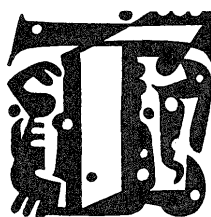


The Spirit of the Alphabet

By Eugene Rosenstock-Huussy



THE following text dates from the darkest of the dark centuries, the tenth of our era. It is preserved on the last page of a manuscript which is now labelled 36 in the Library of Bern, Switzerland.

As it is tucked away at the end of another book, so it also is tucked away in print. Heinrich Keil published in the middle of the nineteenth century six volumes of texts on Latin Grammar written by the ancient Romans themselves.

In 1870, Herman Hagen added a supplement to these six volumes in which he specifically printed some of the writings of the Irish monks who recivilized the continent between 700 and 900; these writings, too, deal with grammar. At the end of this supplement, Hagen printed this spirited allegorical interpretation of the Alphabet.

Being written on the last page of an old manuscript, and being printed as the appendix to a supplement, our text probably never has been appreciated much.

As it has given myself and some friends pleasure, I have tried to edit it in its best available text and to translate it in a legible manner.

If the serious reader is shocked by its mirth and its unhistorical character, unhistorical because our letters certainly are in existence from another theology than the Christian, he may comfort himself by an impeccable consideration. We learn the funda-

mentals of the Christian Faith, from the interpretation of the monk who composed our text, in the manner in which they were alive exactly one thousand years ago.

Prophets and Apostles, the Old and the New Testament, the creation of a new people out of Jews and Gentiles, the universality of the Church, the conquest of the highest by the greatest lowliness, all the central truths of the faith must have been so alive with this author that nothing second rate or devious entered his mind while he worked over this work of love.

There is nothing "dark" in this page from the darkest moment of our era. It seems full of light, of certainty, and of incisiveness, and so simple that it well can strengthen our faith. And this is all the more true, I venture to suggest, as the old monk does not make more of his ideas than they are worth, and solely claims that he has not left the orbit of the rule of Charity. *Non exorbitare de regula Caritatis*, this phrase alone should make him memorable. It is the golden rule of all mental creations.

The Christian Spirit of the Letters of the Alphabet

(from a manuscript, 36, in Bern, Switzerland, tenth century.)

Litterarum figuras congruis aptare sensibus non incongruum credimus, quia hoc facientes de regula caritatis non exorbitamus.

We do not deviate from the rule of Charity when we adapt the configuration of the letters to their corresponding meaning.

Simplicitas elementi huius figurae triplicitate linearum ducta sanctae Trinitatis simplicitatis triplum figurare potest sacramentum, quia de patris substantia ante omnia tempora genitus et spiritus sanctus ab utrisque procedens non naturae est mutabilitas, sed personarum concordantissima diversitas.



The simplicity of the element of this letter's figure may stand, by the triplicity of its strokes, for the triple sacrament of the Holy Trinity; in it, the Son from the Father's substance begotten before there were any times, and the Holy Ghost proceeding from both, do not betray a mutability of God's nature, but express in their diversity the completest unity of heart and soul (Acts 4, 32).

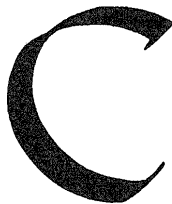
Ex veritatis rectitudine duorum testamentorum processio figuratur ac per hoc prior biculata ductio est contractior, quia littera legalis servitutem generat, subterior autem ideo est productior, quia ubi spiritus Domini, ibi libertas.



Out of the rectitude of truth the two testaments unfold in the figure; for this reason the upper of the two bows

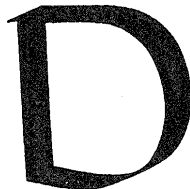
is the narrower as the letter of the law begets slavery, and the lower is drawn larger because where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor. 3, 17).

Sinuata huius litterae tractio gremialem ecclesiae susceptionem figurare potest ex omnibus gentibus in se congregatis, ut est similitudo sagenae (fishing net) missae in mare.



The bosomlike stroke of this letter may be taken to mean the receptive attitude of the Church by which she gathers to her bosom all men out of all nations; it (also) has a similarity to a net thrown into the ocean by a fisherman.

In his duabus lineis missa praedicatio Christi in omnem latitudinem orbis adverti potest, ut dictum est; "Ite in mundum universum, praedicate evangelium omni creaturae." Cuius evangelii sicut initium sic finis est Christus.



In these two strokes we may observe how the preaching of Christ is sent out over the whole width of the earth as it is said: Go into the whole world, preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16, 16). Of this gospel Christ is as He is the beginning so the end. *In tripertitione litterarum tripartitum*

omne vetus testamentum in lege, prophetis et hagiographis adverti potest, quorum si causa perquiratur, Christus invenitur.

CHRISTUS
LEX
PROPH.
HAGIOG.

In the triple division of the three horizontal strokes the triple division of the Old Testament into the Law, the Prophets and Hagiographers may be recognized. However when their cause is sought, Christ is found.

De spiritu sancto gemina procedit dilectio, sed superior, quae est divina, semper debet esse productionior.

AMOR DEI
AMOR
PROXIMI

From the Holy Spirit twin streams of love come forth. But the upper one which is the divine, should always be larger.

Omis praedicatio de regno Dei ad regnum procedere debet caritatis, quamcumque in partem mittatur.

REGNUM CARITATIS
REGNUM
DEI

Every preaching of the kingdom of

God, in whatever direction it is sent, must proceed to the kingdom of Charity.

Adunationem duorum populorum ex diverso venientium esse in Christo nemo dubitat.

GENTES
H
JUDAEI

The Union of two peoples coming from opposite directions is in Christ. Who can doubt it?

Semita Iusti recta est et rectus callis Iusti ad ambulandum.

SEMITA RECTA
I

The path of the Just is straight and the narrow way straight for his walking.

Suscepiunt a Deo montes pacem, ut vivant ex fide colles.

K

The mountains receive peace from God so that the hills may live by faith (Psalm 71, but altered).

Humiliatio figuratur virtutis Christi, de qua dicit Apostolus: Qui cum in forma Dei esset, semet ipsum exinan-

ivit formam servi accipiens in similitudinem hominis factus et habitu inventus ut homo.

L
HUMILIATIO

The humiliation of the power of Christ is figured of which the Apostle says: "Who when He was in the form of God, emptied Himself and took on the form of a slave and became like a man in appearance and condition (Philipp. 2, 6-8).

Praedicatio de Christo nunc caelos attingit, cum divinitas eius, nunc terram, cum praedicatur humanitas, ac sic unde quod dictum est: videbitis angelos Dei ascendentes et descendentes super filium hominis.

M

The preaching of the Christ now touches the heavens whenever His divinity, then again the earth whenever His humanity is preached. Hence it could be said: You shall see the angels of God ascend and descend over the Son of Man (1 Moses 28, 12 together with Matthew 4, 11).

N
LEX PROPHETAE

Haec figuratio consummatio est legis et prophetarum.

This figure shows the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

Ovile designat Christi, quia ecclesia per totum orbem diffusa unum est ovile, quia unus est pastor.

O

The sheepfold (*ovile*) stands for the Christ since the Church, spread over the whole earth, is one single sheepfold of which there is but one Shepherd.

Vis evangelica de spiritu sancto valida ad se.

P

(P's explanation is mutilated and therefore unknown.)

De ecclesia namque haeretici et schismatici exeunt, quod non mirari debemus, quoniam si essent ex nobis,

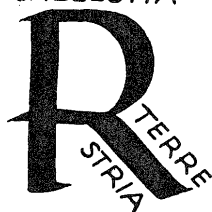
Q
HAERETICI

permansissent utique nobiscum testante Apostolo, quod haec portendere videtur figuratio.

For from the Church the heretics and schismatics depart which we should not wonder at since if they were of us they would stay with us as the Apostle bears witness. The figure seems to signify this (1 Corinth. 11, 19).

Ecclesia nunc per contemplationis vitam caelestia amplectitur, nunc per actualementer terrestribus occupatur.

CAELESTIA

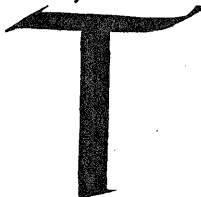


The Church now by her life of contemplation embraces the heavenly, then again by the active life is occupied with the earthly.

Vita Sanctorum undique provida isto designari videtur character.



The life of the Saints a testimonial to God's providence from all sides seems to be signified by this character.



Extensio brachiorum Christi totum ad

se colligit orbem ipso dicente: Cum exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad me ipsum.

The extension of the arms of Christ gathers the whole world to Him as He Himself says: when I am lifted up, I shall draw all towards me (John 12, 32).

Quam lata et spatiosa via est, quae ducit ad mortem, et quam arcta et angusta via est, quae ducit ad vitam; quocirca prosperior ea noscitur, quae est dexterior hac in figurazione.

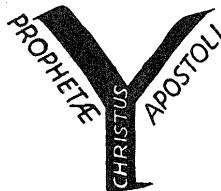


How wide and spacious is the road which leads to death, and how narrow and straight the road that leads to life. So in this figure, the more prosperous is the one which in this letter's shape certainly is to the right.

Crux Christi in omnes protenditur mundi partes.



The Cross of Christ stretches out to all parts of the world.



Fundamentum aliud nemo potest ponere, quam quod positum est, quod

est Christus Jesus. Hoc namque, prophetarum et apostolorum est fundamentum, in quo omnis aedificatio constructioque crescit in templum sanctum in Domino.

No one can lay any other foundation than that which already has been laid in Jesus (1 Corinth. 3, 11) as the Apostle says: This is the foundation of the prophets and the apostles in which all building and construction grows into the Holy Temple in the Lord.

Per incarnationem Christi terrestria

CAELESTIA



TERRESTRIA

coelestibus sociata fuisse nemini fidelium dubitare licebit.

By Christ's Incarnation earthly affairs have become associated with heavenly affairs. None of the faithful has the right to doubt this.



The People

*By Sister Mary of the Compassion,
O. P.*

"Once upon a time," when men were free, independent owners of the means of livelihood, art was the common possession of all. Indeed, the majority of men were artisans. Being thoroughly trained in one craft, most people had a good education, for if one thing is known truly, there is some hope that the mind is trained sufficiently well to grasp and understand any new thing that comes its way. Because they had trained minds, they were capable of making comparisons and of coming to a conclusion, therefore of forming a judgment. The

modern system of cramming the poor human mind with fact on fact, without time for really deep thought for any one fact of them, is not an intellectual training at all.

In the past, when art was not an esthetic indulgence for the highbrow, but an everyday joy for all, even the most advanced artist had a good chance of being understood. For one thing, the formula in which each age expressed itself was living; it was general simply because it was living. Like all living things it grew, but as its change was gradual, each new manifestation did not appear as something strange to the people, who have every

Epilogue to

411

~~Once More~~, THE SPIRIT OF THE ALPHABET

by Eugen Rosenstock-Huessay

Looking ^{at the} ~~in the Pentecost issue of the G. A. G. at the~~
~~splendid illustrations~~ ^{a friend} splendid illustrations which ~~the editor~~ kindly contributed
to ~~the~~ article "The Spirit of the Alphabet", ~~and impres-~~
sions struck home forcibly: the pictures revealed the tre-
mendous educational potentialities of our text; ~~at the same~~
~~time, they made me painfully aware of one serious handicap~~
~~which would have to be removed before this potentiality~~
~~might be realized.~~ On these ~~two~~ points, I would like to
say a few words. ~~The educational value shall be declared~~
~~and the handicap in the perusal of our text shall be re-~~
~~moved.~~

The text as it hails from the times before the Great Schism of the East and the West, still speaks the pre-scho-
lastic and patristic language of the Old Church which the liturgy and the scriptures speak. Therefore, it offers an opportunity for introducing our children into the highest truth through the humblest paths. For this is the secret of scriptural language through the ages.

Today, the children are taught the sequence of the alph-
abet through so-called versus memoriales; the words Apple or
Bear or Cat or similar ones are made to rhyme in the se-

II

quence of the Alphabet without rhyme or reason, or at least for the quite insufficient reason that the first sound of these words sounds like A, B, or C. These doggerels are supposedly funny.

The old text's faith is not in the sounds which after all do not enter script, but in the forms of the letters. The eternal faith of the analogia entis, of the unity of the spirit and the incarnated forms illuminates not the sounds but the strokes. Is this adequate for a child's "psychology"? If we try to answer this question, we had better distinguish between the psyche of the psychologist and the human soul of a child. The apostle says that it is possible to be a psychologist and he calls these people psychists (1. Corinthians 2, 14), that is people who have nothing but an earthly psyche and are not touched by the Spirit. The adults who compose these doggerels are "psychists" in the sense of the Apostle, and ^{call themselves} psychologists in their own conscience. They try to educate by debasing the child to the coarse mentality of adults. The doggerels deliberately degrade our children to the level of silly adults. But the Spirit of the Alphabet was written by an adult who ascended to the wisdom of healthy children.

Psychologists descend to a non-existing mentality which they create. From observation in my own family and in many other children, the conviction of our tradition has been fully confirmed which says that the young child is essentially "liturgy-minded". The normal child

III

has a profound instinct for the spiritual meaning of movement, speech, and writing. Our own son always felt that a man who spoke or kneeled or wrote, held one of the great offices in the kingdom of creation. True we make the children read the funnies ; but the adults compose these funnies. Why, don't we adults go to Hollywood movass and to cocktail parties? Would we like to be judged in our highest qualities by such surface -evidence ? To a healthy child, the liturgical use of words and forms is self-evident, and the practical pranks of the adults hurts their deep expectation of a wonderful cosmic dance to be revealed any moment.

In musing over this contrast in the approaches to the alphabet by the "psychists" of our age and the faith of the tenth century, a faint hope lit up. Might not one or the other reader on this strange globe try to teach his children the catechism in just this manner? Might he not abandon the logical and dialectical approach which has proved powerless to arouse the whole soul and believe again in the essential unity of all incarnations ?

~~But in contemplating such a prospect, we felt pretty low. For, the text as given in the Pentecost issue is not inductive to such an attempt because the reader must be deterred by the fact that one letter of the alphabet is declared by the author of the article to be mutilated. An incomplete alphabet is useless.~~