulated and sexual feelings can be aroused in either of two ways, one without and the other because of an act of the will.

Young people should be instructed to make a sharp distinction between what occurs independently of volition and what occurs by deliberate action. The inability to make this distinction is sometimes the cause of spiritual unrest, because of the fear that sin has been committed when guilt has really not been incurred. The awareness of sexual feeling, the knowledge of an impure thought in the mind do not constitute sin. Whether or not a person commits sin in such temptations, for temptations they are, depends on the way in which he handles the situation presented to him, and the mere fact that an impure thought cannot be banished immediately does not mean failure to resist, on the contrary, a long battle against temptation surely increases the individual's merit in the sight of God Almighty.

There are, however, people whose judgment in these matters is gravely affected by the intrusion of fear. These are the people who, with many others, suffer from scruples. Queerly enough it is the good people who become scrupulous; they are anxious to do God's Will, but seem unable to discriminate between what is morally indifferent and what is morally forbidden, or they may be obsessed with the idea that they have failed in some way to meet the obligations imposed on them by their religion.

## SCRUPLES.

Scruples may be developed in regard to the practice of any part of our religious duties. Mostly they occur because of a meticulous effort on the part of an individual under the influence of fear to confess guilt, but they are frequently found in relation to the reception of the Eucharist, the precepts of the Church, or the interpretation of one's conduct generally. Scruples are purely personal in their development, and are a product of the mind. Such individuals are quite capable of seeing the apparent foolishness of other people who have allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by difficulties which have been exaggerated beyond all reason, but they are unable to form a like judgment of their own condition. They are lacking in insight as well as being influenced by their fears. We have already noted the effect of panic in submerging rational thought. In the scrupulous individual the want of insight and the effect of fear cloud the conscience, which becomes incapable of clear-cut decision, so that the viewpoint put forward is in every case a distorted one, and it is not difficult to see how sometimes scrupulous persons become almost panic-stricken. The condition is really one of mild mental disorder. In an advanced state it is known as *foliede-doute*, a condition in which decision becomes almost impossible. Attention may also be drawn to an allied mental state in which feelings of compulsion occur and in which otherwise normal people are, as it were, forced to think or do things which they recognise are absurd. Fear of dirt, fear of high places, fear of open spaces, fear of disease may all cause intense anxiety and lead to obsessional ideas and acts. A common phobia is fear of dirt, and patients under its influence may spend hours endeavouring to wash themselves free of contamination. Scrupulous persons seem to have a like compulsion. No amount of washing satisfies the one that he is clean. No amount of confession satisfies the other that his soul has been washed clean of guilt. Home life and duties cannot be carried on by the former, spiritual life and duties become almost impossible with the latter. Just as there are many people who suffer from scruples, so there are many suffering from phobias.

In the development of scruples two aspects of fear play their part. We have already seen how teaching along unsuitable lines may lay the foundations of future trouble, but fear is also the basis of what is spoken of as "the inferiority feeling". This feeling of inferiority usually occurs in the "shut-in" type of mentality and becomes especially evident at the period of adolescence. The natural reaction to this feeling is the desire to excel. This is not always possible, and this type of individual then falls back on his own personality, the importance of which he tends to exaggerate and over-emphasise. We find in such people overweening ambition and undue sensitiveness, so that everyone must be careful not to give them offence, and in them scruples may have something in their composition in the nature of spiritual pride. It is as if the individual were asserting that his condition was of an outstanding and unusual kind, so unique that no spiritual advisor has been capable of fully understanding it. The special circumstances of his case are not given adequate consideration, and the careful evaluation of details is lacking, so that frequent change of confessor has become necessary, all to no effect. Hence, the attitude becomes one of obstinacy. No matter what advice is given, it is not accepted. The desire to do absolutely the right thing being impossible of achievement, the individual remains in a state of spiritual paralysis. He excuses his in-action because of the enormous issues involved, but the real reason of it is that he is in the grip of a fear complex.

A scrupulous person can overcome his difficulties provided he is prepared to examine them carefully in the light of what has been said above. In the first instance, he must disabuse his mind of the idea that his is a delicate conscience. It is not, it is a confused conscience, and it cannot function in a normal way because of fear and lack of insight, and it is thus indecisive and vague in its comprehension of what is right and what is wrong. He must realise that the state of spiritual inaction is not pleasing to God, judging by the parable of the servant with one talent who failed to add to it. It must therefore be replaced by activity. Further, it is not possible to run away, because there will be no end to the running and there is no alternative to facing up to his difficulties if he really intends to overcome them. He must accept it that in his own case he is not capable of assessing guilt, and for that reason he must place himself unreservedly in the hands of one confessor and allow him to direct his spiritual life. The preoccupation with himself should be replaced by interest in the welfare of others and his attention fixed on the command to love thy neighbour as thyself. Confession is to be followed by Communion without fail, and no qualms of conscience are to be permitted to interfere with this all-important duty. Advice from his confessor is to be regarded as a command issued by the representative of Christ, and any failure to accept it looked upon as a lack of confidence in Christ Himself, Who

indeed made things so easy for the worst of sinners. All that he himself is required to do is to carry on his spiritual activities in the way he would do if there were no scruples to hinder him. He will find that each time he faces up and does something contrary to his inclination, by so much it will be easier to do so again. At the same time, he must be prepared for a long and arduous journey on the road back to a normal conception of what his religion demands of him, and he should ever keep before his mind that as finite beings no one of us is free from imperfection; only one creature was, and she was none other than the Mother of God.

### **VOCATION.**

Concerning the decision with regard to the employment of the talents given him by God, which the young fellow is called upon to make, he should be allowed to determine his own future without interference and advice should be offered only when a patently unfortunate choice is being made or when irresolution demands it. Much of his future happiness will depend upon the wisdom of his choice, and if his future is to be assured, his employment should be one which excites his interest and absorbs his energy. Forcing young people into vocations for which they are utterly unsuited is to invite a neurotic breakdown, a by no means uncommon result of the fear and insecurity engendered by feelings of incapacity and inferiority. Foolish, therefore, is the parent who endeavours to thwart the call to a religious vocation; but quite apart from this, what answer can such a parent give Christ if he puts obstacles in the way of his child accepting the exhortation to follow Him?

### **MY RELIGION CAUSES ME FEAR.**

Modern writers on psychology, when they come to deal with religion, trace its development by means of purely theoretical speculations, one which is that it was founded originally on fear. It is alleged that early man being surrounded by all kinds of terrifying happenings and impressed particularly by the tremendous forces of Nature, as shown in the crashing thunder and awe-inspiring lightning flashes, conceived the idea that there must be supernatural beings who exerted a benign or malignant influence on his own existence. Prayer and sacrifice then became the methods either of placating or of seeking favours from these gods, who are merely a product of man's imagination. Other explanations are given for man's belief in God, but this one is considered because it is brought forward as a reason for the assertion that religion with this alleged basis of fear can have none but a baneful effect on man's mentality. Religion, however, forms part of man's very being, and belief in a Supreme Being is universal; even the races lowest in the scale of civilisation supplicate the All-powerful God. If the effects of this common belief were of a devastating nature it would, of course, show itself as a frequent cause of neurosis and insanity, but the cold fact is that religion considered from this angle has been relegated far into the background of accepted causations. Where religion does appear to form an integral part of mental disorder, on close examination it will be found that it has only coloured the form the aberration takes. Thus, when persons become very depressed, things vital in importance to them occupy their attention to the exclusion of everything else, and, if delusions occur, they will almost certainly be determined by those things in normal life to which attention was directed most frequently. For example, the melancholic patient may be wholly concerned with alleged financial losses where none actually exist, and it would be quite wrong to say that these imaginary losses were the cause of his breakdown. The statements of a patient that he has lost the respect and affection of all near to him, that he is suffering from some vile disease, that his death will occur within twenty-four hours, or that he is the most wicked sinner in the world, are merely expressions of the patient's disordered personality, and not causes of it. In a minor proportion Of cases of mental aberration it can be expected that religion, when it is of vital importance in the life of the patient, will necessarily, occupy a primary place in his thoughts. It can also be expected that he will deal illogically with his religious ideas just as he does with those of any other subject that engages his attention. In passing, it might be stated that there is no such entity as "religious mania", but in conditions of excitement patients sometimes claim to be some exalted personage, even God Himself.

From the foregoing statements we come to the conclusion that no one should fear that his religious beliefs will possibly cause him injury. We are further strengthened in this opinion when we find that the incidence of mental disorder amongst persons following a religious vocation is well below the general average.

Apart from the type of scrupulous individual, whose worry is that his confession is not satisfactory, there are

numbers of people who fear the confessional and who make this an excuse for neglecting the Sacraments and the practice of their religion. Admittedly, it is not easy to kneel in humility before a fellow-being and confess one's faults, and a degree of moral courage is required to do so. This moral courage is sometimes lacking in persons who are attracted to the Church, but allow Confession to remain a stumbling block to their conversion to the Faith. It should not be to anyone who realises fully the mercy of God, and it is well for us that Christ established this Sacrament through which we can obtain so readily the pardon of our faults and the tranquillity of soul which follows absolution. St. John informs us we are the sons of God (a proud claim indeed, and an indication of our worth in the sight of the Almighty), so that when we sin we actually revolt against a loving Father, Who wishes us to gain heaven through the merits which follow our obedience to Him. The revolt is against God, and it is God alone Who can forgive us. It is this fact which we as sinners must always keep in mind. When we go to Confession we actually kneel at the feet of Christ Himself, and we know that no one ever does so in vain. The representative of Christ listens to the confession of our faults, he assesses our guilt, he admonishes or advises us, he allots us some minor penance, and in the name of his Master he remits our sins. It is thus easy to see why oral Confession is necessary. It is useless for anyone who is sick to expect a doctor to cure him without any information regarding his symptoms being given to the medical practitioner. The doctor's advice and treatment depend on the nature of the ailment, which he diagnoses from the statements made to him and from any examination of the patient which he deems necessary. Similarly in spiritual ailments, the priest advises and prescribes for the sinner after listening to his failings as described by himself. The information given the confessor is secret, and the priest cannot divulge it under any circumstances whatever, even if his life will be forfeited by his refusal to do so, and, in any case, we can be almost certain that the confession is forgotten by the priest within a few seconds; so many sinners kneel before him that one can easily imagine that no lasting impression is made on his memory by any one individual. Further, the vilest of sins can be told to the priest without any fear of any later recognition of them being evidenced by him. One of the charges laid against Christ was that he consorted with publicans and sinners, and the accusation was quite true, because they were the people who approached Christ with the utmost confidence. The sick woman said to herself that if she could touch the hem of His garment she would be healed, and it is with confidence such as this that we should go to Confession. Further, we should ever remember that Penance is a Sacrament, and even when no grave sin worries us, the graces given by the Sacrament are such that we should seek them often. In addition, the confession of some sin of one's past life is an act of humility and an expression of sorrow which must be pleasing to God.

The mention of sorrow raises another point, because there are people who imagine that in order to obtain pardon for sins it is necessary to experience the emotion of sorrow, otherwise the confession cannot be of much value. This view is quite wrong, although there are people who do experience a deep emotional sorrow following the contemplation of their ingratitude to an infinitely good God. We see such in the case of St. Peter, who wept bitterly whenever he thought of his denial of Christ. But an emotional sorrow is by no means necessary. No prayer could possibly improve on that taught us by the Saviour, and in His prayer we say "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them who trespass against us." Again, Christ tells us, "Ask and you shall receive." Petitions of this nature are surely not founded on emotions, but in making them we are recognising God's infinite goodness, His love for us as His children, and our complete dependence on Him. If one, therefore, makes a sincere acknowledgment of his faults, is determined to amend his ways and asks pardon from God, he may be sure that such contrition is perfect in its nature. The thief on the cross says humbly, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom," and he is immediately given the astonishing answer: "This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." Sincerity, therefore, rather than the emotional reaction of sorrow is what is required of us whenever we ask God to forgive us our trespasses.

Judging by what sometimes happens when mental disorder occurs in people who are past middle age, there are some who imagine they have committed "the unpardonable sin" and who must live in a state of almost constant terror. The idea becomes an obsession, and its acceptance is apparently dependant on a feeling of hypocrisy and fear. It is amazing how wide the field is in which the unpardonable sin may be found. Sometimes it is a mere peccadillo, at other times it is some sexual fault of early life, or a sin which has been confessed at some time imperfectly or in a halting fashion, because of the person's difficulty in expressing himself. It has already been pointed out that one's conception of the malignity of sin is not static. As we make progress in grasping the essentials of faith, we see with

increasing clearness how great an offence mortal sin is, but no matter how far we advance, we can never really get a full intellectual grasp of the height and depth of the wickedness of our disobedience to the infinite God. Our regret for past offences need never lessen, but things which belong to the dead past must not displace those of the immediate present. It is far more important for us to live this day well rather than in passing our time in morbid introspection and worry over the past. It is probable that anything in the nature of despair is more hurtful to us in the sight of Christ than any other failing, because when we despair we question the efficacy of the Sacrifice which He made for us. If, therefore, anyone desires the friendship of Christ, by that very fact he is incapable of committing unpardonable sin, and by practising the virtue of Hope, with its implicit confidence in the goodness of God and in the merits obtained for us by the passion and death of Christ, his fears will gradually lessen and finally disappear.

And here a word may be added to point out to the reader the value of Confession from the point of view of mental health. Worry of any kind which is kept locked up in the depths of consciousness has a slowly baneful effect, which shows itself eventually in a state of acute anxiety. If, however, we share our troubles by discussing them with others, much of their seeming gravity lessens, and we can then face them with greater courage. For two thousand years the Catholic Church has been listening to the spiritual worries of her children, and in Confession has given them peace and consolation. A great French psychologist and psychiatrist in one of his books remarked that "regular Confession might have been instituted by some mental specialists of genius as the best means of treating the victim of obsession. Confession acts on all these states of despondency like a healing balm to pacify trouble and quicken dying hopes" (this psychologist was not a Catholic). The mental specialist who introduced Confession was Christ, Who, in instituting the Sacrament of Penance to wash away sins, gives to the penitent sinner serenity and peace of mind beyond understanding. Thus it is that certain kinds of anxiety found in mental disturbances are almost unknown amongst Catholics who practise regular Confession.

### **THE FEAR OF HELL.**

Those who really fear hell have little reason for doing so. It is those who brush hell aside as an impossibility who need to think anxiously about their spiritual state. We possess a moral nature, which is shown in everything affecting our lives, our civilisation being built upon the inevitability of punishment following upon acts which are detrimental to the public good. If all such punishment were abolished evil would become triumphant and rampant. As it is, we frequently wonder why the wicked prosper in this world while the just suffer, it being natural for us to expect that people who pay little regard to moral principles should be punished. Yet, such does not happen in this life. Looking around them at the wretched existence which many have to endure, some people become resentful towards the Creator, and even deny His existence on the pretext that a beneficent God would not permit the pain and suffering so evident throughout the world. For the same reason eternal punishment is unthinkable. Well, if God does not exist, we need not worry about hell, but if He does, it would be supreme foolishness on our part to lay down just what God should or should not do. It is not for us to question the Providence of God, and we cannot know His ultimate purpose in permitting the evil which exists in this world. Quite apart from this, it is easy to see that much of the misery of the world is man-made. The fact that hell exists has been revealed to us, and Christ has warned us of the sentence which will be imposed on the wicked in the day of Judgment, but had it not have been so, we ourselves would have reasoned into existence some kind of punishment in the next life for those who die at enmity with God. We know that disobedience to His Commands is the worst of all evils, and we recognise that the more wilful that disobedience is the more punishment it deserves.

Now, the fear of hell does not mean we should fear God. It is a good thing for us to keep before our minds the inevitable result of unrepented grievous sin and to regulate our conduct accordingly, but we have no warrant whatever for thinking that God in any way could be unjust in His judgment. If anyone goes to hell, he goes there of his own volition and because of his deliberate defiance of his Maker, but we know little about hell and nothing about the number of people who go there. Hell was created to punish spirits who did not possess bodies, and It is difficult to form any opinion regarding the nature of their punishment, beyond the fact that the loss of the beatific vision which was once theirs, must cause them eternal misery. It is very foolish of any one to allow an uneasy mind to affect his relationships with God. We should remember that neither pain nor sorrow is necessarily evil; and both may be turned

to spiritual advantage if they are accepted willingly and offered to God in reparation for our failings, so that on this ground alone we can never say that suffering is meaningless. The greatest misfortune that can befall us is serious sin. Admittedly it is not the easiest thing in the world to keep ourselves in a state of grace, but it is the easiest thing in the world to regain the friendship of God if, unfortunately, we have deliberately rejected it. No matter how low we have fallen, once we say with sincerity to the Almighty, "I regret what I have done and will not do it again," the gates of heaven are immediately opened to us. We cannot fear One Who is so generous to us, and our attitude should be one of tremendous gratitude to the loving Saviour Who made things so easy for us. The fear of hell has its value in so far as it drives home to us very vividly the danger in which we put ourselves whenever we offend God seriously, and it turns our thoughts to the necessity of seeking His forgiveness. Fortunately for us we know that through the merits of Christ it is impossible for us to exhaust the plenitude of God's mercy, and we can have the certitude that the restoration of His friendship will not be denied us. We recognise, therefore, the existence of hell without any fear and without lessening in the slightest degree our admiration and love of God's solicitude and goodness towards us.

### **FEAR OF DEATH.**

We all fear death; even those who allege death ends all things do not face its approach with equanimity. For the origin of this fear we again go back to the Garden of Paradise and the sentence of death imposed on Adam as a result of his disobedience. The fear of death became part of the very being of our first parents, and it has descended to all mankind. Instead of being translated to heaven (after a period of trial), we now must pass through the portals of death and immediately face the judgment seat of Christ. Fear is inherent in this situation because death holds for us unknown terrors, and, in addition, we are naturally fearful of what comes after it. However, we pass out of the world in much the same way as we entered it, that is, without knowledge of what is happening. Death usually follows a period of great weariness, and a gradual withdrawal of contact with the world, and it seems to be in no way a painful process; so that from a physical viewpoint it is not to be feared. But death is also uncertain, and we should pray to be delivered from an end which is sudden and unprovided for. Fear of death may be compared with the fear of hell, because both of them impress upon us the tremendous necessity of ever retaining the friendship of God. If we do this, then death can have no terror for us. Further, in the Sacrament of Extreme Unction the dying find courage, confidence and peace, and please God it will be our own good fortune to be so strengthened and purified by its reception that death will become to us merely the passage to a higher life and eternal happiness.

### **CONCLUSIONS.**

We are sometimes glibed at by those who assert that religion is the opium of the people. These advocates of materialism are well aware that those whose hopes are centred in eternity are not greatly attracted by the things of this world, and will not accept a conception of morality which is completely at variance with what God has ordained. The allegedly scientific materialist tells us we are merely super-animals, and at the same time he is foolish enough to believe that this super-animal will shed his animal characteristics and deny himself in much the same way as he dies when he defers to God's commands. From what is happening around us we can see how false such an assumption is. But if we disregard worldly things, religion does become a kind of opium, for opium is a most valuable medicament and, like it, religion in its own sphere heals our spiritual ulcers, obliterates fear and gives us moral health. It teaches us to approach Christ with the utmost confidence. When, on the Sea of Galilee, a great storm threatened the lives of the Apostles, Our Lord slept soundly in the midst of the danger, and when, in their terror they awakened Him, and begged Him to save them, they were reproached for their lack of faith in Him, but even so, the Saviour removed their fears by commanding the obedience of the elements. Here we have the prescription of the Divine Physician designed to cure fear. Deep and abiding faith in God obliterates all fear. How frequently from the lips of Christ we hear that saying: "Thy faith hath made thee whole". Implicit trust in Him will allay our fears and blot out our sorrows. For us, then, religion should be a constant source of joy and consolation, and if it becomes one of fear we have ourselves to blame. Nothing in the narrative of the Gospels gives us any cause for thinking that Christ's attitude to us is one to make us afraid. On the contrary, He tells us very distinctly that He came to save sinners and to bring back wanderers from His flock. If we are fearful, then we are lacking in faith.

If we look back now at the consideration we have given to fear of various kinds we come to the conclusion that, apart from those fears which have a beneficial effect on conduct, fear of any kind should not be allowed in any way to interfere with the performance of our religious duties. Any such fears are illogical, groundless and even the result of confusion of thought. The religion of the Catholic should be to him a source of such never-ending satisfaction and joy that fear should never be part of it. We are here in this world to gain the merit of eternal happiness, which surpasses all understanding, and our religion provides us with the means of obtaining that immense reward which God's love has prepared for us. From the time we enter into the life of this world until the time when we will be called upon to leave it, provision has been made for us by Christ Himself by means of the Sacraments to render easy our passage through this period of trial. We must have faith, complete, utter and abiding faith in Him. We believe Him to be the Son of God, and if our belief is firm, intense and impervious to the shallow but alluring arguments of His enemies, we are laying with certainty the foundations of our eternal happiness. The world calls and holds out to us the fictitious but evanescent joys which the gratification of our emotions gives, but our real happiness here should consist in an increasing knowledge and love of the infinitely good God. Every thought, every act of our lives can lead us ever nearer to Him. Work was enjoined on Adam and was necessary for his happiness and pleasing to God, and that which earns us our daily bread can be a continuous prayer to Him if we so desire. As for our usual prayers, if they be sincere, they have a stabilising effect in our approach to the Almighty, and fear cannot enter into them. Our prayers are made up from praise, love, thanksgiving and perfect faith, and to gain for us the inner peace we seek they should be simple and direct, like those of children. Children seemingly visualise the Holy Family much more vividly than adults, and talk to the Divine Infant and His Mother with a frankness that is to be envied by their elders. If we try to talk to Christ in a like manner fear will not enter into our relationships with Him. We become fearful because we lack confidence and sometimes because we do not understand. "Fear not" was the salutation of the angel to Mary and to the shepherds. Here is an exhortation from heaven, and it is the way in which we should approach the majesty of God. For we are of infinite worth, having within us the breath of God Himself, and having been redeemed by the precious blood of His Divine Son. Truly we are sons of God and heirs to His Kingdom.

#### **SUMMARY.**

Fear is part of our nature. It is a consequence of the disobedience of our first parents.

Fear arises from any threat to our physical or spiritual security.

It can be met in three ways—by running away, by immobility, or by facing up to it.

Facing up to fear is the best method of dealing with it.

The opposite of fear is faith. If we courageously meet any spiritual fear armed with complete faith in the goodness and mercy of God, that fear will be vanquished.

Such fears as the fear of death and the fear of hell are of positive value, because they bring to mind the necessity of ever remaining in the grace of God. Should we sin, an Act of Perfect Contrition will in a moment restore to us the friendship of God. Fear, therefore, should never be allowed to enter our hearts and paralyse our religious activities.

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