

### REVERENCE

"Reverence is the secret of all religion and happiness," wrote Canon Sheehan in days not so long ago. We of our generation may reflect with profit on this assertion of the famous Irish priest-writer.

#### HISTORICAL VIEW—

History reminds us that the Jews fell into error and excess in their practice of reverence, thus came about their custom of not pronouncing aloud the Sacred Name from their Scriptures. In the Hebrew moral code directions regarding reverence included respect for parents, rulers and elders. Homer shows the Greeks demanding reverence for old age and for manly and military achievement. Plato trusted to reverence being impressed upon youth to check any rise of insolence and to make the future custodians of the State "godlike" and "godfearing." Canon Sheehan's own Irish folk found expression for their deep veneration of their priest in addressing him "Your Reverence."

Despite the flippant tendencies of the present age when democracy is said to degenerate often to revolution, we find touching evidences here and there of a respectful "recognition of transcendent goodness." One such instance is the poignant closing lines of Pilot McGee's ecstatic **High Flight**.

And while with silent lifting mind I've trod  
The high untrespassed sanctity of space  
Put out my hand and touched the face of God.

#### THREEFOLD MANIFESTATION—

Let Canon Sheehan continue to teach us through his schoolmaster-character in **Luke Delmege**. We see reverence under a threefold aspect. "Reverence," he says, "is the motive of each of the commandments of Sinai,—reverence for God, for our neighbour and for ourselves."

Reverence for God—that is religion. Our good old Butler's catechism in its epitome of theology said Christ came to earth to show us the way to heaven by His instruction and example. The basic principle which co-ordinated all else found in Christ's character is humility as He revealed in the precept, "Learn of Me because I am meek and humble of heart." Humility is a virtue which owes its origin to a profound reverence towards God and a recognition



of our true position with respect to our Creator and fellow creatures and in a disposition to form our daily conduct in accordance with that position. "Reverence begets humility" declares Father Leen.

The person who has reverence in his heart and mind will practice his religious duties conscious of his dependence on his Creator. From his confident trust in God and his realization of his own utter nothingness will come a peaceful tranquility, courageous optimism and uplifting joy. (The sovereign cure for worry is religion.) The truly reverent person will never show disrespect by profane language. Sincere respect for Him who is Truth itself will prevent the telling of untruths. How many lie without thinking of Proverbs' warning: "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord."

Cardinal Newman agrees with Canon Sheehan's ideas when he wrote: "No one really loves another who does not feel a certain reverence towards him." Reverence for our neighbor follows indeed as a corollary to attitude of reverence for God. Paul riding to Damascus to persecute the Christians was struck to the ground and heard the voice of Christ: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest Thou Me?" Thus does God regard what we do to our neighbor as done to Himself according to the Gospel pronouncement, "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me." (Matt. XXV, 40).

Courtesy is the flowering of reverence in social relations evincing our faith and charity. Courtesy sees every person, regardless of his race or position, as worthy of respect and consideration. It is a kindly regard for the comfort and happiness of others expressed through the rules for social conduct. Good manners, then, are based on respect for others and a sensitive understanding of their needs and feelings; bad manners are founded on selfishness. Allow me to relate an experience. Getting on a train at an early morning hour in an Ontario city I was distressed as we travelled along to hear four young adults talking by the hour in very loud tones, disturbing the weary travellers trying to rest on seats in the coach. What thoughtless selfishness and bad manners!

In our day there is much written on how to develop one's personality—that magic thing so difficult to define and more difficult to assess! Probably the simplest and yet



the most valid criterion of personality is just the ability to get along with other people. Too often the importance of training personality is neglected—in a study made in the early '40's it was found that in industries surveyed, out of every hundred who lost jobs, only five lost them for lack of skill or inability to do the work; the other 95 per cent were dismissed for inability to get along with their bosses and co-workers because they lacked reverence or respect for others.

Respect for our neighbor's goods springs from sincere feelings of reverence for his person and that is honesty.

Canon Sheehan insists on "the third dimension," reverence for oneself—for oneself as a creature of God, a baptized Christian and temple of the Holy Ghost. The poet, too joined self-respect and respect of neighbor when he wrote:

To thine own self be true  
And it must follow as the night the day  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

A proper and becoming self-reverence teaches respect for our bodies and control of our passions. We esteem our God-given talents and make use of opportunities to develop them as we ought.

A young man was told his tongue would have to be removed because it was cancerous. The kindly doctor told him and asked him if there was anything he wanted to say before taking the anaesthetic. To the edification of all about him came the reverent reply, "I want my last words to be: 'Praised be the Name of Jesus'." How many who misuse the tongue and the gift of speech could benefit by the lesson here conveyed!

#### OUR GOAL—HAPPINESS—

Human acts are the steps which lead to the vision of God, our true happiness according to St. Thomas' definition. Let our actions be inspired by the threefold reverence on which we have reflected and we will be happy here and hereafter.

—S. M.

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"The school is by its very nature an institution subsidiary and complementary to the family and to the Church."

—Pope Pius XI in "Christian Education of Youth."