

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

by

Francois de Salignac de La Mothe Fénelon

Editd and prefaced by CHARLES F. Whiston
Translated by Mildred Whitney Stillman

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To the saintly François de Salignac de La Mothe Fénelon
6 August 1651 – 28 March 1720

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Foreword

LAST YEAR when I was on the lookout for an author for the 1947 Presiding Bishop's Book for Lent, my attention was called to a translation of Fénelon's *Spiritual Letters* by Mildred Whitney Stillman. This little book published by the Idlewild Press seemed to me of such real value for devotional reading that I gladly approved of a suggestion that the translation by Mrs. Stillman of another of Fénelon's works be adopted as the Presiding Bishop's Lenten

Book for 1947.

The Reverend Charles F. Whiston of Church Divinity School of the Pacific kindly consented to act as editor. His introduction and prefaces add greatly to the value of the book.

A careful reading of the proof sheets convinces me of the wisdom of the decision. I commend the present volume, entitled *Christian Perfection*, to all who seek during this period of unrest and perplexity aid in drawing nearer to God and guidance for a clearer understanding of His Will. I am sure that those who read it will join with me in expressing grateful appreciation to the translator, the editor, and also to the publishers, Harper and Brothers, for making this helpful work of Fénelon's available to English readers.

H. ST. GEORGE TUCKER
Presiding Bishop

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Introduction

THIS TRANSLATION of Fénelon's *Instructions et Avis sur Divers Points de la Morale et de la Perfection Chrétienne* is intended to be a book of devotion. It is not a book of systematic or technical theology. It is not a book of religious argument. The book requires therefore to be read in the devotional

mood, if it is to fulfil its purpose of revealing to the reader the spiritual wisdom, insights and convictions of a truly great spiritual expert.

What is meant by devotional reading? It is unlike every other type of reading which we do. Our natural practice of reading newspapers, magazines and novels will be of little help to us in this book. Devotional reading requires a very different mood or temper. In study our minds are critical, analytical, argumentative. In such reading our own minds take the initiative, and are active and energetic. In reading newspapers and magazines we normally skim over them hurriedly. But in devotional reading our whole being (not only our intellects) must be quieted; and made open, receptive, expectant; and above all else, humble. It is not so much the work of the intellect as the attentive receptiveness of the whole man. Any spirit set upon ferreting out the hidden mysteries of God will result in total failure. Humility will accomplish what cleverness and pride cannot accomplish.

Certain analogies will throw revealing and helpful light upon this mood, which is so necessary in devotional reading. First, there is the analogy of coming to know and appreciate great works of art. No passing and hurried glance at a great painting, as we stroll down the corridors of an art gallery, will ever suffice to reveal to us the richness and secret message of any painting. It is necessary that we sit down in quietude, and limit our attention to a single painting, and sit humbly before it and let it act upon us. It is the painting, which is the active agent, and not we. The painting is subject: we are object. We must let the painting act upon us and in us. Furthermore, no single visit will be sufficient. Many, repeated visits to the same painting are required even to begin to receive its revelations. We must wait patiently and humbly until the painting reveals in its own time and way its richness to us.

So it is with the devotional reading of this book. We shall need to read and reread it over many years; to sit quietly in its presence, and reading, to let it reveal its truths to us.

Another helpful analogy is that of the farmer and his seed. The farmer places his seed in the ground. He then knows that great and mysterious powers and energies must act upon it. Rain, sun, air, soil—all these work together to bring about the slow processes of germination and growth. Long before any visible action occurs above ground, there is the sinking downward into the soil of the tap-root, upon which the later growth and harvest will depend. All of this prior, underground work is hidden from the sight of man, going on in the darkness. Only after this hidden work is accomplished does there then appear above ground the green shoot. Only after weeks and perhaps months will the harvest come.

Devotional reading is farming, the sowing of word-seeds in the ground of the mind and spirit, with no expectation that the harvest is to be reaped at once. The word-seeds must have time to germinate, sink tap-roots deep into the mind and heart. The harvest of the word-seeds sown to-day may not come until years later. The harvest will come when least we expect it, and always with the note of being a revelation given to us from God, and not the work of our own minds.

It is helpful also to remember that behind this devotional book is the saintly Fenelon himself. We turn to and use this book not primarily to expose our minds and spirits to ideas and thoughts, but rather to seek to enter into companionship with this friend of God, that through it we may enter into a deeper and richer and truer fellowship with Fénelon's God. It means that in reading this book we are going to school at the feet of a truly great saint of God, to catch from him by contagion something of his intimate companionship

with Him. We are for ever to be aware that we have still very much to learn about God, and about ourselves, and of his relationships with us. We sorely need therefore the expert guidance of this wise interpreter of the things of God. Fénelon knows so much about God and man. We therefore turn to him, beseeching him to enroll us in the ranks of his disciples, promising him to be both humble and docile.

Do you then, who read this book, undertake to begin your reading always with prayer. Pray in this wise:

O God: Grant that I may sit humbly at the feet of Thy servant Fénelon, and be taught by him of Thee, his Lord and mine.

Thus all your reading of this book will be prayed-reading. Such prayed-reading will make you sensitive to Fénelon's words and meanings. Gradually over the years this saint can become one of your deepest spiritual friends, given to you of God.

The reading of this book must be done slowly. The rush and speed of our modern life does not make it easy for us to go at the devotional pace, "not faster than a walk." Rushing will never enable us to receive the truths this book contains. Read it word for word, lovingly pondering over individual words and clauses. In reading, when a word or thought seizes your attention or imagination, stop reading and give your full attention to it. It is most helpful to read using a fine-lead red pencil, marking or underlining the words or passages that find you. The blank pages at the end of the book can be used to make up gradually your own index. Such markings as you read will be an indication to you in future readings of the hidden richness, which escaped you in previous readings.

When, in reading, insights come to you, then before putting the book down, have an act of thanksgiving to God and to his servant Fénelon for them. It is these little acts of thankfulness which serve to create the mood of docility and prepare us for further insights in subsequent readings. Let us remember that the lights which come to us in devotional reading are gifts from God, and not the accomplishments of our own abilities.

I gratefully and humbly desire to express my thankfulness to Mildred Whitney Stillman, the very able translator of this book. From the frequent correspondence between us, at either shore of this great continent, I know that at every step of the work she has done it in the mood of prayer and devotion, the mood in which Fénelon would wish it to be done. She knows much of the holy companionship of Fénelon. We also believe that Fénelon has from the heavenly kingdom of God been following with his concern and intercession our humble attempts to make again available to people of our age his high spiritual teaching. The book is thus dedicated to him.

As the pages of translation have come to me I have carefully gone over each page and sentence of Mrs. Stillman's work, which has been made from the Lefèvre, Paris, 1858 edition; and I have compared and checked it with the Lebel, Paris, 1823 edition, which I have been using.

With the one small exception of a section of ten pages at the end of the chapter, "Pure Love," where it is so indicated, the entire text of the *Instructions et Avis* is contained in this book. The single omission is a section containing so many references to classical figures, that it was believed that the modern reader would benefit little because of his unfamiliarity with them.

The material is primarily taken from various spiritual letters of

Fénelon (a number of them to Madame de Maintenon), and from spiritual conferences held at the Court of Louis XIV where a small number of earnest people, under Fénelon's wise direction, sought to live the life of deep and true spirituality in the midst of a court life, which was profligate and difficult. If true Christian life could be lived under those circumstances, it can also be lived in our own times.

In the arrangement of the material, that which treats of similar or allied subjects has usually been placed together. All of the material of Part I deals with the very practical task of seeking to live the life of Christian perfection in the world. It is largely composed of letters written to people living at court and in the world. Part II deals in a more extended and complete way with important aspects of the Christian life. Short prefaces to each part will offer the reader help in using them.

This book is offered to the reader with the prayer and hope that it may be to the Glory of God, and that many still on their earthly pilgrimage may find in it spiritual help and guidance, and so enter more deeply into that fellowship with God, which is Eternal Life.

CHARLES F. WHISTON
The Church Divinity School of the Pacific
Berkeley, California
September, 1946

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PREFACE TO PART I

ALTHOUGH MATERIAL in these twenty-eight chapters was originally written as letters of spiritual counsel and direction to particular persons living in the late seventeenth century, yet because they all deal with spiritual needs and problems which confront everyone who seeks seriously to live in fellowship with God, they have the power to help and teach us to-day fully as much as they did the individuals to whom Fénelon wrote them. Although the externals of life in seventeenth-century France were undoubtedly very different from those under which we live to-day, yet the interior life of people to-day is still fundamentally the same as then. Both they and we are confronted in everyday living with temptations, and need to have wise counsel to become victors over them; with distractions in prayer and worship; with the never-ceasing interior warfare in the soul; with the conflicting claims of self and of God; with the bearing of our own faults and those of others; with the stubborn factor in life of suffering, deprivations and crosses; with the tainting power of self-love and the need of purgation by God. How shall to-day deal with these experiences as they come into our lives? How is God related to them, and how does he work in and through them? It is of such practical problems as these that Fénelon writes in these spiritual letters, and in them there is given us wise and Christian counsel and direction from which of us can benefit much.

In reading these letters we shall be helped if we keep in mind constantly a note, central in Fénelon's whole life and teaching, but which is often not a central note in our religious thinking and living to-day. It is the great Christian note of *theocentricity*, that all true and Christian religion God himself is the main and central factor. We to-day are so apt to think of religion from a human-centred perspective, and thus think of religion as our acts and words and life toward God and man. But Fénelon's perspective is not ours. For him, religion is primarily that which God himself wills and does in and upon man. It is He who is utterly sovereign in history, even over the slightest details. The Christian doctrine of Providence is thus central

in his writings, as in his own life. He does not attempt to argue or demonstrate the conviction. It is rather the axiom which underlies all of his teaching. We shall constantly be noticing his repeated plea, "Let God act." Man's role is an important one, but it is always subordinate to and dependent upon God's prior action. Man's central act is to abandon his life into the hands of God's wise and loving sovereignty, and one by one to stop every inner resistance to God's redemptive work in him.

Read, and reread, these spiritual letters, and read always in the mood of prayer.

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1

THE USE OF TIME

Avis à une person ne du monde sur le bon emploi du temps, et sur la sanctification des actions ordinaires.

I UNDERSTAND THAT what you wish of me is not merely to establish great principles to prove the need of using your time well. You were persuaded of this by grace long ago. It is good to find souls with whom more than half of the way, so to speak has been travelled. But, lest this seem to flatter you, there still remains much to be done, and a persuaded mind and even a well intentioned heart is a long way from exact and faithful practice.

Nothing has been more common in every age, and still so to-day, than meeting souls who are perfect and saintly in speculation. "You will know them by their works and by their behaviour," said the Saviour of the world, and this is one rule which is never deceiving, if it has been well developed. It is by this we should judge ourselves.

There are many different times in our life, but the principle which should be applied to the whole of it, is that none of it should be considered useless, that it all counts in the order and sequence of our salvation, that every hour is loaded with duties which God has allotted to it with his own hand, and for which he will hold us accountable; because from the first seconds of our existence until the last moment of our life, God has not intended to leave us any empty time, nor any which might be said to be left to our discretion, or for us to lose. The important thing is to know what He wants us to do with it.

We reach this knowledge, not by a tense and restless zeal, which would be more apt completely to obscure than to clarify our duties, but by a sincere submission to those who represent God. In the second place, we reach it by a pure and honest heart which seeks God in simplicity, and sincerely combats all the duplicity and false cleverness of self-interest, as fast as he finds them; for a person does not only lose time by doing nothing, or doing what is wrong, he also loses it by doing something other than that which he ought to do, even though what he does is good. We are strangely ingenious in perpetually seeking our own interest, and what worldly souls do crudely and openly, people who want to live for God often do more subtly, with the help of some pretext, which, serving them as a screen, stops them from seeing the ugliness of their behaviour.

A general rule for the good use of time is to accustom oneself to live in a continual dependence on the Spirit of God, receiving from moment to moment whatever it pleases him to give us, referring to him at once in the doubts which we necessarily run into, turning to him in the weakness into

which goodness slips from exhaustion, calling on him and lifting oneself to him, when the heart, swept away by material things, sees itself led imperceptibly off the path and finds itself forgetting and drifting away from God.

Happy the soul which by a sincere self-renunciation, holds itself ceaselessly in the hands of its Creator, ready to do everything which he wishes; which never stops saying to itself a hundred times a day, "Lord, what wouldst thou that I should do?" "Teach me to perform thy holy will, for thou art my God." Thou wilt show that thou art my God by teaching me, and I will show that I am thy creature by obeying thee. In whose hands, great God, should I be better off than in thine? Beyond that my soul is always exposed to the attacks of its enemies, and my salvation is always in danger. I am only ignorance and weakness, and I should consider my ruin certain if you left me to my own leadership, leaving to my own disposal the precious time which you give me for my sanctification; and following blindly the ways of my own heart.

In such a state what could I make of time, but a wrong choice? And what should I be able to develop in myself, but self-interest, sin and damnation? Send thy light then, Lord, to guide my steps. Shed thy grace upon me at every moment according to my needs, as one gives nourishment to children according to their age and their weakness. Teach me, by a holy use of the present time which thou givest me, to repair the past, and never to count foolishly on the future!

Our time for business and for outside affairs, to be well used, only needs a simple attention to the rules of Providence. Since it is he who prepares them for us and who offers them to us, we have only to follow him obediently, and to yield entirely to God our mood, our own will, our sensitiveness, our anxiety, our self-concern, as well as the over-enthusiasm, the haste, the foolish joy and other emotions which make conflicts for us according to whether the things which we have to do are agreeable or inconvenient. We must be careful not to be swamped by multitudinous outer concerns, whatever they may be. We should try to begin every undertaking in the vision of the pure glory of God, to continue it without relaxing, and to finish it without strain or impatience.

Our time for social contacts and diversion is the most dangerous for us, and can be the most useful for others. At that time we must be on guard, that is, more faithful in the presence of God. The practice of Christian vigilance so recommended by our Lord, the aspiration and elevation of mind and heart toward God, not only as a habit but actually doing so as much as possible in the simple light of faith, the gentle and peaceful dependence of the soul upon grace, which it recognizes as the only basis of its safety and of its strength; all this ought to be called upon to keep the soul from the subtle poison which is often hidden in conversation and recreation, and to let it know how to use wisely an opportunity to teach and influence others. This is especially necessary for those in positions of great power, and for those whose words can do great good or great harm.

Our free time is usually the most pleasant and the most use for ourselves. We can scarcely use it better than by consecrating it to the renewal of our strength (I mean even bodily strength) in a more secret and more intimate communion with God. Prayer is so necessary and the source of so much good, that the soul which has found this treasure cannot resist returning to it when left to itself.

There is more to be said about these three kinds of time. Perhaps I shall be able to say something, if the ideas which impress me at the moment are not lost. In any case, it is a very small loss. God gives further views

when it pleases him. If he does not give them, it is a sign that they are not needed, and if they are needed for our good, we need not mind losing them.

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2

RECREATION

Avis à une person ne de la cour. Se permettre sans scrupule les divertissements attachés à son etat; les sanctifier par une intention pure.

You SHOULD not feel troubled, it seems to me, about the diversions in which you cannot avoid taking part. There are many people who want to make the worst of everything, and who are upset continually, increasing their loathing of the amusements which they have to endure. For myself, I confess that I could not agree to this rigidity. I prefer greater simplicity, and I believe that God himself much prefers it. When pleasures are harmless in themselves, and when we take part in them because of the obligations of the state into which Providence has called us, then I believe that it is enough to take part in them with moderation, and in the sight of God. More severe, more constrained, less agreeable and disarming manners would only give a false idea of piety to the people of the world, who are already only too prejudiced against it, and who would think that a person can only serve God by a grim and gloomy life.

I conclude therefore that when God places us in certain positions which obligate us to take part in everything, as in the place where you are, the only thing to do is to live in peace without constantly quibbling about the secret motives which can unconsciously slip into the heart. We should never finish if we wanted constantly to sound the bottom of our hearts; and in wanting to escape from self in the search for God, we should be too preoccupied with self in such frequent examinations. Let us go in simplicity of heart, in the peace and the joy, which are the fruits of Holy Spirit. Whoever goes forward in the presence of God in the most trivial matters ceases not to perform God's work, although he appears to do nothing important or serious. I suppose that we are always in the order of God and that we are following God's rules for our condition in doing these trivial things.

Most people, when they wish to be converted or reformed, expect to fill their lives with especially difficult and unusual acts, far more than to purify their intentions, and to mortify their natural inclinations in the most usual acts of their condition. In this they often badly deceive themselves. It would be much more valuable for them to change their actions less, and to change more rather the disposition which makes them act. When one is already leading an honest and regulated life, it is far more important, in order to become a true Christian, to change the within rather than the without. God is not satisfied by the sound of our lips, nor the position of our bodies, nor external ceremonies. What he asks is a will which will no longer be divided between him and any creature, a will pliant in his hands, which neither desires anything nor refuses anything, which wants without reservation everything which he wants, and which never, under any pretext, wants anything which he does not want.

Carry this very simple will, this will entirely filled with that of God, wherever his Providence leads you. Seek God in the hours which might seem so empty, and they will be full for you, because God will sustain you in them. Even the most frivolous amusements will turn into good works, if you only

enter into them with true discretion, and for the sake of following God's plan. How the heart is enlarged, when God opens this way of simplicity! We walk like little children, whom the mother leads by the hand, and who allow themselves to be led without worrying about where they are going. We are happy to be tied down. We are happy to be free. We are ready to speak. We are ready to be silent. When we cannot say anything worthwhile we say nothings as cheerfully. We enjoy what St. Francis de Sales calls "*Joyeusetés*." Thus we refresh ourselves while refreshing others.

You will tell me perhaps that you would prefer to be occupied, in a more serious and important way. But God does not prefer it for you, since he has chosen what you would not choose. You know that his taste is better than yours. You would find more satisfaction in the serious things for which he has given you the inclination. And it is this satisfaction which he wants to take away from you. It is this inclination which he wants to mortify in you, although it may be a good and healthy one. The virtues themselves need to be purified in their exercise, by the disappointments which Providence makes them undergo, to detach them more completely from all self-will. When it is based on the fundamental principle of the will of God, without regard for taste, nor temperament, nor the spurts of excessive enthusiasm, O, how simple and serene piety can be! How likeable, discreet and sure in all its proceedings! One lives much as other people do, without affectation, without any show of austerity, in an easy and sociable way, but continually bound by all one's duties, but with an unrelenting renunciation of all which does not moment by moment enter into God's plans, in short with a pure vision of God to which one sacrifices the irregular impulses of human nature. This is the worship in spirit and in truth which Jesus Christ and his Father seek. All the rest is only a religion of ceremony, and the shadow rather than the truth of Christianity.

You will doubtless ask me how you can succeed in keeping yourself in this purity of intention, in a life which is so public and which would seem so frivolous. It is hard enough, you will say, to protect your heart from the emotional floods and the bad examples of society, when you are watching yourself every instant. How then can you hope to sustain yourself if you are exposed so easily to the diversions which corrupt or which at least so dangerously weaken a Christian soul?

I admit the danger, and I believe it to be even greater than may be expressed. I agree to the necessity of taking precautions against so many pitfalls, and I should reduce those precautions to these.

First, I believe that you should place the greatest emphasis on reading and prayer. I am not talking here of reading for curiosity to make you wise on the questions of religion. Nothing is more vain, more indecent, more dangerous. I only should like simple reading, far removed from the least subtleties, limited to things of a practical help, and which all tend to feed the heart. Avoid all which excites the mind, and which hurts that happy simplicity which makes the soul quiet and submissive to all which the Church teaches. When you read not to know more, but to learn better how to distrust your own self, the reading will all turn to profit. Add to the reading prayer, when you meditate in deep silence some great truth of religion. You can do this by concentrating on some deed or some word of Jesus Christ. After being convinced of the truth which you would like to consider make a serious and exact application of it to your own faults in detail, make your resolutions before God, and ask him to strengthen you to accomplish what he has given you the courage to promise him. When you see your mind wandering during this exercise, bring it back gently without being upset, and without ever being discouraged by these distractions which are stubborn. On the contrary, they will help you more than a prayer which brings with it very

evident comfort and fervour, because these distractions will humble you, mortify you, and accustom you to seek God purely for his own sake, unmixed with any pleasure.

If you are faithful in saving regular times evening and morning to practise these things, you will see that they will serve you as an antidote for the dangers which surround you. I say evening and morning, because we must from time to time renew the nourishment of the soul as well as that of the body, lest it fail by being used up in human contacts. We must never allow ourselves to be swept away by outward affairs, however good they may be, to the point of not finding the time to take our own nourishment.

The second necessary precaution is to take, according to when we are free and feel the need, certain days entirely for withdrawal and recollection. It is thus that at the feet of Jesus Christ we heal secretly all the wounds of our hearts, we wipe off all the bad imprints of the world. This even helps our health, because, if a person knows how to make simple use of these short retreats, they rest the body no less than the spirit.

Thirdly, I take for granted that you limit yourself to the diversions consistent with the profession of piety which you are making, and to the good example which society expects of you. For the world, worldly as it is, wants those who despise it to be sincere in the scorn which they have for it, and it cannot keep from respecting those by whom it sees itself despised in good faith. You understand well enough that the true Christians ought to rejoice that the world is so strict a critic, for they should, rejoice to be for that reason more strongly compelled to do nothing unworthy.

Finally, I think that you only ought to enter into the frivolity at court out of friendliness, and only as you are asked to do so. Thus, whenever you are not invited or needed, you must never appear, nor try indirectly to get an invitation. In this way you will give to your domestic affairs and to your religious exercises all that you are free to give to them. The public, or at least the people who are reasonable and not cynical, will be equally satisfied to see you careful to keep in retirement when you are free, and sociable enough to join the permissible pleasures when you are invited.

I feel sure that in keeping these rules, which are simple, you will draw great blessing upon yourself. God, who lead you by the hand among these diversions, will sustain you through them. You will be conscious of him there. The joy of his presence will be sweeter than all of the pleasures which you will be offered. You will be moderate, discreet and recollected without constraint, without affectation, without any irritating sharpness. You will be as St. Paul said, "In the midst of these things as though you were elsewhere," and nevertheless showing a gay and agreeable humour, you will be all things to all people.

If you find that boredom is getting you down, or that joy is vanishing, you will come back quietly and easily to the breast of the heavenly Father, who holds you constantly in his arms. You will look to him for joy and freedom of spirit in sadness, for moderation and recollection in joy; and you will see that he will let you lack nothing. A look of confidence, a simple turning of your heart to him will renew you, and, although you often feel dull and discouraged, yet every moment during which God asks you to do something, he will give you the ability and the courage according to your need. This is the daily bread which we ask for hourly and which will never fail us. For our Father, far from abandoning us, seeks only to find our hearts open in order to overflow them with floods of grace.

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Resignation

Avis à une personne de la cour. Accepter en esprit de résignation les assujettissements de son état.

GOLDEN CHAINS are no less chains than are chains of iron. A person is exposed to envy and deserves to be pitied for it. Your captivity is in no way preferable to that of a person held unjustly in prison. The one thing, which should give you real consolation, is that God takes away your liberty; and it is indeed this consolation which would sustain the innocent person in prison of whom I have just spoken. Thus you have nothing more than him except a phantom of glory, which, not giving you an actual advantage, puts you in danger of being dazzled and deceived.

But this comfort of finding yourself, by the order of Providence, in the situation in which you are, is an inexhaustible consolation. With it, you can lack nothing. By it iron chains are changed, I do not say into chains of gold, because we have seen how despicable chains of gold are, but into happiness and liberty. What good to us is this natural liberty of which we are jealous? Liberty to follow our impulses, badly controlled even in innocent things; to batter our pride, which becomes intoxicated with independence; to do as we please, which is the poorest use we can make of ourselves.

Happy then those whom God takes away from their own will to attach to his own! Those whom God is pleased to chain with his own hands are as free and happy, as those who chain the selves by their passions are miserable. In this apparent captivity, they can no longer do what they wish. So much the better. They do from morning to night against their inclinations, what God wants them to do. He holds them bound hand and foot by lines of his will. He never leaves them a single moment to themselves. He is jealous of this tyrannous "I," which wants all for itself. He leads relentlessly from vexation to vexation, from importunity to importunity, and makes you accomplish his great plans by these conditions of boredom, by childish and idle conversations, of which we are ashamed. He presses the faithful soul, and no longer lets it get its breath. Hardly one annoying person goes away before God sends another to advance his work. We should like to be free to think about God, but we unite ourselves much better with him through his crucifying will, than by consoling ourselves with sweet and loving thoughts of his goodness. We should like to be by ourselves to be more with God. We do not realize that there is no worse way of being with God, than to want to be also by ourselves.

This "I" of the old man, in which we want to re-enter to unite ourselves with God, is a thousand times further from him than the most absurd trifle. Because there is in this "I" a subtle venom which is not in the amusements of childhood.

It is true that we ought to profit by all our free moments to disengage ourselves. Indeed we must before everything else keep some hours to relax mind and body in a state of recollection. But for the rest of the day, when the torrent sweeps us away in spite of ourselves, we must let ourselves be carried off with no regret. You will find God in this sweeping away. You will find him in all the more pure a way, because you will not have chosen this way of seeking him.

The difficulty which we suffer in this state of subjection is a weakness of nature which would like to be comforted, and not anything brought by the

Spirit of God. We think we regret God, and it is self which we regret, because what we find the hardest in this irritating and upsetting state is that we can never be free with our own self. It is the desire of the "I," which remain to us, and which would ask for a more serene state, to enjoy in own way our own spirit, our own sentiments and all our good qualities, in the society of some hypersensitive people who would be apt to make us feel whatever would be most flattering. Or else we would like to enjoy the silence of God and the sweetness pf piety, instead of God wanting to enjoy us, and to break us in order to bend us to his will.

He leads others by the bitterness of privations. As for you, he leads you by the burden o the enjoyment of empty wealth. He makes your state hard and painful, by making it seem, to the blind, the pleasantest in life. Thus he brings two healthy things to pass in you. He teaches you by experience, and makes you die by the things which maintain the corrupt and evil life of the rest of mankind. You are like a king who could touch nothing which is not turned to gold under his hand. Such great riches made him unfortunate. As for you, you will be happy in letting God act, and in only wanting to find him in the things in which he wishes to be for you.

In thinking of the misery of your prestige, of the servitude in which you groan, the words of Jesus Christ to St. Peter come back to my mind. "Before this you walked where you wished to; but when you are older, another stronger than you will guide you, and will lead you where you do not want to go."

Let yourself go and be led; do not hesitate on the way. You will go, like St. Peter, where nature, jealous of its life and liberty, does not want to go. You will go to pure love, to perfect renunciation; to the total death of your own will, while accomplishing that of God, who leads you according to his good pleasure.

You must not wait for freedom and a retreat, to detach yourself from everything, and to vanquish the old man. The dream of a free situation, is only a lovely idea. Perhaps we shall never reach it. We must keep ourselves ready to die in the bondage of our state. What though Providence prevents our plans for retreat, we do not belong to ourselves, and God will only ask us for what depends on us. The Israelites in Babylon sighed for Jerusalem, but how many there were who never saw Jerusalem, and who finished their life in Babylon! What illusion, if they had always put off, until the time of their return to their country, giving faithful service to the true God, and perfecting themselves! Perhaps we shall be like those Israelites.

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4

CROSSES

Avis à une personne de la cour. Des croix attachées à un état de grandeur et de prospérité.

GOD IS ingenious in making us crosses. He makes them of iron and of lead, which are heavy in themselves. He makes them of straw which seems to weigh nothing, and which are less difficult to carry. He makes them of gold and of precious stones, which dazzle the spectators, which excite the envy of the public, but which crucify no less than the crosses which are most despised. He makes them of all the things which we like the best, and turns them to bitterness. Favour brings vexation and importunity. It gives what we do not want, and takes away what we should like.

A poor person who lacks bread has a cross of lead in his extreme poverty. God knows how to season the greatest wealth with equal misery. We are, in this prosperity, starving for freedom and for consolation, as the pauper is for bread. At least he can, in his unhappiness, knock at every door and stir the compassion of every passer-by. But people in favour are the shame-faced poor. They dare not ask for pity, nor seek any comfort. It often pleases God to join physical weakness to this servitude of the spirit a state of greatness. Nothing is more useful than these two crosses together. They crucify a man from head to foot. He feels his weakness, and the uselessness of all that he possesses. The world does not see your cross, because it only considers it a slight annoyance softened by authority, and a light indisposition which it suspects of neurasthenia. At the same time you see in your condition only bitterness, dryness, boredom, captivity, discouragement, pain, impatience. Everything that dazzles the spectators disappears in the eyes of the person who possesses it, and God really crucifies him while all the world envies his good fortune.

Thus Providence knows how to give us all sorts of trials in all sorts of conditions. We must not decline this greatness, and without failure and calamity we can drink the bitter cup. We drink it to the bitterest dregs in the cups of gold which are served at the table of kings. God takes pleasure in thus confounding human power, which is only weakness disguised. Happy the man who sees these things through eyes lighted from his heart, of whom St. Paul speaks. Prestige, which you see and feel, gives no true consolation. It cannot do anything against the ordinary evils of nature. It adds plenty of new and very severe ones to those of nature itself, already miserable enough. The importunities of prestige are more painful than rheumatism or migraine. But religion profits by all the cares of greatness. It takes it only as a bondage, and it is in the love of this bondage that it finds a freedom as real as it is unknown to men.

We must not find any good in prosperity except that which the world cannot recognize there, I mean the cross. The state of favour does not spare any of the pains of nature. It adds great ones, and it makes us not able to take the comforts which we would take if we were in disgrace. At least in disgrace, during illness, we would see whom we pleased, we would not hear any noise, but in great honour the cross must be complete. We must live for others when we need to be by ourselves. We must have no need, feel nothing, wish for nothing, be inconvenienced by nothing, and be pushed to the end by the hardships of too great good fortune. It is because God wants to make what the world most admires ridiculous and frightful. It is because he treats without pity those whom he raises without measure, to make them serve as an example. It is that he wants to make the cross complete, by placing it in the most dazzling honour, to dishonour worldly prestige. Once more, happy are they who in this state consider the hand of God which crucifies them through pity. How beautiful it is to make our purgatory in the place where others seek their paradise without being able to hope for another after this so short and so wretched life!

In this state there is hardly anything to be done. God does not need us to say many words to him, nor to think many thoughts. He sees our heart, and that is enough for him. He sees very well our suffering and our submission. We have only to repeat continuously to a person we love, "I love you with all my heart." It even often happens that we go a long time without thinking that we love him, and we love him no less during this period than in those in which we make him the most tender protestations. True love rests in the depth of the heart. It is simple, peaceful and quiet. Often we deafen ourselves in multiplying conversations and reflections. This experience of love is felt only in a heated imagination.

`Suffering then is only a matter of suffering and being silent before God. "I am still," said David, "because thou hast acted. It is God who sends the humours; the fevers, the mental torments, the weaknesses, the exhaustions, the importunities, the annoyances. It is he who sends even the grandeur with all its torments and its cursed gear. It is he who brings to birth within us the dryness, the impatience, the discouragement, to humiliate us by temptation and to show us ourselves such as we are. It is he who does all. We have only to see him and to adore him in all.

We must not be at all in a hurry to obtain an artificial presence of God and of his truths. It is enough to live simply in this disposition of heart, to wish to be crucified; most of all a simple effortless life, which we renew every time that we are turned from it within by some memory, which is a kind of awakening of the heart.

Thus the difficulties of "being the rage," the pains of sickness, even the imperfections within: if they are endured peacefully and with littleness, are an antidote to a state which is in itself so dangerous. In apparent prosperity there is nothing good except the hidden cross. O cross! O good cross! I embrace thee. I adore in thee the dying Jesus, with whom I must die.

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5

MORTIFICATION AND RECOLLECTION

Avis à une personne de la cour. Sur la pratique de la mortification et du recueillement.

WE DO NOT need, to make a rule, nor always to follow the spirit of mortification and recollection withdrawing us from social relationships, nor always to pursue our zeal to lead others to God. Then what do we need? To divide ourselves between these two duties, so as not to neglect our own needs while devoting ourselves to those of others, and-not to neglect the needs of others while being engrossed in our own.

The rule for finding the right balance depends on the inner and outer state of each person, and we should not be able to make a general rule for what depends on the particular circumstance of each person. We must measure ourselves by our weakness, by our need to guard ourselves, by our inner compunction, by the signs of Providence in exterior things, by the time we have to spend, and by the state of our health. So it is right to begin with the needs of mind and body, and to reserve enough hours for both, on the advice of a pious and experienced person. For the rest of the time, we must still examine thoroughly the duties of the place in which we are, the real good which can be done there, and that which God gives for our success there, without giving ourselves up to a blind zeal.

Let us come to examples. It is not right to stay with a person to whom we could be of no use, when we could be meeting others productively, at least if we have not any debt, such as relationship, very old friendship or courtesy, which obligates us to stay with the first person. Otherwise we should get rid of him, after having done what is proper to treat him honourably. The argument of mortifying self ought not to apply in these cases. We will find enough to mortify ourselves by entertaining contrary to our taste the people whom we cannot get rid of; and by being tied down by all our real duties.

When you are at Saint-Cyr, you must neither be sociable nor withdraw, for self-centred motives. But it is enough to do simply whichever you believe to be the best, and the most in conformity to God's plan, even though self-interest be mingled with it. Whatever we can do, that win slide in everywhere. We must not think about anything, and always go on without stopping. I should think that, when you are at Saint-Cyr, you ought to rest your body, refresh your mind and recollect it before God the most that you can. You are so annoyed, so harassed, and so wearied at Versailles, that you have great need at Saint-Cyr of a free solitude, which will feed your inner life. I should not, however, want you to fail to meet the pressing needs of the house. But only do yourself what it is impossible to have done by others.

I should rather have you suffer less and love more. Seek in church a posture which does not strain your delicate health, and which does not prevent you from being recollected, provided that this posture is in no way immodest, or that the public does not see it. You will always have enough other mortifications in your condition. Neither God nor men will let you escape them. So refresh yourself. Feel at liberty, and think only of nourishing your heart, to be in a better state to suffer what is to follow.

I have no doubts about your obligation to avoid everything which you have found affects your health, like the sun, the wind, certain foods, etc. This care of your health will doubtless spare you some suffering, but that is only going to sustain you, not to spoil you. Besides, this regime does not demand great delicacies and the enjoyment of luxuries. On the contrary, it demands a sober, simple conduct, and consequently mortified in every detail. Nothing is more false and more indiscreet than always to want to choose what mortifies us in everything. By this rule a person would soon ruin his health, his business, his reputation, his relations with his relatives and friends, in fact every good work which Providence gives him.

Your eagerness to mortify yourself should never turn you from solitude, nor tear you away from external affairs. You must show yourself and hide yourself in turn, and speak and be still. God has not placed you under a bushel, but on a candlestick, so that you may light all those who are in the house. So you must shine in the eyes of the world, although your self-love may take satisfaction in this state in spite of yourself. But you ought to reserve hours for reading, prayer and resting your mind and body in the presence of God.

Do not anticipate crosses. You would perhaps seek some which God would not want to give you, and which would be incompatible with his plans for you. But embrace unhesitatingly all those which his hand offers you every moment. There is a providence for crosses, as for the necessities of life. It is the daily bread which feeds the soul, and which God never fails to distribute to us. If you were in a more free state, more serene, more unhampered, you would have more to fear in too soft a life. But yours will always have its bitternesses, while you are faithful.

I beg you, urgently, to stay in peace in this right and simple conduct. In depriving yourself of this liberty by straining after far-fetched mortifications, you would lose those which God is jealous of preparing for you himself, and you would harm yourself under the pretext of advancing. Be free, gay, simple, a child. But be a sturdy child, who fears nothing, who speaks out frankly, who lets himself be led, who is carried in the arms, in a word, one who knows nothing, can do nothing, can anticipate and change nothing, but who has a freedom and a strength forbidden to the great. This childhood baffles the wise, and God himself speaks by the mouth of such children.

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FAULTS AND TEMPTATIONS

Avis à une personne du monde. Voir ses misères sans trouble et sans découragement: comment il faut veiller, sur soi-même. Remède contre les tentations.

YOU UNDERSTAND that there are many faults which are voluntary in different degrees, although we do not commit them with a deliberate purpose of failing God. Often a friend reproaches his friend for a fault which this friend has resolved on expressly to shock him, but into which he let himself be drawn, although he knew that he would shock him. It is thus that God reproaches us for these kinds of faults. They are voluntary, because even though we do not commit them with reflection, we nevertheless commit them with freedom, and with a certain intimate guidance of conscience which would be enough at least to make us hesitate, and to suspend action. These are the faults which good souls often commit.

As for deliberate faults, it is very extraordinary that any one should fall into them when he is entirely given up to God. The little faults become great and monstrous in our eyes as the pure light of God increases in us. Thus you see that the sun, as it rises, shows us the size of objects which we could only make out obscurely during the night. Remember that, as the inner light increases, you will see the imperfections which you have seen heretofore as basically much greater and more harmful than you had seen them up to the present. Moreover, you will see many other miseries, which you could never have expected to find, emerge in a crowd from your heart. You will find there all the weaknesses which you will need to lose confidence in your strength; but this experience, far from discouraging you, will help to uproot all your self-confidence, and to raze to the ground the whole edifice of pride. Nothing marks so much the solid advancement of a soul, as this view of his wretchedness without anxiety and without discouragement.

As for the way to watch yourself, without being too much preoccupied, this is what seems practical to me. The wise and diligent traveller watches his every step, and always has his eyes upon the part of the road directly in front of him. But he does not turn constantly backward to count every step, and to examine every track. He would lose time in going forward. A soul whom God truly leads by the hand (because I am not speaking of those who are learning to walk, and who are still looking for the road), ought to watch his path, but with a simple, serene vigilance, limited to the present, and undisturbed by self-love. It takes a continual attention to God's will to accomplish this every moment, and not a turning back upon self to assure ourselves of our condition, while God wishes us to be unsure of it. This is why the Psalmist said, "My eyes are raised to the Lord, and it is he who will deliver my feet from the snares."

Notice that to conduct his feet safely among roads sown with snares, instead of lowering his eyes to examine every step, he raises them instead to the Lord. We never watch over ourselves so well as when we walk with God present before our eyes, as God commanded Abraham. And indeed, what would all our vigilance amount to? That we should follow God's will step by step. Whoever conforms to it in all things watches over himself, and sanctifies himself in everything. If then we should never lose the presence of God, we should never cease to watch over ourselves, but with a simple, affectionate, serene and detached vigilance; while that other vigilance that we seek for self-assurance is sharp, uneasy and full of self-interest. It is not in our own light, but in that of God, that we must walk. We cannot see the holiness of God, without being horrified by the least infidelities. We must not fail to add to the presence of God and recollection, examination of conscience,

according to our need, in order not to relax, and to facilitate the confessions we have to make. But these examinations are made more and more in a simple, easy manner far removed from all uneasy preoccupation with self. We examine ourselves, not for our own interest, but to follow the advice, and to accomplish the pure will of God. Moreover, we abandon ourselves in his hands, and we are as glad to know ourselves in the hands of God as we should be sorry to be in our own. We do not wish to see anything which it pleases him to hide. As we love him infinitely more than we love our own selves, we sacrifice ourselves unconditionally to his good pleasure. We only think of loving him and of forgetting ourselves. He who thus generously loses his soul will find it for the life everlasting.

Otherwise, in temptations I only know of two things to do. The first is to be faithful to the light within so that we can cut off, with no quarter and no delay, all that we are at liberty to cut off, and that can feed or reawaken the temptation. I say all that we are at liberty to cut off, because it does not always depend on us to flee the occasions. The temptations which are connected with the state in which Providence places us are not supposed to be in our power. The second rule is to be turned to God's side in temptation without being upset, without worrying as to whether or not we have given a half-consent to it, and without letting it block our direct approach to God. We should run the risk of returning to temptation, by wanting to examine too closely to see if we have committed any infidelity. The shortest and sure way is to act like a small child at the breast. We show him a horrible beast. He only recoils from it and buries himself in his mother's breast, so that he will see nothing.

The practice of the presence of God is the supreme remedy. It comforts. It calms. We must not be surprised by temptations, even the most shameful. Scripture says, "Who knows any one who has not been tempted?" and again, "My son, entering into the service of God, prepare thy soul for temptation." We are only here below to be tested by temptation. That is why the angel said to Tobias, "Because you were pleasing to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove you."

Everything is temptation on earth. Crosses tempt us by irritating our pride and prosperity by soothing it. Our life is a continual combat, but a combat in which Jesus Christ fights with us. We must let temptation rage around us and not cease to go forward; as a traveller, surprised by a great wind on a plain, wraps his cloak around him and goes always on despite the bad weather.

As for the past, when we have satisfied a wise confessor who forbids return to it, there is nothing more to do but to throw all those sins into the abyss of compassion. We even experience a certain joy in feeling that we only deserve eternal suffering, and that we are at the mercy of the kindness of God to whom we shall owe all, without ever being able to owe any part of our eternal salvation to ourselves. When an involuntary memory comes of past wretchedness, we have only to remain overcome and annihilated before God, carrying peacefully before his adorable face all the shame and all the ignominy of our sins without nevertheless seeking to dwell on or to recall this memory.

Conclude then that to do all that God wishes, there is very little to do in one sense. It is true that there is a prodigious amount to do, because we must never keep anything back nor resist for a single moment this jealous lover who goes ever relentlessly pursuing, in the deepest recesses of the soul, after the least affections of our own, and the least attachments of which he is not himself the originator. But also, on the other side, it is not the number of insights nor of difficult practices, it is not vexation and

contention which mark true advance. On the contrary, it is only a question of not wishing for anything, and of wishing for everything without restriction and without choice, of going gaily on the day's journey, as Providence leads us, not seeking anything, not refusing anything, finding everything in the present moment, letting him act who does all, and allowing his will to work quietly in our own. O, how happy we are in this condition! And how the heart is filled to overflowing, even when it seems empty of all!

I pray our God that he may open to you the whole breadth of his fatherly heart to plunge yours within it, to lose it there, and to make only one heart of his and your own. This is what St. Paul wished for the faithful, when he longed for them in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

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7

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

De la présence de Dieu: son utilité, sa pratique.

THE CHIEF resource of our perfection is enclosed in that word which God said long ago to Abraham, "Walk in my presence, and you will be perfect." The presence of God calms the mind, gives peaceful sleep and rest, even during the day in the midst of all our work; but we must be God's without any reservation. When we have found God, there is nothing more to look for in men. We must sacrifice our best friends. The good friend is within our heart. He is the bridegroom who is jealous and who does away with all the rest.

It does not take much time to love God, in order to renew ourselves in his presence, to raise our heart to him or to worship him in the depths of our heart, to offer him what we do and what we suffer. That is the true kingdom of God within us, which nothing can disturb.

When distraction of the senses and vivacity of imagination stop the soul from recollecting itself in a quiet and sensitive manner, we must at least calm ourselves by the rightness of our will. Then the desire for recollection is itself recollection enough. We must turn ourselves to God, and do with a right intention all that he wants us to do. We must try to awaken in ourselves from time to time the desire to be with God with the uttermost strength of our soul, that is to say, with our mind to know and think of him, and with our will to love him. Let us also want our exterior senses to be consecrated to him in all their activities.

Let us take care not willingly to be occupied for too long a time, either without or within, with things which greatly distract the heart and mind, and which so draw both out of themselves, that they have trouble re-entering to find God. So soon as we feel that some new thing gives us pleasure or joy, let us separate the heart from it, and, to keep it from finding repose in this creature, present it as soon as possible with its true aim and its supreme good, which is God himself. If we are only faithful in breaking internally with creatures, that is, in stopping them from entering the depths of our hearts, which our Lord has kept to dwell in and to be respected, worshipped and loved in, we shall soon taste the pure joy which God will not fail to give to a soul which is free and detached from all human affection.

When we notice in ourselves eager desires for something which could be, and when we see that our temperament carries us too intensely to all that must

be done, even if it is only to speak one word, see one object, take one step, let us try to restrain ourselves and ask our Lord to stop the haste of our thoughts and the agitation of our behaviour, since God has said himself that his Spirit does not dwell in confusion.

Let us take care not to participate too much in all that is said and done, and not to absorb too much of it, because this is a great source of distraction. When we have seen what God asks of us in each thing which presents itself, let us keep to that, and separate from all the rest. Thus we shall always keep the depth of our souls free and balanced, and we shall cut off thoroughly the futile things which embarrass our hearts, and which prevent them from turning easily to God.

An excellent way to keep ourselves in inner solitude and in freedom of spirit is, at the end of every activity, to end all reflections right there, dropping the returns of self-interest, whether of joy, or of sorrow, because they are one of our greatest troubles. Happy is he in whose mind only the needful dwells, and who only thinks of each thing when it is time to think of it! Thus it is God who awakens eagerness by the glimpse of his will which is to be accomplished, rather than the mind itself which takes the trouble to anticipate this and to find it. Finally, let us become accustomed to recollect ourselves, during the day and in the course of our duties, by a single look toward God. Let us thus quiet all the movements of our hearts, as soon as we see them agitated. Let us separate ourselves from all pleasure which does not come from God. Let us cut off futile thoughts and dreams. Let us not speak empty words. Let us seek God within us, and we shall find him without fail, and with him joy and peace.

In these external occupations, let us still be more taken up with God than with all the rest. To carry them out well, we must do them always for him. At the sight of God's majesty, our spirit should become calm and remain serene. One word of the Lord's once immediately calmed a wildly raging sea. One glance of him toward us, and of us toward him, should even now do the same thing.

We must often raise the heart toward God. He will purify it, enlighten it, direct it. This was the daily practice of the holy prophet David. "I had always," he said, "the Lord before my eyes." Let us often say these beautiful words of the same prophet, "Whom should I seek in heaven and on earth, save thee, O my God? Thou art the God of my heart, and my unique part forever."

We must not wait for free hours in which we can close the door. The moment in which we regret recollection can serve to make us practise it as well. We must turn our hearts to God in a simple, familiar way, full of confidence. All the most preoccupied moments are good at all times, even while eating, while hearing others talk. Idle and boring stories, instead of tiring us, refresh us by giving intervals of liberty to recollect ourselves. Thus all things turn to good for those who love God.

We must often do reading suited to our taste and our need, but often interrupted to give place to the Spirit within, which places us in recollection. Two words simple and full of the mind of God are the secret manna. We forget the words, but they work secretly. The soul feeds upon them and grows.

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Comment il faut aimer Dieu, Sur la fidélité dans les petites choses.

ALL MEN should know that they are indispensably obliged to love God, but they have to learn in what way they should love him. We must love God because he is our Creator, and because we have nothing which does not come from his liberal hand. All that is in us is no less his gift to us who have nothing, since we are nothing by ourselves. Not only we have from God; all that is in us, but all that surrounds us comes from him, and has been formed by him. We should love him also, because he has loved us, but with a tender love, like a father who pities his children, because he knows the mud and clay from which they have been made. He has sought us in our own ways, which at those of sin. He has run like a shepherd who exhausts himself to find his strayed lamb. He is not content to look for us, but after having found us he has taken us and our weakness upon himself by taking human form. It is said that he has been obedient unto death on the cross, and that the measure of his obedience has been the measure of his love for us.

After being convinced of the duty of loving God, we must find out how we ought to love him. Like the cowardly souls who want to divide their heart, giving part of it to God, and keeping the rest for the world and its amusements? Like those who want to mingle truth and lies, God and the world? Like those who want to be God's before the altar, and to leave him there so that they can give the rest of their time to the world, that God may have the lip service, and the world what is real in their affections?

But God rejects this sort of love. He is a jealous God, who wants no reservations. All is not too much for him. He commands us to love him, and explains it thus: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." We cannot, after that, believe that he is satisfied with a religion of only ceremony. If we do not give him everything, he wants nothing.

Indeed, is it not ingratitude only to half-love him who has loved us from all eternity? What am I saying! He has loved us even in the abyss of sin. The world itself, corrupt as it is, prides itself on being shocked by ingratitude. It cannot endure a son not showing the gratitude he owes to him who gave him life. But for what life are we indebted to our father? A life full of misery, bitterness, all sorts of real evils. A life which tends toward death, and which is thus a continual death. Nevertheless, it is an absolute precept to have every respect imaginable for our father and mother. And, by the same principle, how should we treat God? He has given us a life which should last as long as he himself. He has created us to make us perfectly happy. He is more a father, said a Father of the Church, than all the fathers together. He has loved us with an eternal love, and what has he loved in us? For when a person loves, it is for something good which he thinks or finds in the object beloved. And what is there then to be found in us worthy of his love? Nothingness, when we were not, and sin, when we existed.

O, what excess of goodness! Is it possible that we were not loving him who has done us so much good, who sustains and keeps us, so that if he turns away his face for a moment, we should fall into the nothing from which his all-powerful hand has drawn us? Can we divide our heart, and place in comparison God, who promises us the good things which are eternal, and the world, which dazzles us, and which at the moment of death will leave us in the hands of an avenging God, of a God whom nothing can resist, in fact of a just God who will treat us as we have treated him? If we have served the world, he will send us back to this wretched master to reward us. The law by which God commands us to love him was only written, says St. Augustine, to make us

remember that it is monstrous to have forgotten him.

Let us consider the goodness of God, who, knowing our ingratitude, and realizing our weakness, has wanted to use all sorts of means to lead us back to him. He promises us eternal rewards if we love him. He threatens us with punishments if we do not love him, and it is even in these terrible threats that we see best his excessive compassion and clemency. For why does he so often threaten us? So that he will not be obliged to give us extreme punishment. But let us take care not to abuse his blessings, his compassion and his clemency. Let us make use of the present time. Let us fear to irritate him. Let us not do as those wavering souls, who say every day, "To-morrow. To-morrow." Let us make brave resolutions to be wholly his. Let us commence from to-day, from this moment. What rashness to count on what is not in our power! The future is an abyss which God is hiding from us, and even when it comes to us, can we so count on ourselves that we should pretend to do God's work without his grace? Let us profit by what he offers us. It is perhaps that upon which our conversion depends. With time the passions become so strong that it is nearly impossible to put them in subjection. Let us make our choice now, and let us listen to God, who himself said, by Elijah, "How long, my people, will you be divided between Baal and me? Decide which is the true God. If it is I, follow me, and no longer keep your heart in suspense. If it is Baal, follow him, follow the world, give yourself up to him, and we shall see on the day of your death if he will deliver you from my hands."

But it is difficult, we say, to love only God, to leave absolutely every attachment. Eh! What difficulty do you find in loving the one who has made you what you are? It is from the corruption of our nature that this reluctance comes, which you feel in giving to your Creator that which you owe to him. Do you find that it will be pleasant to be divided between God and the world, to be carried away constantly by passions, and at the same time to be torn by reproaches of conscience? Not to enjoy any pleasure without bitterness, and to be always pulled two ways? It is by this unfair division, which makes us suffer relentlessly, that we want to soften the harshness which cowardice makes us find in the divine love.

But, yet again, we greatly deceive ourselves in this. For if anyone can be happy, even in this life, it is he who loves God. If the love of God can be the principle of something good, it ought to carry us to the point of giving up all else, in order to be wholly God's. When his love is alone in a soul, it enjoys the peace of a good conscience. It is content and happy. It needs neither grandeur nor riches, nor reputation, nor indeed anything of all those things which time carries away without leaving any traces. It wishes only for the fulfilment of the will of the well-beloved. It is enough that it knows that that will is being accomplished. It watches constantly while awaiting the bridegroom. Prosperity cannot inflate it, nor diversity bow it down. It is this detachment from its own will in which all Christian perfection consists.

It is not in the subtlety of reasoning. How many doctors, vain and full of themselves, are in error concerning the things of God! This is proved by the words of St. Paul: "Knowledge puffeth up." It is only charity which ennobles. There is no longer virtue in long prayers, since Jesus Christ himself said, "All those who say, 'Lord, Lord,' shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven, and my Father will say to them, I do not know you."

Finally, devotion definitely does not consist in works without charity. We cannot love God without works, because charity is not idle. When it is within us, it urges us unflinchingly to do something for God. And if, through weakness, we are incapable of action, to suffer is to do something very

pleasing to God. Still this is not all. After having come to love God without division, we must lift ourselves to the point of loving him purely for love of him, without any idea of self-interest. O, is it not worth the trouble? If anything deserves to be so loved, is it not he who is infinitely kind?

St. Francis de Sales says that great virtues and small fidelities are like salt or sugar. Sugar has a more exquisite taste, but is not used so often. On the contrary, salt enters into all food necessary to life. The great virtues are rare the, occasion for them seldom comes. When it does present itself, we are prepared for it by all that has gone before. We are stirred by the greatness of the sacrifice, we are sustained either by the brilliance of our action in the eyes of others, or by the satisfaction which we have in ourselves in an effort which we find extraordinary. The small occasions are unexpected. They return every moment. They place us constantly at odds with our pride, our idleness, our scorn, our quickness and our chagrin. They come to break our own will in all things, and to leave us no reserve. if we want to be faithful in these small things, nature never has time to breathe, and we must die to all our inclinations. We should a hundred times rather make some great sacrifices to God, however violent and painful, on condition that we be freed with liberty to follow our tastes and habits in every little detail. It is, however, only by faithfulness in little things that the grace of true love sustains us, and distinguishes itself from the passing favours of human nature.

It is with piety as it is with economy in temporal things. If we do not take care of the things near us, we ruin ourselves more in incidental expenses, than in great extravagances. Whoever knows how to put the small things to good use, spiritual as well as temporal, accumulates great wealth. All the great things are only made by the accumulation of little things which we receive with care. He who loses nothing will soon grow rich.

Besides, consider that God does not so much seek our deeds, as the motive of love which makes us do them, and the pliancy which he exacts in our will. Men hardly judge our actions except from without. God counts as nothing everything in our actions which seem most brilliant in the eyes of the world. What he wants is a pure intention. It is a sincere detachment from ourselves. All this is practised more often, with less danger to our pride and in a way which tests us more sternly, in ordinary occasions rather than in those which are extraordinary. Sometimes even we hold tighter to a trifle than to a great interest. We are more reluctant to give up an amusement than to give away a very large sum. We deceive ourselves the more readily over little things which we think innocent, and to which we think we are less attached. However, when God takes them away, we can easily recognize by the pain of the deprivation, how excessive and inexcusable their use and our devotion to them were. Besides, if we neglect the little things, we shock our family all the time, our servants and the whole public. Men cannot think that our piety is in good faith, when our behaviour seems irregular and weak in detail. How can we make others believe that we should unhesitatingly make the greatest sacrifices, while we fail when it is a question of the smallest ones?

But the most dangerous thing is that the soul, by the neglect of little things, becomes accustomed to unfaithfulness. It sadness Holy Spirit; it yields to its own impulses; it makes nothing of failing God. On the contrary, true love sees nothing as little. Everything which can please or displease God always seems great to it. It is not that true love throws the soul into fussing and scruples, but it does place no limits to its fidelity. It acts simply with God, and as it is quite untroubled by the things which God does not ask of it, it also never wants to hesitate a single instant in that which God does ask of it. Thus, it is sot by fussiness that we become faithful and

exact in the smallest things. It is by a feeling of love, which is free from the reflections and fears of the anxious and scrupulous. We are as though carried away by the love of God. We only want to do what we are doing, and we do not want to do anything at all which we are not doing. At the same time that God, jealous, urges the soul, presses it relentlessly in the least details, and seems to withdraw all liberty from it, it finds itself free, and it enjoys a profound peace in him. O, how happy it is!

Besides, the people who are naturally more careless of detail are those who should make a stricter law for themselves for the smallest things. We are tempted to be scornful of them. We have a habit of thinking that they do not matter. We do not consider them of enough consequence. We do not realize enough the insensible progress which the passions make; we even forget the most disastrous experiences which we have had with them. We prefer to promise ourselves an imaginary firmness, and to trust to our courage, so many times a deceiver, rather than to bother with a continual faithfulness. "That's nothing," we say. Yes, it is nothing, but a nothing which is all for you; a nothing, which you care enough for to refuse it to God; a nothing which you scorn in words so that you may have an excuse to refuse it, but, at bottom, it is a nothing which you are keeping back from God, and which will be your undoing. It is not elevation of the spirit to feel contempt for little things. It is, on the contrary, because of too narrow points of view that we consider as little what has such far-reaching consequences. The more trouble we have to watch ourselves in the little things, the more we must fear to neglect them, the more we must distrust ourselves, and place invincible barriers between ourselves and weakening: *Qui spernit modica, paulatim decidet* ["He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little (Eccles. 19:1)].

In short, judge for yourself. How would you get along with a friend who owed you everything, and who, feeling very much in duty bound to serve you on those rare occasions which we call great, would not take the trouble to show you either kindness or respect in the give and take of ordinary life?

Do not fear this continual attention to little things. At first we must have courage, but this is a penitence which you deserve, which you need, which will make for your peace, and your security. Without it you would have nothing but trouble and relapses. God will give you little by little this sweet and easy state. True love is attentive, without disquiet and without mental conflict.

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9

SEMI-CONVERSIONS

Sur les conversions lâche's.

PEOPLE WHO are far from God think they are very near to him, when they begin to take a few steps to approach him. The most polite and most enlightened people have the same stupidity about this as a peasant who thinks he is really at court, because he has seen the king. We leave the horrible vices; we restrain ourselves in a weak, worldly and dissipated life. We Judge it, not by the Gospel, which is the only rule, but by the comparison which we make between that life and the one which we led before, or which we see led by so many others. No more is needed to canonize ourselves, and to go sound asleep so far as everything goes which has to do with our salvation.

However, this state is perhaps more fatal than a scandalous debauchery.

The debauchery would trouble our conscience, and our faith, and cause it to make some great effort. In the first state the change would only serve to stifle healthy remorse, establish a false peace in the heart, and make our sickness irremediable, by persuading us that we are well. Salvation is not only connected with the stopping of evil. To that must be added the practice of the good. The kingdom of heaven is too great a prize to be given to a slavish fear, which only abstains from evil because it does not dare to commit it. God wants children who love his kindness, and not slaves who only serve him for fear of his power. So we must love him, and, consequently, do what a true love inspires. Can we love God in good faith, and love passionately his enemy the world, to which in the Gospel he has given so harsh a curse? Can we love God, and be content not to outrage him, without taking the trouble to please him, to glorify him, and bravely to bear witness to our love for him? The tree which does not bear any fruit should be cut down and thrown into the fire, according to Jesus Christ in the Gospel, as if it were dead. Indeed, whoever does not bear the fruits of divine love is dead and dried up down to the roots.

Is there a vile creature on earth who would be content to be loved as he is not ashamed of wanting to love God? We wish to love him on condition that we only give him words and ceremonies, and even brief ceremonies, by which we are soon tired and bored; on condition that we do not sacrifice to him any living passion, any real interest, any part of the conveniences of a soft life. We want to love him on condition that we love with him, and more than him, all which he does not love at all and which he condemns in worldly vanities. We want very much to love him on condition that we do not lessen in anything that blind love of ourselves, which goes as far as idolatry, and which causes us, instead of relating ourselves to God as to one for whom we were made, to want on the contrary to relate God to ourselves, and not to seek him except as a last resort, so that he may help us and comfort us, when creatures fail us. In truth, is this loving God? Is it not rather irritating him?

This is not all. We can even love God, on condition that we be ashamed of his love, that we hide it like a weakness, that we blush for him as for a friend unworthy to be loved, that we only give him a few semblances of religion, to avoid scandal and impiety, and that we live at the mercy of the world, not daring to give God anything except with its permission. That is the love with which we pretend to deserve eternal rewards.

I have confessed, we will say, very exactly the sins of my past life. I do some reading. I attend Mass modestly, and I pray God sincerely enough. I avoid the great sins. Besides, I do not feel sufficiently touched to leave the world and to have no more dealings with it. Religion is pretty severe, if it refuses such honest natures. All these refinements of devotion go too far, and are more apt to discourage a person than to make him love the good. That is what people say who otherwise seem well intentioned, but it is easy to undeceive them, if they examine things in good faith.

Their mistake comes from their not knowing either God, or themselves. They are jealous of their liberty, and they fear to lose it by giving up themselves too much to devotion. But they ought to consider that they do not belong to themselves. They belong to God. They are God's, who having made them for himself alone, and not for themselves, should lead them as he pleases, with an absolute authority. They are wholly obligated to him unconditionally and unreservedly. We have not even, properly speaking, the right to give ourselves to God, because we have not any right over ourselves. But if we did not give ourselves to God as something which is by its nature all his, we should make a sacrilegious theft, which would reverse the order of nature, and violate the essential law of the creature. So it is not for us to reason about the law which God imposes on us. It is for us to receive it,

adore it, follow it blindly. God knows better than we do what is right for us. If we made the Gospel, perhaps we should be tempted to soften it to adapt it to our weakness, but God did not consult us in making it. He gave it to us all made, and has not left us any hope of salvation except by fulfilling that supreme law, which is the same for all conditions. Heaven and earth shall pass, but that word of life or of death shall never pass. We cannot cut off a word, nor the least letter. Woe to the priests who would dare to diminish its force, to soften it for us! It is not they who have made the law. They are only the simple depositories. So we must not blame them if the Gospel is a severe law. That law is as formidable for them as for the rest of mankind, and even more so for them than for the others, since they are responsible for others and for themselves for its observance. Woe to "the blind who leads another blind. They will both fall," says the Son of God, "into the abyss." Woe to the ignorant priest, either cowardly or a flatterer, who tries to widen the narrow way! The broad way is that which leads to perdition. Then let the pride of man be hushed! He thinks that he is free, and he is not. It is for him to carry the yoke of the law, and to hope that God will give him strength in proportion to the weight of this yoke.

Indeed, he, who has this supreme power over his creature to command him, gives him by his interior grace the spirit to desire and to do what he commands. He makes him love his yoke. He softens it by the interior charm of justice and truth. He sheds his pure delights upon the virtues, and is disgusted with false pleasures. He sustains man against himself, snatches him away from corruption, and makes him strong despite his weakness. O man of little faith! What are you afraid of? Let God act. Abandon yourself to him. You will suffer, but you will suffer with love, peace and consolation. You will fight, but you can carry off the victory, and God himself, after having fought with you, will crown you with his own hand. You will weep, but your tears will be sweet, and God himself will come with satisfaction to dry them. You will not be free any longer to give yourself up to your tyrannic passions, but you will sacrifice your liberty freely, and you will enter into a new liberty unknown to the world, in which you will do nothing except for love.

Moreover, consider what your bondage is in the world. What do you not have to suffer to keep the esteem of these men whom you scorn? What does it not cost you to repress your runaway passions, when they go too far; to satisfy those to whom you want to yield; to hide your troubles; to sustain tiresome good manners? Is this then that liberty of which you make so much, and which it is so hard for you to sacrifice to God? Where is it? Where is it? Show it to me. I see everywhere only vexation, only base and unworthy servitude, only deplorable necessity disguising itself from morning till evening. We refuse ourselves to God, who only wants to save us. We give ourselves up to the world, which only want to tyrannize over us and destroy us. We imagine that we only do as we please in the world, because we feel the enjoyment of the passions, by which we are carried away; but do we consider the frightful disgusts, the deadly boredom, the disillusionings inseparable from the pleasures, the humiliations that we have to endure in the highest places? Outwardly all is smiling. Inwardly all is full of chagrin and anxiety. We think we are free, when we only depend on our emotions: mad error! Is there on earth a state in which we do not depend much more on the whims of others than on our own? All the business of life is fretted by conventionalities, and by the need of pleasing others.

Besides, our emotions are the rudest of all tyrants. If we only half-follow them, we must at all times struggle against them, and never breathe in safety a single moment. They betray. They tear heart. They trample reason and honour beneath their feet. They never say, "It is enough." Even when we should be sure always to conquer them, what a frightful victory! If, on the contrary, you yield to the current, where will it take you? I am afraid to

think. You would not dare to think yourself.

O my God! Preserve me from this tragic bondage which human insolence is not ashamed to call liberty. It is in thee that we are free. It is thy truth which will deliver us. To serve thee is to reign.

But what blindness to fear to advance too far in the love of God! Let us plunge into it. The more we love him, the more we love also all that which he makes us do. It is this love which consoles us in our losses, which softens our crosses for us, which detaches us from all which it is dangerous to love, which preserves us from a thousand poisons, which shows us a benevolent compassion through all the ills which we suffer, which even in death opens for us an eternal glory and happiness. It is this love which changes all our evils to good. How can we fear to fill ourselves too full of it? Are we afraid of being too happy, too freed from ourselves, from the whims of our pride, from the violence of our passions, and from the tyranny of a deceitful world? Why do we delay to throw ourselves with full confidence into the arms of the Father of Mercies and the God of all consolation? He will love us. We shall love him. His love growing will take the place for us of all the rest. He alone will fill our heart, which the world has intoxicated, agitated, distressed, without being ever able to fill it. He will make us only feel contempt for the world which we already feel contempt for. He will take away from us that which makes us unhappy. He will make us do what we are doing every day, simple and reasonable things which we are doing badly, because we are not doing them for him. He will make us do them well, by inspiring us to do them to obey him. All, even the least activities of a simple and ordinary life, will be turned to satisfaction, to merit and to reward. We shall see in peace the approach of death. It will be changed for us into the beginning of life immortal. Very far from divesting us, it will clothe us with all things, as St. Paul said. O, how amiable is religion!

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10

IMITATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Sur l'imitation de Jésus-Christ.

WE MUST imitate Jesus. This is to live as he lived, to think as he thought, to conform ourselves to his image, which is the seal of our sanctification.

What a difference of behaviour! The nothing believes itself something; and the All-Powerful makes himself nothing. I make myself nothing with thee, Lord. I make thee the entire sacrifice of my pride, of the vanity which possesses me up to the present. Help my good intention. Keep from me the occasions of my falling. "Turn my eyes that I see not vanity," that I see only thee, and that I see myself before thee. It will be then that I shall know what I am and what thou art.

Jesus Christ is born in a stable. He has to flee into Egypt. He passes thirty years of his life in the shop of a craftsman. He suffers hunger, thirst, weariness. He is poor, scorned and abject. He teaches the doctrine of heaven, and no one listens to him. All the great and the wise pursue him, take him, and make him suffer frightful torments. They treat him like a slave, make him die between two thieves, after having preferred a thief to him. That was the life that Jesus Christ chose, and we, we have a horror of every sort of humiliation! The slightest contempt is unbearable to us.

Let us compare our life to that of Jesus Christ. Let us remember that he is the master, and that we are the slaves; that he is all-powerful, and that we are only weakness. He lowers himself, and we raise ourselves. Let us accustom ourselves to think so often of our wretchedness, that we may have only contempt for ourselves. Can we with justice feel contempt for others and dwell on their faults, when we are full of them ourselves? Let us commence to walk on the road which Jesus Christ has marked for us, since it is the only one which can lead us to him.

And how can we find Jesus Christ, if we do not seek him in the conditions of his mortal life, that is to say, in solitude, in silence, in poverty and suffering, in persecutions and contumelies, in the cross and in annihilations? The saints find him in heaven, in the splendour of glory and in ineffable joy, but it is after having lived with him on earth in shame, suffering and humiliation. To be Christians is to be imitators of Jesus Christ. In what can we imitate him except in his humiliations? Nothing else can draw us to him as all-powerful, we ought to adore him; as just, we ought to fear him; as good and merciful, we ought to love him with all our strength; as humble, submissive, lowly and faithful unto death, we ought to imitate him.

Let us not pretend to be able to reach this state by our own strength. Everything in us resists it. But let us console ourselves in the presence of God. Jesus Christ has wanted to feel all our weaknesses. He is a compassionate pontiff, who has wanted to be tempted as we are. Let us then find all our strength in him who became voluntarily weak to strengthen us. Let us enrich ourselves by his poverty, and let us say with confidence, "I can do all things in him who strengthens me."

I want to follow, O Jesus, the road which thou has taken! I want to imitate thee; I only can do so by thy grace. O Saviour, lowly and humble, give me the knowledge of true Christians and a feeling of contempt for myself. And may I learn the lesson which is incomprehensible to the human spirit, which is to die to self by mortification and true humility.

Let us put our hand to the work, and let us change this so hard and so rebellious heart into the heart of Jesus Christ. Let us approach the sacred heart of Jesus. May he inspire our own. May he destroy all our repulsions. O good Jesus, who hast suffered so many shames and humiliations for love of me, print respect and love of thee deeply within my heart, and make me desire their practice!

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11

VIOLENCE TO ONESELF

Sur la violence qu'un chrétien se doit faire continuellement.

TO WHOM do you think St. Paul was speaking when he said, "We are fools for Jesus Christ's sake, and you are wise in Christ"? It is to you. It is to me, and it is not to the people who are free of all shame, and who do not know God. Yes, it is to us who believe that we are working for our salvation, and may not flee the folly of the cross, nor seek for ways to seem wise in the eyes of the world. It is to us who do not tremble at the sight of our weakness. Where St. Paul finds himself weak, we find ourselves strong, and we cannot deny that with good intentions we are rather opposed to this great Apostle. This state ought not to seem good to us, so let us reflect on it. And after we have thoroughly gone into it, let us see where we differ from the true servants of God.

Let us be imitators of Jesus Christ by becoming imitators of St. Paul, who gives himself as a model after the first model. No more complacency with the world, no more complacency with ourselves, no more indulgence for our passions, for our senses, and for our spiritual lassitude. It is not in words that the practice of virtue consists. They are not enough with which to reach the kingdom of God. It is in strength and courage, and in the violence which we do to ourselves. Violence in every encounter when we must resist the tides of the world which stop us from doing good, after having made us commit sin so many times. Violence when we must give up something partly necessary in order not to fool ourselves in believing that we have given up the superfluous. Violence when we must mortify ourselves in the spirit after being mortified in the flesh, without believing that God owes us the rest. Violence to augment the hours of prayer, of reading and of retreat. Violence to find ourselves entirely well off in the state in which we are, without hoping for either more comfort or more honour, or more health, or other company, not even that of good people. Finally violence to reach that degree of absolute indifference necessary to a Christian, whose only will is that of God his Creator; who turns over to him the success of all his affairs, although he does not stop working; who acts according to his condition but who acts without uneasiness, who takes pleasure in considering God, and who fears not at all to be considered by him; who hopes that this regard will be for the correcting of his faults, and who remains serene seeing himself at his mercy for the punishment of his sins. This is where I leave you, and where I pray you to stay, that what you and I can do, in the trouble and confusion of the life of the world, may keep us in peace. Great God, can we think that something of the life of Jesus Christ may be known in us? The more we fear to suffer, the more we need to do so.

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12

PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN

Sur l'histoire du pharisien et du publicain: caractère de la justice pharisaïque.

THE PUBLICANS, or tax collectors, were very odious to the Jewish people, who were jealous of their liberty and accustomed to having only God himself or the princes of the nation for King. At the time of Jesus Christ they were subjected to Roman domination, which they endured impatiently. When Jesus Christ talks about a publican, he puts before the eyes of those whom he is teaching the most profane and shocking person there is. Thus it comes that Jesus Christ places women of doubtful virtue and publicans together.

As for the Pharisees, they were a sect of reformers, who scrupulously carried out every fine point to the letter of the law. Their life was exemplary and dazzling in outward virtues, but they were very grand, haughty, jealous of the first places and of authority, full of themselves and of their good works, disdainful and critical of others, in short, blinded by confidence in their own righteousness.

Jesus Christ tells a story presenting these two characters to show how the Pharisee is farther from the true kingdom of God than the publican, who is burdened with sin. The publican is sorry for his vices. The Pharisee tells his virtues. The publican does not dare to ask for blessings. The Pharisee boasts smugly of those which he has received. God declares himself for the publican. He prefers the humble sinner confounded at the sight of his wretchedness, and who draws his own glory from God's gifts. To take to oneself the gifts of God, is to turn them against God himself in order to flatter one's own pride. O gifts of God! How formidable you are to a soul

who seeks them for itself! It turns to poison the food of eternal life. Everything which ought to make it die to the life of Adam serves only to support that life. We feed our self-love with good works and austerity. We go over our mortifications with ourselves secretly, our victories over our own tastes, our righteous deeds, our patience, humility and detachment. We think we are seeking spiritual consolation in all these things, and we are seeking in them a helpful witness to our own righteousness. We want always to be in condition to tell ourselves whatever good we are doing.

When this inner witness goes, we are desolate, troubled, dismayed. We think that all is lost. This witness by sensation is the support of beginners. It is the milk of tender new-born souls. They have to suck a long time. It would be dangerous to wean them. It is for God alone to withdraw this enjoyment little by little, and to substitute for it the bread of the strong. But when a soul, long instructed and trained in the gift of faith, begins to feel no longer this sweet and consoling witness, it should remain serene in the trial, and not torment itself by dwelling on what God is taking away from it. Then it must harden itself against itself, and it must be content, like the publican, to show its wretchedness to God, hardly daring to raise its eyes toward him. It is in this state that God purifies the soul all the more because he hides from it the sight of its purity.

The soul is so infected with self-love, that it is always soiling itself a little by the sight of its goodness. It always takes something for itself. It gives thanks to God, but nevertheless it knows itself to be a person specially favoured by heavenly gifts. This way of appropriating graces to oneself is very subtle and imperceptible in certain souls which appear righteous and simple. They do not themselves see the theft which they are making. This theft is so much the worse, because it steals the purest blessing, and consequently excites the jealousy of God more. Such souls only stop appropriating their own virtues when they stop seeing them, and when everything seems to escape them. Then they cry out, Like St. Peter when he was sinking in the water, "Save us, Lord; we perish!" They are finding nothing more in themselves. Everything fails them. There is nothing in their hearts but condemnation, horror and hatred of themselves, sacrifice and abandon. In losing thus that self-centered Pharisaic righteousness, they hardly the true righteousness of Jesus Christ, which they consider their own.

This righteousness of the Pharisee is far more common than we think. The first fault of that justice is that the Pharisee placed it entirely in his works, sticking strictly to the rigour of the letter of the law, observing it from point to point without seeking its spirit. That is precisely what many Christians do. They fast. They give alms. They frequent the sacraments. They attend the offices of the church. They even pray, without love for God, without detachment from the world, without charity, without humility, without renunciation of self. They are content if they have before them a certain number of good works regularly done. That is to be a Pharisee.

The second fault of Pharisaic righteousness is the one which we have already noticed. It is that we want to support this righteousness by our own strength. What makes this so comfortable, is that it gives a great support to nature. We take a great pleasure in seeing ourselves righteous, in feeling ourselves strong, in admitting to ourselves in our goodness, as a vain woman is pleased to consider her beauty in a mirror. Our devotion to this contemplation of our virtues tarnishes them, feeds our self-love, and stops us from detaching us from ourselves. Thence it comes that so many souls, otherwise righteous and full of good desires, only revolve around themselves, without ever advancing toward God. Under pretext of wanting to keep this witness within, they are always complacently occupied with themselves. They fear as much to lose sight of themselves, as others would fear to stray from

God. They want always to see a certain build-up of virtues put together in their own fashion. They want always to enjoy the pleasure of being agreeable to God. Thus they only feed themselves on a pleasure which softens them, and on superficial virtues which fill them with themselves.

They should empty themselves, and not fill themselves; harden themselves against themselves, and not accustom themselves to that exquisite experience which often has nothing solid about it. That tenderness is for them what the milk of a nurse would be for a robust man of thirty. Such food would weaken and lessen the soul instead of strengthening it. Moreover, these souls too dependent on joyful experience and on inner peace, are in danger of losing all in the first storm to arise. They cling only to the gift they can feel. When the felt gift is withdrawn, all fails without support. They are discouraged as soon as God tries them. They make no difference between the experience of joy and God. Thus it comes that, when this joy escapes, they decide that God is abandoning them. They are the blind who give up prayer, as St. Theresa said, when prayer begins to be purified by trials, and to become fruitful. A soul which sees the dry bread of tribulation, which finds itself empty of all good, which constantly sees its poverty, its unworthiness and its corruption, which never stops seeking for God, although God rebuffs it, which seeks him alone for love of him, without seeking itself in God, is far above a soul which wants to see its perfection, which worries lest it lose sight of it, and which wants God always to assure it by new endearments.

Let us follow God by the dim way of pure faith. Let us lose sight of all which he wants to hide from us. Let us walk, like Abraham, without knowing where our steps are taking us. Let us count only on our wretchedness and the mercy of God. Only let us go straight. Let us be simple, faithful, never hesitating to sacrifice all to God. But let us be very careful not to rely on our own works, our own sentiments, or our virtues. Let us go always toward God, without stopping a moment to return to ourselves with complacency or with uneasiness. Let us abandon to him all that concerns us, and let us think of glorifying him without ceasing every moment of our life.

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13

TRUE LIBERTY

En quoi consiste la vraie liberté des enfants de Dieu: moyens de l'acquérir.

I BELIEVE that liberty of the spirit should have simplicity. When we are not disturbed by restless reversions to self, we begin to be free with true freedom. On the contrary, false wisdom, which is always tense, always self-centred, always jealous of its own perfections suffers a sharp pain every time that it sees the least stain upon itself.

It is not that the simple self-detached man does not work for his perfection. He works so much the more as he forgets himself more, and as he only thinks of his virtues to accomplish the will of God. The fault in us which is the source of all the others, is ourselves, to which we relate everything instead of relating it to God. Thus whoever works to let go of himself, to forget himself, to renounce himself, following the precepts of Jesus Christ, cuts at one blow the root of all his vices, and finds in the simplest renunciation of himself the seed of all virtues. Then we hear, and we experience within ourselves, the profound truth of that word of Scripture, "Where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." We neglect nothing to make God reign in us as well as without. But we are at peace in the midst of the humiliation caused by our faults. We would rather die than commit the least

fault voluntarily, but we are not afraid of the judgement of men for the sake of our own reputation. At least, if we fear them, it is in order not to shock them. Otherwise, we devote ourselves to the dishonour of Jesus Christ, and we do not worry as to what will happen next. As to the judgements of God, we yield ourselves to them according to the different degrees of confidence, sacrifice or elimination of self of which we are capable. The more we give ourselves up, the more we find peace, and this peace so enlarges our hearts, that we are ready for everything. We desire all, and we desire nothing. We are as simple as little children.

The light of God makes us feel even our least faults, but it does not discourage us. We go forward with him, but if we stumble we hasten to resume our way, and we think only of advancing. O, how happy is this simplicity! But how few, people have the courage never to look behind them! Like Lot's wife, they draw the curse of God on themselves by these restless returns of a jealous and fastidious self-love.

We must lose ourselves if we want to find ourselves again in God. It is to the little ones that Jesus Christ declares his kingdom belongs. Do not reason too much. Go to happiness by aright intention in ordinary things, drop the thousand reflections by which we envelop ourselves and sink ourselves in ourselves, under the pretext of correcting ourselves. That is by and large the way of true freedom without neglecting our duties.

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14

DRYNESS AND DISTRACTION

Sur la sécheresse et les distractions qui arrivent dans l'oraison.

WE ARE tempted to believe that we are no longer praying to God, when we stop finding joy in prayer. To undeceive ourselves, we must realize that perfect prayer and love of God are the same thing. Prayer then is neither a sweet sensation, nor the enchantment of an excited imagination, nor the light of the mind which easily discovers sublime truths in God, nor even a certain comfort in the sight of God. All these things are the exterior gifts, without which love can exist so much the more purely because, being deprived of these things which are only the gifts of God, we will devote ourselves more singly and immediately to himself. That is the love of pure faith, which torments human nature, because it does not leave it any support. It believes that all is lost, and it is thus that all is gained.

Pure love is only in singleness of will. Thus it is not a love of sentiment, because imagination has no part in it. It is a love which loves without feeling, as pure faith believes without seeing. We need not fear that this love may be imaginary, because nothing is less so than the will detached from all imagination. The more the action is purely intellectual and spiritual, the more it is not only reality, but the very perfection for which God asks. Thus the activity in it is the more perfect. At the same time faith exists there, and humility protects it. So the love is chaste because it is God in himself and for himself. It is no longer that he makes us feel to what we are attached. We follow him but not for the many loaves. "What !" we will say, "Does all piety consist only in a will to unite self with God, which may be rather a thought and an imagining than an effective willing?" If this will is not sustained by faithfulness in important things, I believe that it is not true. For the good tree carries good fruit, and this will ought to make us careful to accomplish the will of God. But it is compatible in this life with small weaknesses which God leaves in the soul to humiliate it. If

then we only experience these daily weaknesses, we must pick the fruit of humiliation, without losing courage.

But indeed true virtue and pure love do not exist except in the will alone. Is it not much always to desire the supreme good when we see it, to turn our attention toward it again as soon as we see that we have been deflected from it, never to want anything deliberately except according to its order, and finally, to live submissive to the spirit of sacrifice and abandon to it, when we have no more feeling of consolation? Do you count as nothing doing away with all uneasy reflections of self-love, walking always without seeing where you are going and without stopping? Never thinking voluntarily of self, or at least only thinking of it as we should think of another person, in order to fulfil a duty of Providence in the present moment, without seeing farther? Is it not this which kills the old man, rather than beautiful reflection in which we still are busy with self because of self-love? This rather than many outward works by which we mark for ourselves our own advancement?

It is a kind of infidelity to the leading of pure faith that we want always to be sure that we are doing well. It is wanting to know what we are doing, which we shall never know, and to which God wants us to pay no attention. It is to enjoy the way by thinking about the way itself. The surest and shortest way is to renounce self, to forget self, to abandon self, and not to think any longer of self except by faithfulness to God. All religion consists only in leaving self and its love of self, to reach toward God.

As for involuntary distractions, they do not disturb love at all, since it exists in the will, and the will never has distractions when it does not want to have them. When we notice them, we let them fall, and we turn again to God. Thus, while the outer senses of the bride are slumbering, her heart watches, her love does not relax. A tender father does not always think distinctly of his son. A thousand objects take away his imagination and his mind. But these distractions never interrupt the paternal love. Whenever his son returns to his mind, he loves him, and he feels in the depths of his heart that he has not stopped loving him for a single moment, although he has stopped thinking of him. Such should be our love for our heavenly father, a simple love, without suspicion and without uneasiness.

If the imagination wanders, if the thoughts are carried away, let us not be troubled. All these qualities are not the true man of our heart, "the hidden man," of whom St. Paul asks, "Who is in the incorruptibility of a modest and serene spirit?" We have only to make good use of our free thoughts, by turning them always toward the presence of the well-beloved without worrying about the others. It is for God to increase, when it pleases him, this ability to keep the experience, of his presence. Often he takes it away from us to advance us, because this ability beguiles us with too much reflection. These reflections are the true distractions, which interrupt the simple and direct consideration of God, and which thus draw us back from the twilight of pure faith.

We often seek a rest for our love of self in these reflections, and comfort in the evidence we want to give ourselves. Thus we are distracted by this ardent feeling, and on the contrary, we never pray so purely as when we are tempted to believe that we never pray. Then we fear to pray badly. But we should only fear to let ourselves yield to the torment of our weak nature, to philosophic infidelity, which always seeks to show itself its own accomplishments in the faith, indeed to the impatient desire to see and to feel in order to reassure ourselves.

There is no more bitter penitence than this state of pure faith without any feeling of support. Therefore I believe that it is the most effective, the most crucifying penitence and the one most exempt from all illusion. Strange temptation! We seek impatiently for consolation that we can feel, for fear that we are not sufficiently penitent. Why do we not take as penitence the giving up of the consolation which we are tempted to seek? Indeed, we must remind ourselves again of Jesus Christ, whom his Father abandoned on the cross. God withdraws all feeling and all reflection to hide himself from Jesus Christ. That was the last blow from the hand of God which smote the man of sorrows. That was the consummation of the sacrifice. We never so need to abandon ourselves to God as when he seems to abandon us. So let us take light and consolation when he gives them, but without becoming attached to them. When he plunges us into the night of pure faith, then let us go into this night, and let us lovingly suffer this agony. One moment is worth a thousand in this tribulation. We are troubled, and we are at peace. Not only God hides himself, but he hides us from ourselves, so that all may be on faith. We feel discouraged, and meanwhile we have a firm will which desires all that God desires of hardship. We wish all. We accept all, even the trials by which we are tested. Thus we are secretly in peace because of this will, which keeps reserve strength in the depths of its soul to endure the war. Blessed be God, who has done such great things in us in spite of our unworthiness!

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15

NOT TO BE DISCOURAGED BY FAULTS

Avis à une dame de la cour. Ne point s'étonner ni se décourager à la vue de ses défauts ni des défauts d'autrui.

WE HAVE not sufficiently plumbed the wretchedness of man in general, nor our own in particular, when we are still surprised at the weakness and corruption of man. If we did not expect any good of man, no evil would astonish us. Thus astonishment comes from the mistake of having thought all humanity worth something, when it is nothing and worse than nothing. The tree should not be surprised when it bears fruit. But we should wonder at Jesus Christ, in whom we have our being, as St. Paul said, when our wild stocks bear in him, instead of bitter fruit, the sweetest fruits of virtue.

Disabuse yourself of all human virtue, which is poisoned by smugness and self-confidence. "He who is high in the eyes of man, says Holy Spirit, "is an abomination before God."

There is an interior idolatry in every moment of life. This idolatry, though covered with the lustre of virtues, is more horrible than many other sins which we think more outrageous. There is only one truth, and only one way to judge it, which is to judge it as God himself. Before God, monstrous crimes, committed by weakness, by passion or by ignorance, are less crimes than are the virtues which a soul full of itself practices in order to relate everything to its own excellence, as though it alone were divine. For this is the total reversal of God's whole design for creation. Let us cease then to judge virtues and vices by our own taste, which self-love has made depraved, and by our false standards of greatness. There is no one great except he who makes himself very small before the unique and supreme greatness. You become great by the turning of your heart, and by your habit of turning it. But God wants to abase you and to make you small in his hand. Let him do this.

A for the people who seek God, they are full of misery. Not that God

authorizes their imperfections, but because their imperfections stop them, and keep them from going to God the shortest way. They cannot go fast, because they are too over-burdened with themselves and with all the vast apparatus of superfluities, which they take along with them with so much eagerness and Jealousy. Some think that they go directly, while always using little detours to reach their objectives, which seem to them permissible. Others ignore their own heart, to the point of imagining that they no longer keep anything, although they still keep everything, and the least interest or interference overcomes them. They flatter themselves over their reasoning, in the time that they think they are weighing that of others in the weights of the sanctuary; and thus they become unjust, while only talking of justice and of good faith.

They warn themselves against the people of whom they are jealous. The jealousy, hidden in the innermost folds of their heart, exaggerates the least faults. They are full of it; they cannot be silent; they go off in spite of themselves to dwell on their disgust and contempt. Thence come the disguised criticisms, and the ill turns which they do, without realizing that they do so. The heart, contracted by selfish interest, deceives itself in order to permit what suits it. It is weak, uncertain, timid, ready to cringe, to flatter, in order to get things. It is so wrapped up in itself, that it has no time, nor thought nor feeling left for its neighbour. From time to time the fear of God disturbs its false peace, and makes it give itself to others. But it only does so by fear and in spite of itself. It is a strange impulse, passing and violent. They soon fall back to the depths of their own selves, where they become again their all and their own gods. Everything for self or for what is related to self, and the rest of the whole world is nothing. They do not want to be ambitious, nor avaricious, nor unfair, nor treacherous, but it is not love which steadies and continues all the virtues in opposition to these vices. It is, on the contrary, a strange fear which comes unevenly, and which holds off all those vices which go with a soul devoted to itself.

This is what I complain of most. This is what makes me so desire a piety of pure faith and of complete death, which takes the soul away from itself without any hope of returning. We find this perfection too lofty and impracticable. O, well, let us fall back then into the self-love which fears God, and which goes on ever falling and getting up again weakly to the end of life. While we ourselves so much, we cannot but be full of misery. We make a better appearance than the others when we are more glorious and more exquisite in that glory, but these outer appearances have no true support. It is devotion mixed with self-love which infects us. It is that which scandalizes society, and which even God vomits. When shall we throw it up too, and when shall we get at the source of the trouble?

When we push piety to that point, people are frightened, and find that it is going too far. If devotion does not go that far, it is weak, jealous, hypersensitive, self-centred. Few people have enough courage and faithfulness to lose themselves, to forget themselves, and to annihilate themselves. Consequently, few people give piety all the honour which is its due.

There are faults of haste and frailty, which you indeed understand are not incompatible with a sincere piety, but you do not understand clearly enough that other faults, which come from weakness, illusion, self-interest and habit, are compatible with a real intention to please God. Of course, this intention is not pure enough or strong enough, but however feeble and imperfect, it is sincere within its limits. We are avaricious, but we do not see our avarice. It is concealed by special reasons.

It is called good planning, guarding against loss, anticipation of needs. We are envious, but we do not feel this low and wicked passion which

is hidden in us. It would not dare to appear, because it would cover us with confusion. It is disguised, and sometimes indeed deceives the person tormented with it, more than the others who dissect it with critical eyes. We are sharp, oversensitive, difficult, hard to get along with. It is self-interest which causes all this, but the self-interest screens itself with a hundred fine reasons. Listen to it. You will never get to the end. You will have to assure it that it is doing no wrong. Finally, people of goodwill, and you like the rest, are full of faults mingled with their goodwill, because their will, although good, is still weak, divided, and held back by the secret expedients of self-love.

Even your strong feeling about the faults of others is a great fault. This disdain of the wretchedness of others is a wretchedness which does not recognize itself enough. It is an arrogance which raises itself above the low estate of mankind, while to see clearly, it should look from ground level. My God! When will you have nothing more to see either in yourself or in others? God, all good. The creature, all evil. Besides, the passing impressions which you get are too strong. You jump to conclusions on different occasions, instead of being able coolly to take certain fair attitudes which would be constant, which would apply to all special situations, which would give you a pass-key to all specific things, and which would hardly be subject to change.

You fear to fall into contempt of all mankind. In a sense I could wish that you would feel contempt for it all, for it is contemptible. Only God's light, growing, can give you that penetration of the abyss of evil which is in every man. But in recognizing the depths of all this evil, we must also recognize the good which God mingles with it. It is this mixture of good and evil which it is hard for us to be persuaded of. It is the good and bad grain which the enemy has put together. The servants want to separate it, but the father of the family cries, "Let it grow together until the harvest."

The main thing is not to be discouraged at the sight of so sad a spectacle, and not to push distrust too far. People who are naturally open and trusting withdraw and become suspicious more than others, when they are rebuffed by experience from having been confiding and frank. They are like the cowards who in desperation become more than valiant.

You have plenty to guard against there, because, besides the fact that your position sees a continual parade of all the miseries of the whole human race, also envy, jealousy, rash judgements and the malice of shady practices poison any number of innocent things, exaggerate pitilessly many slight faults. All this rolls up to attack your patience, your confidence and your charity, which grows weary of it. But hold on. God has kept for himself true servants. If they do not do everything, they do a lot compared to the rest of the corrupt world, and considering their natures. They realize their faults. They are ashamed of them. They blame them. They correct them slowly in truth, but in the end they do correct them. They praise God for what they do. They blame themselves for what they do not do. God is satisfied with them. Be satisfied with them too.

If you find, as I find, that God should be better served, aspire no limits and beyond measure to this worship in truth, in which there remains nothing in the creature for itself, and when all returning is dismissed as an infidelity and a selfish interest. O, if you were in this happy state, far from impatiently enduring those who are not, the immense stretch of your heart would make you indulgent and compassionate toward all the weaknesses which shrink selfish hearts. The more perfect we are, the more we get along with imperfection. The Pharisees could not bear the publicans and the women sinners, whom Jesus Christ treated with such gentleness and kindness. When we no longer have any concern for self, we enter into that greatness of God,

which nothing wearies nor rebuffs. When will you be in this liberty and largeness of heart? The fastidiousness, the sensibility, which we think comes from an exquisite love of virtue, comes far more from lack of breadth and from being shut up in ourselves. Whoever is no longer out for himself, is, in God, all out for his neighbour. Whoever is still for himself is not for either God nor his neighbour to any extent, but limited according to the attachment which he still has to himself. May peace, truth, simplicity, liberty, pure faith, disinterested love, completely consume the last vestige of self in you!

* * * *

16

ABANDONMENT TO GOD

Obligation de s'abandonner à Dieu sans réserve.

SALVATION does not depend only on the doing of no evil. To that must be added the doing of good. The kingdom of heaven is too great a prize to be given to a slavish fear which only refrains from sin because it does not dare commit any. God wants children who love his goodness, and not slaves who only serve him for fear of his power. So we must love him, and consequently do all which inspires true love.

Plenty of people, who otherwise seem well intentioned, are mistaken about this. But it is easy to undeceive them if they want to go into the matter in good faith. Their mistake comes from not knowing either God or themselves. They are jealous of their liberty, and they fear to lose it by yielding too much to piety. But they ought to realize that "they do not belong to themselves." They belong to God, who, having made them for himself alone, and not for themselves, ought to lead them as he pleases with an absolute authority. They ought to belong entirely to him, without condition and without reservations. We have not even, properly speaking, the right to give ourselves to God, because we have not any right over ourselves. But if we did not yield ourselves to God as a thing which is of its nature wholly his, we should commit a sacrilegious theft, which would reverse the order of nature, and which would violate the essential law of the creature.

So it is not for us to reason about the law which God imposes upon us. It is for us to receive it, adore it, follow it blindly. God knows better than we do what is right for us. If we were making the Gospel, perhaps we should be tempted to water it down to accommodate our own weakness. But God did not consult us when he made it. He gave it to us ready made, and leaves us no hope of salvation except by fulfilling this supreme law, which is the same under all conditions. "Heaven and earth shall pass, but the word" of life or of death "shall never pass."

We cannot deduct one word or the least letter. Woe to the priests who would dare lessen its force in order to soften it for us. It is not they who made this law. They are only the simple keepers of it. It is not their responsibility that the Gospel is a severe law. This law is as formidable for them as for the rest of mankind, and still more for them than for the others, because they will answer, both for themselves and for others for the keeping of the law. Woe to the blind man who leads another blind man! Both will fall," as the Son of God said, "over the precipice." Woe to the priest who is ignorant, or weak and flattering, who wants to widen the narrow way! "The wide way is that which leads to perdition."

Then let the pride of man be stilled. He thinks he is free, and he is not. It is for him to carry the yoke of the law, and to hope that God will

give him strength in proportion to this yoke. Indeed, he who has this supreme power of command over his creature, gives him, by his grace within, the will to do what he commands.

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17

JOY OF ABANDONMENT TO GOD

Bonheur de l'ame qui se donne entièrement a Dieu. Combien l'amour de Dieu adoucit tous les sacrifices. Aveuglement des hommes qui préfèrent les biens du temps a ceux de l'éternité.

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION is not so severe, tiresome and constraining, as we think. It asks us to be God's from the bottom of our hearts. And since we thus are God's, everything that we do for him is easy. Those who are God's are always glad, when they are not divided, because they only want what God wants, and want to do for him all that he wishes. They divest themselves of everything, and in this divesting find a hundredfold return. Peace of conscience, liberty of heart, the sweetness of abandoning ourselves in the hands of God, the joy of always seeing the light grow in our hearts, finally, freedom from the fears and insatiable desires of the times, multiply a hundredfold the happiness which the true children of God possess in the midst of their crosses, if they are faithful.

They sacrifice themselves, but to what they love most. They suffer, but they want to suffer, and they prefer the suffering to every false joy. Their bodies endure sharp pain, their imagination is troubled, their spirit droops in weakness and exhaustion, but their will is firm and quiet in their deepest and most intimate self, and it constantly says, "Amen," to all the blows with which God strikes it to sacrifice it.

What God asks of us is a will which is no longer divided between him and any creature. It is a will pliant in his hands, which neither seeks nor rejects anything, which wants without reserve whatever he wants, and which never wants under any pretext anything which he does not want. When we are in this disposition, all is well, and the most idle amusements turn to good works.

Happy the man who gives himself to God! He is delivered from his passions, from the judgements of men, from their malice, from the tyranny of their sayings, from their cold and wretched mocking, from the misfortunes which the world distributes to wealth, from the unfaithfulness and inconstancy of friends, from the wiles and snares of enemies, from our own weakness, from misery and the brevity of life, from the horrors of a profane death, from the cruel remorse attached to wicked pleasures, and in the end from the eternal condemnation of God. He is delivered from this countless mass of evils, because, placing his will entirely in the hands of God, he wants only what God wants, and thus he finds his consolation in faith, and consequently hope in the midst of all his sufferings. What weakness it would be then to fear to give ourselves to God, and to undertake too soon so desirable a state!

Happy are they who throw themselves with bowed head and closed eyes into the arms of the "Father of mercies," and the "God of all consolation," as St. Paul said! Then we desire nothing so much as to know what we owe to God, and we fear nothing more than not to see enough what he is asking for.

As soon as we discover a new insight into our faith, we are transported with joy, like a miser who has found a treasure. The true Christian, whatever

the misfortunes which Providence heaps upon him, wants whatever comes, and does not wish for anything which he does not have. The more he loves God, the more he is content. The highest perfection, instead of overloading him, makes his yoke lighter.

What folly to fear to be too entirely God's! It is to fear to be too happy. It is to fear to love God's will in all things. It is to fear to have too much courage in the crosses which are inevitable, too much comfort in God's love, and too much detachment from the passions which make us miserable.

So let us scorn earthly things, to be wholly God's. I am not saying that we should leave them absolutely, because, when we are already living an honest and regulated life, we only need to change our heart's depth in loving, and we shall do nearly the same things which we were doing. For God does not reverse the conditions of men, nor the responsibilities which he himself has given them, but we, to serve God, do what we were doing to serve and please the world, and to satisfy ourselves. There would be only this difference, that instead of being devoured by our pride, by our overbearing passions and by the malicious criticism of the world, we shall act instead with liberty, courage and hope in God. Confidence will animate us. The expectation of the eternal good things which are drawing near, while those here below are escaping us, will support us in the midst of our suffering. The love of God, which will make us conscious of his for us, will give us wings to fly on his way, and to raise us above all our troubles. If we have a hard time believing this, experience will convince us. "Come, see and taste," said David, "how sweet is the Lord."

Jesus Christ said to all Christians without exception, "Let him who would be my disciple carry his cross, and follow me." The broad way leads to perdition. We must follow the narrow way which few enter. Only those who destroy themselves deserve the kingdom of heaven. We must be born again, renounce ourselves, hate ourselves, become a child, be poor in spirit, weep to be comforted, and not be of the world, which is cursed because of its scandals. These truths frighten many people, and this is because they only know what religion exacts, without knowing what it offers, and they ignore the spirit of love which makes everything easy. They do not know that it leads to the highest perfection, by a feeling of peace and love which sweetens all the struggle.

Those who are wholly God's are always happy. They know by experience that the yoke of the Lord is "easy and light," that we find in him "rest for the soul," and that he comforts those who weary and overburdened, as he himself has said. But woe unto those weak and timid souls who are divided between God and the world! They want and they do not want. They are torn by passion and remorse at the same time. They fear the judgements of God and those of men. They have a horror of evil and a shame good. They have the pains of virtue without tasting its consolation. O, how wretched they are! Ah, if they had a little courage to despise the empty talk, the cold mockings, and the rash criticism of men, what peace they would enjoy in the bosom of God!

How dangerous it is for our salvation, how unworthy of God and of ourselves, how pernicious even for the peace of our hearts, to want always to stay where we are! Our whole life was only given us to advance us by great strides toward our heavenly country. The world escapes like a delusive shadow. Eternity already advances to receive us. Why do we delay to advance while the light of the Father of mercies shines for us? Let us hasten to reach the kingdom of God.

The one commandment suffices to blow away in a moment all the excuses

which we could make for having reservations from God. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind and with all thy strength." See how the terms were joined together by Holy Spirit, to prevent all the reservations which man could wish to make to the prejudice of this jealous and dominant love. All is not too much for him. He suffers no division, and he allows us no longer to love outside of God, except what God himself commands us to love for love of him. We must love him not only with all the stretch and all the strength of our hearts, but also with all, the concentration of our thought. How then could we believe that we love him, if we cannot resolve to think on his law, and to bend all our energy to doing his will?

Those who fear to see too clearly what this love asks fool themselves by thinking that they have this watchful and devoted love. There is only one way to love God, that is not to take one step without him, and to follow with a brave heart wherever he leads. All those who live in denial, and yet would like very much to keep a little in with the world, run great risk of being among the lukewarm who they say will be "vomited up."

God has little patience with those weak souls who say to themselves, "I shall go this far and no farther." Is it up to the creature to make the law for his Creator? What would a king say of a subject, or a master of his servant, who only served him in his own way, who feared to care too much for his interests, and who was embarrassed in public because of belonging to him? Still more what will the King of Kings say, if we act like these cowardly servants?

We must learn not only God's will in general but even what his will is in each thing, what will please him further and what is the most perfect. We are only truly reasonable in so far as we consult God's will, to make ours conform to it. This is the true light which we should follow. Every other light is false. It is an illusory light and not a true one. Blind are all they who think themselves wise, and who are not so in the wisdom of Jesus Christ, which alone deserves the name of wisdom!

They run in a black night after phantoms. They are like those in a dream who expect to be awakened, and who imagine that all the dream pictures are real. Thus are beguiled all the great of the earth, the wise of the age, all men enchanted by false pleasures. It is only the children of God who walk in the ray of pure truth. What have men, filled with their vain and ambitious thoughts, before them? Often disgrace, always death, the judgement of God, and eternity. Such are the great things which draw near and come to meet these profane men. Meanwhile they do not see them. Their policy foresees everything, except the overthrow and inevitable annihilation of all that they seek. O blind! When will you open your eyes to the light of Jesus Christ, who would disclose to you the nothingness of every grandeur here below?

They feel that they are not happy, and they hope to find how to become so by the very things which make them miserable. What they do not have grieves them. What they have cannot make up for it. Their troubles are real. Their joys are brief, empty and embittered. They cost them more than they are worth. Their whole life is a vivid and continual sense of confusion. Eternal judgement hangs already over their heads. Their false joys become changed to tears and wailing which will never end. Their life is like a shadow which is going to disappear, or more like a flower which opens in the morning, but which is by evening blighted, withered and trodden under foot.

What has become of them, these mad worldlings? We have seen them, at the moment of death, overcome, dejected, trembling and discouraged. They admit the illusion in which they have lived, and they deplore their mistake.

They often even pass from one extreme to the other, and having been without respect for religion, become fearful and superstitious. Is it not horrible that men are willing to risk eternity rather than to interfere with their evil inclinations?

However, nothing is more usual. Show them as much as you please the emptiness and nothingness of the creature. Make them consider the brevity and uncertainty of life, the inconstancy of fortune, the unfaithfulness of friends, the illusion of great positions the bitterness which is inevitable there, the discontent of the great, the disappointment of all the greatest hopes, the emptiness of all the good things we possess, the reality of all the evils we suffer. All this moralizing, true as it is, only skims the surface of their hearts. They touch them only superficially. The depths of the man are not changed at all. He sighs to see himself a slave of vanity, and does not leave his bondage.

Then what must he do to get out of this pitiable state? He must pray, so that God may wholly enlighten him. First he will know the abyss of good, which is God, and the abyss of evil and of nothing, which is the corrupt creature. Then he will despise himself and hate himself. He will quit himself, fear himself, renounce himself. He will abandon himself to God. He will lose himself in him. Happy loss, since he will thus find himself without seeking! He will have no more self-interest, and everything will turn to good. For everything turns to good for those who love God, and who are fired by this spirit. Those who have not this good spirit are very unfortunate not to have it: he who has lost it, or no longer asks for it, or he who asks for it in the wrong way. It is not by our lips or by our outer actions, it is by the heart's desire, and by a profound humbling of self before God, that we attract within us this spirit of life, without which the best actions are lifeless.

God is so good that he only awaits our desire to overwhelm us with this gift which is himself. The cry, he says in the Scriptures, will not yet be formed in your mouth, when I, who will see it before it is born in your heart, I will grant it before it is made. Thus it is our heart's prayer that God usually grants. We choose some mystery or some great truth of religion, on which we should meditate in profound silence, and after being convinced of it, we must apply it to ourselves, make our resolutions before God, in relation to our duties and our faults, ask him to inspire us to accomplish what he gives us the courage to promise him.

When we see during the prayer that our minds wander, we have only to bring them back quietly, without ever being discouraged by the annoyance of these so stubborn distractions. While they are involuntary, they can do no harm. On the contrary, they will help us more than a prayer accompanied by ardent feeling, because they humiliate us, mortify us and accustom us to seek God purely for himself, without the mingling of any pleasure.

But beside these prayers for which we ought to reserve special times, because our occupations, however necessary they are, never go to the point of not allowing us time to eat our daily bread, we must, I say, beside these regular prayers, accustom ourselves to short, simple and frequent liftings of the heart to God. A word of a psalm, or of the Gospel, or of Scripture, which is apt to touch us, suffices for this. We can lift our hearts in this way in the midst of the people who are with us, without anyone noticing it.

They usually do more good than prayers following a certain subject. It is good, for instance, to make a resolution to make the brief in the morning as well as in the afternoon, to think of God every time we see certain things or certain people, to anticipate our actions, and to go over them. This is

the true way to act in the presence of God, and to become familiar with it, and this presence is the real way to come to despise the world.

For it is in seeing God that we see the nothingness of the world, which will vanish in a little while like smoke. All the grandeurs, and their paraphernalia, will flee away like a dream. All height will be brought low, all power will be crushed, every superb head will be bowed beneath the weight of the eternal majesty of God. In the day when he will judge men, he will obliterate with one look all that shines in the present night, as the sun, in rising, puts out the stars. We shall see only God everywhere, so great will he be. We shall seek in vain, we shall find only him, so shall he fill all things. "Where have they gone," we shall say, "those things which have charmed our hearts? What is left of them? Where were they?" Alas, not even the marks of the place where they have been remain. They have passed like a shadow which the sun dissolves. It is hardly true to say that they have been, it is so true to say that they have only appeared, and that they are no more.

But if the world were not to end, what you have done will leave you. A little sooner or a little later, what difference does it make? Yet a few years, which will flow away swiftly like water, which will disappear like a dream, youth will be passed, the world will turn to another side. It will scorn in disgust those who have not known enough in time to despise it. The time draws near. It comes. It is here. Let us hasten to be ready for it. Let us love the eternal beauty, which does not grow old, and which stops those from growing old who love it only. Let us despise this world which is falling already in ruin on every side. Do we not see for how many years people who were in the same places, surprised by death, have fallen into the hungry abyss of eternity? Seemingly a new world has been built upon the one which we have known. Short as our lives are, we must seek other friends, after having lost the old ones. It is not the same family in which we were brought up. Other unknown relatives come to take the places. We even see a whole court disappear. Others are in the place of those whom we admired. They come to dazzle in their turn.

What has become of the great actors who filled the scene thirty years ago? But, without going so far, how many of them have died in the last seven or eight years? Soon we shall follow them. Is this then the world to which we are so devoted? We only pass through it. We are on our way out. It itself is misery, vanity, folly. It is only a phantom, a passing figure, as St. Paul said.

O world, so frail and so mad! Is it you in which we are made to believe? With what boldness do you hope to impose on us, vain and fantastic form which passes and disappears? You are only a dream, and you want us to believe in you! We even feel in possessing you, that you are nothing real to fill our hearts. Are you not ashamed to give magnificent names to the showy miseries by which you dazzle those who are attached to you? The moment you offer yourself to us with a smiling face, you cause us a thousand pains. The same moment you are going to disappear, and you dare promise to make us happy? Happy only is he who sees his nothingness in the light of Jesus Christ!

But what is terrible, is that thousands of people blind themselves, fleeing the light which shows them their nothingness, and which condemns their dark deeds. As they want to live like beasts, they do not want to know any other life than that of beasts, and they degrade themselves, to stifle all decency and all remorse. They mock those who think seriously of eternity. They treat as weakness the religious feeling by which we wish to avoid being ungrateful to God, from whom we receive all. Relations with such men should be avoided, and we should flee them carefully. It is important to break without delay with these people whom we know to be dangerous. The more we are

exposed to them, the more we ought to watch over ourselves, redouble our efforts, be faithful in the reading of books of devotion, in prayer and in frequent use of the sacraments, without which we weaken, exposed to every temptation.

It is certain that when we ask God, in the "Our Father," for our daily bread, meaning for every day, we are asking for the Eucharist. Why then do we not eat every day, or at least very often, this daily bread? To make us worthy of it let us accustom ourselves, little by little to conquer ourselves, to practise virtue, to turn to God in simple, short prayers, but made with our whole heart. The enjoyment of what we have loved will vanish unnoticed. A new taste for grace will at last possess our hearts. We will be hungry for Jesus Christ, who is to feed us eternally. The more we eat the sacred bread, the more our faith will grow. We shall fear nothing so much as excluding ourselves from the holy table by some unfaithfulness. Our devotions, far from being an inconvenient and burdensome occupation for us, will on the contrary be a source of consolation and sweetening of our crosses. Then let us put ourselves in condition to approach often this sacrament. Otherwise we shall always lead a lukewarm life pining for salvation. We shall have to row against the wind without advancing, but, on the other hand, if we feed ourselves with the flesh of Jesus Christ and his word, we shall be like a vessel in full with a fair wind. Happy are they who are in this state, or at who wish to be so.

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18

PRAYER FOR COMPLETE SELF-GIVING

Priere d'une arne qui desire se donner à Dieu sans réserve.

MY GOD, I wish to give myself to thee. Give me the courage to do so. Strengthen my feeble will, which sighs for thee. I stretch my arms to thee. Take me. If I have not the strength to give myself to thee, draw me to thee by the sweetness of thy perfumes. Lead me after thee by the strings of thy love. Lord, whose am I, if not thine own? What hard bondage to belong to myself and to my passions! O true freedom of the children of God! We do not know it. Happy is he who has discovered where it lies, and seeks it no longer where it is not. A thousand times happy is he who depends on God for everything, no longer to depend except on him alone.

But how is it, O my divine bridegroom, that we fear to break our chains? Do passing vanities mean more than thy eternal truth, and thou thyself? Can we fear to give ourselves to thee? O monstrous folly! That would be to fear for our happiness. That would be to fear to go out of Egypt to enter the promised land. That would be to complain in the desert, to lose taste for the manna, remembering the flesh pots of Egypt.

It is not I who would give myself to thee. It is thou, O my love, who givest thyself to me. I do not hesitate to give thee my heart. What joy to be in solitude and to be there with thee, no more to hear and no more to speak what is empty and useless, so that I may listen to thee! O infinite wisdom! Dost thou not speak to me of better things than these foolish men? Thou wilt speak to me, O love of my God! Thou wilt teach me, thou wilt make me flee vanity and lying. Thou wilt feed me from thyself. Thou wilt hold back in me all idle curiosity. Lord, when I consider thy yoke, it seems to me too mild. And is this then the cross which I ought to carry as I follow thee all the days of my life? Hast thou no other cup, more bitter with thy passion to make me drink to the dregs? Dost thou limit to this peaceful retreat, under a holy

rule, and among such good examples, the severe penitence which I have deserved for my sins? O love! Thou only makest me to love thee. Thou strikest not. Thou sparest my weakness. After this should I fear to draw near to thee? Can the crosses of solitude frighten me? Those with which the world overwhelms us ought to frighten us. What blindness not to be afraid of them.

No infinite misery, which thy mercy alone can overcome! The less I have had of light and of courage, the more I have deserved thy compassion. O God, I have made myself unworthy of thee, but I can become a miracle of thy grace. Give me all that I lack, and there will be nothing in me which does not exalt thy gifts.

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19

CONFORMITY TO GOD'S WILL

Sur la conformité à la volonté de Dieu.

FOR CONFORMITY to the will of God, you will find different chapters of *The Imitation of Christ*, which are wonderful. The reading of St. Francis de Sales will also nourish you with this manna. All virtue consists essentially in the good will. Jesus Christ has made us understand this in saying, "The kingdom of God is within you."

It is not a question of knowing much, of having great talent, nor even of doing great things. We only need to have a heart and to desire the good. Outer works are the fruits and the inseparable consequences by which we recognize true devotion. But true devotion, the source of these works, is all in the depths of the heart. There are some virtues which are for some conditions, and not for others. Some are suitable at one time, and some at another, but the good intention is for all times and all places. To want all that God wants, always to want it, for all occasions and without reservations, this is the kingdom of God which is all within. It is thus that his kingdom comes, since his will is done on earth as it is in heaven. It is thus that we only want what his supreme will instils in our own.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit!" Blessed are they who divest themselves of all, and even of their own will, in order to belong no longer to themselves. O, how poor we are in spirit and in our innermost depths, when we belong no longer to ourselves, and when we have despoiled ourselves to the point of losing every right to ourselves!

But how does our will become good? By conforming itself with no reservations to that of God. We want all that he wants. We do not want anything of all that he does not want. We attach our weak will to the all-powerful will which does all. Thus nothing can happen except what God wills. We are perfectly satisfied when his will is accomplished, and we find in God's good pleasure an inexhaustible source of peace and consolation. Our entire life is a beginning of the peace of the blessed, who say for ever, "Amen, Amen."

We worship, we praise, we bless God for all things. We see him constantly in everything, and in everything his paternal hand is the only thing with which we are concerned. There are no more evils, because everything, even the most terrible wrongs "turn to good," as St. Paul said, "for those who love God." Can we call evils the suffering which God sends us to purify us and to make us worthy of him? That which does us so great a good cannot be an evil.

Then let us throw all our cares on the breast of so good a father. Let him do as he pleases. Let us be content to follow his will in all things, and to place ours in his, so that we may disown it. It is not right that we should have anything for ourselves, we who do not belong to ourselves. The slave has nothing for himself. For how much stronger a reason the creature, who has at bottom only nothingness and sin, and in whom all is gift and pure grace, should not have anything of his own.

God has only given him a free will, capable of possessing himself, in order to obligate him by this gift to strip himself more generously. We have nothing of our own but our will. All the rest does not belong to us. Disease takes away health and life. Riches are snatched away by violence. The talents of the mind depend on the condition of the body. The one thing truly ours is our will. And it is of this which God is jealous, because he has given it to us, not for us to keep, and to stay in charge of, but really to give it back wholly to him, just as we have received it, without holding back any of it. Whoever keeps the least desire or the least repulsion of his own commits a theft from God against the order of creation. Everything comes from him, and everything is his due.

Alas, how many souls there are, their own masters, who want to do good and to love God, but according to their own pleasure and on their own initiative; who would like to make rules for God, as to how he is to satisfy them and to attract them to him! They want to serve him and to possess him, but they do not want to give themselves to him and to allow themselves to be possessed. What resistance God finds in these souls, even when they seem so full of zeal and of fervour! Their spiritual abundance becomes in some ways even an obstacle to them, because they hold everything, even their virtues in their own right, and with a continual seeking of self in their goodness. O, but a very poor soul, truly giving up his own life and all his natural impulses, truly detached in will so that he only wants what God makes him want at each moment, following the rules of his Gospel and the course of his Providence, is far above all these ardent and radiant souls who always want to go forward in virtue by their own road!

This is the profound meaning of the words of Jesus Christ, taken in all their extent. "Let him who would be my disciple give up himself, and follow me." We must follow Jesus Christ, step by step, and not by opening up a highway toward him. We only follow him by renouncing ourselves. What does self-renunciation mean, unless it means to give up all right over self, with no reservations? St. Paul also told us, "You no longer belong to yourselves." No, nothing more remains in us which could belong to us. Woe to him who takes self back after he has given it up.

I pray the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation to snatch your own heart away from you, and not to allow you the least bit of it. It costs a great deal in a very painful operation. We have plenty of anguish letting God act, and remaining under his hand while he cuts to the quick. But this is the patience of the saints and the sacrifice of pure faith.

Let God do all that he wishes with us. Never any voluntary resistance for a single moment. So soon as we see the rebellion of instinct and of human nature, let us turn to God with confidence, and let us be on his side, against weak and rebellious nature. Let us give it over to the mind of God who will make it die little by little. Let us watch in his presence for the least faults, that we may never sadden Holy Spirit, who is jealous of all which passes within. Let us profit by the faults which we have committed by a humble consciousness of our wretchedness, without discouragement and without weariness.

Can we glorify God better than by freeing ourselves from all self-will, so that he can act according to his good pleasure? It is then that he is truly our God, that his kingdom does come within us, when independently of all outer aid and all inner consolation, we only see, within and without, the hand of God who does all, and whom we ceaselessly adore.

To want to serve him in one place rather than another, in one way and not by an opposite one, is to want to serve him in our own way, and not in his. But to be ready equally for all, to want all and to want nothing, to allow ourselves to be a plaything in the hands of Providence, to put no limits to this submission, as the supreme rule of God cannot allow it; this is to serve him by renouncing ourselves. This is to treat him really as God, and to treat ourselves as creatures made only for him.

O, how happy we should be, if he put us to severe tests to give him the least glory. What is our goodness worth, if he who has made us still finds some resistance or some reservation in our hearts, which are his work?

Then open your heart, but open it without measure, so that God and his love may enter there without measure, like a torrent. Fear nothing on the way in which you are walking. God will lead you as though by the hand, if you do not hesitate, and if you are more filled with his love than with fear for yourself.

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20

TRUST IN GOD

Recevoir avec soumission ce que Dieu fait au-dehors et au-dedans de nous.

THE BEST way to do, is to receive equally and with the same submission all the different things which God gives us throughout the day, within us and without.

On the outside, there are unpleasant things which we must endure bravely, and pleasant things for which we must not stop. We resist the temptations of adverse things by accepting them, and we resist the beguiling things by refusing to care about them. As for the interior things, we have only to do the same. Those which are bitter serve to crucify, and to produce all their good in the soul, if we receive them simply with an unlimited acceptance, and without trying to water them down. Those which are pleasant and which are given us to support our weakness by a feeling of comfort in our exterior work, should also be accepted, but in another way. We must receive them, since it is God who gives them to us for our need. But we must receive them, not for love of them, but to conform to the plans of God. We must use them at the moment, like a remedy, without self-satisfaction, without attachment, without possessiveness.

These gifts ought to be received within us, but they ought not to take such a hold on us that, when God withdraws them, their loss ever troubles us or discourages us. The source of presumption is in attachment to these passing and sensory gifts. We imagine that we only depend on the gift of God. But we depend on ourselves, because we appropriate God's gift, and we confuse it with ourselves. The misfortune of this conduct is that every time we are disappointed in ourselves, we fall into discouragement. But a soul who leans only on God is never surprised at his own wretchedness. He is pleased to see that he can do nothing, and that God alone can do all. I hardly mind being poor, knowing that my Father possesses infinite wealth which he wishes to give

me. It is only by feeding our hearts on pure trust in God, that we grow accustomed to the passing of trust in ourselves.

That is why we must count less on ardent feeling, and on certain wise measures which we take upon ourselves for our perfection; and count rather on simplicity, littleness, renunciation of every impulse of our own, and a perfect yielding to all the inspirations of grace. All the rest, while building up conspicuous virtues, secretly only give us more confidence in our own efforts.

Let us pray God to uproot from our hearts all that we want to plant there ourselves, and that he plant there with his own hand the tree of life loaded with fruit.

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21

VALUE AND USE OF CROSSES

Sur l'utilité et le bon usage des croix.

WE HAVE much trouble convincing ourselves of the kindness with which God crushes those he loves with crosses. Why take pleasure, we say, in making us suffer? Would he not know how to make us good without making us miserable? Yes, doubtless, God could do so, because nothing is impossible for him. He holds the hearts of men in his all-powerful hands, and he turns them as he pleases, as the hand of a fountain-maker gives the direction he wishes to the spring on the top Of a mountain.

But God, who could have saved us without crosses, has not wished to do so. Just as he has preferred to let men grow little by little, with all the difficulties and all the weaknesses of childhood, rather than to have them learn with all the force of a ripe age. In this he is the master. We have only to be silent, and to adore his profound wisdom without understanding it. What we see clearly, is that we cannot become entirely good except as we become humble, disinterested, detached from ourselves, in order to relate everything to God without any turning back upon ourselves.

The operation of grace, which detaches us from ourselves and which uproots our self-love, cannot, without a miracle of grace, avoid being painful. God does not make miracles every day in the order of his grace, any more than in that of nature. It would be as great a miracle of grace to see a person full of himself, in one moment dead to all self-interest and to all sensibility, as it would be to see a child who went to bed a baby, and woke up the next morning as large as a man of thirty. God hides his work, in the spiritual order as in the natural order under an unnoticeable sequence of events. It is thus that he keeps us in the dimness of faith. Not only he does his work little by little, but he does it in ways which seem the most simple and the most likely to succeed; so that the means seeming proper to success, human wisdom attributes the success to the means which are like natural ones, and so the finger of God is less noticeable in the matter. Otherwise all that God does would be a perpetual miracle, which would reverse the state of faith in which God wants us to live.

This condition of faith is necessary, not only to train the good, by making them give up their own judgement in a world full of gloom, but even more to blind those who deserve, by their conceit, to blind themselves. Such people, seeing the works of God, do not understand them. They only find what is natural in them. They have lost true intelligence, because no one deserves

it, except as he distrusts his own mind, and because lofty wisdom is unworthy of discerning the workings of God.

Thus it is to keep the action of grace in the obscurity of faith, that God makes this action slow and painful. He uses the inconstancy, the ingratitude of his creatures, the disappointments and disgusts which we find in prosperity, to detach creatures from the deceitfulness of prosperity. He disillusions us with ourselves by the experience of our weakness and our corruption, in an infinite number of failures. All this appears natural, and it is this sequence of apparently natural means that burns us in a slow fire. We should rather be consumed all of a sudden by the flames of pure love. But this so prompt destruction would cost us hardly anything. It is by an excess of self-love that we should thus like to be perfect all at once and at such slight cost. Why are we revolted by the long-drawn-out suffering? It is our attachment to ourselves, and it is this attachment which God wants to destroy. Because, while we still cling to ourselves, God's work is not accomplished. Then of what can we complain? Our trouble is being attached to creatures, and still more to ourselves.

God prepares a series of happenings which detaches us little by little from creatures, and which at last tears us away from ourselves. This operation is painful, but it is our corruption which makes it necessary, and that is the cause of the pain we bear. If this flesh were healthy, the surgeon would not make any incision. He only cuts in proportion to the depth of the wound, and the area of the infection. If the operation causes us so much pain, it is because the infection is bad. Is it cruelty in the surgeon to cut to the quick? No, on the contrary, it is affection. It is skill. He would thus treat his only son.

God treats us in the same way. He never makes trouble for us except in spite of himself, so to speak. His father's heart does not try to desolate us. But he cuts to the quick to cure the ulcer of our heart. He has to take from us what we love too dearly, what we love in the wrong way and without discretion, what we love to the prejudice of his love.

What does he do about it? He makes us weep like children from whom we take the knife with which they are playing, and with which they could kill themselves. We weep, we are discouraged, we cry out loud. We are ready to murmur against God, as children are vexed with their mothers. But God lets us cry, and saves us. He afflicts us only to correct us. Even then when he seems to overwhelm us, it is for our good, it is to spare us from the harm which we would do to ourselves. What we weep for would have made us weep eternally. What we believe to have lost was lost when we thought we had it. God has taken it into safe-keeping to give it back to us soon in the eternity which draws near. He takes from us the things which we love, only to make us love them with a pure love, strong and balanced, to assure us an eternal joy in his bosom, and to do a hundred times more good to us, than we would know how to desire for ourselves.

Nothing happens on earth which God has not willed. It is he who does all, who rules all, who gives to each thing all that it has. He has counted the hairs of our head, the leaves of each tree, the grains of sand on the seashore, and the drops of water which make the depths of the ocean. In making the universe, his wisdom has measured and weighed to the last atom. It is he who every moment produces and renews the breath of life which animates us. It is he who has counted our days, who holds in his powerful hands the keys of the tomb, to open it or to close it. That which strikes us the hardest is nothing in the eyes of God. A little more or a little less of life are differences which disappear in the presence of his eternity. What does it matter if this frail vessel, this body of clay, should be broken and reduced

to ashes a little sooner or a little later?

O, how short and deceiving our sight is! We are in consternation to see a person die in the prime of life. "What a horrible loss," we say. But why is it a loss? What does he who dies lose? Some years of vanity, illusion, and of danger of eternal death. God lifts him from the midst of sin, and snatches him from the corrupt world and from his own weakness. What do the people lose by whom he was loved? They lose the toxin of worldly happiness. They lose a perpetual inebriation. They lose the forgetfulness of God and of themselves, into which they were plunged, or rather they gain, by virtue of the cross, the blessing of detachment. The same blow which saves the person who dies, prepares the others to detach themselves by suffering, to work bravely for their salvation. O, how true it is then that God is good, that he is tender, that he is merciful to our true ills even when he seems to crush us, and even when we are tempted to pity ourselves because of his sternness.

What difference do we find now between two people who lived a hundred years ago? One died twenty years before the other, but after all both died. Their separation, which seemed at the time so long and so hard, seems to us now and really was only a brief separation. Soon what is separated will be united, and no trace of that so short separation will appear. We consider ourselves immortal, or at least as though going to live for centuries. Folly of the human spirit! Every day those who die soon follow those who are already dead. One about to leave on a journey ought not to think himself far from one who went only two days before. Life flows by like a flood. The past is no more than a dream. The present, in the moment when we think we hold it, escapes us, and plunges into the abyss of the past. The future will be no different. It will pass as rapidly. The days, the months, the years crowd by like the waves of a flood which push one upon the other. Yet some moments, yet a few, I say, and all will be finished. Alas, what seems long to us because of ennui and sadness will seem how short when it is finished!

It is because of the weakness of self-love that we are so sensitive to our condition. The invalid who sleeps badly finds the night interminably long. But that night is as short as the others. We exaggerate all these troubles by weakness. They are great, but our hyper-sensitiveness increases them. The true way to shorten them is to abandon ourselves bravely to God. It is true that we suffer, but God wants this suffering to purify us and to make us worthy of him. The world laughs at us, and prosperity has poisoned our hearts. Should we like to pass our whole life until the terrible moment of death in this weakness, in these delights, in this condition, in this empty joy, in this triumph of pride, in this enjoyment of the world the enemy of Jesus Christ, in this estrangement from the cross which alone should sanctify us? The world will turn its back, will forget us ungratefully, will misunderstand us, will place us among the ranks of things which are no more. O, well, do we need to be surprised that the world is always the world, unjust, a deceiver, perfidious? However, it is this world that we have not been ashamed to love, and that perhaps we should like to be able to love still. It is from this abominable world that God snatches us, to deliver us from its accursed bondage, and to make us enter into the liberty of detached souls. It is this which desolates us. If we are so sensitive to the indifference of this world, which is so contemptible and so worthy of horror, we must be our own worst enemies. What! We cannot endure what is so good for us, and we regret so much that which is so fatal for us! So that is the source of our tears and of our griefs!

O my God, thou who dost see the depths of our misery, thou alone can cure us. Hasten to give us the faith, the hope, the love, the Christian courage which we lack. Make us fix our eyes constantly upon thee, O Father all-powerful, who givest nothing to thy dear children except for their

salvation; and upon Jesus thy Son who is our model in all suffering. Thou hast nailed him to the cross for us. Thou hast made him the man of sorrows to teach us how useful sorrows are. Let weak and timid human nature be still then at the sight of Jesus covered with shame and crushed by suffering. Lift up my heart, O my God! Give me a heart like thine own, which can harden itself against itself, which fears only to displease thee; which at least fears the eternal torments, and not those which prepare us for thy kingdom. Lord, thou dost see the weakness and the desolation of thy creature. It has no longer any resource in itself. Everything fails it. So much the better, so long as thou dost never fail it, and that it seek trustfully in thee for all that it despairs of finding in its own heart.

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22

SUFFERING LOVE

Il n'y a que le pur amour qui sache souffrir comme il taut.

WE KNOW that we must suffer, and that we deserve it. However, we are always surprised at the suffering as though we believed that we neither deserved it nor needed it. It is only a true and pure love which loves to suffer, because it is only a true and pure love which abandons itself. Resignation makes suffering, but there is in it something which suffers from having to suffer, and which resists. Resignation which gives nothing to God except with limits and with self-concern, would like to suffer, but it often examines itself fearing to suffer harm. To be more exact, we are two people in resignation. One controls the other, and watches over it to prevent it from revolting. In pure love, which is completely detached and abandoned, the soul feeds itself in silence on the cross and on its union with Jesus Christ crucified, without any reversion to its own suffering. It is only a single, simple will, which can see God as he is, without dreaming of seeing itself. It says nothing. It notices nothing.

What does it do? It suffers. Is that all? Yes, that is all. It has only to suffer. Thus love makes itself enough understood without speech or thought. It does the only thing which it has to do, which is to want nothing when it lacks all consolation. A will satisfied by that of God, when all else is taken away from it, is the purest of all loves.

What a relief to think that we do not have to try so hard to urge ourselves constantly to patience, and to be always careful and strained, so that we can sustain the character of a virtue won on the outside! It is enough to be little and given up to suffering. This is not courage. It is something less and more; less in the eyes of good men in general, more in the eyes of pure faith. It is a littleness in self, which places the soul in all the greatness of God. It is a weakness which detaches from all force, and which gives the whole power of God. "When I am weak," says St. Paul, "it is then that I am strong. I can do all in him who strengthens me."

So it is enough to feed ourselves by some short reading adapted to our condition and our taste, but often interrupted to assist the understanding, and to give place to the Spirit within which draws us into recollection. Two simple words, without reasoning, and full of divine unction, are the hidden manna. We forget the words, but they work secretly, and we are fed upon them. The soul fattens on them.

Sometimes we suffer hardly knowing that we suffer. At other times we suffer and find that we are suffering badly, and we endure our impatience like

a second cross heavier than the first. But nothing stops us, because the true love always goes on, not going for its own sake nor depending any more upon itself for anything. Then we are truly happy. The cross is no longer a cross, when there is no longer an "I" to suffer there, and to take to itself the good things and the bad.

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23

INTERIOR PEACE

La paix intérieure ne se trouve que dans un entier abandon à la volonté de Dieu.

THERE WILL never be any peace for those who resist God. If there is any joy in the world, it is saved for the pure conscience. The whole earth is a place of tribulation and agony for a bad conscience.

O, but the peace which comes from God is different from that which comes from the world! It calms our passions. It preserves the purity of our conscience. It is inseparable from justice. It unites with God. It strengthens us against temptations. This purity of conscience is preserved by the frequenting of the sacraments. Temptation, if it does not overcome us, always carries its fruits with it. The soul's peace consists in an entire resignation to the will of God.

"Martha, Martha, you are troubled and uneasy about many things. Only one thing is needed." A true simplicity, a certain calm of spirit which is the result of a complete abandon to all that God wishes, a patience and a support for the faults of our neighbour, which the presence of God inspires, a certain honesty, and childlike willingness to acknowledge our faults, to recover from them, and to submit to the advice of experienced people; these will be solid useful virtues, adapted to your sanctification.

The trouble which you have over a great many things is because you do not accept all that can come to you with enough abandon to God. Then place everything in his hands, and thus make in advance the complete sacrifice in your heart. From the moment that you wish nothing more according to your own judgement, and that you wish everything which God wishes without reserve, you will have no longer so many uneasy returns and reflections to make over what concerns you. You will have nothing to hide, nothing to manage. Up to that point you will be troubled, changing in your views and your tastes, easily discontented with others, ill content with your own self, full of reserve and distrust. Your good mind, until it has become humble and simple, will only torment you. Your devotion, although sincere, will give you less support and less comfort than the reproaches within. If, on the contrary, you abandon your heart to God, you will be serene, and full of the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Woe unto you if you still consider man in the work of God! When it is a question of choosing a guide, you must count all men as nothing. The least respect for man cuts off grace, increases indecision. We suffer a great deal, and we displease God still more.

What makes us love God is that he has first loved us, and loved us with a tender love, like a father who pities his children, whose extreme weakness he knows, and the clay from which he has moulded them. He has sought us in our own ways, which are the ways of sin. He has run like a shepherd who tires himself to find his strayed lamb. He was not content to seek for us, but after he had found us, he took us and our weakness upon himself. He was obedient even to death on the cross. We can even say that he has loved us

unto death on the cross, and that the measure of his obedience has been that of his love.

When this love really fills a soul, it enjoys peace of conscience. It is content and happy. It needs neither greatness, nor reputation, nor pleasure, nothing which time takes away without leaving any traces. It wants only the will of God, and it watches incessantly in the joyous expectation of the bridegroom.

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24

INTERIOR PEACE (Continued)

Suite du même sujet.

I WISH you all the good which you should seek in your retreat. The chief one is the peace of a simple behaviour, in which we never consider the future with too much concern. The future is God's and not yours. God will temper whatever is necessary, according to your needs. But if you want to penetrate this future by your own wisdom, you will only reap anxiety, and the foreseeing of some inevitable ills. Think only of using each day. Each day has its good and its evil, so that even the evil often becomes a good, if we let God act and never anticipate him in impatience.

Thus God will give you all the time you need to go to him. Perhaps he will not give you all that you want to keep you busy doing what you like, and living for yourself under the pretext of perfection. But you will lack neither time nor opportunity to renounce yourself and your inclinations. All other time beyond that is lost, however well it may seem to be used. Even be persuaded that you will find in all these things a facility suited to your true needs, because much as God Upsets your inclinations, he will support your weakness to the same degree. Fear nothing and let him act. Only by a mild, serene and regulated occupation can you avoid the sadness and boredom which are the most dangerous temptations of your nature. You will always be at liberty in God, if you do not get thinking that you have lost your liberty.

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25

HELPS IN DISSIPATION AND SADNESS

Remèdes contre la dissipation et contre la tristesse.

IT SEEMS to me that you are painfully caught between two things; one avoiding dissipation, the other keeping yourself from depression. For dissipation, you will never cure yourself of it by strained reflections. Do not hope to perform the work of grace with the resources and efforts of nature. Content yourself to giving your will to God without reserve, and never envisage any painful state which you do not accept by yielding to divine Providence. Be careful never to go further than this in your thoughts of the cross; but when God permits them to come to you without your seeking them, never let them go by without result.

Accept, despite the revulsion and horror of nature, all that God presents to your mind, as a proof by which he wants to train your faith. Do not trouble yourself to know if you will have, when the time comes, the strength to carry out what you want to do from a distance. The present

opportunity will have its grace, but the grace of the moment in which you visualize these crosses is to accept them with a good heart when God gives them to you. Having laid the foundation of abandonment, go on serenely and with confidence. Provided that this disposition of your will is not changed by voluntary attachments to something against the order of God, it will always last.

Your imagination will be straying among a thousand vain objects. It will be even more or less disturbed, according to where you are, and according to whether it has been more or less dazzled by more vivid or weaker things. But what does that matter? The imagination, as St. Theresa said, is the fool of the house. It constantly makes a racket and deafens us. Even the mind is carried away by it. It cannot stop seeing the pictures which come before it. Its attention to these pictures is inevitable, and this attention is a true distraction. But, provided that it is involuntary, this never separates us from God. It is only a distraction of the will which does the harm.

If you never wish the distraction, you will never be distracted, and it will be true to say that your prayer will not have failed. Each time that you notice your distraction, you will let it fall without struggling against it, and you will turn yourself quietly to God's side without any contention of spirit. When you do not notice your distraction, it will not be a distraction of the heart. As soon as you see it, you will lift your eyes to God. Your fidelity in returning to his presence, every time that you notice your state, will win you the blessing of a more frequent presence; and it is, if I do not deceive me, the way soon to make this presence familiar.

This faithfulness in turning promptly from other objects, every time that we see these distractions, will not last long in a soul without the gift of frequent and easy recollection. But we must not imagine that we can enter this state by our own efforts. That struggle would make you upset, scrupulous, uneasy in the relationships and in the conversations in which you should be free. You would always be afraid lest the presence of God escape you; always be running to recapture it. You would wrap yourself up in all the phantoms of your imagination. Thus the presence of God, which ought, by its sweetness and its light, to make it easy to apply yourself to all the other things which we need to consider in the order of God, would make you on the contrary always upset, and nearly incapable of the outer duties of your condition.

So never worry lest this tangible presence of God escape you, but above all take good care not to want a presence of God, which is reasoned, and sustained by many reflections. Be content, in the course of the day and in the detail of your occupations with a confused idea of God, so that if anyone asks you then what the disposition of your heart is, it would be true to say that it turns to God, although you were then paying attention to some other object. Do not feel too badly about the straying of your spirit, which you cannot control. Often we distract ourselves by the fear of distractions, and then by regret at having seen them.

What would you say of a man who, on a voyage, instead of always going on without stopping, should pass his time anticipating the falls which he could make, and, when he does make one, in looking back to see the place where he has fallen? "Go forward, go forward always," you would tell yourself. I say the same thing to you. Go forward without looking behind you, and without stopping. "Go forward," says the Apostle, "so that you are always in a greater abundance." The abundance of the love of God, it is true, will correct you more than your own anxieties and your returnings wrapped up in yourself.

This rule is simple, but nature, accustomed to do everything by feeling

and reflection, finds it simple in excess. We want to help ourselves, and give ourselves more movement, but that is why this rule is good, because it keeps us in a state of pure faith, in which we can only lean on God, to whom we have given ourselves up, and in which we die to ourselves by suppressing all that is of self. For that reason we do not multiply outward practices which could irritate very busy people, or hurt their health. We turn them all to loving, but to loving simply. It follows that we only do what love makes us do. Thus we are never overburdened, because we only carry that which we love. This rule, well taken, is enough to cure sadness.

Often sadness comes because, seeking God, we do not feel his presence enough to satisfy ourselves. To want to feel it is not to want to possess it, but it is to want to assure ourselves, for love of ourselves, that we do possess it, in order to console ourselves. Nature beaten and discouraged is impatient at guiding itself in a state of pure faith. It makes all its efforts to get out of it because there all support is lacking. It is as though up in the air. It would like to feel its advancement. At the sight of its faults, pride is offended, and it takes this hurt pride for a feeling of penitence. We should like, because of love of self, to have the pleasure of seeing ourselves perfect. We scold ourselves for not being so. We are impatient, haughty and in an ill humour against ourselves and against others. Deplorable error! As if the work of God could be accomplished by our chagrin! As if we could unite ourselves to the God of peace by losing the peace within! "Martha, Martha, why art thou troubled about so many things," for the service of Jesus Christ? "One thing only is needful," which is to love him and to keep ourselves motionless at his feet.

When we are really abandoned to God, all that we do we do well, without doing many things. We abandon ourselves with confidence to the future. We want with no reservations all that God wants, and we close our eyes in order not to anticipate the future. Meanwhile we devote ourselves in the present to accomplishing his will. Sufficient to each day is its good and its evil. This daily accomplishment of the will of God is the coming of his kingdom within us, and at the same time our daily bread. We should be unfaithful, and guilty of a pagan distrust, if we wished to penetrate into that future time which God hides from us. We leave it to him. It is for him to make it sweet or bitter, short or long. Let him do what is good in his eyes. The most perfect preparation for this future, whatever it is, is to die to all will of our own, in order to yield ourselves wholly to that of God. As the manna had all flavours, this general disposition encloses all the graces and all the feelings suitable to every state in which God can successively place us.

When we are thus ready for everything, it is in the depth of the abyss that we begin to find foothold. We are as serene about the past as about the future. We suppose all the worst that we can of ourselves, but we fling ourselves blindly into the arms of God. We forget ourselves, we lose ourselves; and this forgetting of self is the most perfect penitence, because all conversion only consists of renouncing self to be engrossed in God. This forgetting is the martyrdom of self-love. We should prefer a hundred times to contradict ourselves, condemn ourselves, torment our body and mind, than to forget ourselves. This forgetting is an annihilation of self-love, in which it finds no resource. Then the heart is enlarged. We are comforted by getting rid of all the weight of self with which we were laden. We are astonished to see how straight and plain the way is. We expected to have to struggle continually, and always to have to undertake some new activity with no letting up. On the contrary, we see that there is little to do; that it is enough, without thinking too much about the future or the past, to regard God with confidence, like a father who leads us at present by the hand. If some distraction makes us lose sight of him, without stopping for the distraction, we turn ourselves toward God, and he makes us feel what he wants. If we

commit faults, we perform our penance for them, which is a grief all of love. We turn ourselves toward him from whom we were turned away. The sin seems hideous, but the humiliation which comes from it, and for which God has permitted it, seems good. As the reflections of pride about our own faults are bitter, worried and chagrined, so the return of the soul to God after its faults is recollected, peaceful, and sustained by confidence.

You will feel by experience how this simple and peaceful return will make your correction easier than all the vexation over the faults which dominate you. Only be faithful in turning yourself simply to God, from the moment that you see your fault. You may well quibble with yourself. It is not with yourself that you should take your measures. When you take yourself to task for your wretchedness, I only see in your stand you alone with yourself. Poor council, in which God does not take part! Who will reach you his hand to get you out of the mire? Will it be you? Ah, it is you yourself who plunged you into it, and who cannot get you out.

Besides, this mud is yourself. The whole basis of your trouble is that you cannot get out of yourself. Do you hope to get out of it by always communing with yourself, and feeding your sensibility by contemplating your weaknesses? You only make yourself pity yourself by all this introversion. But the slightest glance toward God would calm your heart far better, troubled as it is by this preoccupation with yourself. His presence always brings about getting out of ourselves and this is what is needed.

So go forth from yourself and you will be at peace. But how to go forth? You only need to turn yourself quietly toward God, and little by little form the habit of doing so by the fidelity with which you return every time that you notice your distraction.

As for natural sadness which comes from melancholy, that only comes from the body. Thus medicines and regulation lessen it. It is true that it always returns, but it is not voluntary. When God gives it, we endure it in peace, as we do fever and other bodily ills. Our imagination is in a deep darkness. It is all draped in mourning. But our will, which only feeds itself on pure faith, wants to experience all these impressions. We are at peace, because we are in harmony with ourselves, and submissive to God. It is not a question of what we feel, but of what we want. We want everything which we have. We do not want anything which we have not. We would not want to be freed from what we are suffering, because it is only for God to distribute crosses and consolations. We are joyful in the midst of tribulations, as the Apostle said. It is not a joy of the senses. It is a joy of pure will.

The irreligious, in the midst of pleasures, have a strained joy, because they are never content with their condition. They would like to get rid of some distasteful things, and still to enjoy some delights which they lack.

On the contrary, the faithful soul has a will which is not strained in anything. It accepts freely all that God gives it of sorrow. It wants it. It loves it. It embraces it. It would not want to leave it even if it only cost a single wish to do so, because this wish would be a selfish desire, and contrary to its abandon to Providence, which it wants never to anticipate in anything.

If anything is capable of enlarging and freeing the heart, it is this abandon. It spreads in our hearts "a peace more full than the rivers," and a "righteousness which is like the depths of the sea." This is how Isaiah put it.

If anything can make a mind serene, abolish its scrupulousness and its

black fears, soften its pain by the unction of love, give a certain strength to its every action, and spread the joy of Holy Spirit even on our faces and in our words, it is this simple behaviour, free and childlike in the arms of God. But we reason too much, and we hurt ourselves in reasoning. There is a temptation to reason which we must fear as we fear other temptations. There is a sensitive, restless, uncertain preoccupation with self, which is all the more a temptation because we do not consider it a temptation, and because on the contrary we go deeper and deeper into it, as we take it for the watchfulness recommended in the Gospel. The vigilance which Jesus Christ commands is a faithful attention always to love and do the will of God in the present moment, following the indications that we have of it. It does not consist, however, in upsetting ourselves, tormenting ourselves, being constantly preoccupied with ourselves, rather than lifting our eyes to God, our only help against ourselves.

Why, under the pretence of vigilance, do we stubbornly look in ourselves what God does not want us to see during this life? Why do we thus lose the fruit of pure faith and of the interior life? Why do we turn away from the presence of God, which he wishes continually to give us? He did not say, "Always let your own self be the object before which you walk"; but he said, "Walk before me, and be perfect."

David, full of his spirit said, "I saw always God before me, and again, "My eyes are always raised to the Lord, that he may keep my feet from the snares." The danger is to his feet, yet his eyes are on high. It does less good to think of our danger than to think of the help of God. Moreover, we see all things united in God. We see in him human wretchedness and divine goodness. One glance of the eye of a right and pure soul, however simple he may be, sees all things in this infinite light. But what can we see in our own darkness, except our own darkness?

O my God! If I do not cease to see thee, I shall not cease to see myself in all my wretchedness, and I shall see myself far better in thee than in myself. True vigilance is to see in thee thy will, that I may accomplish it, and not to reason for ever on the state of my own. When outer concerns stop me from seeing thee alone, by making in prayer avenues for my every sense, then I shall see thee, Lord, doing all things in all things. I shall see with joy everywhere thy will being done both within me and without. I shall ceaselessly say, "Amen," like the blessed. I shall always sing in my heart the canticle of the celestial Sion. I shall bless thee in the wicked, who, by their ill will, nevertheless in spite of themselves accomplish thine all-righteous, all-holy, all-powerful. In the chaste liberty of spirit which thou givest to thy children, I shall act and speak simply, gaily and with confidence. "Even though I pass through the shadows of death, I shall fear nothing, for thou art always with me." I shall never seek any danger. I shall never enter into any engagement except with indications of thy Providence, which will be my strength and my comfort therein. Even in those states in which thy vocation will sustain me, I shall give every day, every hour, every moment which you leave free to me to recollection, prayer and retreat. I shall never leave that happy state except when thou thyself dost call me to some outside duty. Then I shall seem to go forth from thee, but thou wilt go with me, and, in this apparent setting forth, thou wilt carry me in thy breast. I shall not seek myself in relations with creatures. I shall not fear at all that recollection may lessen my congeniality with them, and make my conversation dry. For I do not want to please men except so far as it is necessary in order to please thee.

If thou wishest to use me for thy work for them, I give myself to it, and, without thinking about myself I shall simply spread to them all the gifts which thou hast poured upon me. I shall not go forward groping, always

falling back upon myself. However dangerous and disintegrating the duty may be, I shall behave simply before thee with a right intention, knowing the goodness of the father before whom I walk. He wants no subtlety in his own.

If, on the contrary, thou dost not wish to use me for others, I shall by no means offer myself. I shall not anticipate anything. I shall perform in peace the other things to which thou dost limit me. Because, according to the grace of yielding which thou dost give me, I neither desire nor refuse anything. I am ready for anything, and consent to be useless in everything. Sought, refused, known, ignored, praised, contradicted, what does it matter? It is thou, and not me. It is thou, and not thy gifts separate from thee and thy love, which I seek for. All good conditions are immaterial to me. Amen.

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26

HELPS IN SADNESS

Remèdes des contre la tristesse.

FOR ONE who notices a sort: of sadness which constricts and oppresses the heart, here are two rules which seem to me well worth observing. The first is to help this sadness by the means which Providence affords us, for example, by not overloading ourselves with painful affairs, so as not to succumb under a burden beyond our strength, to husband not only our bodily strength, but also that of our mind, by not undertaking things in which we should overrate our courage; by keeping hours for prayer, for reading; for encouraging ourselves with good conversation, even by making merry; to relax mind and body at the same time, according to our need.

We still need some safe and discreet person, to whom we can unburden our heart of everything which is not another's secret, for this unburdening comforts and enlarges the oppressed heart. Often suffering, too long kept in, increases until it breaks the heart. If we could get it out, we should see that it was not worth all the bitterness which it had caused us. Nothing so draws the soul from the depths of gloom, as the simplicity and the littleness with which it tells its discouragement at the expense of its reputation, asking light and consolation in the communion which should exist between the children of God.

The second rule is to carry peacefully all the involuntary feelings of sadness which we suffer in spite of the help and precautions which we have just explained. Discouragements within make us go faster than all else in the way of faith, provided that they do not stop us, and that the involuntary let-down of the soul does not surrender it to that sadness which takes possession, as though by force, of everything within. One step taken in this state is always the step of a giant. It is worth more than a thousand taken in a milder and more comfortable mood. We have only to scorn our discouragement, and always to go on, in order to make this state of weakness more useful and greater than the most heroic state of courage and strength.

O, how deceiving this courage of the senses is, which makes everything easy, which does everything and endures everything, which knows itself willing never to hesitate! O, how it feeds our self-confidence and a certain exaltation of heart! This courage, which sometimes edifies the public marvellously, nourishes a certain satisfaction within us, and a witness which we give to ourselves, which is a subtle poison. We get a taste for our own goodness; we are pleased with it; we want to possess it; we are glad to know its strength.

A weak and humble soul, which finds no more resource in itself, which fears, is troubled, is sad unto death, as Jesus Christ was when he was in the garden; which cries at last as he did on the cross, "O God, O my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" is much more purified, underrates itself more, is more annihilated and more dead to all its own desire, than the brave souls which enjoy in peace the fruits of their own virtue.

Happy the soul which God beats down, which God crushes, from which God takes away all force of its own in order no longer to sustain it except in him. One which sees its poverty, which is content with it, which carries, besides the crosses outside, the great inner cross of discouragement, without which all the others would weigh nothing!

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27

DEATH

Sur la penséee dc la mort.

WE CANNOT too greatly deplore the, blindness of men who do not want to think of death, and who turn away from an inevitable thing which we could be happy to think of often. Death only troubles carnal people. "Perfect love casts out fear." It is not by thinking ourselves right that we cease to fear. It is simply by loving, and abandoning ourselves to him whom we love without returning to self. That is what makes death sweet and precious. When we are dead to ourselves, the death of the body is only the consummation of the work of grace.

We avoid the thought of death in order not to be saddened by it. It will only be sad for those who have not thought about it. It will come at last, this death, and will enlighten him who did not want to be enlightened during his life. We will have at death a very distinct light on all that we have done, and on all that we should have done. We shall see clearly the use which we should have made of the graces we have received, the talents, the wealth, the health, the time, and all the advantages or misfortunes of our life.

The thought of death is the best rule which we could make for all our actions and undertakings. We must desire it, but we must also wait with the same submission which we ought to have to the will of God in everything else. We ought to desire it, because it is the consummation of our penitence, the beginning of our happiness, and our eternal reward.

We must not say that we want to live to do penance, since death is the best penance which we could do. Our sins will be purged more purely and wiped out more effectively by our death than by all our penances. It will also be as sweet for men of goodwill as it will be bitter for the wicked. We ask for it every day in the "Our Father." We must all ask that God's "kingdom come." So we must all wish for it, since prayer is only the heart's desire, and since that kingdom can only come for us through our death. St. Paul recommends to all Christians that they "console themselves together" in the thought of death.

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28

SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS

Sur les amitiés particulières: combien elles sont craindre dans les communautés.

WE BELIEVE ordinarily that there is nothing more innocent than to give oneself to a right friendship with people in whom we find worth and qualities which we like. It is a necessity of life, we say, to have some confidant to whom we can open our hearts for our comfort. It is only a hard heart which can do without the pleasure of a virtuous and firm friendship. But these friendships, which are full of danger in other states, are singularly to be feared in religious communities, and we ought, when we believe ourselves called to this life, to consider our relation to friendships quite differently from the way we should in a private and free life in the midst of our generation. These are the reasons:

I. We have given ourselves to obedience and subordination. Thus we are no longer our own. If we cannot dispose either of our time or of our work, we ought still less to dispose of our attachments, since attachments, if followed, take time and attention. When you form relationships which your superiors do not approve of, you disobey, you enter unconsciously into a special spirit, contrary to the general spirit of the house. You even run the risk of falling into hypersensitiveness, jealousy, huffiness and an emotional involvement in the petty interests of the person you love, which you would be ashamed to feel for yourself. Your superiors are right to distrust your moderation, discretion, detachment and other virtues. These special attachments often make you rebellious toward their plans to set you entirely apart or give you some duty you love. That would be enough to sour you against your superiors, make your obedience bitter, and make you seek pretexts to escape it. You break silence, and have little secrets to say. You are delighted to find free moments for conversation against the rules. A quarter of an hour in which the heart lets itself go thus does more harm, and puts submission further off, than all the conversations that one could have in other ways.

The superiors, seeing the harm, try to remedy it, and all the most charitable remedies that they use seem to your mind distrust and cruelty. "What shall I do?" you say. "What are they blaming me for? I like such a person for her worth, but I hardly see her more than others. I do not flatter her. We only love each other for God. They want to take away the only comfort left me. With what severity they would treat me, if I broke any rules, since they are pitiless about so innocent a thing!"

The superiors see the harm and cannot very well explain it. They see that an indiscreet friendship subtly poisons the heart, and they do not know in detail how to prevent this contagion. At first the person grows angry, then embittered, and finally revolts to the point of going astray. The finest beginnings cause the most unfortunate results.

2. We do great harm to others. We give them a dangerous example. Each believes herself allowed to form special attachments, which go unconsciously farther than she had thought at first. She excites a kind of emulation and opposition of feeling among those who have different friendships. From this come the little cabals and intrigues which demoralize the most regular houses. Moreover, jealousies come between two people, when they are devoted to the same friend. Each fears lest the other be preferred. What loss of time! What distraction of mind! What foolish anxieties! What disgust with all the interior exercises! What fatal abandon to vanity! What extinction of the spirit of humility and fervour! Even what trouble and what scandal on the outside in all these indiscreet attachments!

We must admit nevertheless that the communities are much exposed to this

danger because these attachments are contagious. When one person takes this liberty, it is the forbidden fruit which she makes others eat after having been the first to eat it. The others do not want to have less comfort and support than this person who seeks to love and to be loved.

3. We do an irreparable wrong to the person whom we love too much. We make her emerge from her simple, detached and submissive conduct. We make her return to herself with satisfaction, and in all the pleasures most flattering to self-love. We draw many mortifications upon her on the part of the superiors. She afflicts them, and she is afflicted by them. They see themselves forced to distrust her, even to suspect her sometimes of things which she has not done, to notice the least slips, not to believe what she says, and to vex her in many little things which, affect her to the depths of her heart.

You who have devoted yourself to her, share with her your crosses and hers. This makes a dangerous relationship, because having hearts full of bitterness on either side, you shed all your rancour one upon the other. You murmur together against the superiors. You strengthen yourselves by vain pretexts against the simplicity of obedience, and this is the unhappy result of all these lovely friendships.

Besides, one single special friendship is capable of upsetting the general unity. A person beloved by another often excites the jealousy and criticism of the whole community. They hate this person. They cross her in everything. They cannot endure her, because she usually seems proud and disdainful, or at least cold and indifferent toward the others whom she does not love. When a person behaves with a general charity, she is generally beloved, and she edifies everyone. When, on the contrary, she is carried away by special friendships, following her own taste, she wounds the general charity by these differences which shock a whole house.

4. Finally, we do great harm to ourselves. Is this renouncing self, following the precept of Jesus Christ? Is this dying to all things? Is this forgetting self, and walking naked after Jesus Christ? Instead of crucifying self with him, we only seek to weaken ourselves, to intoxicate ourselves with a foolish friendship. We lose recollection. We no longer enjoy prayer. We are always eager, anxious, fearful, mysterious, defiant. Our heart is full of her whom we love, that is to say, of a creature and not of God. We make an idol of this creature, and we want also to be hers. It is a perpetual diversion.

Do not say, "I shall control myself in this friendship." If you are this presumptuous you are incapable of controlling yourself. How could you control yourself, in so strong an emotion, when you cannot even control yourself beforehand? Then do not flatter yourself any more. The tender and affectionate nature, which makes you unable to do without some attachment, does not allow you any moderation in those which you will form. At first they will seem necessary and moderate to you, but soon you will realize how many times you will have to be able to govern your heart, and to stop it exactly where you please.

I say in conclusion, that if you have not any special attachment, you could not watch your heart too much, nor guard it too carefully, so that you will never let it escape into these vain affections, which are always heart-breaking in their results.

Do not love one single person so much, and love more all those whom God commands you to love. O, how you will enjoy peace and happiness, if God's love, which is so good and so perfect, takes away your leisure, and your taste

for diversion and the frivolous friendship for creatures, always imperfect and incapable of filling our hearts!

But if you are already ill of this fantasy, if the infatuation of a lovely friendship preoccupies you, at least try to cure yourself little by little. Open your eyes. The creature which you love is not faultless. Have you had nothing to put up with from her? Turn your affection to the supreme goodness, from whom you will never suffer anything. Open your heart to the love of order and of obedience. Taste the pure pleasure of the charity which embraces the whole world, and which makes no jealousy. Love the work of God, the unity and the peace in the house in which he calls you. If you have some obligation to this person, show her your gratitude, but not at the expense of hours of silence, and of your regular exercises. Love her in God, and in God's way. Cut out the indiscreet and grumbling confidences, the foolish caresses, the indecent demonstrativeness, the vain joys, the affected eagerness, the frequent conversations. Let your friendship be grave, simple and edifying in all things. Love God, his work. your community, and your salvation, still more than the person in question.

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PREFACE TO PART II

THESE THIRTEEN chapters which follow divide themselves quite naturally into five groups. Chapters 29 and 30 deal primarily with the Creator-creature relationship existing between God and man, and with the rightful claims which the Creator God has over the lives of men. In them is to be found a profound, yet simple, treatment of the theological doctrines of Creation and Preservation, treated however not as systematic theology, but as living faith. Also in these two chapters Fénelon treats of the practical aspects of the Problem of Evil, of Judgement, and of election. His treatment of these subjects is not difficult to understand. The difficulty arises rather in the attempt to carry out in life their implications. Both chapters constitute the foundation and background for the great theme with which Fenelon will deal in the next section.

The four chapters 31, 32, 33 and 34 all deal with his teaching on Pure Love, and thus form a distinct section. In them we have unrivalled passages of the deepest and keenest psychological insight into the nature of man in his relation to God. Here we find dealt with that most fundamental conflict in man, between living for the Glory of God, and living for self; of egocentricity over against theocentricity. These chapters can be for the reader a rare school in the quest for true self-knowledge. The final chapter of this section treats of what is a common failure in so much religious living, i.e., that of rooting religious faith in consolations. Fénelon shows how religion built upon this foundation cannot survive, and of the need for a much deeper and surer foundation for our religious faith.

Section three, comprising the single long 35th chapter, deals with a fact which is all-important in the living of the spiritual life—that of the indwelling of God in man. Here again Fénelon shows his rare gifts of teaching men about God's indwelling of man, and of man's deep-seated resistances to the work of God within us. There is hardly a page of this section but will portray to us our own selves, and throw much revealing light upon this interior warfare in the soul.

The fourth section, comprising chapters 36 to 39, follows closely upon the foundations laid in the three preceding sections, and describes to us the double work of God upon and in us—his work from without in Providence, and his work within in mortification, suffering and deprivations.

The final section, chapters 40 and 41, deals with two of the great Christian virtues, Simplicity and Humility.

The whole of Part II will require many rereadings even to begin to exhaust its rich content; and those who will do so will greatly profit. Through many rereadings the reader will know that he has been to school with one who knows both God and man deeply and accurately.

* * * *

29

KNOWING GOD

Nécessité de connoître Dieu: cette connoissance est l'ame et le fondement de la solide Piété

WHAT MEN lack most, is the knowledge of God. They know, when they have read a good deal, a certain sequence of miracles and of marks of providence the deeds of history. They have made serious reflections on the corruption and the frailty of the world. They are even convinced of certain maxims useful to reform their habits as touching their salvation. But all this edifice lacks foundation. This body of religion and Christianity is without a soul. What should stir the truly faithful is the idea of a God who is all, who does all, and to whom we owe all.

He is infinite in all things; in wisdom, in power, in love. We must not be astonished if everything which comes from him has this character of infinity, and is beyond human reason. When he prepares and arranges anything, his plans and his ways are as Scripture says as far above our plans and our ways, as heaven is above the earth. When he wants to carry out what he has resolved, his power is not shown by any effort, because there is no deed, great as it may be, which is any more difficult to him than the most ordinary one. It has cost him no more to draw heaven and earth out of nothingness, such as we see them, than it does to cause a river to run in its natural course, or to allow a stone to fall from above to below. His power is manifest entirely in his will. He has only to will, and things are at once accomplished.

If Scripture represents him speaking during creation, it is not that he needed to have a single word proceed from him, in order to have his will understood by the nature which he wished to create. This word, which Scripture tells of, is entirely simple and entirely inward. It is his creative thought, and the resolution which he made deep within himself. This thought was fruitful, and without going forth from him, it drew from him, as from the source of all existence, everything which composes the universe. His compassion, moreover, is nothing else than his pure will. He has loved us before the creation of the world. He has seen us. He has known us. He has prepared good things for us. He has loved us and chosen us from eternity. When some new good comes to us, it flows from this ancient source. God has never any new will for us. He does not change. It is we who change.

When we are just and good, we are being like him and in harmony with him. When we fall away from righteousness, and when we stop being good, we stop being like him and being in harmony with him. It is an immutable rule, by which the changeable creature draws near or goes off successively. His rightness toward the wicked and his love for the good are merely the same thing. It is the same goodness which unites with all which is good, and which is incompatible with all that is evil. As for compassion, it is the goodness

of God which, finding us evil, wishes to make us good. This compassion, which we are conscious of in time, has its source in the eternal love of God for his creature. He alone gives true goodness. Unhappy the presumptuous soul who hopes to find it in himself. It is the love which God has for us which gives us all.

But the greatest good which he can do for us, is to give us the love which we ought to have for him. When God loves us enough to make us love him, he reigns in us. He makes our life, or peace, our happiness, and we begin already to live by his abundant life. This love which he has for us bears his infinite character. He does not love as we do, with a limited and narrow love. When he loves, the dimensions of his love are infinite. He descends from heaven to earth to seek the creature of clay, which knowing God he loves. He becomes man and clay with him. He gives him his flesh to eat. It is by such wonders of love that the infinite surpasses all the affection of which men are capable. He loves as a God, and this love is entirely incomprehensible. It is the height of folly to wish to measure infinite love by limited knowledge. Far from losing any of his greatness by this excess of love, he engraves it with the character of his greatness, marking it with the exuberance and ecstasy of an infinite love. O how great and amiable he is in his mysteries! But we have not the eyes to see them, and we lack the sensitiveness to see God in everything.

* * * *

30

KNOWING GOD (Continued)

Suite du même sujet. Dieu n'est point aimé, parcequ'il n'est pas connu.

IT IS not surprising that men do so little for God, and that the little which they do for him takes such effort. They do not really know him. They hardly believe that he exists. The belief in him which they have is rather a blind deference to the power of public opinion, than a living and distinct conviction of divinity. We suppose so, because we should not dare to look into the matter, and because so far as that goes we do not care very much, being much too wrapped up in other things. But we only know God as some kind of marvellous being, vague and far from us. We think of him as powerful and severe, one who demands a great deal of us, who upsets our desires, who threatens us with great harm, and against whose terrible judgement we must be prepared. Thus think those who do think seriously about religion, small as their number is. We say, "There is a man who fears God." Indeed he only fears him without loving him, as children fear the teacher who uses the rod, as a bad valet fears his master's beating, when he serves him with cringing, and without caring for his interest. Would we want to be treated by a son or even by a servant, as we treat God?

It is because we do not know him, because if we knew him we would love him. "God is love," as St. John said. He who does not love him does not know him, for how can we know love without loving him? Therefore it stands to reason that all those who only fear God, do not know him.

But who does know thee, O my God? He who wishes to know only thee, who wishes no longer to know himself, and to whom all that is not thee will be as though it did not exist. The world would be surprised to hear these words, because the world is full of itself, full of vanity, of deceit, and empty of God. But I hope that there -will always be souls who will hunger for God, and who will relish the truths which I am going to say.

O my God! Before thou madest heaven and earth, there was only thee. Thou wert existing because thou didst never begin to be. But thou wert alone. Beyond thee there was nothing. Thou wert enjoying thyself in happy solitude. Thou wert sufficient unto thyself, and thou didst not need to find anything beyond thyself, since it is thou who givest, far from receiving, to all which is not thyself. By thy all-powerful word, that is to say by thy simple will, at no cost, and creating all its desires by pure will, without time, and without any outer effort, thou didst cause the world which was not, to begin to be. Thou didst not create as do the workmen here below, who find the materials for their works, who only assemble them, and whose art consists in arranging little by little, with great trouble, these materials which they have not made. Thou didst find nothing made, and thou didst thyself make all the materials of thy work. It was upon nothing that thou didst labour. Thou saidst, "Let there be a world," and there was. Thou hadst only to say it, and all was done.

But why didst thou create all these things? They were all made for man, and man was made for thee. That was the order which thou didst establish. Woe to the soul who reverses it, who wishes all for himself, and who shuts himself up in himself! This violates the fundamental law of creation. No, my God, thou canst not cede thine essential rights as Creator. That would be to degrade thyself. Thou canst pardon the guilty soul Who has outraged thee, because thou canst fill it with thy pure love. But thou canst not stop being opposed to the soul which takes thy gifts to itself, and which refuses to relate itself by a sincere and disinterested love to its Creator. Only to fear thee is not to relate ourselves to thee. On the contrary, it is only to think of thee for our own sakes. To love thee simply to enjoy the advantage to be found in thee, this is to relate thee to self, instead of relating self to thee. What must we do then to relate ourselves entirely to the Creator? We must renounce ourselves, forget ourselves, lose ourselves, enter into thy interests, O my God, against our own. To have no will, no glory, no peace but thine. In a word, it is to love thee without loving ourselves.

O how many souls, leaving this life loaded with good qualities and good works, will never have this complete purity, without which we cannot see God. Because of not having this simple relationship of creature to Creator, they will need to be purified by the jealous fire, which in the next life leaves the soul nothing of all which attaches it to self. These souls will not enter into God, until they have completely gone out of themselves in this trial of inexorable justice. All that is still self is of the domain of purgatory. Alas, how many souls rely on their virtues and are not willing to make this unreserved renunciation! This saying is hard for them, and scandalizes them, but it will cost them dear for having neglected it. They will pay a hundred times over for their self-centredness and the futile consolations which they did not have the courage to give up.

Let us repeat. Such is the grandeur of God, that he can do nothing except for himself and for his own glory. It is this incommunicable glory of which he is necessarily jealous, and which he can give to no one, as he himself has said. On the other hand, such is the baseness and the dependence of the creature, that he cannot, without raising himself to a false divinity, and without violating the immutable law of his creation, do anything, say anything, think anything, wish anything for himself or for his own glory.

O nonentity, you want to glorify yourself! You only exist to become nothing in your own eyes. You only exist for him who brought you into being. He owes everything to himself. You owe everything to him. He cannot yield to you. Anything which he would release to you would break the inviolable rules of his wisdom and his goodness.

One single instant, one single sigh of your life in your own interest would hurt essentially the Creator's design for his creation. He has no need of anything, but he wishes all, because all is his due, and all is not too much for him. He has no need of anything, because he is so great, but this same grandeur makes it so that he cannot produce anything beyond himself which is not totally for himself. It is his good pleasure that he wishes in his creature.

He has made heaven and earth for me, but he cannot allow that I should make voluntarily and by choice one single step for any other end than to accomplish his will. Before he had produced creatures, there was no other will but his. Shall we believe that he has created reasoning creatures to will otherwise than he wills? No, no! It is his sovereign reason which ought to enlighten them and be their reason. It is his will, the rule of all good, which should be willed in us. All these wills should only make one through his. That is why we say, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done."

To understand this better, we must realize that God, who has made us from nothing, remakes us still, so to speak, every instant. Because we existed yesterday it does not follow that we are to exist still to-day. We would cease to be, and we would fall back completely into the nothingness from which we came, if the same all-powerful hand which drew us out of it, did not stop us from plunging back into it. We are nothing by ourselves. We only exist because God causes us to exist, and only for the time which it pleases him. He has only to withdraw the hand which carries us, to drown us in the abyss of our nothingness, as a stone, which we hold in the air, falls of its own weight as soon as we no longer hold it. Thus we have life and being only as the gift of God.

Moreover, there are other blessings, which being of a higher and purer order, still more come from him. The good life is more valuable than life. Character is a greater prize than health. Rightness of heart and love of God are further above temporal gifts than heaven is above the earth. If then we are incapable for a single moment of possessing the base and common gifts without God's help, how much stronger reason must there be that he should give us the other sublime gifts of his love, of detachment from ourselves, and of all the virtues!

Thus, O my God, it is not to know thee to think of thee as outside of us, as an all-powerful Being who gives laws to all nature, and who has made all that we see. This is to only know a part of what thou art. It is to ignore what is most wonderful and most touching for thy thinking creatures. What transports me and melts me is that thou art the God of my heart. Thou doest there whatever it pleases thee. When I am good, it is thou who so makest me. Not only dost thou turn my heart as it pleases thee, but even more, thou givest me a heart like unto thine own. It is thou who lovest thyself in me. It is thou who dost animate my heart, as my soul animates my body. Thou art more present and closer to me than I am to myself. This "I" to which I am so sensitive and which I have so loved, should be a stranger to me in comparison to thee. It is thou who hast given it to me. Without thee it would be nothing. That is why thou wishest that I love thee more than I love myself.

O incomprehensible power of my Creator! O right of the creator over his creature, which the creature will never fully understand! O prodigy of love, which God alone can perform! God places himself, so to speak, between me and myself. He separates me from myself. He wants to become closer to me through pure love than I am to myself. He wants me to regard this "me" as I should regard a stranger. He wants me to burst the narrow bounds of this "I", to sacrifice it once for all, and to offer it absolutely and unconditionally to

the Creator from whom I received it. What I am should be much less dear to me than is he, by whom I am. He made me for himself and not for myself. That is to say, to love him, to wish what he wishes, and not to love myself in seeking my own will.

If anyone feels his heart revolted by such entire sacrifice of the ego to him who has created us, I deplore his blindness. I feel badly to see him the slave of himself, and I pray God to deliver him from himself by teaching him to love without self-interest.

O my God! I see in these persons who are scandalized by thy pure love, the darkness and the rebellion caused by original sin. Thou didst not make the heart of man with this monstrous propensity for his own selfish interests.

That rectitude, in which the Scripture teaches us that thou hast created him, simply consists in living not for ourselves, but for him who has made us for himself. O Father! Thy children are disfigured. They no longer are in thy likeness. They are annoyed, they are downcast, when they are told to have their being in thee, as thou dost have thy being in thyself. Reversing this so just order, they want madly to raise themselves to divinity. They want to live for themselves, to do everything for themselves, or at least only to give themselves to thee with reservations, with certain conditions, and for their own interest. O monstrous selfishness! O rights of God unrecognized! O ingratitude and insolence of the creature!

Wretched nonentity! What have you to keep for yourself? What have you that belongs to you? What have you which does not come from on high, and which ought not to return there? Everything, even this so unfair "I", which wants to divide God's gifts with him, is a gift of God which was only made for himself. Everything which is in you cries out against yourself for your Creator. Be still then, creature, who avoid your Creator and offer yourself to him.

But alas, O my God! What a comfort to think that everything is thy work, within me as well as without! Thou art always with me when I do wrong. Thou art within me, reproaching me for the wrong which I am doing, stirring in me regret for the good which I am abandoning and showing me the outstretched arms of compassion. When I do well, it is thou who dost inspire me with the desire to do so, who dost create the good in me and through me. It is thou who lovest the good and hatest the evil in my heart, who dost suffer, pray, edify my neighbour, and give the alms. I do all these things, but it is by thee. Thou makest me to do them. Thou placest them in me. These good works, which I are thy gifts, become my works, but they are always thy works, and they cease to be good works when I consider them mine, and when thy gift, which makes it possible, escapes my sight.

Thus, and I am overjoyed to think so, thou art working ceaselessly in the depths of my heart. Thou workest there invisibly, like a workman who labours in the mines in the bowels of the earth. Thou doest all things, and the world sees thee not. It attributes nothing to thee. I myself erred seeking thee by vain efforts far from me. I was gathering together in my mind all the wonders of nature, to form some picture of thy greatness. I was going to ask for thee among all thy creatures. I did not dream of finding thee at the bottom of my own heart, where thou ceasest not to be. No, my God, we do not need to dig in the depths of the earth. We do not need to cross the seas. We do not need to fly up to the heavens, as thy holy oracles said, in order to find thee. Thou art nearer to us than we are to ourselves.

O God so great and at the same time so familiar, so raised above the skies, and so proportioned to the lowliness of thy creature, so immense and so

intimately enclosed in the bottom of my heart, so terrible and so amiable, so jealous, and so accessible to those who treat thee with the familiarity of pure love, when shall thy own children cease to know thee not? Who will give me a voice strong enough to reproach the whole world for its blindness, and to tell it with authority all that thou art?

When we tell men to seek thee in their own heart, it is telling them to go to seek thee farther than in the most unknown lands. What is farther off and more unknown to most shallow and disintegrated men, than the bottom of their own hearts? Do they know what it is ever to enter their own selves? Have they ever tried the road? Can they even imagine that it is in this sanctuary within, in this impenetrable depth of the soul, that thou wishest to be worshipped in spirit and in truth? They are always outside of themselves, wrapped up in their ambitions or in their pleasures. Alas! How could they understand heavenly truths, when as Jesus Christ said, they are not even aware of the truths of this earth? They cannot conceive what it is to retire into oneself for serious reflection. What would they say, if we proposed to them to go out of themselves in order to lose themselves in God?

As for me, O my Creator, with my eyes closed to all outer things which are only vanity and grief of spirit, I desire to find in the most secret place of my heart, an intimate familiarity with thee, through thy son Jesus, who is thy wisdom and thy eternal mind, become a child to humble our vain and foolish wisdom by his childhood and the folly of his cross. It is there that I wish, whatever it costs me, in spite of my foresight and my reflections, to become little, senseless, even more contemptible in my own eyes than in those of all the falsely-wise. It is there that I wish to become inebriate of Holy Spirit, as the Apostles were, and to be willing as they were to be the laughing stock of the world. But who am I to think of such things? It is no longer I, vile and weak creature, soul of mud and sin; it is thou, O Jesus, truth of God, who thinkest thus within me, and who wilt accomplish these things, that thy grace may triumph the more through a more unworthy instrument.

O God! We do not understand thee. We do not know thee as thou art. "The light shineth in the midst of darkness, and the darkness cannot comprehend it." It is through thee that we live, that we breathe, that we think, that we enjoy pleasures, and we forget thee through whom we do all these things! We only see because of thee, universal light, sun of our souls, who lightest still more brightly than that of our bodies, and seeing nothing except by thee, we see thee not! It is thou who givest all: to the stars their light, to the springs their water and their courses, to the earth its plants, to the fruits their flavour, to the flowers their scents, to all nature its richness and its beauty; to men their health, reason, virtue. Thou givest all. Thou makest all. Thou rulest all. I see only thee. All the rest disappears like a shade from the eyes of him who has once seen thee. And the world sees thee not! But, alas! He who sees thee not at all has seen nothing and has passed his life in the illusion of a dream. He is as though he were not, he is even more unhappy, because it would have been better for him, as I understand thy word, if he had never been born.

As for me, my God, I find thee everywhere. Within me it is thou who doest all that I do of good. I have felt a thousand times that I could not by myself conquer my humour, nor overcome my habits, nor moderate my pride, nor follow my sense of right, nor continue to desire the good which I did at one time desire. It is thou who givest this desire. It is thou who keepest it pure. Without thee I am only a reed blown by the least wind. Thou hast given me courage, integrity, and all my noblest sentiments. Thou hast made me a new heart which desires thy righteousness, and which thirsts for thy eternal truth. In giving it to me, thou hast taken away this heart of the old man, full of mud and corruption, jealous, vain, ambitious, restless, unjust, avid

for pleasures. In what misery should I have remained, alas, had I never hoped to turn toward thee, and to throw off the yoke of my tyrannous passions?

But behold the miracle which wipes out all the rest! Who else but thee could tear me away from myself, turn all my hatred and all my scorn upon myself! It is not I who have done this work, because it is not through self that we escape from self. Thus it had to be a support beyond, upon which I could lean outside of my own heart to condemn its wretchedness. This help had to be from without, because I could not find it in the self which I had to fight, but it also had to be intimate, to snatch the ego from the innermost folds of my heart.

It is thou, Lord, who carrying thy light to the depths of my soul, impenetrable to all else, hast shown me all the ugliness there. I know well that by seeing it I have not changed it, and that I am still hideous in thine eyes. I know well that my own eyes could not have discovered all my hideousness, but at least I see part of it, and I want to find it all. I see myself horrible, and I am at peace, because I want neither to flatter my vices, nor that my vices should discourage me. I see them now, and I bear this shame calmly. I am for thee against myself, O my God! Only thou couldst have divided me thus against my own self. Behold what thou hast done within me, and thou continuest to do it daily, to take away from me all the rest of the wicked Adam-life, and to complete the creation of the new man. It is this second creation of the inner man which is renewed from day to day.

I yield myself, O my God, into thy hands. Turn and turn again this clay. Give it a form. Then break it. It is thine. It has nothing to say. It is enough for me that it serve thine every design, and that nothing resist thy good pleasure, for which I was made. Ask, order, forbid. What wouldst thou that I should do? What wouldst thou that I should not do? Raised, abased, comforted, suffering, intent upon thy works, useless for anything, I shall always adore thee, sacrificing all my own will to thine. I can only say in all things as Mary said, "Be it unto me according to thy word!"

But while thou workest thus within, thou art no less active without. I find everywhere, even in the least corpuscles, the great hand which carries heaven and earth, and which seems to carry on the whole universe as though it were child's play. The one thing which has puzzled me, is to understand how thou allowest so much of evil to be mingled with the good. Thou canst not make evil. All that thou makest is good. How comes it then that the face of the earth is covered with crimes and misery? It seems as though evil prevails everywhere over good. Thou didst make the world only for thy glory, and we are tempted to believe that it is turning to thy dishonour. The number of the wicked infinitely surpasses the number of the good, even within thy church. All flesh has perverted its way. Even the good are only half-good, and make me groan almost as much as the others. Everyone suffers. Everything is in a state of violence. The misery equals the corruption. Why dost thou wait so long, Lord, to separate the good from the evil? Make haste. Glorify thy name. Make those who blaspheme it know how great it is. Thou owest it to thyself to recall all things to order. I hear the impious who say secretly that thou shuttest thine eyes upon all which passes here below. Up, Lord, up! Trample thine enemies beneath thy feet!

But, O my God, how deep are thy judgements. Thy ways are farther above our ways, than the heavens are above the earth. We are impatient, because our entire life is only a moment. On the contrary, thy long patience is founded on thy eternity, to which a thousand years are as the yesterday already passed. Thou keepest the moments in thy power and men do not understand. They grow impatient. They are horrified. They think that thou hast surrendered to evil, but thou laughest at their blindness and all their false

zeal.

Thou makest me to understand that there are two kinds of evils; those which man has made against thy law and without thee, by the wrong use of their liberty; and others which thou hast made, and which are really blessings, if they are considered as the punishment and correction of the wicked, which is thy intention. Sin is the evil which comes from man. Death, illness, pain, disgrace and all the other miseries are the evils which thou turnest to good by making them serve as reparation for sill. As for sin, Lord, thou permittest it in order to leave man free and in the hand of his counsel, according to the words of Scripture. But, without being the author of sin, what marvels thou hast made it accomplish to show forth thy glory! Thou dost make use of the wicked to correct the good, and to perfect them through humility. Moreover, thou dost make use of the wicked against themselves, by punishing them through each other. But, what is touching and lovable, thou dost use the injustice and the persecution of some to convert others. How many people there are who were living in forgetfulness of thy grace and in contempt of thy law, and whom thou hast brought back to thee by detaching them from the world by the injustices which they have suffered.

But, O my God, I see, still another wonder. Thou allowest a mixture of good and evil even in the hearts of those who are most devoted to thee. These imperfections which remain in good souls, serve to humble them, to detach them from themselves, to make them feel their own weakness, to make them run more eagerly to thee, and to make them understand that prayer is the source of all true virtue. O what an abundance of blessings thou dost draw from the evils which thou hast permitted! Thou dost only suffer the evils in order to draw greater blessings from them, and to show forth thy all-powerful goodness by the skill with which thou dost use these evils. Thou dost arrange these evils according to thy plan. Thou dost not create the wickedness of man, but, being incapable of producing it, thou dost only turn it from one side more than to another, as it pleases thee, in order to carry out thy profound plans in justice or in mercy.

I understand the human reasoning which wants to pass judgement on thee, which wants to penetrate thine eternal secret, and which says, "God did not need to draw good from evil. He could have made every man good. He could have done that. He only would have had to do for all men what he has done for some, whom he has taken away from themselves by the charm of his grace. Why didn't he do that?" O my God, I know the answer in thine own words, "Thou hatest nothing which thou hast made. Thou dost not wish the loss of any soul. Thou art the saviour of all." But thou art of some more than of others.

When thou judgest the earth, thou shalt be victorious in thy judgements. The condemned creature will only see justice in his condemnation. Thou wilt show him clearly that thou hast done all that thou shouldest for the cultivation of thy vine. It is not thou who failest him. It is he who fails himself and who destroys himself. Now man does not see this point, because he does not know his own heart. He realizes neither the graces offered to him, nor his own real feelings, nor his inner resistance. In thy judgement thou wilt unfold it all to his own eyes. He will see himself. He will be horrified by the sight. He cannot keep from seeing in an eternal despair what thou hast done for him, and what he has done against himself.

This is what man does not understand in this life, but, O, my God, when he knows thee, he ought to believe this truth without understanding it. He cannot doubt that thou existest, thou by whom all things exist. He cannot doubt that thou art the supreme good. Thus, he has only to conclude, in spite of all the surrounding darkness, that in giving grace to some thou doest right to all. Moreover, thou grantest grace even to those who will forever

experience the rigour of thy justice. It is true that thou dost not always grant so much grace to them as to others. But yet thou dost grant them grace, and such grace as makes them inexcusable when thou dost judge them, or rather when they judge themselves, and when the truth imprinted within them pronounces their condemnation. It is true that thou couldst have done more for them. It is true that thou didst not wish to do so. But thou didst wish to do all that was necessary not to be thyself responsible for their destruction. Thou didst permit it, and thou didst not cause it. If they have been wicked, it is not because thou didst not give them the chance to be good. They did not want to be. Thou didst leave them in their liberty.

Who can complain because thou hast not given them a superabundance of grace? Has not the master, who gives a fair wage to all of his servants, a right to be extra liberal to some of them? Does the extra, which he gives to these, give the others the least right to complain of him? By this, Lord, thou wilt show that, "all thy ways," as Scripture says, "are truth and judgement."

Thou art good to all, but good in different degrees. And the mercies which thou showerest with an extraordinary profusion on some, are not a strict law which obliges thee to be so lavish to all the others.

Be still then, O ungrateful and rebellious creature! You who are thinking at this moment about the gifts of God, remember that this very thought is God's gift. At the very moment when you want to complain of your lack of grace, it is grace itself which causes you to pay attention to the gifts of God. Far from murmuring against the author of all these blessings, hasten to profit by those which he is giving you right now. Open your heart. Humble your weak spirit. Give up your vain and presumptuous mind. Vessel of clay, he who has made you has a right to break you, and far from breaking you, see how he fears to have to. He warns you in his mercy.

Thus I wish always, O my God, to choke back in my heart all the reasoning which tempts me to doubt thy goodness. I know that thou canst never do anything but good. I know that thou hast made thy work like thyself, right, just and good, as thou art; but thou hast not wanted to take away from it the choice between good and evil. Thou offerest it the good. It is enough. I am sure of this without knowing exactly in what way. But the changeless and infallible idea which I have of thee does not allow me to have any doubt of it. I have no stronger reasons for believing that thou art dwelling in any man, whose inner life I know nothing of, and whose innermost nature is unknown even to himself, than I have to believe that thou wilt not condemn any man in thy judgement, without making him inexcusable in his own eyes. That is enough to make me at peace. In that case, if I perish, it is because I shall destroy myself. It is because like the Jews I shall resist Holy Spirit, who is the grace within.

O Father of mercies! I am going to think no longer of philosophizing about thy grace, but of giving myself up to it in silence. Grace accomplishes everything in man, but it accomplishes everything with him and through him. Thus it is with grace that I must act, forbear, suffer, wait, resist, believe, hope and love following all its impressions. It will accomplish everything in me. I shall accomplish everything through it. It is grace which touches my heart, but at least my heart is touched, and thou dost not save man without causing man to act. Then it is up to me to work without losing a moment, in order not to delay the grace which constantly urges me. All good comes from it. All sin comes from me. When I do good, it is grace which animates me. When I do wrong it is because I am resisting it. Ah, may it please God that I seek not to learn still more! All the rest would only serve to feed a conceited curiosity in me. O my God, keep me always among those little children to whom

thou dost reveal thy mysteries, while thou hidest them from the wise and the prudent of the age.

Now, O great God, I no longer stop at this difficulty which has often struck my mind. Why has God, who is so good, made so many men whom he allows to be lost? Why did he cause his own Son to be born and die, when his birth and death are only helpful to so small a number of men? I understand, O all-powerful Being, that all which thou doest, costs thee nothing. The things which we admire and which are the most beyond us are as easy for thee as those which we admire less because of being more accustomed to them. Thou hast no need of proportioning the fruits of thy labour to the labour which the work costs thee. No work costs thee ever either effort or labour, and the only benefit which thou canst derive from all thy works is the accomplishment of thy good pleasure. Thou hast need of nothing. There is nothing which thou canst acquire. Thou dost carry all things within thyself. What thou doest outside adds nothing to thy happiness nor to thy glory. Thy glory would therefore be no less even if no man received the benefit of the Saviour's death. Thou wouldst have given him for only one predestined soul. Only one would have sufficed, if thou hadst wished only for one, because everything that thou doest, thou doest not for thy need of things nor for their value to thee, but to accomplish thy completely free will, which has no other rule but itself and thy good pleasure. Also, if so many men perish, though washed in the blood of thy Son, it is, once more, because thou leavest them in the use of their liberty. Thou findest thy glory in them through thy justice, as thou findest it in the good through thy mercy. Thou only punishest sinners because they are sinning in spite of thee, although they have had the chance to be saints. And thou only crownest the saints because they have become so through thy grace. Thus I see that in thee all is justice and goodness.

For all the evils without, I have already observed, O eternal Wisdom, why thou dost permit them. Thy providence draws the greatest blessings from them. Men, weak and ignorant of thy ways, are horrified. They lament for thee, as though thy cause were lost. It would not matter, if they did not believe that thou art failing, and that irreligion is triumphing over thee. They are tempted to believe that thou dost not see what is happening, or that thou art indifferent to it. But let these impatient and blind men wait a little. The irreligion which triumphs scarcely triumphs. "It flourishes as the grass of the field," which flourishes in the morning and in the evening is trampled underfoot. Death restores all to order.

Nothing presses thee to overwhelm thine enemies. Thou art patient, as St. Augustine said, because thou art eternal. Thou art sure of the blow which will crush them. Thou holdest thine arm upraised a long time, because thou art a father, because thou only strikest with regret because of necessity, and because thou knowest the weight of thine arm. Then let the impatient be horrified.

As for me, I regard the centuries as a minute, because I know that the centuries are less than a minute to thee. This sequence of centuries, which we call the duration of the world, is only a shifting scene which is going to disappear, as a figure which passes and vanishes. A little while, O man who sees nothing, a little while and you will see what God is preparing. You will see him, himself treading all his enemies under his feet. What! You find this horrible waiting too long! Alas, it is only too near for so many wretches! Then the good and the evil will be separated forever, and, there will be as Scripture says, "a time for everything." Meanwhile, whatever happens, it is God who has brought it about, and who has brought it about so that he may turn it to our good. We shall see in his light, in eternity, that what we were desiring would have been fatal for us, and that what we sought to avoid was essential to our happiness.

O deceitful blessings, I will never call you blessings, because you only made me wicked and unhappy! O crosses with which God has weighted me, and by which weak human nature thinks me overwhelmed, you which the blind world calls evils, you will never be evils to me! Rather never speak, than speak the cursed language of the children of this time! You are my true blessings. It is you which humble me, which detach me, which make me feel my wretchedness and the vanity of all that I tried to love here below. Blessed be thou forever, O God of truth, that thou hast attached me to the cross with thy Son, to make me like the eternal object of thy love!

Let no one say to me that God does not see so closely what passes among men. O you blind, who speak thus, you do not even know what God is! As all which exists, only exists by the communication of his infinite being, everyone who has intelligence only has it by a flowing forth of his supreme mind; and everyone who acts only acts by the expression of his supreme activity. It is he who does everything in everything. It is he who, in each moment of our life, is the breath of our heart, the motion of our limbs, the light of our eyes, the intelligence of our spirit, the soul of our soul. Everything that is in us, life, actions, thought, will, is made by the actual impression of that power and that life, of that thought and of that eternal will.

How then, O my God, couldst thou ignore in us what thou thyself hast done! How couldst thou be indifferent to the evils to which we are only exposed by resisting thee within, and to the good which we do only so far as thou takest pleasure in doing it thyself in us? This attention costs thee nothing. If thou ceased to have it, all would perish. There would be no creature left who could wish, or think, or exist. O, men need to know their impotence and their worthlessness, thy power and thy unlimited activity, when they think that thou wouldst be tired of watching and working in so many places! Fire burns wherever it is. We have to put it out and do away with it to make it stop burning, so active and ravenous is it by nature. Thus God is all activity, life and motion. He is a consuming fire, as he himself has said. Wherever he is, he does all, and as he is everywhere, he does everything in every place. He makes, as we have seen, a perpetual creation, and he renews it ceaselessly for all creatures. He creates no less at each instant all free and intelligent creatures. It is he who gives them their mind, their will, their good intentions, and the different degrees of harmony between their wills and his own. Because, "he gives," as St. Paul said, "the will and the deed."

Behold what thou art, O my God, or at least what thou art in thy works, for no one can approach that source of glory which dazzles our eyes, to understand all that thou art in thyself. But at least I see clearly that thou makest use of the evils and the imperfections of creatures to create the good which thou hast resolved upon. Thou hidest thyself behind the intruder, who annoys the faithful person who is impatient and jealous of his freedom to work, and who consequently needs to be interrupted to mortify his pleasure in being free and methodical in his good works. It is thou, my God, who dost use slanderous tongues to destroy the reputation of the innocent, who need to add to their innocence the sacrifice of their reputation, which was too dear to them. It is thou who by the wicked schemes and mean tricks of the envious, dost reverse the fortunes and the prosperity of thy servants, who still cling to this vain prosperity. It is thou who dost suddenly hurry to the tomb people to whom life is a continual danger, and death a blessing which places them in safety. It is thou who makest of the death of these people a remedy, bitter indeed, but very healthy for those who clung to them in too intense and too tender a friendship. Thus the same blow which takes away one person to save him, detaches another and prepares him for his death by the death of those who were the dearest to him. Thus in thy mercy, O my God, thou sheddest bitterness on all which is not thee, so that our hearts, formed to love thee

and to live by thy love, may be forced to return to the feeling that there is no support in all the rest.

My God, thou art all love, and therefore all jealousy. O jealous God, (for it is thus that thou callest thyself) a divided heart annoys thee, an erring heart stirs thy compassion. Thou art infinite in all things; infinite in love as in wisdom and in power. Thou lovest as God; when thou lovest, thou removest heaven and earth to save what is dear to thee. Thou madest thyself man, a child, the last of men, covered with shame, dying in disgrace and in the agony of the cross. It is not too much for infinite love. A finite love and a bounded wisdom cannot understand it. But how can the finite understand the infinite? It has neither eyes to see it, nor a heart fit to feel it. The base and shrivelled heart of man, and his vain wisdom are shocked by it, and do not appreciate the exceeding love of God. As for me, I recognize it by this infinite character. It is this love which creates all, even the ills which we suffer. It is by these ills that he prepares the real blessings for us.

But how can we give back love for love? When shall we seek him who is seeking us, and who carries us in his arms? It is in his tender and fatherly breast that we forget him. It is because of the sweetness of his gifts that we stop thinking of him. What he gives us every moment, instead of touching us, diverts us. He is the source of all these pleasures. Creatures are only their crude channels. The channel makes us not consider the source. This immense love pursues us in everything, and we constantly evade its pursuit. It is everywhere and we do not see it anywhere. We think we are alone when we have only him. He does all, and we do not count on him in anything. We think our condition desperate, when we have no resources but those of Providence. As though infinite and all-powerful love could do nothing! O monstrous error! O reversal of the whole of man! No, I do not want to say more. The erring creature upsets what remains of our reason. We cannot endure it.

O love! Yet thou dost endure it! Thou waitest for him with an endless patience. Thou seemest by thy excess of patience even to encourage his ingratitude! Even those who want to love thee only love thee for themselves, for their consolation or for their security. Where are they, those who love thee for thyself? Where are they, those who love thee because they were created only to love thee? Where are they? I do not see them. Are there any on the face of the earth? If there are not any, make some! Of what use is the whole world if no one loves thee, or if no one loves thee enough to lose himself in thee? This is what thou didst wish in making outside of thyself what is not thyself. Thou didst wish to make beings who, receiving everything from thee, would offer themselves only to thee.

O my God, O love, love thyself in me! In this way thou wilt be loved as thou art lovable. I only want to live to be consumed before thee, as a lamp burns ceaselessly before thine altars. I do not exist for myself at all. It is only thou who existest for thine own self. Nothing for me, all for thee. This is not too much. I am jealous for thee against my own self. Better perish than allow the love which should be given to thee, ever to return to me. Love on, O love! Love in thy weak creature! Love thy supreme beauty! O beauty, O infinite goodness, O infinite love: burn, consume, transport, annihilate my heart, make it a perfect holocaust!

I am not surprised that men do not know thee. The more I know thee, the more I find thee incomprehensible, and too far removed from their shallow thoughts to be possibly known in thine infinite nature. That which makes the imperfection of men makes thy supreme perfection. Thou dost never choose anyone for the good which thou findest in him, because thou only findest in anything the good which thou hast thyself placed there. Thou dost not choose

men because they are good, but they become good because thou hast chosen them. Thou art so great that thou hast no need of any reason for thy decisions. Thy good pleasure is the supreme reason. Thou doest everything for thy glory. Thou relatest all things to thyself alone. Thou art jealous with an implacable jealousy, which does not permit the least reservation in a heart which thou wishest entirely for thyself. Thou, who forbiddest vengeance, thou reservest it for thyself, and thou punishest eternally. Thou ledest, with an incredible condescension and patience, the cowardly souls who live divided between thee and the world, while thou pushest to the extreme the generous souls who give themselves to thee to the point of not considering themselves at all any more. Thy love is tyrannical. It never says, "It is enough." The more it is given, the more it asks. It even treats the faithful soul with a sort of treason. First it draws it by its gentleness. Then it becomes stern toward it. And at last it hides itself to give it a mortal blow, by taking away all visible support. O incomprehensible God, I adore thee! Thou hast made me for thyself alone. I exist for thee and not for myself.

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31

PURE LOVE

Sur le pur amour: sa possibilité, ses motifs.

GOD "has made all things for himself," as Scripture says. He owes to himself all that he makes, and in this he can never yield his rights. The intelligent and free creature is no less his than the creature without intelligence and without liberty. He brings back to himself necessarily and wholly everything which is in the creature without intelligence, and he wishes the intelligent creature to offer itself entirely and without reserve to him alone. It is true that he wishes our happiness, but our happiness is neither the true aim of his work, nor an aim equal to that of his glory. It is indeed for his glory that he wishes our happiness. Our happiness is only a lesser aim, which he connects with the last and essential aim, which is his glory. He himself is his chief and only end in all things.

To reach this main aim of our creation, we must prefer God to ourselves, and only wish for our own salvation for the sake of his glory. Otherwise we should reverse his order. It is not our own interest in our blessedness which should make us desire his glory. It is on the contrary, the desire for his glory which should make us desire our blessedness, as one of the things which he is pleased to make part of his glory.

It is true that many righteous souls are not capable of this so explicit preference of God to themselves, but the implicit preference at least is necessary. The explicit preference, which is the most perfect one, is only suitable for those souls to whom God gives the insight and the strength to prefer him so much to themselves that they only wish their own salvation for the sake of his glory.

The reason that men have such a reluctance to understand this truth, and that this word is so hard for them, is that they love themselves and want to love themselves for their own interest. They understand in general and superficially that we must love God more than all creatures, but they do not understand at all what it means to love God more than self, and only to love self for his sake. They speak these great words easily, because they do so without understanding their whole force. But they shudder when anyone explains to them that we must prefer God and his glory to ourselves and our

beatitude, so that we should love his glory more than our beatitude, and truly associate one with the other, as the lesser end to the main end.

It would be astonishing that men should have so much trouble understanding a rule so clear, so just, so essential for the creature; but, since man "has stopped in himself," as St. Augustine says, he sees only within the narrow limits of the self-love in which he has shut himself. He continually loses the point of view, that he is a creature, that he owes nothing to himself because he does not exist for his own sake, and because he belongs without reserve to the good pleasure of him by whom he has his being. Tell him this overwhelming truth: he dares not deny it. But it escapes him, and he wants always unconsciously to come back to bargaining with God to seek his own interest.

We may say that God has given us a natural inclination for beatification, which is himself. In that way he may have wanted to facilitate our union with him, and to have placed an inclination in us for our own happiness, as he has placed in us one for the food which we need to live; but we must carefully distinguish the delight which God- has put in us at the vision of himself, which is our beatitude, with the strong propensity, which the revolt of the first man has put in our hearts, to center ourselves in ourselves, and to make our love for God depend on the blessedness which we look for through this love. Besides, it is not here a question of any natural inclination necessary, and involuntary. Can we fear that men fall into illusion in doing without what is needed and involuntary?

These involuntary desires, which are less desires than necessary inclinations, can no more be lacking in men, than weight is in stones. It is not a question of our voluntary and deliberate acts, which we can do or not do. So far as these free actions go, the motive of our own beatitude is not forbidden. God is glad to have us find our own interest in our union with him; but this motive must only be the least, and the least wanted by the creature. We must want the glory of God more than our own beatitude. We must only want this beatitude to add to his glory, as the thing which we want the least for the sake of the thing which we want the most. Our interest must matter incomparably less to us than his glory.

This is what the creature, wrapped up in itself since the fall, has such a hard time to understand. This is a truth which is in the very essence of creaturehood, which ought to subdue all hearts, and which nevertheless shocks them when they realize it. But let justice be done, and let justice be done to God. Did we make ourselves? Do we exist for God or for ourselves? Has he made us for ourselves or for himself? To whom do we belong? Has God made us for our own beatitude or for his glory? If it is for his glory, then we must conform to the essential order of our creation. We must wish his glory more than our beatitude, so that we refer our whole beatitude to his own glory.

So it is not a question of the natural and involuntary propensity of man for his beatitude. How many natural propensities or inclinations there are in men, which they can never destroy or diminish, and which they still do not always follow. For example, the inclination to save our lives is one of the strongest and most natural. The inclination to be happy cannot be stronger than the one to live. Beatitude is only the "better life," as St. Augustine says. Thus the desire to be happy is only a sequel to the desire to save our lives. However, we cannot follow this desire in our deliberate acts. How many times the Greeks and Romans gave themselves freely to certain death! How many we see who have given away their lives, despite this deep instinct in the depths of their natures!

Again, it is not a question of our free acts of love for God, and of the

motives involved in our seeking our beatitude. We come to see that the motive of our own interest is only permissible when it is the one which matters least to us, and which only matters in its relation to the chief motive, which we must desire with our whole will, that is to say, the glory of God. It is now only a question of comparing two different ways of thus preferring God to ourselves. The first is to love him in his wholeness, perfect in himself and beatifying for us, in such a way that the motive of our beatitude, though less strong, nevertheless sustains the love which we have for the divine protection, and that we should love God a little less, were he not beatifying for us. The second way is to love God, whom we know to be beatifying for us, and from whom we wish to receive beatitude because he has promised it, but not to love him at all from the motive of selfish interest in that beatitude which we expect. It is to love him only for himself because of his perfection, so that we should love him as much, even if (impossible supposition) he would never be beatifying for us. It is clear that the last of these two loves, which is the disinterested love, accomplishes more perfectly the entire unique relationship of the creature to his end, since it yields nothing to the creature, since it gives everything to God alone, and consequently is more perfect than the other love in which our own interest is mingled with that of God.

It is not that the man who loves without interest does not care for the reward. He cares for it in so far as it is of God, and not in so far as it is his own interest. He wants it because God wants him to want it. It is the order, not his own interest, that he seeks in it. He cares for himself, but he only cares for himself for love of God, as a stranger would, and for the sake of loving what God has made.

It is evident that God, infinitely perfect in himself, does not suffice to sustain the love of a person who needs to be loved for the sake of his own beatitude, which he finds in God. The other person has no need for such a purpose. To love what is perfect in itself, he only needs to recognize the perfection. He who needs the motive of his own beatitude is only devoted to this purpose because he feels that his love would be less strong if this support were taken away from him.

The invalid who cannot walk without a cane cannot let anyone take it away from him. He feels his weakness. He fears to fall, and he is right. But he ought not to be upset to see a healthy and strong man who does not need the same support. The healthy man walks more freely without a cane. But he should never be contemptuous of him who cannot do without it. Let the man who still needs to add the desire for his own beatitude to the supreme perfection of God, in order to love him, recognize humbly that there is in the treasures of the grace of God a perfection above his own. Let him give glory to God for the gifts which others have, without being jealous of them. At the same time let him who is drawn to love without interest follow this lead, but let him not judge either himself or others. Let him attribute nothing to himself. Let him be ready to believe that he is not in the state in which he appears to be. Let him be docile, submissive, distrustful of himself, and strengthened by all the goodness which he does find in his neighbour, who still needs a mixture of self-interest in his love. But indeed the love with no motive of selfish interest in beatitude is clearly more perfect than the one which is mixed with this selfish interest.

If anyone imagines that this perfect love is impossible and visionary, and that it is a foolish subtlety which can become a source of illusion, I have only two words with which to answer him. Nothing is impossible to God. He himself calls himself the jealous God. He only keeps us in the pilgrimage of this life to lead us to perfection. To treat this love as a visionary and dangerous subtlety is to accuse of illusion the greatest saints of every age,

who have admitted this love, and who have reached through it the highest degree of spiritual life.

But if my reader refuses still to recognize the perfection of this love, I ask him to answer me exactly the questions which I am going to put to him. Is not the life eternal a pure gift of grace, and the height of all blessings? Is it not our faith that the kingdom of heaven is only given by the purely free promise, and by the merits equally free, of Jesus Christ? The benefit could be no less free than the promise on which it was based. This is what we never stop saying to our mistaken brothers. We justify ourselves to them by the term "merit," which the church uses, protesting that all our merits are not based at all on a stern righteousness, but only on a promise made in pure mercy. Thus the life eternal, which is the end of God's order, is the freest gift of all. All other blessings are given in relation to that one. This grace, which embraces all the others, is only founded on the most purely gratuitous promise, and followed by the application equally gratuitous, of the merits of Jesus Christ.

The promise itself, which is the foundation of all, is supported by the pure mercy of God, on his good pleasure, and on the good purpose of his will. In this order of blessings, everything is plainly reduced to a supreme free will.

Having presented these indisputable principles, I make a supposition. I suppose that God wants to annihilate my soul at the moment that it escapes from my body. This supposition is only impossible because of the entirely free promise. God could have excepted my particular soul from his general promise for others. Who will dare deny that God could not annihilate my soul following my supposition? The creature, who is nothing by himself, only exists by the arbitrary will of the Creator. So that he will not fall into nothing, the Creator must ceaselessly renew his creation, keeping it going by the same power which has created it. I suppose then a very possible thing, since I only suppose a simple exception to the purely free and arbitrary rule. I suppose that God, who makes all other souls immortal, will finish the duration of mine at the moment of my death. I suppose again that God has revealed: his design to me. No one would dare say that God could not do this.

Admitting these very possible suppositions, there is no more promise, nor reward, nor beatitude, nor hope of future life for me. I can no longer hope to possess God, nor see his face, nor love him eternally, nor be loved by him beyond this life. I suppose that I am about to die. Only one moment of life remains of a life, which is to be followed by fatal and eternal extinction. How shall I use this moment? I urge my reader to answer me with the most exact precision. In this last instant, shall I give up loving God, because of not being able to think of him as a reward? Shall I renounce him since he will no longer be my salvation? Shall I abandon the main true end of my creation?

Could God, in excluding me from the joys of eternity, which he was under no obligation to give me, divest himself of what so essentially belongs to him? Has he ceased to work for his own glory? Has he lost the right of the Creator in creating me? Has he freed me from the obligations of the creature, which owes necessarily all its existence to him by whom it exists? Is it not evident that in this very possible supposition I ought to love God for himself alone, without expecting any reward for my love, and with a certain exclusion from all beatitude, so that this last moment of my life, which will be followed by eternal annihilation, ought to be necessarily filled by an act of love, pure and completely disinterested?

But if he, to whom God gives nothing of eternity, owes so much to God;

what does he owe to him to whom he gives himself entirely forever? I am going to be annihilated right now. Never shall I see God. He refuses me his kingdom which he gives to others. He does not want either to love me or to be loved by me forever. I am obliged, nevertheless, in dying, still to love him with all my heart and all my strength. If I fail him in this, I am a monster and an unnatural creature.

And you, my reader, for whom God prepares, without your deserving it, the possession of himself forever, will you fear, as a fantastic extreme, this love of which I have given you an example? Will you love God less than I, because he loves you more? Will the reward only serve to make your love selfish? If God loved you less than he does love you, you would still have to love him with no motive of self. Is it then the result of the promises and the blood of Jesus Christ, that people do not have a generous and disinterested love of God? Because he offers you complete beatitude in himself, will you only love him in so far as you are sustained by this infinite prize? Is the kingdom of heaven, which is offered to you, while I am excluded from it, a good reason for you not to love God without the motive of your own glory and your own felicity?

Do not say that this felicity is God himself. God could, if he wanted to, be no more beatifying for you than for me. I must love him, although he is not so for me. Why can you not resolve to love him, without being sustained by this incentive that he is beatifying for you? Why do you shudder at the very name of a love which no longer gives this interest?

If eternal beatitude were due us as aright, and if God were, in creating men, forced by obligation to them, to give them eternal life, one could deny my supposition. But one cannot deny without manifest irreverence, that the greatest of blessings, which is eternal life, would be no more a grace. The reward would be due us independently of the promise. God would owe eternal existence and happiness to his creature. He could not do without it. It would become a necessary being. This doctrine is monstrous.

On the other hand, my supposition shows the rights of God and makes plain the possible situation, where love without interest would be necessary. If the order established by the free promise does not enter into the case, it is because God does not judge us worthy of these great tests; it is because he is content with an implicit preference for him and his glory rather than for ourselves and our beatitude, which is like the seed of pure love in the heart of all the just. But, finally, my supposition, comparing man ready to be annihilated with one who has received the promise of eternal life, makes us feel how greatly love mingled with self-interest is beneath disinterested love.

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32

SELF-FORGETFULNESS

Loubli de soi-même n'empêche pas la reconnaissance des bienfaits de Dieu.

THE FORGETFULNESS of self, of which we often speak, does not keep souls who want wholeheartedly to seek God from being thankful for his gifts. For this reason: this forgetting does not mean never seeing anything in relation to ourselves, but only never staying shut up within ourselves, concerned with our blessings or our troubles simply from the point of view of our own possessions or welfare. It is this preoccupation with ourselves, which keeps us from love pure and simple, which contracts our hearts, and which turns us

from our true perfection, because it makes us seek it with pressure, trouble and uneasiness, for love of ourselves.

But when we forget self, when we no longer deliberately seek our own interest, we usually keep ourselves out of the picture. We do not regard ourselves for love of ourselves, but the vision of God which we seek often results in a new view of ourselves. It is like a man who looks at another, behind whom there is a great mirror. In considering the other he sees himself, and discovers himself without intending to. Thus it is in the pure light of God that we see ourselves clearly. The presence of God, when it is pure, simple and sustained by a true faithfulness of soul and the most strict vigilance over ourselves, is this great mirror in which we discern even the least stain on our soul.

A peasant shut up in his village only partially knows his wretchedness, but let him see rich palaces, a superb court, and he will realize all the poverty of his village. He cannot endure its hovels after a sight of so much magnificence. It is thus that we see our ugliness and worthlessness in the beauty and the infinite grandeur of God.

Show as much as you please of the vanity and nothingness of the creature by the faults of creatures. Call to notice the brevity and uncertainty of life, the fickleness of fortune, the faithlessness of friends, the illusion of great places, the bitterness which is inevitable there, the disappointment of the most beautiful hopes, the emptiness of all the good things we possess, the reality of all the evils we suffer: all this moralizing, true and reasonable as it is, only-skims the heart. It does not sink in. The inner man is not changed at all. He sighs to see himself a slave to vanity, and does not get out of his slavery. But if the ray of the divine light shines within, he sees the abyss of good which is God, the abyss of nothingness and evil which is the corrupted creature. He despises himself. He hates himself. He leaves himself. He flees himself. He fears himself. He renounces himself. He gives himself up to God. He loses himself in him. Happy loss! For then he finds himself without seeking. He has no more interest in his own affairs, and everything prospers with him, because everything turns to good for those who love God. He sees the mercy which comes into this abyss of weakness, of nothing and of sin. He sees and he is content with the sight.

Notice that those who are not yet advanced enough in self-renunciation still regard this flow of divine mercy in relation to their own spiritual advantage, in proportion as they still cling more or less to themselves. But, as the entire detachment of the will is very rare in this life, there are also hardly any souls who do not still regard the mercies they have received in relation to the fruits which they receive from them for their own salvation. Thus these souls, although they intend to have no self-interest, still do not cease to be very sensitive to this great interest. They are delighted to see an all-powerful hand which has snatched them from themselves, delivered them from their own desires, broken their chains when they thought they were only going deeper into bondage, saved them, so to, speak, in spite of themselves, and taken pleasure in doing them as much good, as they were doing harm to themselves.

The entirely pure and detached souls, such as are those of the saints in heaven, regard the mercies shed on others with as much love and satisfaction as they do the mercies which they themselves have received. For, not considering themselves at all, they love God's good pleasure, the riches of his grace, and the glory which he derives from the sanctification of another, as much as that which he derives from their own sanctification. Everything is the same then, because the "I" is lost and annihilated, the "I" is no more myself than another. It is God only who is all in all. It is he only whom we

love, whom we admire, and who makes all the joy of our hearts in this heavenly and disinterested love. We are enraptured by his mercies, not for love of self, but for love of him. We thank him for having performed his will and for having glorified himself, as we ask him in the "Our Father," that he carry out his will and glorify his name. In this state, it is not for ourselves that we thank him.

But, waiting for this happy state, the soul, clinging still to self, is touched by this remainder of reversion to self. All that there still is of this reversion stirs a lively thankfulness. This thankfulness is a love still slightly mixed and bent back toward self; whereas the thankfulness of the souls lost in God, like those of the saints, is an immense love, a love without any coming back to self-interest, a love as transported by the mercy shown to others as by the mercy shown to their own selves; a love which admires and receives the gifts of God only for the pure interest and glory of God himself.

But, as nothing is more dangerous than to go beyond the limits of our state, nothing would be more harmful to a soul who needs to be upheld by feelings of gratitude than to deprive itself of this nourishment suited to it, and to run after ideas of a higher perfection for which it is not ready.

When the soul is touched by the memory of all that God has done for it, it is a sure sign that it needs this memory, even taking for granted that its joy in this memory is mixed with some self-interest in its own good fortune. We must leave this joy entirely free, because love, although partly self-centred, sanctifies the soul. And we must wait patiently until God himself comes to purify it. It would be to anticipate him, and to undertake what is reserved for him alone, to want to deprive a man of all motives in which interest in self mixes with that of God. Man himself ought not to trouble his heart in the least over that, nor give up ahead of time the supports which his weakness needs. The child who walks alone, before he is allowed to, will soon fall. It is not for him to do away with the leading strings with which his governess supports him.

So let us live in thankfulness, while thankfulness, even when self-interested, will serve to nourish our hearts. Let us love God's mercies, not only for the love of him and his glory, but also for love of ourselves, and of our eternal happiness, so long as this attitude will strengthen us according to our state. If, later on, God opens our hearts to a purer and more generous love, to a love which would lose itself in him without reversion, and would only see his glory, let us allow ourselves to be carried away without delay or hesitation by this so perfect love.

If then we love the mercies of God, if they transport us with joy and wonder for the sole pleasure of seeing God so good and so great; if we are only concerned with the accomplishment of his will, of his glory which he finds in his own way, of the greatness with which he makes an honoured vessel of that which was base clay: let us give him thanks even more freely, since the benefit is greater, and the purest of all the gifts of God is to love his gifts only for his own sake, without seeking self.

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33

REALITY OF PURE LOVE

Réalité de l'amour pur. L'amour intéressé et l'amour désintéressé ont leur saison.

WHY WOULD we prefer to see the gifts of God in ourselves rather than in others, if this is not attachment to self? Whoever prefers to see them in himself than in others, will also feel badly to see them more perfected in others than in himself. Hence comes jealousy. Then what must we do? We must rejoice that God has performed his will in us, and that he reigns within us, not for our happiness, nor for our perfection because it is ours, but for God's good pleasure and for his pure glory.

Notice two things about this. One, that all this is not a fantastic subtlety, because God, who wants to strip the soul to perfect it, and will pursue it relentlessly toward a purer love, makes it really pass these tests of itself, and does not let it rest until it has taken away all reversion and all self-support from its love. Nothing is so jealous, so severe and so sensitive as this principle of pure love. It would not endure a thousand things which are imperceptible to us in an ordinary state. And what ordinary pious people call subtlety appears an essential thing to the soul which God wants to detach from itself. It is like the gold which is purified in the crucible. The fire consumes all that is not pure gold. We must also make crucibles of our entire hearts, to purify the divine love.

The second thing to notice is that God does not thus pursue every soul in this life. There are an infinite number of very religious people whom he leaves in some self-interest. Indeed these reversions sustain them in the practice of virtue, and serve to purify them up to a certain point. Nothing would be more unwise nor more dangerous than to take from them this comforting preoccupation with the blessings of God in relation to their own perfection. The first persons have a disinterested gratitude. They render glory to God for what he does for us for his pure glory. The last persons also consider what he has done for them, and unite their interest to that of God.

If the first wanted to take this mixture, and this support of self-interest in relation to their blessings, away from the others, they would do as much harm as if we should wean a baby who cannot yet eat. To take the breast away from him, would be to make him die. We should never want to take from a soul who still nourishes it, and what God allows it to sustain its weakness. To want to anticipate grace is to destroy it. Also the second kind of person must not condemn the others, although they are not concerned with their own perfection in the blessings which they receive. God does what he pleases in each one. "The Spirit bloweth where it listeth," and as it wishes. Forgetfulness of self, in the pure view of God, is a state in which God can bring to pass in a soul all which is most pleasing to him. The important thing is that the second kind of person be not curious about the state of the others, and that the others desire not to have them know the experiences to which God is not calling them.

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34

DEPENDENCE

Contre l'attachement aux lumières et aux goûts sensibles.

THOSE WHO are devoted to God only in so far as they feel the joy and consolation of his presence, are like the people who followed Jesus Christ, not for his teaching, but for the miraculously multiplied bread. They say, like St. Peter, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tabernacles here." But they do not know what they are saying. After being intoxicated by the rapture of Tabor, they misunderstand the Son of God, and refuse to follow him to Calvary. Not only they seek the joys, but they want

still more illumination. The mind is curious to see, while the heart wants to be stirred by sweet and flattering feelings. Is that dying to self? Is that the righteousness of St. Paul, of which faith is the life and the food?

We should like to have extraordinary experiences, which would mark his gifts as supernatural and an intimate message from God. Nothing so flatters self-esteem. All the grandeur in the world put together does not so uplift the heart. We give a secret life to our human nature through supernatural gifts. It is an ambition as refined as it is spiritual. We want to feel, to taste, to possess God and his gifts, to see his light, to understand hearts, to know the future, to be a quite extraordinary soul, for the taste for lights and sensations leads a soul little by little to a secret and subtle desire for all these things.

The Apostle shows us a more excellent way, by which he inspires a saintly emulation in us. It is the way of charity, which "seeketh not her own." She does not want to be adorned, as the Apostle said, but she lets herself be divested. It is not the joy in him, that she loves. It is God, whose will she wishes to perform. If she finds pleasure in prayer, she uses this passing pleasure without stopping for it, to help her own weakness, as an invalid, who rises from sickness, uses a cane to walk with. But the convalescence once over, the cured man walks alone. In the same way, the soul still tender and childish, which God feeds with milk in the beginning, lets itself be weaned when God wants to feed it with the stronger bread.

How would it be if we were always children, always hanging to the breast of heavenly consolations! We must put away childish things, as St. Paul said. The first delights were good to attract us, to turn us from coarse and worldly pleasures to others more pure, in fact, to accustom us to a life of prayer and recollection. But to enjoy a delight which leaves out the value of crosses, and to play with a favour which makes us live as though we were seeing paradise wide open, this is by no means death on the cross and self-annihilation.

This life of visions and palpable joys, when we stick to it to the limit, is a very dangerous trap.

1. He who has no other support will leave prayer, and with prayer God himself, when this source of joy is exhausted. You know that St. Theresa said that a great number of souls stopped praying when prayer began to be real. How many souls, having had too tender a childhood in Jesus Christ, too delicate, too dependent on so mild a milk, draw back and give up the life within, when God begins to wean them! Need we be surprised at this? They make the sanctuary of what was only the porch of the temple. They only want an outer death of the crude instincts, so that they can live delightfully within themselves. Thus comes so much infidelity and disappointment among even the souls which have appeared the most ardent and the most detached. Even those who have talked the most of detachment, of death to self, of the dark night of faith and of privation, are often the most surprised and the most discouraged, when the test comes and the consolation goes away. O how good it is to follow the way marked by the blessed John of the Cross, who wants us to believe while we yet do not see, and to love without trying to feel.

2. Every illusion comes from attachment to joyful sensations. Souls are dull at this point, in that they seek sensation to find surety. Quite the opposite. It is sensation which makes us changeable. It is a flattering enticement for self-love. We are not afraid of failing God, while the joy lasts. We say then in our abundance, "I shall never be shaken"; but we think all is lost when the ecstasy is past. Thus we put our joy and our imagination in place of God. It is only pure faith which saves from illusion. When we

rely on nothing imagined, felt or tasted which is illuminated or extraordinary; when we hold to God alone, in pure and naked faith, in the simplicity of the Gospel, receiving consolations as they come, and not stopping for any, not judging at all and always obeying, believing easily that we can be mistaken, and that others can correct us; finally, acting every moment with simplicity and good intention, following the light of faith actually present, we are in the way most contrary to that of illusion.

The practice will make us see better than anything else how much safer this way is than that of joyful experiences and of extraordinary visions. Whoever wishes to try it, will recognize soon that this life of pure faith, wholly followed, is the deepest and most complete death to self. The pleasures and assurances within compensate self-love for all exterior sacrifice. It is a subtle possession of oneself, which gives a secret and refined life. But to let ourselves be stripped without and within all at the same time, without by Providence, and within by the bareness of dim faith, is total martyrdom, and consequently the state farthest from illusion. We only deceive ourselves and we only go astray by flattering ourselves, by sparing ourselves, by reserving some secret life for self-love, by putting some disguised thing in the place of God. When you drop all special vision, all flattering sensation, when you only want to love God without counting on feeling his presence, and to believe the truth of the faith without counting on seeing, this dim nakedness leaves no hold for our will and our own senses, which are the sources of all illusion.

Thus those who want to guard themselves from illusion by seeking joyful experiences to reassure themselves, expose themselves in that very way to illusion. On the contrary, those who follow the appeal of denuding love and of pure faith, without seeking lights and sensations to support them, avoid what can cause illusion and wandering.

You will find in *The Imitation of Christ*, where the author says, that if God takes the inner sweetnesses away from you, your joy should be to stay deprived of all pleasure. O, how a soul thus crucified is agreeable to God, when it does not seek at all to be freed from the cross, and when it truly wants to die there with Jesus Christ!

We seek excuses, saying that we fear to have lost God when we are no longer conscious of him. But in truth, it is our own impatience under trial, it is the restlessness of our hyper-sensitive and self-centred nature; it is the seeking of some support for our self-love, it is an inertia toward abandon, and a secret revival of ourself after having been freed by grace. My God, where are the souls which do not stop on the way of death? Those which persevere to the end will be crowned.

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35

THE WORD WITHIN

Ecouter la parole intérieure de l'Esprit saint; suivre l'inspiration qui nous appelle à un entier dépouillement.

WE KNOW, according to the Bible, that, the Spirit of God dwells within us, works there, prays without ceasing, sorrows, desires and asks for what we ourselves do not know enough to ask for; urges us, inspires us, speaks to us in the silence, suggests all truth to us, and so unites us to himself that are no longer other than "one spirit with God."

This is what faith teaches us. This is what the doctors farthest removed from the inner life cannot keep from recognizing. However, despite this knowledge, they tend always to suppose, in practice, that the outer life, or still more a certain insight into doctrine and reasoning, enlightens us within, and that it follows that it is our mind which acts by itself on this instruction. They do not count enough on the doctor within, who is the Holy Spirit, and who effects everything within us. He is the soul of our soul. We should not know how to form a thought nor a desire except through him. Alas, how great is our blindness! We act as though we were alone in this inner sanctuary. And on the contrary, God is there more intimately than are we ourselves.

You will say to me perhaps, "Then are we inspired?" Yes, surely, but not as were the prophets and the Apostles. Without the actual inspiration of the spirit of grace, we can neither do, nor desire, nor believe anything good. Thus we are always inspired, but we continually stifle this inspiration. God does not cease speaking, but the noise of the creatures without, and of our passions within, deafens us, and stops our hearing. We must silence every creature, we must silence ourselves, to hear in the deep hush of the whole soul, the ineffable voice of the spouse. We must bend the ear, because it is a gentle and delicate voice, only heard by those who no longer hear anything else.

O, how rare it is that the soul is sufficiently stilled to let God speak! The least murmur of our foolish wishes, the least murmur of self-interest, confuses the message of the Spirit of God. We do hear him speaking and asking for something, but we have no idea of what he is saying and often we are as glad not to guess. The least reservation, the least consideration of self, the least fear of hearing too clearly that God is asking for more than we want to give him, any of these will disturb the word within. Need we then wonder, that so many people, even pious people, but still pleasure loving, full of foolish desires, of false wisdom, of complacency, cannot hear; and consider this inner word the imagination of fanatics?

Alas, what do they want to say with their scornful rationalities? Of what use would be the outer word of their ministers, and even of the Bible, if there were not an inner word of the Holy Spirit himself, which gives to the other its power? The outer word, even the Gospels, without this living and fruitful word within, would only be an empty sound. It is the letter which killeth, and only the spirit can give life.

O Word, O eternal and all-powerful Word of the Father, it is thou who speakest in the depth of our souls! The word, which went forth from the mouth of the Saviour during the days of his mortal life, would not have had so great a virtue, nor would it have produced so much fruit in the earth, had it not been inspired by that word of life which is the Word itself. For this reason St. Peter said, "To whom should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Thus it is not only the outer law of the Gospel which God shows us within by the light of reason and of faith, it is his spirit which is speaking, which is touching us, which is operating in us and which is quickening us. In fact it is this spirit which does in us and with us all that we do of good, just as it is our soul which gives life to our body and guides its movements.

Thus it is true that we are constantly inspired and that we only live the life of grace in so far as we have this inner inspiration. But, my God, few Christians feel this. For there are very few of them who do not nullify it by their voluntary dissipation or by their resistance. This inspiration should by no means persuade us that we are like the prophets. The inspiration of the prophets was full of certainty for the things which God revealed to

them or commanded them to do. It was an extraordinary movement, either to reveal the future, or to perform miracles, or to act with complete divine authority. Here, on the contrary, inspiration is without light, without certainty. It is limited to instilling obedience, patience, gentleness, humility, and all the other virtues necessary to every Christian. It is not a divine movement to predict, to change the laws of nature, and to command men on the part of God. It is a simple invitation in the depths of the soul to obey, to allow ourselves to be destroyed and made nothing, according to the designs of God. So this inspiration, taken thus within its limits and in its simplicity, only includes the common doctrine of the whole church. It has not of itself, if the imagination of men add nothing to it, any snare of presumption nor illusion. On the contrary, it keeps us in the hand of God under the guidance of the church, giving all to grace without hindering our liberty, and not leaving anything either to pride or to the imagination.

With these principles clear, we must recognize that God speaks constantly' within us. He speaks in the unrepentant sinners, but these sinners, deafened by the sounds of the world and of their passions, cannot hear him. His word to them is a story. He speaks in the converted sinners. When these sinners are truly touched, they have no trouble understanding this secret voice, because that is what is stirring them so deeply. It is in them the two-edged sword of which St. Paul speaks. It divides the soul from itself. God is making himself felt, appreciated, followed. We hear this voice which carries a tender reproach to the bottom of our hearts, and our hearts are torn by it. This is true and pure contrition.

God is speaking in people who are enlightened, wise; and whose lives, outwardly disciplined in everything, appear adorned by many virtues. These turn everything to reasoning. They seek in natural wisdom, and in prudence, what would come to us infinitely better through the simplicity and the quietness of the Spirit of God. These people appear good, sometimes more so than the others. They are good up to a certain point. But it is a mixed goodness. They want always to be ruled by the measure of their intelligence. They want always to be on their own. They are strong and great in their own eyes. O my God! I give thee thanks with Jesus Christ that thou hidest thy ineffable secrets from the great and the wise, while thou art pleased to reveal them to weak and childlike souls. It is only children with whom thou art familiar without reserve. Thou treatest the others in their way. They want knowledge and lofty virtues. Thou givest them brilliant intelligence and makest them a kind of hero. But that is not the best part. There is something more hidden for thy dearer children. They rest with St. John on thy breast.

As for the great who fear always to yield and to become small, thou leavest them in their greatness. Thou treatest them according to their solemnity. They will never have thy caresses nor thy familiarities. We must be children and play on thy knees to deserve these. I have often noticed that a rough and ignorant sinner, who in his conversion is beginning to be deeply touched by love of God, is more likely to understand this interior language of the Holy Spirit, than some brilliant and wise people who have grown old in their own wisdom. God, who seeks only to communicate, does not know, so to speak, where to get a foothold in these souls so filled with their own selves, and overfed by their own wisdom and virtue. But his familiar talk, as Scripture says, is with the simple.

Where are they, these simple folk? I scarcely see any. God sees them and it is in them that he is pleased to dwell. "My Father and I," said Jesus Christ, "shall come to them, and make our abode with them." O, but a soul given up to grace with no turning back to self, not counting himself for anything, and walking without measure in the mind of pure love, which is the

perfect guide, experiences things which the wise can never experience nor understand! I have been wise, I dare say, as another, but then, thinking that I saw all, I was seeing nothing. I was going groping through a succession of rationalities, but the light was not shining in my darkness. I was content to reason. But alas, when once we have silenced everything in us so that we can hear God, we know all without knowing anything, and we can have no doubt that up to that point we had been ignorant of what we thought we understood. All that we clung to escapes, and we care no longer. We have no more interest in self. We have lost everything. We have lost ourselves. There is something which says within us, I as the spouse of the Song, "Let me hear thy voice, that it may sound in my ears." O, how sweet it is, that voice! It makes my bowels tremble. Speak, O my spouse, and may nothing but thee dare to speak! Hush, my soul! O, love, speak on!

I have just said, we know all without knowing anything. This does not mean that we have the presumption to think that we possess all truth in ourselves. No, no, quite the contrary. We feel that we see nothing, that we can do nothing, and that we are nothing. We feel this and we are overjoyed. But in this renunciation without reserve, we find from one moment to another in the infinity of God all that is necessary according to his plan. It is there that we find the daily bread of truth, as of everything else, without making provision for it. It is there that grace teaches us all truth while taking from us all knowledge, all glory, all self-interest, all selfish desire, keeping us content in our powerlessness, and below every creature, ready to yield to the last worms of the earth, ready to confess our most secret wretchedness before all. Fearing in our faults only infidelity, not fearing either punishment or confusion. In this state, I say, the Spirit teaches us all truth because all truth is gloriously contained in, this sacrifice of love in which the soul strips itself to give all to God. That is the manna, which without being any particular kind of food, has the flavour of every kind.

In the beginning, God attacked us from without. He snatched away little by little the creatures which we loved the most, contrary to his law. But this work from without, although essential to lay the foundation of the whole building, is only a very small part of it. O, but the work within, though invisible, is incomparably greater, more difficult and more wonderful! There comes a time when God, after having thoroughly despoiled us, thoroughly mortified us from without through the creatures which we set store by, attacks us from within by taking us away from ourselves. It is no longer extraneous things of which he deprives us. This time he takes away the ego which was the centre of our love. We only loved the rest because of this ego, and it is this ego which God pursues pitilessly and relentlessly. To take away a man's clothes is to treat him badly; but that is nothing to the severity of flaying him and not leaving any flesh on his bones. Cut the branches of a tree and, far from making it die, you strengthen its vitality. It shoots up again on all sides. But attack the trunk, or destroy the roots, and it drops its leaves, sickens, dies. It is thus that God pleases to make us die.

He makes us accomplish the outer mortification of the senses by some brave effort against ourselves. The more the feelings are deadened by this courage of the soul, the more the soul sees its virtue, and is sustained during the struggle. But next God reserves for himself the right to attack the depths of that soul, and to snatch away from it even the last sigh of its own life. Then it is not by the force of the soul that it fights outer things; it is by the weakness of the soul that he turns it against itself. It sees itself. It is horrified by what it sees. It remains faithful, but it no longer sees its faithfulness. Every fault which it has had up to then, raises itself against it, and often new ones appear which it had never suspected. It finds no longer that resource of fervour and courage which sustained it

before. It fails in exhaustion. It is, like Jesus Christ, sad unto death. All that is left to it is the desire to cling to nothing, and to let God act without reservation. It does not even have the consolation of discovering this will in itself. It is no longer a sensitive and cautious will, but a simple will, with no reverting to self, and even more hidden as it is more intimate and deeper in the soul.

In this state, God takes care of all that is necessary to detach this person from herself. He divests her little by little, taking away one after the other all the clothes with which she was dressed. The last stripping, although not always the greatest, is nevertheless the most severe. Although the dress is more valuable than the slip, we feel much more the loss of the slip than that of the dress. In the first undressing, what is left makes up for what is lost. In the last, nothing is left but bitterness, nakedness and confusion.

You will ask perhaps of what these deprivations consist, but I cannot say. They are as different as men are different from one another. Each suffers his own according to his needs and God's plan. How can we know of what we shall be stripped, when we do not know what we are wearing? Each one of us keeps an infinity of things which he would never guess. We do not know are attached to them until they are taken away. I do not feel my hairs until they are pulled from my head. God unfolds for us little by little our depths which were unknown to us. And we are astonished to discover, even in our virtues, vices of which we had not believed ourselves capable. It is like a cave that seemed dry on all sides, and from which water gushes forth all of a sudden in the places which we suspected the least.

These deprivations which God asks of us are not ordinarily what one would imagine. What is expected finds us prepared, and does not kill us. God surprises us by the most unexpected things. They are the nothings, but the nothings which desolate us, and are the torment of self-love. The great brilliant qualities are no longer the thing. They would sustain our pride. They would give a certain force and inner assurance contrary to the purposes of God, which is to make us go beyond our depth. Thus it is a simple and even guidance. Everything is ordinary.

Others see nothing important and even the person herself finds nothing in herself but her own nature, weak and relaxed, but we should a hundred times rather fast all one's life on bread and water, and practise the greatest austerities, than to suffer all that goes on within. It is not that we have a certain eagerness for austerities. No, this eagerness has vanished. But we find, in the yielding which God asks for in a myriad of little things, more renunciation and more death to self than there would be in great sacrifices. Meanwhile God does not leave the soul at rest until he has made it supple and pliable by bending it from all sides. We have to speak too frankly, then we have to be silent. We have to be praised, then blamed, then forgotten, then examined afresh. We have to be abased, to be exalted, to let ourselves be condemned without first saying a word in justification. Another time we have to speak well of ourselves. We have to be willing to find ourselves weak, restless, irresolute over a trifle, to show the spite of a little child, to shock our friends by our sternness, to become jealous and suspicious with no reason; even to speak our stupidest jealousies to those against whom we have felt them, to speak with patience and frankness to some people, against their inclination and against our own, to no avail; to appear artificial and of bad faith; finally to find ourselves dry, failing, weary of God, disintegrated and so far from all feeling of grace, that we are tempted to fall into despair. These are examples of the inner deprivations, which come now into my mind, but there are an infinite number of others which God suits to each according to his designs.

Let no one tell me that these are wild imaginings. Can anyone doubt that God acts directly in our souls? Can anyone doubt that he only acts there to make us die to ourselves? Can we doubt that God, after having taken away the coarser passions, attacks all the subtle reversions of self-love within us, especially in the souls which have given themselves up generously and without reserve to the spirit of grace? The more he wants to purify us, the more he tries us within. The world has no eyes to see these trials, nor ears to hear them, but the world is blind. Its wisdom is only death. It cannot be compatible with the spirit of truth. "It is only the Spirit of God," as the Apostle said, "who can penetrate the depths of God himself."

In the beginning we are not yet accustomed to this guidance within, which tends, to strip us to the bone. We are glad to be still, to be recollected, to endure all things, to let ourselves go with the stream of Providence, as a man would let himself be carried by the current of a river, but we do not yet dare to risk listening to the voice within calling us to the sacrifices which God prepares. We are like the child Samuel, Who was not yet accustomed to the messages of the Lord. The Lord called. He thought it was Eli. Eli said, "My child, you have dreamed. No one is speaking to you."

However, we do not know if it is our imagination which has pushed us too far. Often the high priest, Eli, that is to say the conductor, tells us that we have dreamed, and that we should remain in peace. But God does not allow us to, and he calls us until we pay attention to what he wants to say. If it is a question of visions, apparitions, revelations, extraordinary lights, miracles, conduct contrary to the feeling of the church, we should be right not to stop for them. But when God has led us to a certain point of detachment, and then we have an inner conviction that he still desires certain harmless things, which will only make us more simple and ready for more complete self-dying, is there any illusion in following these movements?

I suppose that we do not follow them without good advice. The reluctance of our wisdom and our self-love to follow these movements shows clearly enough that they are indications of grace; for thus we see clearly that we are only held back from them by sensitiveness and by the pull of self-interest. The more we fear to do these things, the more we need them, because the fear only comes from fastidiousness, stiffness, and attachment either to our own tastes or to our own views. But we must be dead to all of these opinions of our natural life. Thus every pretence of drawing back is taken away by the conviction at the bottom of our hearts that they will help to make us die.

Flexibility and promptness in yielding to these stirrings is what advances souls the most. Those who are noble enough never to hesitate soon make an incredible progress. The others reason, and never lack reasons to keep them from doing what they have at heart. They want to and they do not want to. They wait for certainty. They ask advice at this point, which lets them out of what they fear to undertake. At each step they stop and look backward. They languish in irresolution, and unconsciously alienate the Spirit of God. First they sadden him by their hesitations. Then they irritate him by their repeated resistance. Finally they extinguish him by their continued resistance.

When we resist, we find pretexts to cover our resistance and to authorize it. But unconsciously we ourselves shrink, we lose our simplicity, and however hard we try to deceive ourselves, we are not at all at peace. There is always in the back of our conscience a something or other which reproaches us for having failed God. But as God withdraws because we have withdrawn from him, the soul hardens little by little. It is no longer at peace, but it is not seeking its true peace. On the contrary, it goes farther

and farther away looking for it where it is not. It is like a dislocated bone, which keeps on secretly aching, but although it is in a terrible condition out of place, it does not try to get back in position. On the contrary, it becomes imbedded in its bad situation. O, how pitiable a soul is when it begins to regret the secret invitations of God, who asks it to die to all!

First it is only a grain of sand, but this becomes a mountain, and soon forms a kind of impenetrable chaos between God and itself. We pretend to be deaf when God asks for a little simple thing. We are afraid to hear him. We should like to be able to tell ourselves that we have not heard him. Indeed we do say it to ourselves, but we are not convinced. We become confused, we doubt all that we have experienced, and the evidences of grace which have helped most to make us simple and small in the hand of God, begin to seem illusions. We seek without, in the authority of directors, to calm the conflict within. We do not fail to find it, because there are so many of them who have had little experience, even with great knowledge and piety. In this state, the more we want to be cured, the sicker we make ourselves. We are like a wounded stag, who carries in his flanks the arrow by which he has been pierced. The more he plunges across the forest to get rid of it, the deeper it buries itself in his body. Alas, "Who has resisted God and been at peace?"

Can God, who is the only true peace, leave a heart at rest which is opposing his purposes? Thus we are like people who have an unknown disease. All the doctors use their skill to relieve them, and nothing does relieve them. You see them unhappy, overcome, failing. There is neither food nor remedy which can do them any good. They fall away day by day. Need we be surprised that in going off our true road we go away from every route, wandering constantly farther and farther?

But, you will say, the beginnings of all these troubles are nothing. It is true, but what follows is fatal. We did not want to hold anything back in the offering which we were making to God. Thus we were apt to consider things from a distance confusedly. But then, when God takes us at our word, and accepts our offerings in detail, we feel a thousand strong repugnances which we had not suspected. Our courage fails, vain pretexts come to flatter a weak and disturbed heart. First we slow down, and we doubt if we should go on; then we only do half of what God asks. Into the divine project, we mix a certain movement of our own natural ways, to save some last measure of that corrupt core which does not want to die. God, jealous, cools off. The soul begins to want to shut its eyes, not to see any longer what it has not the courage to perform. God leaves it in its weakness and its cowardice, since it wants to be so left.

But understand how great its fault is. The more it has received from God, the more it ought to give back to him. It has received an attentive love and unusual blessings. It has tasted the gift of a pure and disinterested love, which so many souls, otherwise very pious, have never felt. God has left nothing undone to entirely possess it. He has become the bridegroom within. He has taken care to do everything for his bride, but he is infinitely jealous. But do not be surprised at the sternness of his jealousy. Of what then is he so jealous? Is it of our talents, intelligence, the regularity of our virtues? No. He is condescending and easy about all such things. Love is jealous only of love. All of his punctiliousness is only concerned with the rectitude of the will. He cannot suffer any division of the heart of the bride, and he suffers still less all pretexts by which the bride seeks to deceive herself to excuse the division of her heart. That is what lights the devouring flame of his jealousy. So far as a pure and ingenuous love guides you, O bride, the bridegroom will bear with an unlimited patience all that you do which is irregular, through carelessness or weakness,

without detriment to the integrity of your heart. But from the moment that your love refuses anything to God, and that you want to deceive yourself in this refusal, the bridegroom will consider you an unfaithful bride who wishes to cover her infidelity.

How many people, after great sacrifices, fall into this sort of resistance! False wisdom causes nearly all the trouble. It is not so much for lack of courage as because of too much human reason, that we are stopped in this course. It is true that God, when he has called souls to sacrifice without reserve, treats them in proportion to the ineffable gifts with which he has showered them. He demands insatiably mortification, loss, renunciation. He is even jealous of his gifts, because the excellence of his gifts secretly nourishes a certain self-confidence within us. All must be destroyed. All must perish. We have given all. God wants to take away all from us, and indeed he leaves us nothing. If there is still the least thing to which we cling, good as it may appear, he comes, sword in hand, to cut that least thing from the farthest recess of our heart. If there is any place where we are still fearful, it is there that he comes to take us, because he always takes us in the weakest place. He drives us without ever letting us get our breath. Need we be astonished? Can we die while we still breathe? We want God to give us the death blow, but we should like to die painlessly. We should like to die to all desire, by choice of our own desire. We should like to lose everything and to keep everything. Alas, what agony, what pangs, when God leads us on to the end of our strength! We are in his hands like a sick person in the hands of a surgeon who performs a painful operation. We fall in a swoon. But this comparison is not good, because after all, the operation of the surgeon is to make us live, and that of God is to make us really die.

Poor souls! Weak souls! How the last blow crushes you! The very expectation makes you tremble, and turn backward. How many there are who never get so far as to cross the frightful desert! Hardly two or three will see the promised land. Unhappy those from whom God expects all, and who do not fulfil their blessings! Unhappy he who resists within! Strange sin, that of the sinner against the Holy Spirit! The unforgivable sin in this world and the other, is it not the sin of resisting the invitation within? He who resists conversion will be punished in this world by trouble, and in the other by the pains of hell. He who resists being absolutely dead to himself, and giving himself up to the grace of pure love, will be punished in this world by remorse, and in the other by the vengeful fire of purgatory. We have to have our purgatory in this world or the other, either by the inner martyrdom of pure love, or by the torments of divine justice after death. Happy he who never hesitates, who fears only not following quickly enough, who always would rather do too much than too little against himself! Happy he who bravely offers all of the goods, of which he has only been asked for a sample, and who lets God cut from the full width of the cloth! Happy he who not counting on himself for anything, never makes God need to direct him! Happy he whom all this does not terrify!

We think that this state is horrible. We are mistaken. It is there that we find peace, liberty, and that the heart, detached from all, expands without limit, so that it becomes immense. Nothing contracts it, and according to his promise, it becomes one with God himself.

O my God! Thou alone canst give the peace which we experience in this state. The more the soul offers itself freely and without falling back upon itself, the more it is at liberty. So long as it does not hesitate to lose all and to forget itself, it possesses all. It is true that the soul's peace is not a considered possession, so that we can say to ourselves, "Yes, I am in peace, and I live happy." That would be to revert too much to ourselves, and

to seek our own good, after having left it. It is an image of the state of the blessed, who will be forever lost in God, without having in all eternity one instant to think of themselves or of their good fortune. They are so happy in this transport, that they will be happy eternally, without saying to themselves that they are enjoying their happiness.

O bridegroom of souls, thou let test the souls which do not resist thee experience in this life an advance taste of that felicity. We want nothing and we want all. As it is only the creature which bounds the heart, the heart, never being contracted by the attachment to creatures nor by conversion to self, enters so to speak into thine immensity. Nothing stops it. It loses itself more and more in thee. But although its capacity grows infinitely, thou dost entirely fill it. It is always brimming over. It does not say, "I am happy," because it does not care about being so. If it cared, about being so, it would not be so any longer. It would still be loving itself. It does not possess its joy, but its joy possesses it. When at any time someone takes it and asks, "Do you want to suffer what you are suffering? Would you like to have what you have not?" it replies with no hesitation, and without considering itself, "I want to suffer what I suffer, and I do not want what I do not have. I want all. I want nothing."

That, my God, is the true and pure worship in spirit and in truth. Thou seekest such worshippers, but thou dost scarcely find them. Nearly all seek themselves in thy gifts, instead of seeking thee alone by the cross and by deprivation. We want to guide thee, instead of letting ourselves be guided by thee. We give ourselves to thee to become great, but we hold back since we have to let ourselves be made small. We say that we cling to nothing, and we are frightened by the slightest loss. We want to possess thee, but we do not want to lose ourselves so that we can be possessed by thee. This is not loving thee. This is wanting to be loved by thee. O God! The creature does not realize why thou hast made it. Teach it and impress in the depths of its heart that the clay should allow itself unresistantly to take all the shapes that the potter pleases.

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36

SUFFERING

Utilité des peines et des délaissements intérieurs. N'aimer ses amis qu'en Dieu et pour Dieu.

GOD, WHO seems so stern to souls, never makes them suffer anything for the pleasure of making them suffer. He only plunges them into suffering to purify them. The rigour of the operation comes from the illness which must be done away with. No incision would be necessary if all were well. He only cuts what has mortified and is ulcerated. Thus it is our corrupt self-love which makes our pains. The hand of God hurts as little as it can. Judge how deep and poisonous are our wounds, since God spares so much, and nevertheless makes us so violently suffer.

Even when he never makes us suffer except for our healing, he does not take away one of his gifts, without returning it a hundredfold. For love's sake he takes away all the purest gifts which we possess impurely. The purer his gifts, the more he is jealous that we should keep them without appropriating them, and without ever relating them to ourselves. The noblest blessings are the most dangerous poisons, if we depend somewhat on them and are somewhat complacent about them. This is the sin of the bad angels. All they did was to consider their blessed state and feel smug about it. Behold

them, in that very instant, thrown out of heaven and eternal enemies of God.

This example makes us see how many men think that they are not sinning at all. This is the greatest sin of all. However, it is very rare to find souls pure enough to hold the gift of God purely and without possessiveness. When we think of the blessings of God, it is always for ourselves; and it is the love of self which makes nearly always a certain sensitiveness which we feel about our blessings. We are sunk to find ourselves weak. We do not think of our perfection only for the glory of God, as we should think of that of someone else. We are depressed and discouraged when the enjoyment we can feel and when visible blessings escape us. In a word, it is mostly with ourselves and not with God that we are concerned.

Hence comes it that all the visible virtues need to be purified, because they nourish the natural life in us. Corrupt nature is nourished very subtly on the graces most contrary to human nature. Self-love feeds itself not only on austerity and humiliations, not only on fervent prayer and self-renunciation, but still more on the purest abandon and the most extreme sacrifices. It is an infinite support to think that we are not supported by anything, and that in this horrible ordeal, we do not cease to give ourselves faithfully and without reservation. To complete the sacrifice of purification in ourselves of the gifts of God, we must therefore manage to destroy the sacrifice. We must lose all, even the sense of abandon by which we see ourselves given up to destruction.

We find God by himself, only in this apparent loss of all his gifts, and in this real sacrifice of our whole self, after having lost every resource within. The infinite jealousy of God pushes us to this extent, and our self-love makes it, so to speak, a necessity, because we only lose ourselves completely in God when all begin to let himself go until after all supports at the edge escape his hands. The self-love which God casts down, clings, in its despair, to all the shadows of grace, as a man who is drowning catches at the brambles which he finds as he falls into the water.

So we must understand clearly the need for this taking away, which little by little is done with all the divine gifts in us. There is not a single gift, noble as it may be, which, after having been a means of advancement, does not generally become, later on, a trap and an obstacle, by the return of self which soils the soul. For this reason God takes away what he has given. But he does not take it away to deprive us of it for ever. He takes it away so that he can better give it, so that he can give it back without the impurity of this evil sense of ownership which we mingle with it without noticing it in ourselves. The loss of the gift takes away our ownership, and the sense of possession being taken away, the gift is given back a hundredfold. Then the gift is no longer the gift of God. It is God himself in the soul. It is no more a gift of God, because we consider it no longer as something apart from him, and something which the soul can possess. It is God himself whom we see immediately, and who, without being possessed by the soul, possesses it according to its good pleasure.

God's most usual way with souls then is first to attract them to him in order to detach them from the world and from gross desires, by making them taste all the most devout fervency and the sweetness of recollection. In the first sensitive attraction, the whole soul is turned to mortification and prayer. It fights itself constantly in all things. It does away with all external consolations, and those of friendship are also curtailed, because it is conscious of the impurity of self-love, which relates friends to self. There remain only the friends to whom we are bound by similarity of feeling, or those whom we cultivate for charity or for duty's sake. All the rest become a tax, and if we have not lost our natural liking for them, we distrust

their friendship still more when they are not in the same religious mood in which we are.

There are plenty of souls which never pass this state of fervour and spiritual abundance. But there are others which God leads farther, and which he divests jealously after having clothed and adorned them. These last fall into a state of distaste, dryness and languor, in which everything is a burden to them. Far from being responsive to friendship, the friendship of the people whom they formerly enjoyed the most becomes irritating to them. A soul in this state feels that God and all his gifts are withdrawing from it. It is a time of agony and a kind of despair. We cannot endure our suffering selves. Everything loses its flavour. God takes away all, and the enjoyment of friendships as well as all the rest. Need we be surprised? He even takes away our joy in his love and his law. We no longer know where we are. The heart is blighted and nearly extinguished. It would not know how to love anything. The bitterness of having lost God, whom we had felt so sweetly with such fervour, is wormwood spread over everything which we have loved among his creatures. We are like an invalid who feels his weakness from lack of nourishment, and who feels a revulsion toward all the daintiest of foods.

Then do not speak of friendship. The very name hurts, and would bring tears to our eyes. Everything overcomes us. We do not know what we want. We have affections and griefs as a child does. We cannot tell the reason, and they vanish like a dream, the moment that we speak of them. Whatever we say of our condition seems always a lie, because it stops being true when we begin to speak of it. Nothing lasts in us. We cannot respond to anything, nor promise ourselves anything, nor even describe ourselves. We are, so far as our inner feelings go, like the daughters of the Visitation in their cells and on their benches. Everything changes. Nothing is left to us, and our hearts least of all. It is hardly believable that here this childish inconstancy belittles and, destroys a wise soul, which is strong and high-minded in character. To speak of natural goodness, of tenderness, generosity, constancy, gratitude for our friends, to a sick and suffering soul, is like talking of dancing and music to a person who is dying. The heart is like a tree withered to the root.

But wait until the winter is past, and until God has made all die which ought to die, then the spring revives all. God gives back friendship with all the other gifts a hundredfold. We feel our old interest in our true friends reborn in us. We no longer love them in ourselves and for ourselves. We love them in God and for ourselves. We love them in God and for God, but with a lively, tender love accompanied by enjoyment and sensitiveness, because God knows how to make the sensitiveness indeed pure. It is not sensitiveness, but self-love, which spoils our friendship. Now we give ourselves up without scruple to chaste friendship, because God gives it. We love along his way without being turned from it. It is he who is loved in what he makes us love.

In this order of Providence, which links us with certain people, God gives us an affection for them and we do not fear at all the desire to be loved by these people, because he who instils this desire instils it very purely, and without any return of possessiveness in us. We want to be loved as we would want someone else to be loved, if it were the order of God. We seek it for God's sake, without self-satisfaction and without self-interest. In this resurrection of friendship, since all is disinterested and without consideration of self, we see all the faults of our friend and of his friendship without being discouraged by them.

Before God has thus purified our friendships, the most religious people are hypercritical, jealous, pained, for their best friends, because self-love is always afraid of losing, and wants always to gain even in relations which

seem the most generous and disinterested. If they do not seek wealth or honour through a friend, at least they seek a common interest, the comfort of confidence, rest for the heart, which is the greatest sweetness in life. At best they seek the exquisite pleasure of loving generously and without self-interest.

Take away this consolation, trouble this friendship which seems so pure, and self-love is desolate. It complains. It wants to be pitied. It is vexed. It is beyond itself. It is for itself that it is offended. This shows that it is self that it was loving in its friend.

But when it is God that we love in our friend, we stand by him firmly and with no reservations. Meanwhile if the friendship is broken in the order of God, all is serene in the depths of our souls. We have lost nothing, for we ourselves have nothing to lose, because we ourselves are already lost. If we are saddened, it is for the person we loved, in case the break may be bad for him. The pain may be keen and bitter, because the friendship was very sympathetic. But it is a calm suffering, and free from the cutting grief of a possessive love.

There is still a second difference to notice in the changing of friendships through the action of grace. While we are still self-centred, we love nothing except for our own sake. And the man shut up in himself can only have a friendship limited by his own measure. He has always a heart shrunken in all his affections. And the greatest worldly generosity has always, in some direction, narrow limits. If the pride of loving well leads far, we stop short when we come to the point where we think that this pride will be wounded. As for out-going souls, who truly forget themselves in God, their friendship is as large as the one in whom they love. There is only the reversion to ourselves which bounds our hearts, because God has given them any amount of infinity in relation to himself. This is because the soul which is not preoccupied with itself, and which counts itself as nothing in all things, finds in this nothing the immensity of God himself. It loves without measure, without end, without human motive. It loves because God, measureless love, loves in it.

Think of the state of the Apostles, which was well expressed by St. Paul. He feels everything with an infinite purity and vividness. He carries all the churches in his heart. He rejoices. He is afflicted. He grows angry. He grows tender. His heart is as though it were the seat of all the strongest passions. He makes himself small. He makes himself great. He has the authority of a father and the tenderness of a mother. He loves with a jealous love. He wants to be cursed for his children. All these feelings are given him, and it is thus that God makes a person love others, when he no longer loves himself.

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37

PRIVATIONS

Contre l'horreur naturelle des privations et des dépouillements.

NEARLY all of those who serve God, think of serving him for themselves. They think of gain and not of loss; of being comforted and not of suffering; of possessing, and not of being deprived; of increase, and never of decrease. On the contrary, all work within consists in losing, sacrificing, lessening, belittling oneself, and even divesting oneself of the gifts of God, so as to cling to him alone. We are constantly like invalids obsessed with their own

health, who feel their pulse thirty times a day, and who need a doctor to reassure them by ordering frequent remedies, and telling them that they are getting better. That is nearly all the use we make of a doctor. We only revolve in a small circle of common virtues, and never go wholeheartedly beyond that.

The director, like the doctor, flatters, comforts, encourages, keeps up our fussiness and sensitiveness over ourselves. He only orders mild little remedies, which become a habit. As soon as we find ourselves deprived of sensible blessings, which are only milk for babies, we believe that all is lost. This is a clear proof that we cling too much to the means, which are not the ends, and that we always want everything for ourselves.

Privations are the bread of the strong. It is they which make the soul robust, which take it away from itself, which offer it purely to God. But we are desolate when they commence. We believe that all is in reverse, when all is beginning to be established firmly and to be purified. We want very much to have God make what he wishes of us, provided that he always makes something great and perfect. But unless we want to be destroyed and annihilated, we will never be the victims of a destruction from which nothing remains, which the divine fire consumes. We would like to enter into pure faith, and always to keep our own wisdom; to be a child, and to be great in our own eyes. What a fantasy of spirituality!

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38

SELF-RENUNCIATION

Nécessité de renoncer à soi-même: pratique de ce renoncement.

IF YOU really wish to understand what it means to renounce self, you have only to remember the difficulty which you felt within you and which should quite naturally feel, when I said never to consider at all this "ego" which is so dear to us. Self-renunciation is to count oneself as nothing. Whoever feels the difficulty of doing this has already understood what the renunciation which revolts his whole nature consists of. Since you have felt this blow, it has shown the tender spot in your heart. Now it is up to you to allow the all-powerful hand of God to operate. He will know how to take you away from yourself.

The source of our trouble is that we love ourselves with a blind love which reaches the point of idolatry. All that we love outside we love for self alone. We must free ourselves from all these generous friendships, in which we seem to forget ourselves so that we think only of the interests of the people to whom we are attached. When we are not seeking any low and crude interest in the give and take of friendship, we are seeking another interest there, which is only the more dangerous by being more hidden, more delicate and even more ingenuous in the world's eyes. It is capable of poisoning us by the better nourishing of our self-love in us.

Thus we seek in these friendships, which appear both to ourselves and to others so generous and so unselfish, the pleasure of loving unselfishly, and of lifting ourselves by this noble sentiment above all the hearts which are weak and attached to their own selfish interests. Besides this evidence which we want to give ourselves to flatter our pride, we seek in the world also the glory of unselfishness and generosity. We seek to be loved by our friends, although we do not seek to use them. We hope that they will be charmed by everything that we do for them without reversion to self and thus we find

again the reversion to self which we seem to have left. For what is there sweeter and more flattering to a sensitive and delicate self-love than seeing itself praised as though it were not self-love?

We see a person who seemed to be all for others and not at all for himself, who is the delight of sincere people, a person who seems self-disciplined, self-forgetting. The self-oblivion is so great that self-love even tries to imitate it, and to find no glory equal to that of not appearing to seek any. This moderation and this self-detachment, which would be the death of our nature if it were a real and effective sentiment, becomes, on the contrary, a more subtle and imperceptible food for a pride which scorns every ordinary means of exalting itself, and which wants to trample beneath its feet all the cruder kinds of vanity which puff up the rest of mankind.

But it is easy to unmask this modest pride, although it does not appear to be pride in any manner, it so seems to have given up all which is flattering. If it is criticized, it is impatient of criticism. If the people whom it loves and helps do not repay it in friendship, respect and confidence, it is hurt to the quick. You see, it is not disinterested, although it forces itself to appear to be. Indeed, it is not repaying itself as crudely as do others. It does not need dull praises, nor money, nor success in receiving place and honour. It does, however, want to be repaid. It is hungry for the esteem of good people. It wants to love so that it will be loved, and so that others will be impressed by its unselfishness. It only seems to forget itself in order to make itself more interesting to everyone.

Not that it would think all this through in a logical manner. It does not say, "I want to fool the world by my unselfishness, that everyone will love me and admire me." No, it would not dare say such crude and unworthy things to itself. But it fools itself in fooling others. It admires complacently its own disinterestedness, like a lovely woman before her own glass. It is impressed with itself, seeing itself more sincere and more disinterested than other people. The illusion which it spreads for others comes back on itself. It only gives itself to others for what it believes itself to be, that is, for the sake of being unselfish. That is what flatters it the most.

However little we revert to ourselves to consider something which saddens or flatters us, we will easily recognize that pride has different tastes, according to whether it is cruder or more sensitive. But pride, whatever good taste you give it, is always pride, and that which appears the most reasonable is the most diabolic. For, in valuing itself, it suspects others. It pities the people who repay themselves with foolish vanities. It recognizes the emptiness of grandeur of the highest type. It cannot endure people who become intoxicated with their good fortune. It wishes, by its moderation, to be even above success, and thus to reach a new height, and leave at its feet all the false glory of humankind. It wants, like Lucifer, to become like the All Highest. It wants to be a kind of divinity above the passions and interests of men. It does not see that it is by this deceitful pride which blinds us, that it places itself above other men.

Let us come to the conclusion that it is only the love of God, which can make us get out of ourselves. If the powerful hand of God did not sustain us, we should not know where to get a foothold to take a step outside of ourselves. There is no middle way. We must refer everything to God or to ourselves. If we refer everything to ourselves, we have no other God except this "ego" of which I have said so much. If on the contrary, we refer everything to God, we are in his order, and then, not regarding ourselves more than his other creatures, without self-interest and with the one object of accomplishing the will of God, we shall commence that self-renunciation which

you hope to know well.

But, once more, nothing would so close your heart to the blessing of renunciation, as this philosophic pride and this self-love, disguised as worldly generosity, which you should suspect yourself of, because of your natural inclination and habits. The more we have by nature a background of friendliness, unselfishness, pleasure in doing good, delicacy of feeling, taste for frankness and for disinterested love, the more we should free ourselves from ourselves, and fear to delight in these natural gifts.

No creature can take us from ourselves, because there is none which deserves to be preferred to ourselves. There is none which has either the right to take us away from ourselves, or the perfection needed to attach us to it without reversion to ourselves, nor in fact the power to satisfy our heart in this attachment. Thus it follows that we love nothing outside of ourselves except for our own sake. We choose either according to our coarse and brutal passions, if we are coarse and brutal, or according to our pride and our glory, if we have sufficient delicacy not to like what is coarse and brutal.

But God does two things, which he alone can do. One, he shows himself to his creature, with all his rights and with all the charms of his grace. We feel that we did not make ourselves, and that thus we were not made for ourselves; but that we were made for the glory of him who was pleased to make us; that he is too great to make anything except for himself; that thus our entire perfection and our entire happiness depend on losing ourselves in him. This no creature, no matter how dazzling it may be, can ever make us feel for it. Far from finding the infinity which satisfies us and transports us in God, we find always, on the contrary, in creatures, an emptiness, a powerlessness to fill our hearts, an imperfection which always lets us down so that we fall back upon ourselves.

The second wonder which God performs is to move our hearts, as he pleases, after having enlightened our minds. He is not content to show himself infinitely lovable, but he makes us love him by producing love for him in our hearts by his grace. Thus he himself performs in us what he makes us see that we owe to him.

You will say perhaps that you would like to know in a more understandable and detailed manner what this self-renunciation is. I am going to try to satisfy you. We can easily understand that we should give up criminal pleasures, unjust gains, and coarse frivolities, because the renunciation of all these things consists in a scorn which absolutely rejects them, and which condemns all enjoyment of them, but it is not so easy to understand the renunciation of wealth legitimately acquired, of the charms of an honest and modest life, or of honours which come from a good reputation and from a character which rises above envy.

It is hard to understand that we must renounce these things, because we are not to reject them with horror; and on the contrary we must keep them to use according to the state in which Providence has placed us. We need the comforts of a smooth and quiet life to relieve us in the difficulties of our situation. We must consider our position. We must keep the wealth which we possess for its needs. How can we give up all these things, when we are busy trying to take care of them?

The thing is to do what we can calmly to take care of such things in moderation, to use them for a serious purpose, and not to play with them not to centre our emotions upon them. I say a serious purpose, because, when we do not throw ourselves into something emotionally, to enjoy it and to seek our fortune through it, we only take what we need of it, as you see a wise and

faithful steward try only to take of his master's goods what is actually necessary for his true needs. Thus the way to renounce evil things is to reject them with horror, and the way to renounce good things is to use them only moderately, as needed, trying to cut down all the imaginary needs with which greedy nature tries to flatter us.

Notice that we must renounce not only evil things but also good ones, because Jesus Christ has said plainly, "Whoever does not give up everything which he possesses, cannot become my disciple." Thus every Christian must renounce all his possessions, even the most innocent, because they would cease to be so, if he did not renounce them. He even must renounce those things which he is obliged to take great care of, like his family's property, or his own reputation, since he should not throw his heart into any such things. He should only take care of them for a serious and moderate use, so that he will be ready to lose them every time that Providence wants to take them away from him.

He even should renounce the people he loves best, and whom he ought to love. This renouncement consists of loving them only for God's sake, of using the comfort of their friendship seriously, according to our Reed, of being ready to lose them when God takes them away, and never trying to find in them our heart's true rest. This is the chastity of true Christian friendship which seeks only the sacred bridegroom in the mortal and earthly friend. In this state, we use the creature and society as though we were not using them, following the phrase of St. Paul. We do not want to way with them, we want only to make good use of what God gives, and wants us to love. But we use these things with a restraint which takes for need only, and which keeps itself in reserve for a more worthy object. It is in this sense that Jesus Christ wants us to leave father and mother, brothers, sisters and friends, and has come to bring the sword into the midst of families.

God is jealous. If you are devoted to some creature from the depths of your heart your heart is not worthy of God. He rejects it as a bride who divides herself between the bridegroom and a stranger. After having given up everything around us which is not ourselves, we must finally come to the last sacrifice, which is that of everything which is within us and ourselves. The renunciation of our body is frightful to most sensitive and worldly people. These weak people know nothing which is more them selves than their own bodies, which they flatter and adorn with great care. Often these people, when their bodies have lost their grace, keep a love for physical life which becomes a shameful fear which makes them tremble at the very word death. I trust that your natural courage will raise you above these fears. I seem to hear you say, "I do not want to flatter my body, nor hesitate to consent to its destruction, when God wants to strike it down and turn it to dust."

But, although we thus renounce our body, there remains great difficulty in renouncing the soul. The more we scorn this body of clay, through a natural courage, the more we are tempted to overestimate the quality within us which enables us to scorn the body. Toward our soul, toward its wisdom and virtue, we are like a young society woman toward her beauty. We are complacent. We are glad to know ourselves wise, moderate, saved from the idleness of others. And thus we become intoxicated with prosperity. We renounce by a brave moderation the enjoyment of all which the world has which is most tempting, but we want to enjoy our moderation. O, how dangerous is this state! O, how subtle is its poison! O, how you would fail God if you should give up your heart to this refinement of self-love! You must then renounce all enjoyment and all natural self-satisfaction in your wisdom and your goodness.

Notice that the purer and more excellent the gifts of God are, the more

God is jealous of them. He had pity on the first sinning man, and he condemned pitilessly the rebellious angel. The angel and the man had sinned through love of themselves, and as the angel was perfect, so perfect that he was tempted to consider himself a kind of divinity, God punished his unfaithfulness with a more severe jealousy than he punished that of the man.

Let us conclude then that God is more jealous of his most excellent gifts than of his most ordinary ones. He wants us to be attached only to himself, and not to his gifts, however pure they may be, following his purpose to unite us more easily and more closely to himself alone. Whoever regards one of his blessings complacently as if it were his own, turns it at once into poison. So never appropriate, not only the outer things like favour or your talents, but also the inner gifts. Your goodwill is no less a gift of mercy than your life itself which comes from God. Live as a borrower. All that is yours and all that is yourself is only a loan. Use it according to the intention of him who is loaning it, but never dispose of it as of goods which belong to you. The firm renunciation of self consists in this spirit of disappropriation and this simple use of self and mind to follow the movements of God, who is the only true owner of his creature.

You will ask me probably what the detailed practice of this disappropriation and renunciation ought to be. But I will answer that this attitude is no sooner in the depth of the will, than God himself will lead the soul as though by the hand, to train it in renunciation in every happening of the day.

It is not by painful reflection, and by continual struggle that we renounce ourselves. It is only in refraining from introspection and from wanting to control ourselves in our own way, that we become lost in God.

Every time that we notice a touch of scorn, of silly complacency, of self-confidence, of desire to follow our own irregular inclination, of considering our own taste, of impatience toward the weaknesses of others or against the boredom of our own condition, we must let these things fall like a stone to the bottom of the pond, recollect ourselves before God, and wait to act until we are in the mood into which the recollection should lead us. Even when the distraction of things to be attended to, or the liveliness of our imagination prevent the soul from recollecting itself in an easy, quiet and sensible manner, we must at least try to calm ourselves by the rightness of our will and by the desire for recollection. Then the wish for recollection is itself a kind of recollection which is enough to strip the soul of its own will and to make it supple in the hands of God.

Even when in your haste, some too natural impulse escapes you, which may be of evil prompting, do not be discouraged. Always stick to your path. Carry the humiliation of your fault peacefully before God, without letting yourself be delayed on your way by the biting scorn which self-love makes you feel for your weakness. Go forward always with confidence, without letting yourself be touched by the grief of a sensitive pride, which cannot bear to see itself imperfect. Your fault will serve, by this inner confusion, to make you die to yourself, to detach you from God's gifts, and to annihilate yourself before him. The best way to repair it is to die to your feeling of self-love, and to abandon yourself without delay to the channel of grace, which you have slightly interrupted by this passing unfaithfulness.

The important thing is to renounce your own wisdom by a simple behaviour, and to be ready to sacrifice public favour, respect and approval, every time that the guidance of God asks it. I do not mean that you should involve yourself in things which God has not given you to be responsible for, nor to compromise yourself needlessly by speaking truths which

well-intentioned people are not yet able to bear. We must follow God and never go ahead of him. But also, when he gives the signal, we must leave all and risk all to follow him. To delay, to weaken, to soften what he wants us to do, to fear to expose ourselves greatly, to want to seek shelter from distaste and contradictions, to seek plausible reasons to get out of doing very difficult and trying things, when we are convinced at heart that God expects them of us, and that he has put us in a condition to accomplish them; that would be to take over ourselves again, after having given ourselves without reserve to God. I pray him to preserve you from such unfaithfulness. Nothing is so terrible as to resist God within. It is the sin against the Holy Spirit, which Jesus Christ assures us will not be forgiven in this world or the next.

The other faults which you will make in the simplicity of your good intention will turn to your profit, by humiliating you, and making you smaller in your own eyes. But resistance to the Spirit of God by a conceit and worldly wisdom which will not go forward with a simple enough courage, and which wants to run itself without doing God's work, this fault will extinguish insensibly the spirit of grace in your heart. God jealous, rebuffed after so many blessings, would draw back and leave you to yourself. You could only turn in a sort of circle instead of advancing by great steps on the right road. Your inner life would languish, and could only grow less, with you scarcely able to tell the deep and hidden cause of your trouble.

God has given you a simplicity and candour which doubtless pleases him very much. It is on this foundation that he wants to build. He wants from you a simplicity which will be as much his wisdom as it is not your own. He wants you to be small in your own eyes, and yielding in his hands like a little child. It is this childlikeness, so contrary to the spirit of man, and so urged in the Gospel, which God wants to put in your heart despite the corruption which rules in the world where it is so unknown and so despised. It is by this simplicity and this littleness that he wants to heal you of whatever remains of lofty and cynical wisdom. You ought to say like David, "I shall be even simpler, lower, and smaller than I have been, from the moment that I have offered myself to God."

If you are faithful in reading enough to feed your heart and to teach you, in recollecting yourself from time to time in odd moments stolen from the day, and especially if you have regular times to be with God, you will see whatever you have to do to practise every virtue. Opportunities will present themselves to you as though by themselves. If you are simple in the presence of God, he will not leave you in doubt.

But what can contuse you and stop the flow of God's blessings upon you, is if you fear to go too far in goodness, and if you do not let God act enough at the expense of your own wisdom. Above all, do not set him any limits. It is not a question of undertaking great things, which God perhaps is not asking you in the way in which you would imagine, and which would be ill-timed. It is a question of following without eagerness, without haste and without any action of your own, the leads which God will give you from one moment to another to open the hearts of your friends, and to show them what they owe to God in their position.

This is a work of patience, of faith and of continual attention. It takes a marvellous discretion. You must take good care not to go at it with the kind of zeal which makes more heat than light. But this so-needed discretion is not what one would think. It is a discretion which does not start, as worldly wisdom does, to carry out its own plans, but only to wait always for God's moment, and to keep your eyes constantly on him so that you will only act as he urges you by the leads which his Providence furnishes

without, and by the lights which he gives you within. Thus I do not ask that you ever become hurried; on the contrary, that you yourself remain motionless, but unresistant, so that nothing stops nor delays you when God wants to act through you.

I pray him to shower upon you the grace of the Child Jesus, with the peace, the confidence and the joy of the Holy Spirit.

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SELF-RENUNCIATION (Continued)

Suite du même sujet.

WHEN I said that whoever is not attached to himself by his own will is truly detached, I hoped to anticipate or to cure the uneasiness which you may feel over the way we keep turning back to self. Souls sincere in self-offering often are tormented by glimpses of selfish interest which come to them when they are talking or working. They fear that they have not resisted a foolish complacency, a desire for glory, a taste for some comfort, or self-seeking in the satisfaction of fine conduct. All this frightens a gentle soul. It blames itself. In reassurance it is good to say that all good and all evil is in the will. When these reversions to selfishness are involuntary, they do not stop any one from being truly detached from self.

But when we are really free of self, you say, can we involuntarily have our eyes on self-interest? To that I answer that it is rarely that a soul truly free of self, and devoted to God, still seeks its own interest purposely. But in order to feel relieved, and to stop being continually tormented, we must know once for all that involuntary reversions to selfishness do not make us displeasing to God, any more than do the other temptations to which we have given no consent.

Besides we must understand that people who have a sincere piety, but who are not entirely dead to the comforts of life, or to reputation or friendship, allow themselves a little self-seeking in everything. We do not go straight toward it with bent head, but we let ourselves be drawn into it as though by accident. We still cling to self in all these things, and a sure sign that we cling to it, is that if anyone disturbs these natural supports, we are desolate. If some accident upsets the tranquillity of our life, threatens our reputation, or takes away from us those people whose friendship we value, we feel within ourselves a sharp pang, which shows how much self is still alive and sensitive.

Thus we cling to ourselves almost without noticing it, and it is only times of loss which show us the true depths of our hearts. It is only as God takes things from us, or seems about to take them from us, that we lose an unfair and sinful proprietorship in them by sacrifice. All which is called moderate use does not make our detachment sure, as we are assured by a serene deprivation. It is only by loss, and by loss which God himself brings about, that we truly become detached from ourselves.

In this state of sincere but imperfect devotion, we have any number of these secret seekings of self. There is a time when we do not yet see them distinctly, and when God does not allow our inner light to go any further than our strength for sacrifice. Jesus Christ speaks within as he spoke to the Apostles, "I have many other things to explain to you, but you are not yet ready to bear them."

We see good intentions in ourselves which are sincere, but we should be frightened if we could see to how many things we still cling. It is not with our full consent and with reflection that we have these attachments. We do not say to ourselves, "I have them and I want to have them," but after all we have them and sometimes we fear to stray too far to look for them. We feel our weakness. We dare not penetrate further. Sometimes also we would like to find them all so that we can sacrifice them all. But this is a foolish and rash zeal, as that of St. Peter, who said, "I am ready to die," and then a servant made him afraid. We try to discover all our weaknesses, and God directs us in this search. He refuses us a vision beyond our state. He does not allow us to see in our hearts what it is not yet time to take away from them. This is a wonderful direction of God's kindness, never to ask us inwardly to offer to him anything which we have loved and possessed heretofore, without giving us inspiration concerning it, and never to give us the inspiration to sacrifice without giving us the strength. Up to that point we are, so far as sacrifice goes, as the Apostles were concerning Jesus Christ's prediction of his death. They understood nothing and their eyes were closed to the light. The souls most sincere and watchful about their faults are still in this state of obscurity about certain detachments which God reserves for a more advanced state of faith and of death. We must not wish to anticipate the time, and it is enough to live in peace, provided that we are faithful in all that we do know. If anything else remains to be known, God will disclose it to us.

There is a veil of mercy behind which God hides from us what we should not be able to bear. We have a certain amount of impatient eagerness for our own perfection. We should like to see everything and sacrifice everything at once. But a humble waiting under the hand of God, and a quiet bearing ourselves in this state of darkness and dependence, are infinitely more useful to help us die to ourselves than all our restless efforts to advance our own perfection. Let us then be content to follow, without looking ahead, all the light which is given us from one moment to another. This is the daily bread. God only gives it for each day. It is still the manna. He who tries to take a double amount, and to make provision for the next day, makes a great mistake. It will spoil in his hands. He cannot keep any more of it than the person who has only taken enough for one day.

It is this dependence of a child toward his father to which God wishes to bend us, even in spiritual things. He gives us light within, as a wise mother would give her young girl work to do. She would not give her new work until the first is finished. When you have finished all that God has put before you, at that very instant he will give you new work, because he never leaves the soul idle and without growth in detachment. If, on the contrary, you have not yet finished the first work, he hides what is to follow. A traveller who is marching across a vast plain sees nothing ahead of him but a slight rise which ends the distant horizon. When he, tops this rise, he finds a new stretch of country as vast as the first. Thus, in the way of self-renunciation, we think we see everything at once. We think that we are holding nothing back, and that we are not clinging to ourselves or to anything else. We should rather die than hesitate to make a complete sacrifice. But, in the daily round, God constantly shows us new countries. We find in our hearts a thousand things which we would have sworn were not there. God only shows them to us as he makes them appear. It is like an abscess which bursts. The moment when it bursts is the only one which horrifies us. Before that we were carrying it without feeling it, and we did not think we had it. However, we did have it, and it only broke because we had it. When it was hidden, we thought that we were healthy and quite as we should be. When it breaks we smell the stench of the pus. The breaking is healthy, although it is painful and disgusting. Each of us carries in the depth of his heart a mass of filth, which would make us die of shame if God should show us all its poison and

horror. Self-love would be in an unbearable suffering. I am not speaking now of those whose hearts are gangrenous with enormous vices. I am speaking of the souls which seem honest and pure. We should see a foolish vanity which does not dare to come out in the open, and which stays in shame in the deepest folds of the heart. We should see self-complacencies, heights of pride, subtle selfishness, and a thousand windings within, which are as real as they are inexplicable. We only see them as God begins to make them emerge.

Stop, he will say to you, see what corruption there was in the deep abyss of your soul! After that, glorify yourself, promise yourself anything from yourself! Then let God act, and let us be content to be faithful to the light of the present moment. It carries with it all that we need to prepare us for the light of the moment to follow. And this sequence of blessings, which connects one with another like the links of a chain, prepares us unconsciously for the further sacrifices which we have not even glimpsed. This death to ourselves, and to all that we love, which is still general and superficial in our will, when we have pierced the surface of it, will throw deep roots into the most intimate depths of that will. It will penetrate to the centre. It will leave nothing to the creature. It will push out, relentlessly, all that is not good.

Otherwise, be persuaded on the word of others, while waiting for experience to make you taste and feel, that this detachment from self and from all that you love, far from withering good friendships and hardening your heart, produces, on the contrary, a friendship in God, not only pure and firm, but completely cordial, faithful, affectionate, full of a sweet relationship. And we find there all the fullness of friendship which human nature seeks for its consolation.

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SIMPLICITY

En quoi consiste la simplicité: sa pratique et ses divers degrés.

THERE IS a simplicity which is a fault, and there is a simplicity which is a marvellous virtue. Simplicity is often a fault of understanding and is ignorance of the consideration which we owe to each person. When we speak in society of a simple person, we mean a limited, credulous and coarse mind. The simplicity which is a virtue, far from being coarse, is something sublime. All good men will enjoy it, admire it, feel it when they wound it, notice it in others, and are aware of when they must practise it, but they have trouble saying exactly what this virtue is. One may say of this what the little book, *The Imitation of Christ*, says of compunction of heart. "It is better to practice it than to know how to define it."

Simplicity is a rightness of the soul which cuts away all useless turning back upon ourselves and upon our own behaviour. It is different from sincerity. Sincerity is a virtue below simplicity. We see lots of people who are sincere without being simple. They say nothing which they do not believe to be true. They only want to seem what they are, but they constantly fear to seem what they are not. They are always studying themselves, going over all their words and all their thoughts, and going back over all that they have done, afraid of having said or done too much. These people are sincere, but they are not simple. They are not at ease with others, and others are not at ease with them. We find in them nothing easy; nothing free, nothing ingenuous, nothing natural. We would prefer less regular and more imperfect people, who were more natural. That is man's preference and God is the same.

He wants souls which are not concerned with the and as though always making up before the mirror.

Always to be interested in creatures, without ever making any reflection about oneself, this is the blind state of people whom the present and the maternal always carries away. It is the opposite extreme to simplicity. Always to be engrossed in self in all that we have to do, whether for creatures or for God, this the other extreme which makes the soul wise in its own eyes, always reserved, full of itself, upset by the least things can trouble its self-complacency. That is false wisdom, which with of all its grandeur is hardly less vain or hardly less foolish than the folly of the people who throw themselves head first into every pleasure. The one is intoxicated by all that it sees outside. The other is intoxicated by all that it thinks that it is doing within. But in the end they are both intoxicated.

Being intoxicated with oneself is even worse than being so with outside things, because it seems like wisdom, and is not. We think less of curing ourselves of it. It does us honor. It is approved. We put a force into it which raises us above honours and above the rest of mankind. It is a sickness like a frenzy. We do not feel it. We are at death's door, and we say, "I fell well." When we give no thought to ourselves, because of being carried away by things outside, we are dizzy. On the contrary, when we turn upon ourselves too much, it is a forced behaviour, and contrary to simplicity.

Simplicity consists of a middle ground in which we are neither giddy nor too composed. The soul is not carried away by the outside world, so that it can no longer make the necessary reflections, but it also cuts off the reversions to self, which an uneasy self-love, jealous of its own excellence, multiplies infinitely. This liberty of a soul which sees immediately before it as it goes forward, but which loses no time reasoning about its steps, studying them, constantly considering those which it has already made, this is the true simplicity.

Thus we see the soul's progress. The first stage is that in which it frees itself from outside things, to retreat within itself, and to occupy itself with its own condition for its own interest. Up to this point there is nothing which is not natural. It is a wise self-love, which wants to get out of the intoxication of outside things. In the second stage, the soul joins to the consideration of itself that of God, whom it fears. That is a weak commencement of true wisdom, but it is still wrapped up in self. It is not content with fearing God; it wants to be assured that it fears him. It fears not-fearing. It comes back constantly to its own behaviour. These so uneasy and so frequent reversions to self are still far removed from the peace and the liberty which we enjoy in simple love, but it is not yet time to enjoy this liberty. The soul must pass through this disturbance, and he who wants to set it from the very first in the freedom of simple love would run the risk of misleading it.

The first man wanted at first to enjoy himself. That is what made him fall into attachment to creatures. Man returns ordinarily by the same road which he took in going astray, that is, having passed from God to outer objects, when coming back to himself at first he also passes again the objects outside of God in re-entering the depths of his heart. We must then ordinarily have a penitent soul for some time struggling with itself in a rigorous search of its own wretchedness, before we introduce it into the freedom of the beloved children. So long as the attraction and the need of fear lasts, the soul must be nourished by this bread of tribulation and anguish. When God begins to open the heart to something more pure, the heart must follow the operation of God's grace without losing time and as though step by step. Then the soul begins to enter into simplicity.

In the third stage, it has no longer these anxieties over itself. It begins to consider God more often than it considers self, and insensibly it tends to forget self in order to become more concerned with God with a love devoid of self-interest. Thus the soul, which did not heretofore think of itself because it was always carried away by outer objects, which stirred its desires, and which later passed through a wisdom which recalled it constantly to itself, comes finally little by little to another state, in which God does for it, what these exterior things did before, that is, that he carries it away and detaches it from itself, by occupying it with his own self.

The more docile and yielding a soul is in letting itself be carried away without resistance or delay, the more it advances in simplicity. It is not that it becomes blind to its faults, and that it does not feel its infidelities. It feels them more than ever. It has a horror of the least faults. Its light always grows to discover its corruption. But this knowledge no longer comes through uneasy reversions to self. It is by the light of God's presence that it sees itself against his infinite purity.

Thus it is free in its course, because it does not stop to compose itself with skill. Again, this marvellous simplicity is not suitable to the souls which are not yet purified by a thorough penitence, because it can only be the fruit of total detachment from self, and of a disinterested love for God. But it succeeds little by little, and although the souls who need penitence to tear themselves away from the vanities of the world ought to make many reflections concerning themselves, nevertheless I believe that, following the openings which grace gives, they must be stopped from falling into a certain excessive preoccupation and anxiety over themselves, which vexes them, troubles them, embarrasses them and always delays them in their course. They are wrapped up in themselves like a traveller who would be wrapped in so many coats, one upon the other, that he could not walk. Too great introversion produces in weak souls a superstition and meticulousness which are harmful, and in souls which are naturally strong, a presumptuous wisdom which is incompatible with the mind of God. All this is contrary to simplicity, which is free, right and generous to the point of forgetting itself in order to give itself up to God without reserve. O, how bappy is a soul which is delivered from its low, self-centred and worrisome reversions! How noble is its bearing! How great it is! How strong it is!

If a man wants his friend to be simple and free with him, so that he will forget himself in this friendly relationship, with how much stronger a reason God, who is the true friend, wants a soul to be without reversion, without anxiety, vexation, without jealousy for itself, without reserve, in the sweet and intimate familiarity which he is preparing for it! It is this simplicity which makes the true perfection of the true children of God. It is the end toward which we should reach and to which we should let ourselves be led. The great obstacle to this happy simplicity is the foolish wisdom of the age, which wants to trust nothing to God, which wants to do everything by its own efforts, to arrange everything for itself, and to admire itself constantly in its works. This wisdom is a folly, according to St. Paul. And the true wisdom, which consists in giving oneself up to the Spirit of God without uneasy reversion to self, is a folly in the mad eyes of the worldly.

When a Christian is not yet fully converted, we must constantly ask him to be wise. When he is fully converted, we must begin to fear lest he be too wise. We must inspire him with that sober and temperate wisdom of which St. Paul speaks. In fact, if he wants to advance toward God, he must lose himself to find himself, he must disconcert this wisdom of his own, which gives a support to his sceptical nature. He must drink the bitter chalice of the foolishness of the cross, which takes the place of martyrdom for generous souls who are not destined to shed their blood like the first Christians.

The cutting off of anxious and interested reversion to self places the soul in an inexplicable peace and liberty. This is simplicity. It is easy to see from a distance that it should be wonderful, but experience alone can show what largeness of heart it gives. We are like a little child on its mother's breast. We wish nothing more and we fear nothing more for self. We let ourselves be turned in every way. With this purity of heart, we are no longer troubled by what others think of us, except that in charity we avoid scandalizing them. We carry on our business of the moment the best that we can, with a gentle, free, gay attention, and we give no thought to success. We no longer judge ourselves, and we are not afraid of being judged, as St. Paul said of himself.

Then let us hold to this happy simplicity. May enough road remain for us to reach it! The further we are from it, the more we must hasten to go forward with great strides toward it. Far from being simple, most Christians are not sincere. They are not only artificial, but false and hypercritical with their neighbours, with God and with themselves. A thousand little evasions, a thousand inventions indirectly to give twists to the truth. Alas! "Every man is a liar." Even those who are naturally upright, sincere, frank, and who have what is called a wholly simple and easy nature, do not escape from having a sensitive and jealous devotion to themselves, which secretly nourishes their pride, and which prevents true simplicity, which is the sincere renunciation and constant forgetting of oneself.

"But," shall we say, "how can I keep from being concerned with myself? A crowd of reversion to myself trouble me, tyrannize over me, and cause me a very keen sensitiveness."

I only ask for what is voluntary in these returns. Never be voluntarily in uneasy and jealous introversions. That will suffice. Your faithfulness in renouncing them every time that you notice them will free you little by little; but do not make a frontal attack on these thoughts, do not seek a quarrel making yourself stubborn to fight them. You will irritate them. A continual effort to push away the thoughts, which occupy us with ourselves and our own interests, would be in itself a continual occupation with ourselves, which would distract us from the presence of God and the tasks which he wants us to accomplish.

The important thing is sincerely to have surrendered into the hands of God all our interests in pleasure, convenience and reputation. Whoever casts away all, and accepts without reservation all that God wants to give him of humiliation, suffering and trials, whether without or within, begins to harden himself against himself. He is not at all afraid of not being approved of, and of not being able to avoid the criticism of men. He has no more hypersensitiveness, or if he has some involuntarily, he despises it and checks it. He treats it so roughly, in order not to give it any consideration, that it soon lessens. This state of full acceptance and constant acquiescence makes true freedom, and this liberty produces perfect simplicity.

The soul which has no more self-interest, and which is not worrying about itself, has only candour. It goes altogether rightly without difficulty. Its way becomes always wider to an unlimited degree, as its renunciation and self-forgetfulness augment. Its peace is deep as the sea in the midst of its troubles. But while we still cling to self, we are always upset, unsure, wrapped up in reversion of self-love. Happy is he who is no longer his own!

I have already noticed that the world has the same liking that God has for a noble simplicity which forgets self. The world likes in its children, corrupt like itself, the free and easy manners of a man who does not seem

concerned with himself. Indeed nothing is greater than losing sight of self. But this simplicity is misplaced in the children of the world, because they are only distracted from themselves on account of being carried away by still vainer things. However, this simplicity, which is only a false image of the true one, nevertheless shows its greatness. Those who cannot find the body run after the shadow, and this shadow, all shadow as it is, charms them, because it slightly resembles the truth which they have lost. This is what makes the charm of simplicity, even when it is out of its place.

A man full of faults, who does not want to hide any of them, who never tries to fascinate, who never affects talents, or virtues, or good will, who seems to think no more of himself than of others, who seems to have lost the "I," of which he is so jealous, and who like a stranger in regard to himself, is a man who is infinitely pleasing despite his faults. Man is charmed by the image of so great a good. This false simplicity is taken for the true one. On the contrary, a man full of talent, of acquired virtues, and exterior grace, if he is too self-contained, if he seems always to be attentive to himself, if he affects the best things, is an unpleasant personality, boring; and one who antagonizes everyone. So nothing is better nor greater than to be simple, that is to say, never preoccupied with self. Creatures, whatever views they give us, never make us really simple. We can, through human nature, be less jealous of certain honours, and not be disturbed in our actions by certain subtle and uneasy reflections, but in the end we do not seek creatures except for ourselves, and we never truly forget ourselves, because we are only devoted to them to enjoy them, that is, to relate them to ourselves.

"But," we will say, "must we never thin of self, nor of any of the things which interest us, and never talk about ourselves?"

No, we must not strain ourselves to this extent. In trying to be simple, we should drive away simplicity by sticking scrupulously to the practice of never talking of self, for fear of being preoccupied with ourselves and saying a few words about ourselves.

Then what must we do? Make no rule about it, but be content to affect nothing. When we feel like talking about ourselves through self-interest, we need only to despise this vain impulse, while turning our attention simply either to God, or to the things which he wants us to do. Thus simplicity consists of not having any wrong shame, or false modesty, and no more ostentation, vain complaisance, or attention to ourselves. When the thought comes through our vanity to speak of self, we need only to drop this foolish reversion to self quickly. When, on the contrary, we think of speaking of self for some reason, then we must not debate it too much. We need only to carry out our purpose.

But what will they think of me? They will think that I am praising myself foolishly. I shall make myself suspect by speaking freely of my own interest. All these uneasy reflections do not deserve to occupy us for a single moment. Let us talk frankly and simply of ourselves as we should of others, when it is a question of them. It is thus that St. Paul often speaks of himself in the Epistles. Of his birth, he declares that he is a Roman citizen. He makes his rights respected to the point of frightening his judge. He says that he has done no less than the greatest of the Apostles, that he has not learned any of the doctrine from them, nor received anything from them for the ministry, that he stands as well as they do with Jesus Christ, that he has worked more and suffered more than they, that he has resisted Peter to his face, "because he was reprehensible," that he had been lifted up to the third heaven, that he has nothing to reproach himself for in his conscience, that he is a chosen vessel to bring light to the Gentiles; in fact, he says to the

faithful, "Imitate me as I do Jesus Christ."

What grandeur there is in speaking thus simply of oneself! St. Paul speaks in the highest praise of himself, without appearing either moved, or concerned with self. He tells these things as he would tell a story of two thousand years ago. All should not undertake to say and to do the same, but what we are obliged to say of ourselves, we must say simply. Everyone cannot reach this sublime simplicity, and we must be careful not to want to reach it before our time. But when we have a true need to talk of ourselves on public occasions, we must do it quite simply, and not give in to an affected modesty, or to a shame which comes from false pride. False pride often hides itself beneath an air of modesty and reserve. We do not want to show how good we are, but we are quite ready to have others discover it, to have the honour at the same time of our virtues and of our care to hide them.

To judge of the need which we have to think of ourselves or to speak of ourselves, we must take advice from the person who knows our condition of grace. Thus we will avoid following our own guidance and judging ourselves, which is a source of blessing. Thus it is for the devout and enlightened man from whom we take advice to decide if the need to speak of ourselves is real or imaginary. His examination and his decision will spare us much self-concern. He will also find out if the neighbour, to whom we are to speak, will not be shocked at this liberty and this simplicity in speaking favourably of ourselves without ceremony in a real need.

In unexpected cases, in which we have no time to seek advice, we must yield ourselves to God, and do according to his light at the time what seems best, but without hesitation, because hesitation would be confusing. First we must make our decision, then even if we have made a wrong one, wrong will be turned to right by a right intention. God will never blame us for what we have done for lack of advice, when we are yielding ourselves to the simplicity of his spirit.

As for all the ways of speaking against ourselves, I do not want to either blame or advise. When they come through simplicity, through the hate and scorn for ourselves which God stirs in us, they are wonderful, and it is thus that I consider them in so many of the saints. But ordinarily the simplest and surest way is never to speak of self either well or ill unless necessary. Self-love prefers injury to oblivion and silence. When we cannot keep from speaking ill of ourselves, we are very ready to make up with ourselves, like impassioned lovers who are ready to go back to their folly, when they appear in the most horrible rage against the person with whom they are madly in love.

As for our faults, we ought to be careful to correct them according to our own interior state. There are as many different ways to watch out for correction, as there are different conditions of the life within. Each effort should be in proportion to the state in which we find ourselves, but in general, we certainly uproot our faults by recollection, by the extinction of all voluntary desire and repugnance, and by pure love and abandon to God without self-interest, rather than by uneasy reflections about ourselves. When God takes part, and when we do not delay his action, the work goes very fast.

This simplicity expands little by little to outer things. As we despise ourselves within by the cutting off of all voluntary returns, we act more naturally. Calculation drops with these reflections. We act without thought of ourselves or of our actions, by a certain rightness of will which is inexplicable to those who have not experienced it. Then faults turn to good, because they humiliate without discouraging. When God wants to accomplish

some outer act through us, either he takes away these faults, or he makes them work for his plans, or he prevents the people who are to be acted upon from being repelled by them.

But finally, when we are truly in this interior simplicity, our whole appearance is franker, more natural. Sometimes it even appears less simple than some more serious and more affected personalities. But this only appears so to people of poor taste, who take the affectation of modesty for modesty itself, and who have no idea of true simplicity. This true simplicity seems sometimes a little careless and more irregular, but it has a feeling for frankness and truth which makes us conscious of a certain openness, gentleness, innocence, gaiety, and serenity, which is charming when we see it near to and continually, with pure eyes.

O, how amiable this simplicity is! Who will give it to me? I leave all for this. It is the pearl of the Gospel. O, what will give it to those who want it only? Worldly wisdom, you despise, and it despises you. Foolish wisdom will give way, and the children of God will detest this prudence which is only death, as his Apostle said.

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41

HUMILITY

De l'humilité.

ALL THE saints are convinced that sincere humility is the foundation of all virtues. This is because humility is the daughter of pure charity, and humility is nothing else but truth. There are only two truths in the world, that God is all, and the creature nothing. In order that humility be true, we need to give continual homage to God in our lowliness, and to stay in our place, which is to love being nothing.

Jesus Christ said that we must be meek and humble of heart. Meekness is the daughter of humility, as anger is the daughter of pride. Only Jesus Christ can give that true humility of heart which comes from him. It is born of the unction of his grace. It does not consist, as one imagines, in performing exterior acts of humility, although that is good, but in keeping one's place. He who has a high opinion of himself is not truly humble. He who wants something for himself is no more so. But he who so completely forgets himself that he never thinks of self, who has no turning back on himself, who within is only lowliness, not wounded by anything, without affecting patience on the outside, who speaks of himself as he would speak of someone else, who does not affect forgetting self when he is all full of it, who gives himself up to charity without noticing whether it is humility or pride to act in that way, who is quite content to pass as being not humble at all; finally he who is full of charity is really humble. He, who does not seek his own interest, but the interest of God alone in time and for eternity, is humble. The more we love purely, the more perfect is our humility. Let us then not measure humility by the fabricated exterior. Let us not make it depend on one action or another, but on pure charity. Pure charity divests man of himself. It reclothes him with Jesus Christ. That is in what true humility consists, which makes us live no longer for ourselves, but lets Jesus Christ live in us.

We are always trying to be something. We often are conspicuous in devotion, after having been so in the things which we have left, and why? Because we want to be distinguished in every condition. But he who is humble

seeks nothing. It is the same to him to be praised or scorned, because he assumes nothing for himself, and does not care how he is treated. Wherever he is placed, he stays. It does not even occur to him that he should be somewhere else.

There are plenty of people who practise sincere humility, and who, however, are very far from that humility of heart of which I have just spoken, for outer humility, and one which has not its source in pure charity, is a false humility. The more we think we are lowering ourselves, the more we are persuaded of our elevation. He who is conscious of lowering himself is not yet in his place, which is beneath all lowering. People who think they are lowering themselves have a good deal of conceit. Also, at bottom, that kind of humility is often a subtle seeking of conceit. That kind of humility will not enter into heaven unless it is reduced to pure charity, source of true humility, alone worthy of God, which he takes pleasure in filling with himself. Those who are full of it can neither humble themselves nor lower themselves, before anyone, finding themselves beneath all abasement. If they wanted to lower themselves, they would have to raise themselves first, and in that way leave the state which is proper to them. Also they are so persuaded that to humiliate themselves, they must place themselves higher than they are, and leave their own place, that they think that they never could do it. They do not feel at all humiliated by all the scorn and condemnation of men. They only stay in their place. They do not even take any part in the applause which could be given them. They deserve nothing. They expect nothing. They take part in nothing. They understand that it is only the word of God who, in becoming incarnate, was lowered beneath what he was. That is why Scripture says that he became nothing, which it does not say of any creature.

Many misunderstand themselves at this point, keeping up their humility by their own will; and, failing in the resignation and the perfect renunciation of themselves, they offend divine charity believing to favour a humility, which nevertheless is not humility, if it is not compatible with charity.

If we had the light to discern it, we should see clearly that when we think we are humbling ourselves we are exalting ourselves; when we think we are annihilating ourselves we are seeking our own life; and then finally we enjoy and possess the glory of humility as a contemptible virtue in the acts of humility which we practise. The truly humble does nothing, and objects to nothing. He lets himself be conducted and led where anyone wishes. He believes that God can do everything in him; thus that he can make everything of chaff, and there is more humility in doing these things and in giving ourselves to them, than in opposing, under the pretence of humility, the designs of God. He who prefers contumely, by his choice, to exaltation, is not yet truly humble, although he has a taste for humility. Indeed, he who lets himself be placed and led where anyone wishes, high or low, who does not feel any difference, who does not notice if he is being praised or blamed, nor if what is being said to him is to his advantage, or disadvantage, is truly humble, although he may not appear so to the eyes of men, who do not judge true virtue by what it is in itself, but entirely by what people think of it.

The truly humble is perfectly obedient, because he has renounced his own will. He lets himself be led to where he is wanted, in one way or another. He yields to everything, and resists nothing, because he would not be humble if he had a choice and a will or an argument over what was ordered for him. He has no leaning for anyone thing, but he lets himself be bent from whatever side anyone pleases. He wants nothing, asks nothing, not from the habit of not asking anything, but because he is in such profound self-forgetfulness, and is so completely separated from self that he does not know what is most suitable for himself. The truly humble is one of those children of whom Jesus

Christ has said that the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. A child does not know what he needs. He can do nothing. He thinks of nothing, but he lets himself be led. Let us abandon ourselves then with courage. If God makes nothing of us, he will give us justice, because we are good for nothing; and if he makes great things, the glory will be his. We shall say with Mary that he has done great things in us, because he has regarded our low estate.