

VII. - The scattering of thoughts.

To make many books is no end, and to read many is fatigue. PRED. 12:12.

Religion no longer occupies the place in social and public life it once did. In the 16th century Religion was almost alone, now it casts a dark shadow. The atmosphere, then favorable to religion, now rather depresses it. The words of Religion in the court are muffled. The waters in the holy stream are at a lower level. Modern life as a whole does not work on the holy ground, but rather against it. In what our century may be great, it is not the century of religion. As a result, from among those who merely walked along in the sacred, more and more abandon their purely historical and handed-down faith and go over to the apostasy, while those whose faith is personally rooted in the rebirth, feel to their own degree that life no longer carries them, but that they have to row against the tide of life in an ever more debilitating manner.

To explain this change in the state of affairs, reference was first made to the rapid and unparalleled power which the last century gave us over the forces of nature; something which caused the feeling of dependence on a higher power among the ignorant masses to diminish noticeably. And then attention was focused on the restlessness of modern times, which over-stimulates the nervous life and thus disturbs the quiet in which God-fearing contemplation used to germinate. To this must now be added a third cause of the general sluggishness in the life of Religion, which might be called the fact that the human spirit is occupied by all kinds of other things.

The human spirit has a wonderfully versatile disposition, and there have always been a few persons who possessed the ability to let their minds run wild in almost all directions, to occupy themselves with anything and everything at almost the same time, and yet to direct their minds so intensely to each thing that occupied them that the one almost never distracted them from the other. But this is not how most people, especially the great masses, exist. On the contrary. The vast majority are only very limited in the range of their human mind. They do not survey a continent or a country, not even a region or a metropolis; they live, if we may express it this way, with their minds in a spot, if not in an even smaller hamlet. Their horizon does not extend any further. It is true that in their minds too lie the seeds for all kinds of other development, but these seeds do not sprout. They can only be occupied with very few things at once, and if they scatter their minds too much, they end up being nothing. Their spirit sometimes expresses itself in an

exceptionally powerful manner, and not infrequently reveals itself with surprising resilience, but to do so they must also gather all their resilience in one single point. They are strong, at least they can be, but only through concentration, through the gathering of all their strength, in order to make it work in one particular direction. And what they can't do is that there is too much that pulls them off. If this happens, then they become scattered in their minds, and with that the secret of their power is gone. What for Samson was his Nazirite crown, is for them that concentration of their spiritual power, and when Delilah comes to take away that main source of their power, then their power is, often irrevocably, broken. As I said, there are some who do not suffer at all, but these form a very high exception, and even if among the others there are often not a few who, at least to a certain extent, manage to avoid the threatening weakening of their spirit, for the great, great mass the rule that lack of concentration cuts the cord of their strength continues in all circles of society.

Reading the history of your country, you are amazed that in earlier times not only the heroes, who are in the foreground, but also the wider class of the bourgeoisie manifest such a powerful character, such wonderful energy, such manly power in every field. And that almost without any aid, with inadequate schools, with instruments that are no longer worthy of respect. When men were asked to undertake a difficult task, they were never shy. It is as if they were sprung from the ground. And - you can see it on the history page - everything they take on, they handle with great care, and they hit the mark. An image of living boldness, against which our constant lack of men, worthy of the name, contrasts so gloomily. Our men know more, encompass more, do more, but the spring vein of their personal power drips, where it then jumped, splashed and flowed. England has, of all nations, maintained its method of concentrated education the longest, and therefore, comparatively speaking, still has the most male, personal power. Elsewhere there is more than enough power, but the band around the bundle of arrows is gone, and the overwhelming expression of power of the past is no longer possible due to a lack of cohesion. That which, taken together, could still exert extraordinary power lies scattered and has therefore been weakened. The concentration of the mind in itself, which created miracles in the past, is no longer there, and that lack of concentration avenges itself in weary stumbling.

Yet for the time being nothing can be done about it. The spirit of the times, the standpoint on which our current development stands, the factors that govern our lives, do not permit a different outcome. In the past, knowledge was extremely

limited, the area over which human knowledge extended was narrowly circumscribed. And even in the period of the polyhistor, i.e., of the men of science, who attempted to encompass the whole of science, the field of knowledge they surveyed was still quite surveyable without a telescope. But we are no longer in that situation. Human knowledge has been broadened, widened and extended in such an unbelievable manner that the law of division of labor has become self-evident. General knowledge and general development are now the exception. The entire body of spiritual workers has divided itself into all kinds of groups of specialties, and each group is dedicated to the study of one particular field of the immeasurable. All study in that particular field has therefore become almost infinitely deeper. One chooses one particular object of research and study, but then gives oneself completely to it, and looks at it from all sides for so long that it finally reveals all its secrets to us. A polyhistor, i.e., a man who embraces all science, is completely unthinkable in our time. Even in his own field, each of us knows only a single part of it, and most have to content themselves with absorbing the more general data for the other subjects. But precisely because the body of spiritual workers, who are engaged in this way, is now ten times larger than it was in the past, the sum of knowledge gained is so immeasurably large, and extends so unutterably far into the field, and so unutterably deep into the foundations, that the capital of knowledge gained has washed over our heads.

As a result, the education and training of the rising generation took on a completely different form than before. It was no longer possible to limit oneself to passing on a few skills. The field in which our young man and young woman now have to feel at home to some extent is becoming ever broader. Thus, the subjects of education are constantly increasing in number and scope. More and more is demanded of the newly awakened brain. And the unfortunate exams, through which one wants to test whether one's education was right, have for not a few become tortures that dull the mind more than they enlighten it. What can be asked at an examination is so unlimited and unforeseeable that the old-fashioned examination, which referred to general development, is still only known from delivery. As a result, almost every examiner has so-called loops, which young people who are to be examined listen to and hand over to each other; something that is, of course, the deathblow to proper study. In this way the mind of man is scattered and divided among all kinds of things from an early age. It has become impossible to immerse oneself deeply in any kind of study. The mind itself is not formed. The mind does not learn to assemble and collect itself. The concentration of spiritual resilience is becoming

rarer and rarer. *Multa non multum* is what we call this in Latin, i.e., it becomes a lot of verbiage without proper science. And yet we must go with the flow. One would remain a stranger in life, if one could not speak about the most general data in every field. Even in England, where the old method was adhered to the longest, people are beginning to give in. The formerly oh, so small world has now become so immeasurably large, and of that large world one should at least know the major roads, or one cannot go on.

If this has resulted in the mind at all kinds of schools not only being overloaded but also top-heavy, and lacking all formation for powerful concentration, then the Droipers will come after us throughout our lives, to thwart every first even attempt at concentration.

In itself, the printing press is one of the greatest blessings we have received. It is the one that has opened up the field of knowledge, previously open to only a few, to the wider circles of society. It is the great means of spreading the light of knowledge into the most hidden circles of society as a whole. But it should therefore not be forgotten that the same printing press places a very heavy burden on our minds.

Think first of all of the daily press. Every morning, and often every evening as well, the paper arrives in your home to inform you of everything that is going on in the world. In the old days, when there was even a serious war going on, it was already a lot if, ten or twelve days after a big battle, fought at a great distance, you heard some vague report about it. Now you are inundated with more and more detailed reports every day, and your mind is forced to follow the entire course of the battle in detail. Such a war attracts you. You live with it, and your mind is occupied with it hour after hour, whether you like it or not. And so it is not only with a violent war that is being waged, but literally with everything. You follow closely what happens in the parliaments of other countries. Everything is presented to you in broad terms, with the odds against and for each party. The goings-on in other countries grab you, they interest you, and again a part of your mind is occupied, unwillingly and unnoticed, by something that lies outside your own circle of life. In the same way, you are presented with everything that happens in your own country or in a foreign country in the wide field of crime and human stupidity. The administration of justice in all countries is essentially approached. In the field of art and literature you will be introduced to each new phenomenon. Anything remarkable that happens in the scientific field will be told to you in

summary form. The social question in all its forms throughout the world demands your attention. Sports and competitions occupy you. And what is going on in the field of agriculture, industry, trade and shipping in the world at large is brought to your attention in details. Now, not all are grazing on these fields with equal eagerness. Most of them can't handle it, they can't keep up with it, they skip it, they don't read it anymore, and passing by the common grass, they gorge themselves on what to each of them is the trefoil. But even that forced choice from the many shows the overwhelming magnitude of the stream of reading material. And even though very many of them confine themselves to a cloverleaf, the circle of those who want to peruse everything briefly is very wide, and they are also not a few who have to keep abreast of almost everything and therefore have to toil through the mountain of knitting every morning and every evening.

Then come the magazines. By the week, by the half month, by the month, or by the quarter. You have not even half finished the previous issue when the new one arrives. Increasingly voluminous, with a more mixed content. And so interesting that you have to read it, because everyone talks about it. It's like one big restaurant, where you have lost all freedom of choice of your dishes, and each time you have to content yourself with the dishes from the fixed menu that is presented to you. In this way someone else decides for you, and not you yourself, what you will read. And it is precisely this kind of prescribed reading that is so much to the taste of the mind that has become so helpless, that new magazines or weeklies are added again and again, taking up a few hours of your short week.

This is true of the periodical press; but this, for all its size, is still only a small part of the entire mass of reading material that comes rushing at you. Not only what our own country produces, but the products of all countries, in original or in translation, come to you. Time and again your bookseller overwhelms you with piles of books on sight. In reading societies, the books go around in heaps. Professional books that you must have for your own profession, but above all also books of a more general nature, which everyone must be familiar with. Especially those books which attract general attention and are constantly being discussed. Every year each country publishes a separate catalog of what has been published in this one country in that one year, and for our little country alone this catalog already forms a rather bulky volume. And this continues year after year. The books alone, published during your own lifetime, form, if you are over fifty, already a mighty library.

Now you can stop that flow by not buying and not reading. But you don't want to be backward, you want to be a child of your time. And, what also counts, there are books with a magnet inside that draw you irresistibly to them. Especially the novel-literature is too powerful for many. They can't stay away from it. And once they get into such a novel, they can't get out until the last page has been turned. And such novels also put a strain on their minds, scattering them and drawing them away from the concentration of their own spiritual life. All this, without even mentioning the immoral literature that so easily seduces the younger generation, and not only scatters the mind but also stimulates the passion.

If you compare this situation to the circumstances in which our fathers lived, you can hardly imagine the relative peace and quiet in which they spent their days. Newspapers just emerging. Rare and extremely small in size. So exquisite. No mail, then sometimes in two days. Magazines not on the market. Foreign literature only in very few families. And all that the book market brought in a whole year, a small number of mostly Latin books, and then pamphlets; also, some poems. But never the flood of literature that came crashing down on them like a tidal wave, lifting them up and swallowing them up. One and the same book was sometimes read two or three times, and the small library was limited to very few writings. Thus, man's mind was left to itself for the greater part of the day, or was lost in conversation. And what one would read, one chose, one got hold of with difficulty, and it was usually written in such an unrefined style that one had to want to read it in order to be fascinated by it. One was never overfed. People ate more sparingly, more sparingly and more simply, but in choosing their spiritual food they remained masters of their own table. In this way there was plenty of time to retreat into oneself, to reflect, to reconcile one's mind with itself. The concentration of the mind thus came naturally, and sometimes distraction, diversion and relaxation had to be deliberately sought in order to escape the excessive urge to occupy one's own mind. The mind remained more master of its own house. There was no such restless knocking at the door. It was the exception rather than the rule for another spirit to enter the quiet room of the soul and occupy it. People's minds were busy, active, but they were not as occupied with what the printing press brought to the ordinary citizen. Today it is almost like an order office, where everyone who writes drops off his package, but in those days, people only received what they themselves ordered, and furthermore the mind had its own life process, which formed character and resilience.

To wish for that time back would be to reach for the sky. That is not possible. That is not allowed. It would reek of the soot in the dip. In logical development, what was then has grown up into what is now. It is God's order that life should expand, broaden and expand. And it will eventually become apparent that the human spirit has the latent capacity to regain its freedom of mind even under the overwhelming influence of what is occupying it. We live in an age of transition, and it has happened so fast that our minds are not prepared for it. We have lost our balance, and each of us has to make an effort, on the one hand, to live with the life of the times and yet, on the other, to keep our minds free and to force them to concentrate on themselves.

But this is not possible for the masses, and you will have an open eye for this too when you judge the decline of religion in society. Those who have entered the Sanctuary are now safe, but the multitude who still remain in the forecourt are subject to the damaging influence of the gusts of wind that blow by day. The traditional, historically transmitted faith of the multitude (to be distinguished from the personal faith of God's children) is not able to withstand this upheaval. Among the multitude in the courtroom, people know a great deal, are busy doing much, and are interested in all kinds of things, but their minds are no longer free, their spirits are overwhelmed, and their minds are occupied by the wealth of knowledge and learning about all kinds of things that daily penetrate their consciousness. They themselves feel this pressure and therefore need entertainment and relaxation much more than others; but they do not have the peace, quiet, isolation to withdraw into themselves and concentrate. Their minds are constantly occupied with all kinds of things, not because they seek them and want them, but because everything attacks them, assaults them, overwhelms them, and occupies every place in their hearts and minds uninvited. They are not living, but being lived. They no longer have a choice, but must take what is set before them. This disturbs them, this divides them in their own inner being. They have to think what others think. They have been seized. They are no longer themselves.

If what flows through them as a current to confirm the religion, or at least to draw their attention to the religion, would not be so fatal that the apostasy from the faith of the fathers would also occur among this large group. But just the opposite is the case. By far the greater part, everything that floods them in this tidal wave, goes completely outside of religion. It is all emerging from the world and engaged with the world. The soul does appear in it, even a lot, but the soul as it struggles here on earth, feasts on appearances, and defiles itself. Or also, where one aims higher, and

the nobler things blaze, and the ideal shines forth, yet it remains limited to this life, and one notices nothing of a higher and eternal destination. Religion is also discussed, however little, but when it is, it is mostly in a destructive sense, either the basis of religion itself is undermined, or the professed believers in religion are subjected to ridicule and jeering.

Thus, out of this overwhelming stream there almost never emerges a force either to confirm the transmitted faith or to awaken deep religious thoughts, much less to tempt man to seek and thirst after his God.

They were already alienated from the Church. The Holy Scriptures were put on the bookcase for good. And religious literature is found to be tedious and boring. It does not stimulate or relax. That is why even the female generation, which for a time clung to the old tradition, is turning away from the Christian religion, sometimes to seek a new stimulus in Spiritism or Theosophy, but even more, unfortunately, to turn its back on all religion. And how can this be done? Religion first of all requires concentration of mind. Without concentration of mind, there is no prayer. There may be a short form prayer before meals, or a fragmented "Our Father", but there is no prayer from the heart, from the depths of the soul, no seeking of the Infinite with our finished spirit. One, occupied as one is in one's spirit, no longer returns to oneself. One does not want it anymore. One is afraid of it. And also, one is too absent-minded for it. The mind is always too full, too occupied, too overloaded for it. Already at school one is deprived of concentration. Throughout life one has drifted away from the concentration of one's mind. One is not trained for it. One is no longer capable of it. And where everything is withdrawn from God, and almost nothing is left to lift the heart to God, how will any religion worthy of the name survive in the Garden of Eden?

Do not forget that all religion is an intrusion into the unity of the universe, in order to grasp in that unity the One, from Whom all is, with the hidden of the soul. So, to take pleasure in Godliness, you must climb out of the many, the miscellaneous, the infinitely different, to the coherence of it all, in order to penetrate to the One, from Whom it all is, and it is precisely to that summation, to entering into that unity, to crossing the boundary that separates the finite from the infinite, that the people in the forecourt so seldom come. The mass of things that overwhelms them is too great for that. When you talk to them, you not only feel that they are too absent-minded, too hung up on the few, but also that the inner spring, which should lift the religious life, no longer springs in them.

This does not hinder the gathering of believers in the Sanctuary, but it does indicate that the multitude in the court will almost dwindle away within not so many years. Even from the court they will go forth to what lies beyond it in the life of the world. The faithful will not diminish. Our King will always preserve and protect His people. The Sanctuary will not be empty. But the court, if not emptied, will be depopulated for the greater part. The historical, the bare traditional faith will continually decrease in strength and scope. With the older families you still find this historical faith, but the sons and daughters have turned away from it. And with the grandsons and granddaughters it will be even more bitter. They will be completely alienated, and even the name of Jesus will become a foreign sound to them. There are already such people. Not many yet. But they are increasing in number. And that number will yet grow. There is no power that can stop it. It will be as it was in the days of the apostles. There will be a circle of personal believers in the sanctuary, but this small circle will be placed in the midst of a society that is alienated not only inwardly, but also outwardly from historic Christianity. Such a process proceeds slowly, but once begun it restlessly continues. And in all this the high decision of our God will take place, to make all And in all this there will be a high decision of our God to expose all Christianity in its vanity and defenselessness, and just in contrast to this to make the divine power, which is at work in "the little flock", and which is powerful, yes, only powerful, to make him who fears God, enjoy the spiritual "sameness" of his soul, even in the midst of the endless dispersion of our days.