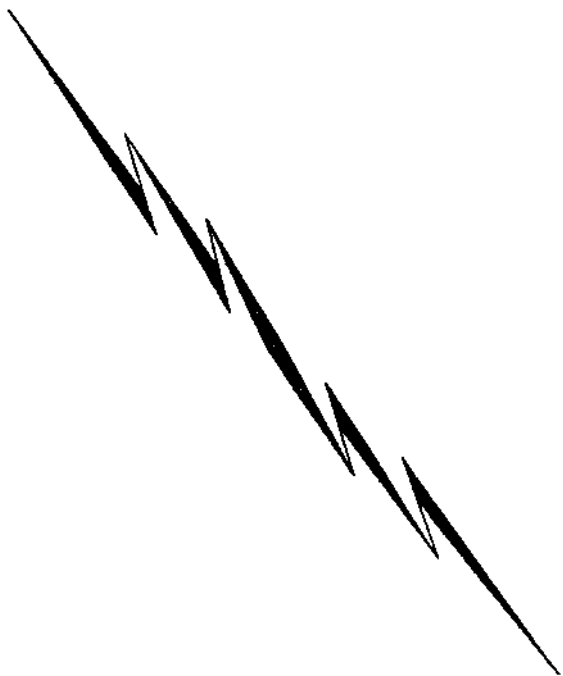


# APPLIED CHRISTIANITY



**John J. Hugo**



# APPLIED CHRISTIANITY

*by*

FATHER JOHN J. HUGO

Third Edition

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✠ *Francis J. Spellman,*  
Archbishop of New York.

New York, May 8, 1944.

# TO OUR LADY

THE QUEEN OF THE MOST HOLY ROSARY

whose fifteen mysteries

so marvelously exemplify and epitomize

that divine pattern of living

given to us by Him who said:

*I am the Way and the Truth and the Life*

## Part One

### BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN LIVING

#### Introductory

#### *First Principle: Elevation to Divine Life*

I	The Two Principles of Activity.....	1
II	Principles of Action for Supernatural Living.....	9
III	The Harmony between Natural and Supernatural.....	15
IV	The Conflict between Natural and Supernatural.....	23
V	The Law of the Flesh.....	29
VI	The Pagan Mentality.....	35
VII	Jesus Speaks of the Supernatural Life.....	41
VIII	The Christian Mentality.....	47
IX	The Fullness of Christian Life.....	53

#### *Second Principle: The Glory of God*

X	The Glory of God.....	61
XI	The Samples: Doctrine.....	67
XII	The Samples: Application .....	73

#### *Third Principle: The Folly of the Cross*

XIII	The Folly of the Cross.....	81
XIV	The Folly of the Cross: Application.....	89
XV	Summary and Conclusion.....	95

## Part Two

### THE PRINCIPLES COMBINED

#### Introductory

#### *The Samples Again*

XVI	The Love of God.....	99
XVII	The Contempt of the World: Doctrine.....	107
XVIII	The Contempt of the World: Practice.....	115
XIX	The Forbidden Samples.....	125
XX	The Samples and Sin.....	133

#### *Fourth Principle: The Supreme Dominion of God*

XXI	The Supreme Dominion: Doctrine.....	139
XXII	The Supreme Dominion: God's Intention.....	145
XXIII	The Supreme Dominion: In Persons: Blind Instruments.....	155
XXIV	The Supreme Dominion: In Superiors: Obedience.....	163
XXV	The Supreme Dominion: The Human Will.....	169
XXVI	The Supreme Dominion: The Divine Will.....	175

#### *Finale: The Sowing*

XXVII	Almsgiving: The Sowing of External Goods.....	182
XXVIII	Mortification: The Sowing of Bodily Goods.....	188
XXIX	Afflictions: The Sowing of Interior Goods.....	198
XXX	Death: The Final Sowing.....	204
	Epilogue.....	212



*"If anyone desires to do His will, he will know of the teaching whether it is from God, or whether I speak on my own authority."*

—John 7, 17.

## FOREWORD

Each of the chapters of this book gives in condensed form matter originally set forth in conferences that lasted an hour or more. They are then rather outlines than complete studies of the subjects they discuss; and together they are here presented as a short basic text on the Christian life, to be supplemented of course by other readings.

If brevity has its disadvantages, preventing that fullness of treatment that is desirable in matters of importance, it also has advantages. Among other things it enables us in the present case to offer a complete conspectus, or panorama, of the Christian life, in which the relation of the several parts to one another and to the whole is clearly visible. Each person is free to read or not to read this book, as he chooses; but it is urged that those who do read it, regard it as a whole, a unit, a total picture, in reference to which, and not otherwise, the various parts are to be understood and interpreted. This observation applies strictly at any rate to Part One, which is incomprehensible except as a piece. The chapters of Part Two are intended to give a fuller account of the matter described in Part One, thus filling in and completing the picture sketched out there.

The chief difference between this new edition and the two that have gone before it—apart from minor revisions and the adoption of a more legible type face—is that several chapters, three appendices, and all footnotes have been dropped. This change, made in the interests of greater simplicity and directness, is more readily possible now because, since the first appearance of the book, it has been supplemented by other works in which the somewhat technical material here deleted is still substantially available to those interested.

In all that I have written here or elsewhere I wish simply to take part, however modestly, in the general apostolate of the Catholic Church. Therefore my work is submitted humbly and completely to the Church for approval.

JOHN J. HUGO

## **Let Us Pray**

It is truly meet and just, right and salutary, always and in all places, to give thanks unto Thee, O Holy Lord, Father Almighty, Eternal God, through Christ Our Lord, Who, after His Resurrection, appeared openly to all His disciples and in their presence, ascended into heaven, so that He might make us

### **PARTAKERS OF HIS GODHEAD.**

Therefore, with the Angels and Archangels, with the Thrones and Dominations, and with all the heavenly hosts, we sing the hymn of Thy glory, saying again and again

**Holy, Holy, Holy,  
Lord God of Hosts,**

**The Heavens and the Earth are Full of Thy Glory.**

**Hosanna in the Highest!**

**(Preface, Feast of the Ascension)**

## Part I

# Basic Principles of Christian Living

Partakers of the Divine Nature



### FIRST PRINCIPLE

Elevation to Divine Life



## "Partakers of the Divine Nature."

—II Peter, 1, 4.

From the very beginning the Divine Trinity desired and decreed, out of Its overflowing love, to create a race of creatures (two races, if we take into account the angelic universe) who would be able to share the measureless love and everlasting life and happiness of the Three Persons Themselves. For this reason, "in the fullness of time" God the Father sent His Only-Begotten Son on earth, Who became a sharer of our humanity that we in turn might share His divinity. By sharing His divinity, and only thus, are we fitted to enter the blessed Society of the Trinity.

Clearly, therefore, the basic fact and truth of the Christian religion is man's elevation, through Jesus Christ to a life that is more than human, that is in fact supernatural and divine, with a destiny that will carry him into the very intimacy of the Godhead.

It is this basic truth of man's elevation to the divine life that will be taken in this work as the starting point and fundamental principle in the study of the Christian life.

*"O admirable exchange! The Creator of the human race, taking unto Himself a body and soul, has vouchsafed to be born of a Virgin, and appearing here below as a man, has made us*  
**PARTAKERS OF HIS DIVINITY**

(Antiphon, Octave of Nativity)

## CHAPTER 1

# The Two Principles of Activity

According to an ancient legend, Pygmalion, King of Cyprus, who was also a sculptor, carved a statue of a maiden; and the statue was so beautiful that Pygmalion fell in love with it. But he was sad because the statue, while beautiful, was lifeless. Then the goddess Aphrodite, taking pity on him, gave life to the statue; and now Pygmalion was overjoyed to have his love received and returned.

This story is but the myth of a false pagan religion; and yet it may stand as an example and symbol of the true God's dealings with mankind. God made men, giving them the precious gift of life and all the superabundant goods of the material world to sustain that life. Yet he was still, if not sad, at least dissatisfied; for God is love and, as with Pygmalion and the statue, He could not yet love men as His equals. Love demands equality; that is why one cannot love, say, his dog with a true love of friendship, and why the dog, despite all its dumb loyalty, cannot really return its master's love. That is also why Pygmalion could be happy only when the statue of the maiden became a living human person. And so also God after creating us and giving us a human nature, has given us a further communication of His own life, a participation in the divine nature, by which we are raised to a higher than human level of existence, to a kind of equality with Himself, to the status of sons of God and therefore capable of receiving and in some measure of returning His love.

This communication of divine life is what is meant by sanctifying grace. Thus our creation was completed and crowned with grace, by which man is raised to the supernatural and divine order of life, and is here introduced into the bosom of the Trinity, to share in the measureless life and happiness of the Three Divine Persons.

Man's elevation to the supernatural order is the basic fact of Christianity. It enables us to grasp in some sort the dignity and privilege of being Christians. And the conception of grace as being a share in the divine nature itself—a conception which we owe to St. Peter (II Pet. 1, 4)—must be the starting-point and foundation of our study of the Christian life.

### 1. Natural and Supernatural Activity

Thus, in every man there is a twofold principle of activity. The first is simply his human nature, which enables him to act as a man, on the natural plane, as a human being—to walk and eat and play and work and think and love. The other principle is sanctifying grace, the share in the divine nature, which makes him a son of God; so that the Scriptures then say to him, "*You are gods!*" (Psalm 81, 6)

Nature, in a sense, belongs to us: once God decreed to create us, all that goes with human nature belongs to us properly. But the supernatural principle does not belong properly to us at all. It is God's free gift, the greatest of all His gifts.

Moreover, life manifests itself in activity; and each kind of life has its own distinctive activity. Plants feed themselves, grow, and reproduce their own kind. Animals have the power of moving about and possess sense knowledge. We recognize a dog by its barking, a bird by its flying, a fish by its power to swim. Similarly, our human nature gives us special powers: we can think, act freely, work with tools. And when we are raised to a share in the divine life, we are given further and still higher powers of action, such as befit divinized beings.

Suppose (if you can imagine yourself as omnipotent) that you were to attach wings to some pet goldfish; so that now, besides being able to swim, they are also able to fly. Or suppose that you were able to give a pet dog the power to think and speak; your faithful companion would no longer be dumb, but would be able truly to enter into your human interests. Now God is omnipotent; and He has given us human beings powers of life and activity that are supernatural and divine. It becomes henceforth our privilege and responsibility to live and act on the higher plane: and this is what is meant by living a supernatural or Christian life.

As a first step towards understanding such a supernatural life, we must carefully distinguish between natural and supernatural life and activity. We may do this in three ways: by their make-up, by their respective guides, and by their destinations.

### a. According to Their Make-Up

A natural life is one in which natural activity proceeds from nature as from its principle; it is made up of all the actions that men can perform with their own human powers. If they eat and sleep, move about and work, see and feel and think and talk and love—if they do all these things, but nothing more, and do them in virtue of their natural energies, then they are living natural lives.

On the other hand, a supernatural life is one that exceeds all the powers of nature and proceeds from a supernatural principle. We have already seen that it is by sanctifying grace that we are raised to the supernatural order; and thus it is that our lives and actions become supernatural by the transforming influence of this sanctifying grace, which, together with the actual graces that supplement it, becomes the principle and source of our activity.

Now while sanctifying grace itself gives us our status in the supernatural world, it becomes a principle of action, that is, it becomes active and influential in the practical sphere of every day conduct, by means of the virtues, especially the theological virtues, that are infused into the soul with it. These virtues are active powers, dynamic qualities, that tend to make the supernatural impulses that originate in grace the ruling force of our lives: grace in action, we might call them. Thus our

actions become supernatural when, in accordance with our new supernatural status, they are referred to God by one or another of these virtues. Moreover, of all the virtues, the highest is charity, or love: primarily the love of God, secondarily the love of neighbor; so that it is above all the influence of charity that makes our actions supernatural. Indeed, even when a Christian performs acts of the other virtues, such as humility or patience, charity is even then at work implicitly or secretly; just as when you exert your arms or legs, you call your heart into action also. Thus St. Paul says, *Charity is patient, is kind.* (I Cor. 13, 4)

Accordingly, if you give an alms out of love for God, your motive of love makes grace the principle of your action; and your action is thereby supernatural. But if you give an alms *to be honored by men* (Matt. 6, 2), your worldly motive intercepts the impulse of grace and by providing a natural motive keeps the action on the natural plane: so that there will be no eternal reward for it.

### b. According to Their Guides

Natural and supernatural life may be defined and distinguished also by their respective guides.

As God gives us sight to guide us in our bodily movements, so on the higher and distinctively human plane He gives us reason or intelligence for a guide. Reason is man's typical human faculty—it is what distinguishes him from the beast. If we were to live according to reason only (which is possible, although only within limits, as will be noted in a moment) we would be living virtuous lives, the lives of good pagans; but we would not yet be acting supernaturally, as Christians.

*Faith* is the guide provided by God for us in the supernatural order; we live on the supernatural plane of life when we take the truths revealed by faith as the guide for our lives on earth: *The just man liveth by faith.* (Rom. 1, 17)

Suppose that you are injured by another. What is your *natural* tendency? Simply to strike back, that is, to have justice from your assailant. Even *reason* will permit this, will say that your anger is justified. But *faith* offers a higher rule: *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you.* (Matt. 5, 44)

### c. According to Their Destinations

Finally, the natural and supernatural orders may be defined in reference to their respective ends. When we are raised to the supernatural order, we are given an altogether new end or destiny. That is to say, we are no longer to labor for a merely natural end, but rather direct our efforts, in accordance with our elevation and new powers, towards an end that is supernatural and divine.



The destination of the supernatural life is the happiness of heaven, a perfect and eternal friendship with God, a participation in the intimate love-life of the Trinity.

The destination of the merely natural life is merely natural happiness. Natural actions, although good, do not merit heaven for they are not supernatural; they merit only natural happiness. There must be proportion between an end and the means used to obtain that end; and natural actions are not a proportionate means for obtaining a supernatural end. Hence it is that to attain to our supernatural end we must live supernatural lives and exercise ourselves in supernatural activity.

Natural happiness consists in the satisfaction of the human powers and desires, i.e., the satisfaction of the senses, of intellect and will. According to the philosophers, natural happiness consists essentially, and in its highest form, in the knowledge and love of the supreme Good, which of course is God. But this knowledge and love are cold, remote, abstract, such as may be obtained on earth by philosophy; they are nothing like the intimate embrace of friendship and personal love granted to those who live in the supernatural world.

God, in raising man to the supernatural order, took away even the most sublime natural good as an end in life. Only unbaptized infants can possess something like natural happiness, in limbo. But limbo is closed to the baptized. For these, the natural way of life may be compared to a dead-end road—a road which, perhaps good, and going some distance, nevertheless leads to no destination. While men may still perform some good natural actions, even by their unaided human powers, and thus proceed some little distance on the natural road of life, these good natural actions can never lead them to natural happiness in limbo; for limbo is now closed to them as a result of the divine plan to raise man to the supernatural order.

It is the theological virtue of hope that lifts our hearts above earthly happiness and causes us to seek confidently a supernatural end and happiness. Thus, to summarize, we see how supernatural life manifests itself in the activity of faith, hope, and charity; *but the greatest of these is charity*. (I Cor. 13, 13) These three virtues, respectively, guide us in the supernatural world, lift our hearts towards a supernatural End, and join us to that End, which is nothing other than God.

## 2. The Third Level

When men, neglecting grace, attempt to live on the natural level by their own unaided powers, they not only fall below the standards of supernatural conduct but are prone also to fall below even natural morality into sin. While they can perform *some* good actions without grace, such as helping a neighbor or acting honestly, they cannot, in their present condition, and without grace, perfectly conform even to reason or fulfill entirely and permanently all the requirements of the natural law as established by reason. If, therefore, men neglect grace

and the duty of living supernaturally, they will go down a slow but definite declivity into sin. Here, then, is a third possible level of activity, that of sin. Such activity consists in disobedience to God; it may be said to be guided, neither by faith nor by reason, but rather by animal appetite; and its term is hell.

This tendency towards evil should be kept in mind when we speak of living natural lives. It is possible to live good natural lives (apart from the assistance of grace) only temporarily or for relatively few actions.

There are, then, three possible levels of life:

	I	II	III
LEVELS	MAKE-UP	GUIDE	DESTINATION
Supernatural	Charity	Faith	Heaven
Natural	Natural Activity	Reason	(Limbo)
Sin	Disobedience	Appetite	Hell

(NOTE—The parenthesis and broken arrow above indicate that limbo is a merely theoretical possibility.)

In order to see God we must get on the supernatural level and live there. If we wished to interview an executive whose office is on the top floor of a skyscraper, we should have to go up to where he is; failing this, no amount of effort or patience would obtain the interview. Nor can we see God in supernatural happiness except through living supernatural lives. No matter how good we are, if our goodness is merely natural, it merits only natural happiness (limbo) and not the supernatural vision of God. Or, again, to reach Philadelphia from the West we must travel by the Lincoln Highway; no matter how persistently we follow the William Penn Highway, which is parallel to the Lincoln, we will never get to Philadelphia; for that particular road does not lead there. Likewise, to reach heaven we must travel the supernatural way; no other road leads there.

To summarize: In each of us there are three possible planes of action; one may act as a god, or as a pagan, or as a devil. To get to heaven, however, we must act as gods—for we are in fact sons of God. But even though baptized, we are still free to act by means of our natural powers alone, therefore like pagans; and when we do so our actions do not merit heaven although there may be no sin in them. Of course naturally good actions, as we shall see, can be supernaturalized. But the point to be observed here is that such actions, although good in the natural order, cannot of themselves merit heaven.

### 3. This Doctrine In Sacred Scripture

Since we receive the doctrine of man's elevation to a supernatural life from divine revelation, it will be most useful to meditate on this doctrine as given by Scriptures. And while it is the inspired word

that reveals the doctrine, we may also say, conversely, that a clear understanding of this doctrine offers a key to innumerable passages of the Scriptures that would otherwise remain incomprehensible.

Perhaps the clearest statement of the need of a rebirth and a higher life is the famous text from St. John (3, 5): *Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

St. John also shows us that this rebirth through Christ makes us sons of God—therefore giving us a share in the divine life: *But to as many as received Him, He gave the power of becoming sons of God; to those who believe in His name.* (John 1, 12)

Other texts contrast the life of faith with that of reason, as we have done above. *Amen, amen I say to you, he who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has life everlasting, and does not come to judgment, but has passed from death to life.* (John 5, 24) This text is typical of a whole group which speak of those who believe, i. e., who live by faith, as having life, while those who do not live by faith are dead in a spiritual and supernatural sense. To this group may be joined another group that makes a similar contrast of life and death: *I have come a light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in the darkness.* (John 12, 46) Mark: Jesus does not say, as we might carelessly think, that those who sin grievously against the moral law, as by adultery or murder, are in darkness and death; they are in darkness and death who do not believe, who do not live by faith; that is, those who, neglecting or rejecting the truths of faith, prefer to live by reason. Even Christians can fall into such rationalism—and so walk in darkness or be tainted by the corruption of death—when in their daily lives they are guided by reason only and fail to make the truths of faith the light of their footsteps.

The practical consequence of our new life in Christ is put strikingly by St. Paul: *Therefore, if you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, not the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* (Col. 3, 1-2) Since Christians are elevated to a supernatural life, they should devote themselves to the pursuit of the things of God. At the same time they should renounce, at least by inward detachment, the goods things of earth. And this detachment is to be so real and final that the Apostle compares it to the separation from all things that comes with death. Alas, that in actual fact, so many Christians are quite alive to the pleasures of the world and dead rather to Christ and the things of God, at least so far as any active interest and affection are concerned.

## A Note on Limbo

The idea of natural happiness (limbo) is introduced to help in defining the natural order and distinguish it clearly from the supernatural order; or, in other words, to assist in distinguishing natural religion from Christianity. It is not suggested of course that Christians may go to limbo; to them limbo is finally closed. In the divine plan men do not have a choice between natural and supernatural happiness. To miss the latter is to miss all happiness. Nevertheless, the concept of limbo shows us the proper term of the natural order—the destiny that men would have had if God had left them in the natural order. In so doing it assists us to define the natural order. (For further details on limbo, see *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Art. "Limbo.")

Purgatory is not given in our diagram simply because purgatory is an anteroom to heaven and all those who enter purgatory are sure of happiness in heaven; thus the conditions for admission into purgatory are substantially the same as for heaven: to gain purgatory the soul must also live a supernatural life.

It may be thought that, since there is no limbo for the baptized, it is useless to go into the matter. Actually, however, the idea of limbo is very helpful for understanding the Christian life. When a person enters a religious community, he gives up marriage and takes upon himself a quite different set of obligations. Marriage as an end in life is closed to him; and yet it is certainly not useless for him to know something of marriage—without such knowledge he will have a very inadequate understanding of human life and will indeed not be able to understand even the nature of his own renunciation. Similarly, although we cannot enter limbo, our notions of the natural order are likely to be misty and vague unless we understand that limbo is the term of the natural life. Here are five good reasons for considering limbo:

(1) It helps to define the natural life. The best practical way to distinguish two highways is to tell their destinations, i. e., that one leads, say, to New York, the other to Philadelphia. To state the respective terms of natural and supernatural activity is similarly the best practical method to mark out these two distinct ways of life.

(2) The idea of limbo helps also to bring out the fact that natural activity, even when it avoids sin, does not of itself lead to heaven and supernatural beatitude. A Christian must not only rise above sin; he must also rise above nature, that is, above merely natural standards of conduct; otherwise he is on the road that leads to limbo, not on that which leads to heaven. With this in mind one is more likely to realize that the Christian life is not only super-SINFUL, but also, quite literally, super-NATURAL.

(3) Limbo helps to give a pure and true idea of supernatural happiness. Many persons appear to think that supernatural happiness is like the happiness men long for in this world. In fact supernatural happiness is, not sensual, but spiritual, and also immeasurably higher than that spiritual but still natural joy sought by good pagans in art, science, and literature. Supernatural happiness rather consists in the possession of God in a perfect and eternal friendship. If we forget about limbo, we may come to think of heaven as just above hell, thus confusing it with the merely natural happiness that is proper in limbo. To keep limbo in our thinking gives us a true picture of the immense height of heaven, not only over hell, but also over the loftiest natural happiness.

(4) Since limbo is the proper term of the natural order, to forget about it is to run the risk of forgetting about the natural order altogether, particularly about natural activity. When God raises us to the supernatural order, He takes away limbo as our final destination. But He does not take away that natural activity which of itself would lead to limbo; this remains, and, if it is to help us merit heaven, it must be supernaturalized. If we forget that this natural activity is in truth only natural, and that, although good, it can of itself lead only to limbo and not to heaven, we will be likely to neglect the task of supernaturalizing our activity.

In this way, neglect of limbo can lead to a wholly falsified conception of the Christian life. For if the natural level of activity falls out, then we think of the possibilities of action as being on two levels instead of the three shown in our diagram. We come to think of actions as either sinful or supernatural; we have lost hold of the fact that they may be good yet only natural and therefore tending to limbo and not to heaven.

(5) Limbo shows us what grace does *not* do. What grace *does* do is to raise us to the supernatural order, endow us with supernatural powers, and give us a supernatural destiny, heaven, while at the same time closing the natural happiness of limbo to us. What grace does *not* do is to supernaturalize our activity in the moral or practical (or ascetical) order, that is, in the direction or orientation of our activity towards our supernatural end. For the task of referring our actions to our supernatural end depends on our own free choice and disposition of these actions. In other words, grace does not suppress our freedom, does not force sanctity upon us, does not dispense us from the task of corresponding with the divine influence. If we expected grace to do all, if we were to neglect this need for cooperation on our own part, then we would fall into spiritual slackness under pretense of exalting grace. And the idea of limbo brings all this out by indicating that even good natural activity, unless freely referred to man's supernatural end, of itself can but lead to a natural end (limbo).

## Principles of Action For Supernatural Living

Important practical principles follow immediately from the basic doctrine outlined in Chapter One. Here are five such principles.

### ***First Principle: The Great Law of Christianity Is the Law of Love***

Once we are elevated to the supernatural plane, we have the duty and responsibility of acting as sharers in the divine nature, as divinized beings, as sons of God. How shall we do this? Where shall we find direction and counsel? Obviously in the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, in Whom the human and divine natures are so wonderfully combined. And Jesus, to prevent confusion or uncertainty amid the manifold instructions of Sacred Scripture, gives a perfect summary of all His teaching in the commandment of love. To the lawyer who asked how he might enter into eternal life, Jesus answered, *Love the Lord Thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole mind, with thy whole soul and with all thy strength. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like to this: thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*

Moreover, not only is love the first and characteristic law of the supernatural world, but its fulfillment is also necessary for salvation. St. Paul leaves us in no doubt of this: *If I should speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have charity, I have become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And if I have prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, yet do not have charity, I am nothing. And if I distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, yet do not have charity, it profits me nothing.* (Cor. 13, 1-3)

St. Gregory the Great sees this doctrine of the necessity of charity inculcated in our Lord's parable of the man who was cast out of the wedding feast because he did not wear a wedding garment. St. Gregory says that this wedding garment could not refer to baptism or to faith; for these are required even to obtain entrance into the feast, that is, into the place where the feast is prepared, into the Church. And since the man in the parable had already been admitted to the feast, he must stand for those who have faith and have been baptized, and are therefore in the Church, but who lack some other quality necessary for salvation. This other quality, the Saint says, can be no other thing than charity.

It is true that the charity demanded is an infused virtue; that is, not a virtue that we acquire by our own effort but one poured into our souls by God. Nevertheless, this infused charity is given to us to be exercised; only through its exercise can we merit salvation. An executive does not pay his secretary for having cultivated the habit of typing, but for exercising this habit. So also God rewards men for exercising the supernatural powers which He has given them. Charity is a dynamic quality that of its very nature tends towards action. In this it resembles the other virtues and habits, whose use is that they give readiness and facility in action. Accordingly, St. Thomas says (II II, 24, 4), "Charity is essentially a virtue ordained for action, *ordinata ad actum*." And St. Francis de Sales adds (*Love of God*, IV, 2) that charity "being an active quality cannot be long without acting or dying." The latter Saint follows the Fathers in comparing charity to Rachel, who said, "*Give me children, otherwise I shall die*." So also charity "urges the heart which she has espoused to make her fertile of good works; otherwise she will perish." The fundamental law of charity imposes on us the duty of making the *virtue* of charity operative to the fullest extent: "Love the Lord with thy *whole* heart, with thy *whole* mind, with thy *whole* soul, and with all thy strength."

### ***Second Principle: Christianity Is Not Merely the Avoidance of Sin***

From the fact that the great law of Christianity is that of love, as well as from the possibility of living on three levels, it follows that practical Christianity cannot consist in the mere avoidance of sin. If we seek only to avoid sin, and perhaps further limit ourselves to the avoidance of mortal sin, ignoring the higher impulses of grace and the law of charity, then we live as pagans rather than as Christians—good pagans perhaps, such as described by the ancient philosophers, but pagans nevertheless, following a merely natural and rational standard of conduct. Moreover, we may practice all the natural moral virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) and still act as pagans. The supernatural virtues alone enable us to act on the divine plane, as Christians.

It is therefore insufficient to take as a guide for conduct the rule, "Avoid mortal sin." If we make this our maxim of conduct, we will not rise above the merely natural standard of behavior proper to the good pagans. We have already seen, in the diagram of the three levels, that we can avoid sin and still be on the merely natural plane. Moreover, if we take this rule, to avoid mortal sin, as the only norm of conduct, we will be likely to slip into the belief that, provided we avoid mortal sin, it will be permissible for us to abandon ourselves to the love of creatures and the pursuit of pleasure: we will live, not as good pagans, but as gross pagans. But even reason demands conformity to the natural law; our vocation as Christians is the vastly higher one of conforming to Christ and conducting ourselves as sons of God.

It follows, further, that mere obedience to the precepts of the natural law does not make us act as Christians. The natural law comprises all the commandments which men know by reason, that is to say, by reflecting on the inclinations of their own nature. For example, Thou shalt not kill, and Thou shalt not steal, are laws of nature. Men might know such laws without divine revelation—although revelation has made them clearer and more accessible to all. By the mere observance of such commandments of the natural law men cannot enter into supernatural happiness. By such observance we could merit only limbo—which, however, because of God's plan of salvation, we cannot now enter.

To be sure, one who in the state of grace observes the natural law by avoiding grave sin, will be saved. This is because observance of the law of nature excludes from the soul whatever gross evil is utterly incompatible with the possession of grace and charity; so that such a person may receive and retain sanctifying grace and, by excluding grave evil, exercises the lowest degree of love. Still it is sanctifying grace, the activity of the virtue of charity, and obedience to the law of charity, that save him—not a mere observance of the natural law. The point to be observed here is precisely that only a supernatural principle and supernatural activity, that is to say, actions which proceed from a supernatural principle, can merit salvation.

Furthermore, a Christian who limits himself to the observance of the natural law limits himself to an absolute minimum—in defiance of the law which tells us to love God with our *whole* hearts, that is, to seek an absolute maximum of love. Suppose a wife reproaches her husband for neglecting her. And suppose he replies by protesting his love for her. And when she asks him the extent of this love, he goes on to say, "Well, my dear, you see I do not divorce you!" Would a wife be satisfied with such a declaration? It does contain some love, but a minimum; it is not what a true lover would say. When we take as our rule the avoidance of mortal sin, while neglecting the total love for which we should strive, we are acting like such a husband; we are saying to God that of course we love Him since we are so careful not to divorce ourselves from Him. But our reluctance to do more than avoid divorce is no strong argument for the sincerity and ardor of our love.

Christianity, therefore, is not to be put down as a mere system of natural morality; it is not to be identified with natural ethics. Yet this mistake is frequently made. Christianity takes natural morality as its starting-point and then goes far beyond; it is essentially a supernatural religion. Its law is not the mere moral correctness enjoined by reason; it is the holiness inspired by love.

It was not Our Lord's special mission to teach the natural law. The great pagan teachers had already done this in large measure. We Christians are under a heavy debt to enlightened pagans like Plato and Aristotle. And we ought to be thankful to God that by His Revelation He made even the natural law clearer and more certain for the greater



number of men. But we ought not to confuse our supernatural religion with even the highest natural law and natural religion.

### *Third Principle: Hatred of the World Is of the Essence of Christianity*

This third principle, which follows immediately from the second, may also be stated thus: hatred of the world is the reverse of the love of God; the love of God involves and requires hatred of the world. It is only by raising ourselves above the whole natural order that we live supernaturally, as Christians. To do this we are to love God with our whole heart, our whole mind, our whole soul, our whole strength. This means that we are to withdraw our affections, not only from sin, but also from all the goods of the natural world. The Christian life is not only super-sinful but also super-natural. To give our whole love to God means that we must detach ourselves from the pleasures of the world. It does not take a knowledge of higher mathematics to see that if we give all the love of our one heart to God, we will have nothing left to squander on the creatures of the world.

If a man says that he loves his wife more than he loves some offensive creature like a toad or a snake, she will not be overcome by such a declaration! What he must say is that he loves her more than all other women—he may not except even very attractive ones: the very fact that other women are attractive is the reason why his wife demands his preference. Love is preference.

Now sin is spiritual filth. Do we then flatter and please God when we say that we love Him more than filth? We must rather prove to God that we love Him more than all other things, even the most attractive. Hence the maxim, "Enjoy the pleasures of the world—as long as you do not commit mortal sin," belongs to paganism rather than to Christianity. To be sure, the avoidance of mortal sin is already a great good—though far below what a Christian should aim at. But the search for enjoyment in the good things of the earth is not Christian behavior at all. It is paganism that says, "Eat, drink and be merry!" The Scripture teaches, *Mind . . . NOT the things that are upon the earth.* (Col. 3, 2)

Man's powers of affection are limited, and the more he squanders them on created objects, the less love he has left to give God. To progress in the love of God, therefore, one must withdraw his affections, not only from evil, but from all objects other than God. This is why contempt for creatures is the reverse of the love of God and belongs to the very essence of that love.

### *Fourth Principle: Action and Pleasure Are on the Same Plane*

If I wish to enjoy the pleasure of eating an apple, I eat an apple; and I do not expect to obtain that particular kind of pleasure, say, from drinking coffee. There is, then, a proportion between actions and the

pleasure or reward that they bring. If actions are on different planes, then their pleasure will also be on altogether different planes. Sensible actions, like eating, bring sensible pleasure; intellectual actions, like reading, bring intellectual pleasure. In the same way natural actions can bring only natural pleasure or happiness; to obtain supernatural happiness, we must perform supernatural actions.

St. Paul states the same principle in a slightly different way: *For what a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows in the flesh, from the flesh also he will reap corruption. But he who sows in the spirit, from the spirit he will reap life everlasting.* (Gal. 6, 8) If a farmer sows wheat, he will not expect to reap grapes. No more may we, from *sowing in the flesh*, that is, from living natural lives, expect to obtain life everlasting in the supernatural order.

A man who works for Jones cannot expect to be paid by Brown. If he should go to Brown, the latter would understandably send him to Jones for his wages. Similarly, when one works for the world, he must be content with the sort of pay that the world can give. If we wish to be paid by God, that is, if we desire a supernatural reward, we must labor for Him. Thus Jesus says: *When thou givest a dinner or a supper, do not invite thy friends, or thy brethren, or thy relatives, or thy rich neighbors, lest perhaps they also invite thee in return, and a recompense be made to thee. But when thou givest a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; and blessed shalt thou be, because they have nothing to pay thee with; for thou shalt be repaid at the resurrection of the just.* (Luke, 14, 12-14)

### ***Fifth Principle: Death Changes Nothing: Death Simply Immortalizes What Is in Us***

If we wish to enter heaven we must live supernaturally on earth. We will carry into eternity only the amount of love that we possess when we leave the earth. If I have five degrees of love when I die, I shall have five degrees when I arrive in eternity—and throughout eternity. If I die with fifty or seventy-five degrees of love—or with no love at all—then throughout eternity I will have fifty or seventy-five degrees of love—or no love at all.

The reason for this is that our time of probation is limited to our lives on earth; with death, our probation ends and, with it, our time of meriting. After death we can merit no further increases of eternal happiness. In fact, our souls are judged at the instant of death; and the attitude and dispositions of our souls are fixed forever as death finds them, as sculptured figures of dancers are fixed forever in the attitude in which they are carved.

If a man is an Englishman when he gets on a ship in England, he is still an Englishman when he gets off the ship in New York; the trip does not change his nationality. Now there are only saints in heaven; so that, to dwell in heaven, we too must become saints. And if we wish to arrive in heaven as saints, we must leave the earth as

saints. The passage into eternity will not transform us; we will simply enjoy in eternity what we have labored for on earth.

Some people keep postponing a change from worldly living, as though they can be transformed after death. But the essential transformation must take place before death. They think wrongly of purgatory and imagine that it offers an escape from the austerity of a true Christian life. There will be no meriting, hence no increase of charity, in purgatory. To gain even purgatory we must fulfill the conditions for supernatural living.

Hence, if we desire the spiritual and supernatural pleasures of heaven, we should cultivate a taste for them here. If we wish to love God in eternity, we must learn to love Him here. Christians who take their delight in the pleasures of the world, are not preparing themselves very wisely for eternity. Do they think that their tastes will suddenly and miraculously change when they die? Death changes nothing; death simply immortalizes what is in us. *If the tree falls to the south or to the north, in what place soever it shall fall, there it shall be.* (Eccles. 11, 3)

## The Harmony Between Natural and Supernatural

The practical relationship between nature and the supernatural may be stated in the rule that nature is to be mortified. Now to mortify means to make dead, to kill; therefore the whole duty of the Christian life is to kill or mortify—not sin merely—but nature. So, St. Paul says that *if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the flesh, you will live.* (Rom. 8, 13)

However, it is necessary to know how to go about this killing! A surgeon, when performing an operation, must know exactly what organs need to be removed and which may be removed without injury to the whole system; he must also know exactly where to find them and how to cut them out. If he makes any mistakes or works clumsily, he will destroy where he intended to cure.

So also, in mortifying the natural man, we do not intend to destroy our human nature—if we did, then the quickest way to attain to our supernatural end would be to commit suicide. In fact only one element in our natural activity—that, namely, which is in conflict with our supernatural destiny—needs to be removed or mortified. Whatever does not conflict with this destiny, but rather harmonizes with it, need not be mortified. There are, then, two elements in our natural lives: one that is good and also in harmony with our supernatural destiny, and this need not be mortified or destroyed; the other conflicts with our supernatural destiny. This is a matter of great importance, and in discussing it here at the beginning of our study we are like the surgeon as he makes certain preliminary examinations, preparatory to an operation. For example, he examines the heart and the lungs—without, however, any intention of removing *these*, but to learn the condition of the whole system; afterwards he will turn his attention to the infected part, to remove it. In the same way we examine first what is in harmony with our supernatural destiny, marking off the element which need *not* be mortified. Afterwards, in the next chapter, we will examine the area of infection.

This chapter also contains certain preliminary notions which if properly grasped will prevent misunderstanding of what will be said in later chapters. It is thus necessary to define the element of harmony in order to know what is *not* meant when we speak of mortifying our natural activity.

### 1. Where the Harmony Is Found

There is harmony between the natural and our supernatural destiny:

### a. In Regard to Human Nature Itself

Human nature was created by God, and whatever is created by God is good. Therefore human nature is good and we need not destroy or injure it in order to live a supernatural life. We need not, and we may not, maim or disfigure or in any way damage our bodily or rational powers in order to become holy. But does this mean that we are to leave nature just as it is? No; nature has been perfected and divinized by grace and it is our business to see that it is wholly transformed by grace. Of itself, our human nature, although good, cannot merit supernatural happiness; for this it must be penetrated by a higher principle. Still, it will always remain essentially the same human nature no matter how far the process of divinization advances. This it is necessary to realize lest we expect too much of our human nature, —lest we overstrain ourselves by trying to act as pure spirits.

When a blacksmith plunges steel into a fire and applies the bellows, the metal first reddens under the action of the flame, then it comes to a white heat, and finally it becomes a molten liquid. It remains essentially the same throughout the process; it is steel in its molten condition as when it had been a solid piece. Yet it has been transformed too, and, in this new condition, it can readily be shaped by the blacksmith. So must our human nature be transformed by grace; it will likewise remain essentially the same throughout the process of transformation; but the action of grace will render it soft and pliant, therefore easily molded according to the divine pattern for human life.

Thus, far from remaining merely human, our natures and our whole lives must be inwardly changed by the divine principle of grace. This is what happens to the saints. This is why they are so great even when their human talents and achievements are not very notable. They can all say with St. Paul, *By the grace of God I am what I am* (I Cor. 15, 10)

### b. In Regard to Natural Activity

Our natural activity, considered physically—the activity of our bodies, senses, minds, and wills—is good; it proceeds from human nature, itself good, and therefore harmonizes perfectly with our supernatural vocation. There is no need, then, nor is it permissible, to mortify, in the sense of destroying, this natural activity in the interests of a mortified Christian life. For example, in order to mortify our eyes, as recommended by spiritual writers, we should not stare at the sun and thus destroy our sight. Nor need we cut off our ears or tongues to mortify these members, although they certainly must be mortified. The fifth commandment forbids all such wrong-headed mortifications, just as it would forbid us to injure our health by eating worthless food or by excessive fasting (which, however, is not a frequent fault!).

Nevertheless, we are not to leave this activity on the merely natural or human level. It must be elevated to the supernatural plane, where alone it can merit eternal happiness for us. Of course, in the

first instance it is the grace of God that raises us and our activity to the supernatural plane. Nevertheless, God leaves us free; so that we may refuse to remain, or at any rate to act, on the higher level by neglecting to correspond with grace.

What we are to do with our natural activity is illustrated by the farmer who grafts one kind of fruit on the stock of another. We have, of ourselves, only natural activity, and yet we want our works to have supernatural life and bring forth the supernatural fruit of eternal happiness. How may we accomplish this? By grafting our natural activities to the supernatural life, our works, while remaining in themselves human and within the range of our natural powers, become divine in their source and principle, hence also in their eternal value. For, as St. Francis de Sales says, "the fruits of grafted trees always follow the graft, for if the graft be apple it will bear apples, if cherry it will bear cherries; yet so that these fruits always taste of the stock." And of course the fruits get not only their taste but also their vitality finally from the stock. In the spiritual life our activities are in themselves natural; but these natural activities are grafted to a supernatural principle of life. Thus the works themselves will follow the graft, that is, will in their material content be merely human and natural; but the life of these works will be derived from the stock, hence will be divine and supernatural, giving to these fruits an interior, invisible, supernatural vitality that is meritorious of eternal life.

### c. In Regard to Truth

There is no discord between the natural truths of reason and the mysteries of faith. The truths of faith and those of reason belong to different orders, but they do not contradict each other; both come from God, Who is very Truth, One and Eternal. Theologians state the matter by saying that the truth of faith is above reason but not contrary to it. In the same way, the knowledge of our minds is superior to that of the senses, although the latter is true enough as far as it goes: what our mind tells us about an apple, for example, completes what our eyes tell us about it.

Hence the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, which tells us that there are three persons in one God, is not really opposed to the truth of arithmetic which says that three times one are three; nor does the doctrine of the Incarnation, informing us that there are two natures in the one person of Jesus, contradict the fact that two times one are two. These mysteries of faith are simply beyond the limited comprehension of human reason.

The practical application of this doctrine is at once apparent. Since faith is above but not contrary to reason, then to live by faith we need not cultivate eccentricities and singularities, as in dress and manners, under the delusion that we are thereby "rising above reason." Thus, in order to live by the rule of poverty, we should not cultivate slovenliness or untidiness; in order to be unworldly, we should not disregard the legitimate customs and conventions of society by acting as eccen-

tricks or boors. We should not, in the effort to live by faith, fly in the face of prudence or good sense—as long as prudence and good sense are inspired by the truths of faith. We need not act silly or in any way make fools of ourselves in order to act on the supernatural plane. The Christian life is super-rational, not irrational.

Nevertheless, although there is no contradiction between the truths of faith and those of reason, the former are much higher than the latter; and when we live by faith we break away, as it were, from our human moorings to follow a line of conduct that our reason cannot understand and therefore may rebel against; as, for example, when instead of defending ourselves against injury we turn the other cheek. The truths of faith are so far beyond reason that they may *seem* to contradict it; as when Abraham, a childless old man, was told by God that he was to be the father of many nations and then, when Isaac was born, was further commanded to sacrifice this only son. Evidently living by faith is a severe strain and trial—a mortification or spiritual death—to reason.

## 2. How to Supernaturalize Natural Activity

Once we realize the essential goodness of human nature and its activity, it is evident that the practical task of the Christian life is to raise our natural activity to the supernatural plane. God does not do this for us, does not bypass our freedom—although He makes us *capable* of acting on the supernatural plane by giving us the virtues together with sanctifying grace, and by further assisting us with an endless series of actual graces.

What, then, are we to do on our part to make grace operative and productive in our daily lives? The answer follows from the principles already given. We must activate the infused supernatural virtues, for example the moral virtues, but especially the theological virtues, and charity most of all.

Accordingly, it may be said that we can make our lives supernatural and divine by bringing them under the rule of grace and the infused virtues, especially love. *God is love*, the Scripture says (I John 4, 16). When we are raised to the supernatural order, we pass from man's world to God's, to a world in which love is the very atmosphere. Our actions are made supernatural and our lives become divine when they are inspired by divine love, whether this love acts directly of itself or by means of any other of the brilliant array of Christian virtues: faith or hope, humility, patience, meekness or love of neighbor. A supernatural life may therefore be defined as one that is ruled by the love of God.

On the other hand, a natural life is one that is ruled, at any rate in practice, by the love of creatures. Of course, when a man takes a creature as his final end and supreme good in life, he commits mortal sin; he lives on the lowest plane, that of sin, and not even at the natural level. Yet one may, without committing grave sin, allow the desire for pleasure and the affection for creatures to become in practice

the immediate impulse for one's actions. This is the pagan life—life according to the maxim, "Eat, drink and be merry!"

Now how can we make sure that divine love is the ruling force in our lives? By seeing to it that our lives and actions are *motivated* by the love of God. The motive of an action fixes its end and thereby determines its living principle. Hence we may say that, presupposing the state of grace, an action is made supernatural by a supernatural motive that refers it to God. By such a motive we clear the way for the action of grace, give freedom to the holy impulses originating in the infused virtues.

If, on the other hand, our motives are merely natural, grace does not impel our actions but is rather kept bound up in the soul; the actual impulsion of our actions comes rather from nature and its desires, so that our actions remain natural.

To sanctify our lives, therefore, means to make love the ruling force of our lives. This is the manner in which we may bring religion into all the actions of every day; it is the manner in which we may sanctify ourselves by small and ordinary duties. Here, indeed, is the ultimate secret of sanctity, accessible to all who will hear it; and it makes holiness a possibility for the least of us. Nothing extraordinary is required; only to do all that we can with an ardent love for God.

Of course, in urging supernatural motives it is not asserted that they are necessary under pain of sin. The purpose of these pages is to point the way to the fullness and perfection of the Christian life. To such fullness we are all urged by Jesus when he says, *Love the Lord thy God with thy WHOLE heart . . .*

### 3. Harmony Between the Three Lives

Let us return to the fact that (although there is but one soul in each of us) we may act as animals, as pagans, or as Christians. God we know, has established a harmony between these three elements, the animal, the human, the divine. It is then our duty, in the area of our freedom, to preserve this harmony; for, in virtue of our freedom, we may destroy it. If we are led by our sense appetites, we live on the animal level only. If we act by reason, imposing the rules of reason on our appetites, then we are acting on the human plane, as good pagans. If we force reason to submit to the higher rule of faith, then we live on the Christian and supernatural plane. A child without training eats like an animal. Then, instructed in the amenities of life, he eats as a gentleman. Finally, in virtue of a supernatural motive, he eats as a Christian.

There is no difficulty in seeing the discord when a human being behaves like an animal; yet the discord is equally real, although not so apparent, when a Christian behaves like a pagan. In all our actions, therefore, we must insert, besides the animal and human elements, the third or Christian element. The rule, then, for supernaturalizing natural activity, and for preserving harmony between the three orders, is to get in the third element, the supernatural motive. By referring



our actions to God by such a motive, especially by a motive of love, we see to it that these actions are really divinized by grace.

In our relations with others we may also behave as animals (by quarreling, etc.), as human beings (by observing good manners) and as Christians (by treating our neighbors as "other Christs"). Friendship and love between spouses may likewise exist on the same three levels. In all these cases, therefore, it is necessary to "get in the third element." Love may be mere lust, or noble human love, or the still higher Christian love, i.e., love centered in God. The angel Raphael told the youthful Tobias that in marrying Sara he should put God first—that is, "get in the third element"; otherwise he would fall under the power of Satan and be killed like Sara's seven previous husbands.

Divine truth does not change: it is still true that those who leave God out of their arrangements—who fail to "get in the third element"—fall under the power of Satan. Friendships that leave God out are broken by the devil, who is the prince of hatred and division. Marriages that leave God out are also destroyed by the devil; he destroys them by means of the divorce courts and by the suffering that they bring in place of the happiness that was desired and expected.

Even in our relations with our families we must "get in the third element," refusing to allow any human affection to draw us away from the love of God. That is why Jesus said, *If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, yea and his own life, he cannot be my disciple.* (Luke 14, 26) This means that we must put God before the most sacred relationships, even before our own life, allowing nothing to come between God and ourselves; that, in a word, we must love God before every creature.

### A Note on the Two Meanings of Natural Activity

In this chapter we have been considering natural activity in its intrinsic goodness and ideal perfection. That is to say, we have isolated the human faculties and their operation for purposes of study; much as scientific students study models of bodily organs or else the organs themselves when removed from dissected bodies and artificially preserved. And, thus considering whatever is good in our faculties and their operation, we have said that it should be elevated to the supernatural plane.

But we arrive at this conception of natural activity in itself, and realize its excellence, only by abstracting from the actual conditions in which this activity is found in daily life; much as the student studies the preserved organ apart from the conditions in which it functions in a living man. Accordingly, to possess the whole truth, especially to possess truth in the practical order, we must also consider natural activity in the concrete, that is, in the actual circumstances in which it is found in daily life. That is to say, from a practical religious point of view, we must consider this activity in its actual moral circumstances, i.e., in the use that is made of it, the mental attitudes that govern it,

the motives that impel it, the ends that it is made to serve. And when we thus consider natural activity in the concrete, it is obvious that this activity, in its moral and spiritual orientation often falls away from the high standard of virtue fixed by right reason.

An artist studies the human form and features in their ideal perfection; but he is able to conceive of this perfection only by combining in one concept qualities he has discovered in many individuals. No one individual will possess every beauty of feature. All will but approximate the ideal, and that more or less in each case. Thus the human form considered in itself must be distinguished from the human form as it exists in the concrete.

Or again: we speak of an ideal wife or husband, including in our mental picture of such an ideal all that could be desired in wife or husband. Yet in actual life, although there are good wives and good husbands, they do not always and in every respect measure up to the ideal; because of human weakness, they may at times act from selfishness and therefore not in the manner required by the ideal proper to them.

It is in a similar way that we distinguish between natural activity in itself and natural activity in the concrete. Although our natural activity is in itself good, men often fail to regulate it in the manner prescribed by reason. Thus the activity of eating is in itself good and necessary. But in practice it is often not done in such a way as serves the highest good of man, thus meeting the requirements of reason, but rather in order to please the senses and indulge the appetites. Men should eat to live; but actually, as the saying is, they too often live to eat. Now a man is led into intemperance or sensuality in eating or drinking by a desire that is in itself natural; yet the pampering of this desire carries him into conduct that is opposed to the true good of human nature. In this way, any natural activity may deflect him from the austere norms established by right reason.

Moreover, reason itself, considered in the concrete circumstances of life, regularly falls below the high standards fixed by right reason. In other words, right reason is reason in its perfection; and it is an abstraction formed by combining in one idea all the excellences of reason. But no individual has right reason in its perfection; all approximate it more or less, while in their practice they follow, not the right reason which they do not have but their own concrete, limited, somewhat darkened reason. This is why men seek to justify as "reasonable" conduct and practices that, considered in themselves, veer from right reason, i.e., racial prejudice, self-indulgence.

Obviously, faith is not only above this reason darkened by worldly prudence—reason in the concrete—but is rather clear contrary to it. St. Paul accordingly tells us that *the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God* (I Cor. 3, 19). Conversely, the doctrine of the cross is *foolishness* to the Gentiles with their natural mentality (I Cor. 1, 25). Therefore we who belong to Christ must become *fools for Christ's sake* (I Cor. 4, 10), that is to say, we must fly in the face of

the false wisdom of the world, which is the wisdom of reason in the concrete.

It was stated above that natural activity, taken in the concrete, *often* falls below the norms fixed by right reason. It may be more definitely stated that this is *usually* the case in imperfect and unmortified men. Only those rather perfect Christians who have purged their natural activity, that is, who have purified the springs of action, will be able to satisfy in any adequate measure the full demands of even natural reason and rectitude. Therefore, considering natural activity in the concrete, it must be stated that the imperfections that get mixed into it must be mortified; they cannot be elevated by grace. This is what is meant by purifying nature—a fact that should be kept in mind during the reading of subsequent chapters, which speak of mortifying nature. In this sense also we must purify and mortify reason.

The distinction between natural activity in itself and in the concrete is not of academic interest only but is of considerable practical importance. In dealing with the practical demands of Christianity we must consider natural activity as it is found in the actual circumstances of life. The concept of natural activity in itself, that is, in its ideal perfection, which belongs properly to philosophy, is of utility in showing the intrinsic excellence of nature, as also in giving us a norm for measuring the immensely greater height of our supernatural elevation. Yet to limit our attention to natural activity in itself would be to risk serious misjudgments concerning the actual demands of life; as if a doctor would try to cure a patient by following a standardized procedure given in a textbook, while taking no cognizance of his patient's physical peculiarities and case history.

Another reason for emphasizing this distinction, and precisely in this place, is that it introduces us to the next subject, "The Conflict Between the Natural and the Supernatural." When we realize how in concrete reality natural activity frequently veers from the moral standards set by right reason, there will be no difficulty in appreciating how this activity may also come into conflict with the still higher norms of faith.

# The Conflict Between Natural and Supernatural

At this point we are like the doctor who has completed his preliminary tests and knows his patient's general condition as well as the organs that are sound and do not need surgery. We have satisfied ourselves that nature is good and harmonizes with grace—that, in the words of theology, grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it. Moreover, we have learned where the harmony is to be found and how it may be preserved. Our next task is akin to the surgeon's effort to localize the place of infection in order to operate. What we must do is to discover what in us hinders us from fulfilling our true vocation, what prevents us from remaining on the divine plane in our daily lives, what element of our actions, in a word, is in conflict with our supernatural destiny.

Any reader who is surprised at the assertion that there is a conflict between natural and supernatural should re-read and reflect upon the Note at the end of Chapter Three. In this connection one may also profitably study the chapter in the *Imitation of Christ* (Book III, Chapter 54) which treats of "The Diverse Motions of Nature and Grace." "My Son," this well-known chapter begins, "pay diligent heed to the motions of nature and grace, because they move in a *very contrary* and subtle manner . . ."

## 1. Where the Conflict Lies

In the preceding chapter it was observed that no conflict appears, and that there is full harmony between the three kinds of life in the Christian when he acts from a supernatural motive. The reason for this fact, which is the clue needed for the answer we are seeking, is not hard to discover. God indeed raises us to the supernatural order; but He leaves us free; He does not constrain us to act supernaturally; we are still free to act on the natural level.

God, in this matter, is like a father who lifts his child up to reach for some fruit on a high shelf, leaving the boy's arm free. If the child takes the fruit, he enjoys and profits by its goodness; but if he refuses to reach out for it, as he may do since his arm is free, he loses this pleasure and nourishment. God, in giving us grace, raises us to the divine plane, but He does not force us to live divine lives. This remains for us to do by freely corresponding with grace.

Despite our elevation by grace, therefore, we are still free to act according to nature. That is to say, we may follow nature's inclinations and desires; we may allow our actions to be impelled in practice by

the affection for earthly goods and pleasures. It is then our natural affections and the desire for sense pleasure, not grace and divine love, that rule our actions. These actions are accordingly but natural. And since we have been raised to the supernatural plane, such natural actions, while not indeed necessarily sinful, are nevertheless in conflict with our supernatural destiny. We are in these actions neglecting to carry out God's plan, which is that we live supernatural lives.

And it is in the motive that the conflict is centered. A supernatural motive prevents or removes the conflict; on the other hand, a natural motive creates conflict. If a man in the state of grace eats for the love of God, his action is supernatural; if he eats for the love of the food, his action is natural. The conflict is not in the act of eating, for, as we know, natural activity can be supernaturalized, and even saints must eat. The conflict is in the impelling force, the motive behind the natural activity: in the *why* of his eating.

The reason for this central importance of the motives is that they comprise the chief area of our freedom. Our actions for the most part are not otherwise free. Nature determines *that* I must eat; the cook determines *what* I must eat. My freedom of choice is limited to the motive: I can refer my action to God or eat for mere enjoyment.

Our motives are what should therefore occupy our spiritual efforts. All progress in perfection is essentially progress in the purification of our motives. By means of supernatural motives we exercise the supernatural virtues and effectively cooperate with grace. Note, too, that there is a double aspect to this effort. Not only must we introduce supernatural motives into our actions, we must at the same time remove natural motives from them; only to the extent that our hearts are freed from natural motives can they be filled with supernatural motives and the love of God. We must cease clinging by natural motives to created goods in order that by supernatural motives we may cling wholly to God.

Nor is it sufficient that our motives be good they must also be supernatural. A motive may be good but only naturally good. The more purely supernatural are our motives the more meritorious will our actions be in the supernatural order. There must be proportion between an end and the means proposed to gain it; so that the more purely supernatural our motives are, the more apt are they to obtain for us our supernatural end.

Obviously, therefore, we have not finished our spiritual efforts when we have brought our souls, or those of others, into the state of grace. Parents, when they have brought a child into the world, cannot consider their task finished; they must now nourish and rear the child. Nor may the supernatural life be abandoned as soon as the soul is reborn by grace. Once we have this new life, our task, like that of the parents, has just *begun*. We must now nourish and increase supernatural life until it reaches its maturity—which is holiness.

God is not pleased when I say to Him: "Although I am acting like a pagan, nevertheless I am in the state of grace." It is precisely

because I am in the state of grace that He expects me to act as a Christian. We would not attempt to console the mother of a feeble-minded child by telling her that the child has reason potentially although unable to use it. Her sadness is caused by the very fact that her child has reason but is incapable of living as a reasonable being. So God is displeased with us when we neglect to act in accord with our divinized humanity.

It is by means of supernatural motives that we act in keeping with our dignity as children of God and make divine grace the effective principle of our lives. What we do therefore (aside from sin) is relatively unimportant. *It is the motive that counts.* Not only will supernatural motives make indifferent actions, like walking, supernaturally meritorious; but they will preserve and increase the merit of actions, like prayer and almsgiving, that are intrinsically good. The principle of supernatural motivation is the great secret of practical sanctity. It is illustrated in the life of the Little Flower who achieved the highest holiness by accomplishing nothing extraordinary but doing every action with extraordinary love.

*Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or do anything else, do all for the glory of God. (I Cor. 10, 31) Whatever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Whatever you do, work at it from the heart as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance of your reward. (Col. 3, 17-23)*

## 2. The Reasons for the Conflict

Why do natural actions conflict with our supernatural destiny? Two reasons may be given.

God has elevated us to the supernatural plane; and He wants us therefore to live on that higher level, renouncing conduct that merely accords with nature. In fact, to obtain our reward as children of God we must live and labor on the divine plane. This, then, is the first reason why acting naturally, that is, out of natural motives, brings us into conflict with our supernatural calling.

If a musician insists on playing a piece in the key of C, while the rest of the orchestra plays it in the key of D, to which it has been transposed, he will not please the audience nor the conductor no matter how good his performance may be, considered individually. When he agrees to play with the orchestra at all, he tacitly agrees also to perform with the others and under the leadership of the conductor. We, too, having been transposed (so to speak) to the supernatural order, must now live in accordance with the rules governing that order, as ordained by the Supreme Director. If we refuse to do so, obstinately remaining on the natural plane, our actions are in conflict with our supernatural destiny, and this despite the excellence of nature and natural activity in their own order.

Again, if a king should bring a peasant boy into the royal court with the intention of making him a prince, then the king will expect

the boy to lay aside the manners of the peasant and adopt those proper to the court. Should the boy refuse to do this, saying that his peasant ways are good enough and that in any event he is used to these and finds court manners strange and awkward, he would certainly be told to conform to the manners of the court or else leave it and forfeit the privilege of being a prince. Peasant ways may be very attractive and good—for peasants; but they are not fitting at the court of a king. Now we are adopted as sons of the great King and must conform to the manners of His heavenly court, by living supernaturally. We can no longer allege the excellence of life according to nature; that life we abandon when we are raised to the supernatural plane. If we nevertheless insist on acting on the natural plane, we are clearly out of harmony with God's plan for us and with our own true vocation.

The second reason why our actions conflict with our supernatural calling when we act out of natural motives is that the love of God demands supernatural motives.

This may be seen from this axiom: we get our motives from what we love. Jacob worked fourteen years tending sheep for Laban in order to marry Rachel. Now Jacob could have had four possible motives for doing this: he could have done it for love of Laban; he could have done it for love of the sheep; or he could have done it for love of work. But no one doubts for a moment why he did it—it was out of love for Rachael. He took his motive from the object of his love. So also we do.

Therefore, if we truly love God, we will take our motives from God. On the other hand, if we love the world, we will take our motives from the world.

Two friends, James and John, we will suppose, are both attracted to Mary and she to them, so that she can scarcely make up her mind which to marry. Now the two friends become rivals—not because of any evil that either does, but simply because of their affection for Mary. Love is exclusive and jealous. Now God created the world and the world is good; God and the world, so to speak, are friends, like James and John. Our souls may be compared to Mary; and it is our power of affection, and God's desire to have it for Himself, that creates a kind of rivalry between God and the world. When we give our love to the world, God is jealous; if we give it to God, the world is jealous. God and the world become rivals because of our affection. We must thus be detached from the world and despise its pleasures, not because they are evil—on the contrary, they are in themselves good—but because our "marriage" to God through charity requires us to abandon our affection for His rival. When Mary decides to marry James she must renounce her affection for John.

When Mary has married James, and they are settled down after their honeymoon, let us imagine that she announces to her husband that she is going to spend an evening with John. What will James say to that? A question will rise spontaneously to his lips; and the question is "Why? What is your motive in seeking John's companionship?"

*Why*: that is the question love always asks. If Mary says, "For utility—he can show us how to build a house," then James will not object. But if Mary tells James that she wishes to see John because she loves him, then James will object. Still it is not her seeing John that he objects to, but rather to her motive of love.

Similarly, our relationship to God is one of love. When therefore we use the things of this world—which is like visiting with God's rival—then God asks us the question of love: *Why? What* is your motive?" If we say that our motive is one of utility, that we are using creatures for some immediately practical or necessary purpose, then God does not object, especially when our final purpose in using them is to manifest His glory. But if we must acknowledge that we are using creatures out of love for them, then God objects. His fundamental law is a demand for our total love. Our motives are thus a matter of love. We must make our motives supernatural precisely because we are to love God with our whole hearts, our whole minds, our whole souls.

We have established here a rule of the most fundamental importance for supernatural living. Our use of creatures is to be regulated by motives of *utility* or *necessity*, never by motives of *love*. Our motives of love are to be given to God alone.

Let us add here two useful practical corollaries of the principle, "We get our motives from what we love."

The first is this. Since we get our motives from what we love, then our motives will reveal the object of our love. Our motives, in other words, indicate the spiritual state of our souls; they are like a gauge or indicator that shows at a glance the condition of a boiler or machine. As the mechanic watches the gauge on his machine, so should we watch our motives to know the condition of our soul. *Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven.* How can we know whether our love is from the lips only or truly from the depths of the heart? If our motives are habitually supernatural, then our love of God is genuine. But if our motives are habitually natural, then it is clear that we are in practice giving our affections to God's rival, the world. We get our motives from what we love.

Secondly, if it is important to be detached from creatures, then it would be helpful to have some practical rule of thumb to tell whether or not we have an affection or an attachment for the creatures we are using. Now the principle of the motive gives us such a rule, which may be stated thus: when we use a creature habitually without any real utility or necessity, this is a sign that we are attached to it and that we are using it from a motive of love. And our principle is that we should use creatures for necessity or utility only, never for love.

Suppose that Mary tells James that she has invited John over for the evening, and to his inevitable "Why?" offers a motive of utility.



John is going to bring over some furniture for their house, we will say. But suppose that the following evening she again tells her husband that John is coming over. Once more James asks the question of love, "Why?" and once more she replies with a motive of utility: more furniture perhaps. But if this performance is repeated many more times, and Mary is always seeking John's company without any really good reason, then James will suspect, and rightly, that there is something more than utility in these meetings, that in fact his wife has an affection for his rival.

In the same way, our continual enjoyment of a creature without real utility indicates an attachment for that creature. I say to God I am going to use this creature; for example, "I am going to eat this chocolate." God asks, "Why?" And I answer, "Not out of affection but out of utility." But if I do this again and again, constantly indulging myself when there really is no utility, then it is clear that I am attached to that creature and am using it simply for pleasure. Thus the repeated use of a creature without utility betrays an attachment for it. And every deliberate attachment for creatures is in some sort a refusal to give to God that total love which he demands in *the greatest and the first commandment*.

# The Law of the Flesh

## 1. The Doctrine of Imperfect Actions

A wife is ordinarily not jealous, at least reasonably jealous, when her husband gives some small fraction of his affections to such pleasures as smoking or taking a glass of beer. Can we then take seriously the idea that God is rivalled by our love for earthly pleasures and that we should therefore mortify such affections, as also the natural motives that issue from them?

Let us suppose that a man not only indulges in drinking or smoking occasionally but that he becomes so fond of these and similar pleasures that he practically lives at his club, although he continues to visit his wife occasionally and is not faithless to her in the sense that he divorces her and marries a rival. Still, the wife would be jealous—and reasonably so now. Despite the fact that he is not guilty of formal infidelity, she would not tolerate his practice of squandering his interest and affection on these trifling pleasures to the extent that he has not time nor concern to show any affection for her.

Similarly, God would not condemn us for some small attachment or for a few natural motives. But if a man's affections are so occupied with the world that he spends all his time in its joys and pleasures, only stopping occasionally to make a polite bow (so to speak) to God by some act of devotion, then God is justly displeased. It is the habit of acting from natural motives, the fixed natural mentality, that causes His displeasure.

Yet natural attachments even when considered singly, even small attachments, are not to be considered as being without spiritual significance. St. Francis de Sales affords an illustration of this fact with an example from the Old Testament.

Jacob so loved Rachel that he worked fourteen years for Laban to obtain her hand in marriage. One day Rachel wanted some mandrakes that had been gathered by her sister Lia, who was also married to Jacob but not loved by him. Lia refused, complaining that Rachel had already stolen the affection of her husband, and was now adding insult to injury by asking for her mandrakes. Whereupon Rachel, little valuing Jacob's great love, promised Lia Jacob's favor in return for the mandrakes.

St. Francis de Sales remarks that the great St. Augustine once observed some mandrakes to see why Rachel coveted them. He found that they are pleasing to the sight and have a delightful smell; hence surgeons formerly used them on patients on whom they wished to make an incision. But the Saint also learned that they are altogether insipid to the taste. For this reason they well represent worldly pleas-

ures. Those pleasures "have an attractive outside, but he who bites this apple, that is, he who sounds their nature, finds neither taste nor contentment in them; nevertheless they enchant us and put us to sleep by the vanity of their smell . . . And it is for such mandrakes, chimeras and phantoms of content, that we cast off the love of the heavenly Beloved; and how then can we say that we love Him above all things, since we prefer such empty vanities before His grace?"

Surely, looking at the matter in this light, we can see why God is displeased by natural motives and natural affections for creatures.

Thus there are actions which, although without the formal guilt of sin, are imperfect. Such imperfections may be defined as actions lacking in charity, or conversely, actions proceeding from natural affections or natural motives. It is precisely because of the lack of charity that these actions are imperfect, for grace perfects nature and, since grace becomes operative through charity, our natural activity is perfected above all by charity.

While the worldly mind belittles the importance of such imperfect actions, it is clear when we look at the matter from a supernatural point of view, and not merely from the standpoint of natural morality, that they are a blemish and a defect in the total love that we owe to God. After Mary marries James, she can scarcely be charged with adultery every time she casts a flirtatious glance at another man. Yet every such glance or word marks an infidelity to the entire and exclusive love that she has pledged to her spouse. A true wife would not allow herself such liberty; nor would James like it very well should he discover it. In like manner every action prompted by the love of God's rival, the world, is an act of infidelity, however minute, which a true lover of God will avoid.

The Scriptures also warn us of the ill effects of small infidelities. *He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little.* (Ecclus. 19, 1) Again, the same high authority warns, *He that is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in a very little thing is unjust in much.* (Ecclus. 16, 10)

## 2. What Is the Spiritual Effect of Imperfect Actions?

Imperfect actions may be viewed either in relation to God or in their effect on the soul. In relation to God, such actions have a twofold effect:

First, they insult God. For one thing they insult God because they indicate that we are offering inferior and defective works to God. Suppose a child brings an apple to his teacher, and the teacher, upon biting into it, discovers that the apple is wormy. She asks the boy if he knew this, and he replies, "Yes I did, but I thought that you could eat around the worm holes." When we present imperfections to God, we are doing as this boy does; we are offering Him deeds in which, as we are aware, there is imperfection and even corruption, but we expect God to extract from them whatever good He can find.

By such imperfections, however, we insult God even more directly and personally than by offering Him spoiled works; we also directly outrage His love. If James gives Mary a gift but does so out of affection for an old rival of Mary, on the occasion of the rival's birthday, then Mary is offended rather than pleased. When we act from natural motives, we act from love of the world, which is God's rival; in so doing, we affront God to whom we are wedded by charity.

Secondly, the Sacred Scriptures indicate that natural affections for creatures, and therefore the natural motives which are derived from such affections, are an imperfection in our love of God: they are a dross, an alloy, that must be removed from our charity by means of trials that He sends upon us, in the same way that fire is used to remove impurities from gold. *Over this you rejoice; though now for a little while, if need be, you are made sorrowful by various trials, that the temper of your faith—more precious by far than gold which is tried by fire—may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* (I Peter 1, 7)

God does not try us by depriving us of sinful things only: He tries us by taking good and lawful things—health, possessions, friends, the dear ones of our families—and such are in truth the heaviest trials of all. Thus He regards merely natural affection for such goods, not indeed as an evil, but a dross of which our love for Him must be purified.

When we look at imperfect actions in relation to our own souls, we discover that they have the following five effects:

First. Imperfect actions deprive us of grace and merit. If a talented student neglects to study, then, despite his superior gifts, he will not advance in knowledge. Similarly, if we fail to exercise our charity (and the other virtues which are directed by charity) then we will not obtain the grace and merits that we could easily have by utilizing our supernatural endowments. As we shall see in the next chapter, it is extremely doubtful whether we merit any grace at all when we act from natural motives. Even if we adopt the doubtful opinion that such motives may gain some merit, it is nevertheless certain that they will obtain but little—not nearly as much as could be obtained, not nearly as much as is needed to live fully supernatural lives and grow in holiness.

Second. Imperfect actions undernourish and weaken the soul. If a man's diet is lacking in nutritional value, then it will gradually weaken him even though he eats a great deal; he will be well-fed, perhaps over-fed, but undernourished. Natural motives, by depriving our souls of the nourishment of grace, prevent it from gaining the strength needed to overcome temptation and observe all the laws of God. We know that, without grace, a man cannot perfectly fulfill even the whole law of nature; even less will he be able to observe the higher revealed law of God without the assistance of grace. Thus, acting out of natural motives—even though we suppose that they contain some merit, which is doubtful—one is like a person who eats

foods lacking nutritive value: he may be getting some grace, but not enough; he is therefore undernourishing and weakening his soul.

Third. Imperfect actions lessen the ardor of charity. There are before us two containers of water; the water in the one is a hundred degrees in temperature, while that in the other is only ten degrees. If we put the lukewarm water little by little into the hot water, the latter will itself gradually become lukewarm. It is the same with charity. Although charity may be very great in a soul, as after the reception of the sacraments, imperfect acts cool its fervor, and if this process continues long enough, the soul may lose fervor altogether.

Fourth. Imperfect actions reduce the real influence of charity, or, to put it differently, they lessen its radiation and keep it so bound up that it cannot exercise its divine influence in our lives. Imagine an old-fashioned carriage going along a dirt road in a driving rain. Mud splashes up and little by little dims the light of the lanterns. The light is there; it does not go out, but the accumulation of dirt prevents it from giving its full illumination. So also in the imperfect soul. Grace and charity are there—all the imperfections that can be imagined could not of themselves destroy charity—but this charity remains in the substance of the soul, so to speak, and does not manifest any influence or sufficient influence, on our ordinary daily actions; these are rather performed from a natural impulse, that is, from a motive derived from the love of creatures.

Fifth. While only mortal sin can *directly* destroy charity, imperfections can nevertheless *indirectly* destroy it by undermining it. Or to state the matter in a different way, imperfections, while not sinful themselves, nevertheless dispose the soul to sin. It is St. Thomas who points out that charity may be indirectly destroyed or undermined; and one of the causes that he cites as producing this effect is negligence in exercising charity.

All sins come from the love of creatures. For example, gluttony comes from the love of food, drunkenness from the love of drink. Hence the love of creatures prepares the way for sin, is a disposition for sin; and the natural motives which cause us to act from love of creatures are also a disposition towards sin. If a man fasts for one hundred days and falls over dead on the hundredth, his death is really no more attributable to the last day's fast than to the first day's. So, too, with mortal sin, the final collapse of the soul: if it comes immediately from one final natural motive by which a creature is loved in preference to God, it is in the end no more due to this last sinful motive than to the countless other harmless natural motives that preceded it and weakened the soul by pampering its appetite and affection for creatures.

This brings us to an important insight into sin. We may, following St. Augustine and St. Thomas, define sin as a turning towards creatures and a turning from God. Not merely a turning towards creatures; for the love of creatures is itself not sinful. But a turning towards creatures *and* a turning from God. It is the turning away from

God that creates the malice of sin. But is the love of creatures and the turning towards them that causes one to turn from God. Thus the love of creatures, although itself not sinful, disposes the soul towards sin. A man's affection for a girl is not in itself wrong; but it is wrong if it causes him to be faithless to his wife.

Accordingly, there is an axiom in the spiritual life which states, "Imperfections predispose to venial sins as venial sins further dispose to mortal sin." The reason is that, although imperfections, venial sins, and mortal sins differ essentially from one another, they all nevertheless have one common cause, which is the love of creatures. Just as disease grows from small beginnings until it destroys health, so does the love of creatures, harmless in itself, in time corrupt our soul by turning it from God. And when the turning from God is complete, then mortal sin has occurred. Mortal sin is nothing else than an act by which one gives his affections to a creature as to his final end and good instead of giving it to God.

It can now be seen how impossible and ridiculous is the rule which some lay down for themselves when they say, "I can enjoy creatures and act from natural motives as much as I want as long as I avoid mortal sin." If you make it a policy and principle to love and enjoy creatures you will not be able to avoid mortal sin. A man may take it into his head to jump from the top of a skyscraper "for a thrill," without however wishing to hurt himself by falling on the sidewalk. But suppose he jumps and enjoys the thrill—what is to break his fall on the pavement below? We may likewise desire to enjoy the world "just for the thrill," without wishing to commit mortal sin; and so we make it our practice to enjoy the things of the world by acting from natural motives. And when we thus become habituated to acting out of love for creatures, how can we refrain from so acting when the pleasure is forbidden? In acting from the love of creatures, we throw away the only principle—detachment from creatures—that can protect us against sin.

Thus sins have roots, have a cause. This cause is affection for creatures, which is made manifest concretely in natural motives. And as, to get rid of disease we must be rid of its cause, so to get rid of sin we must mortify natural motives.

Sins are like weeds in the garden of the soul. Weeds have roots and the way to get rid of the weeds is to dig out the roots. If a gardener, heedless of such common sense, tries to remove the weeds from his lawn by running a mower over them, but not removing the roots, then the weeds will vanish for a little but will soon reappear. If he wishes to be really rid of the weeds, then he will dig out the roots with a trowel.

When we sin, the cause of our sin is the love of creatures, which is manifested concretely in natural motives (since we get our motives from what we love). And when we go to confession, we may be very sorry for the sin indeed; but if we do not clear our heart of the love of creatures, the sin will recur: we are then like the gardener who

clears his lawn of weeds with a mower. That is why, despite sincere resolutions, we fall into the same sins again and again. What we must do is to mortify our affection for creatures and our natural motives. By so doing we kill the roots and will finally free our souls of sin. But we can do it in no other way.

St. Paul, in an illuminating passage in his letter to the Romans (Chap. 7), explains the slow drift into sin, and how it is the love of creatures that causes this drift, when he says that men are first caught in what he calls *the law of the members* and are thereby captivated in *the law of sin*. The law of the members is nothing but the tendency of our natural faculties, and especially of our sense appetites, to crave and seek their own gratification. The eye delights in seeing and the ear in hearing, and so with the other senses. On the higher level the mind similarly delights in knowledge and the will in good. If these pleasurable tendencies are not regulated and restrained, if they are not compelled to serve the life of grace, they will lead us away from God and into evil. The law of the members will deliver us over to the law of sin. And as it is by means of natural motives that the affection for creatures gains control of our actions, it is also by means of these same motives that the law of the members takes control of our souls and prepares them for the entrance of the darker law of sin.

# The Pagan Mentality

## 1. The Meaning of the Pagan Mentality

Perhaps you have seen skilled workmen go quickly and expertly about their trade. You have seen stone masons, we will say, cut and lay stone with great skill and accuracy, producing a work of beauty. They are able to do this because of training and experience, which have developed in them habits of craftsmanship.

Now it should be evident that in the effort to live supernatural lives, our attention needs to be occupied less with individual actions than with the mentality that regulates our actions from behind and within. If we form spiritual and supernatural mentalities—if, in a word, we have *the mind of Christ* (I Cor. 2, 16)—then, like the skilled workman; we can proceed in virtue of well-formed habits, quickly and easily perfecting each action as we perform it, because of deep religious conviction and long practice in acting from supernatural principles and motives. If, on the contrary, we adopt natural principles, then we will also act habitually from natural motives; we will form a natural or pagan mentality, an habitual cast of thought and mold of action that will keep our daily lives on the natural plane.

Our spiritual efforts, then, must be directed towards casting off the natural or pagan mentality and being *renewed in the spirit of our minds* (Eph. 4, 23) by a Christian mentality. A mentality, once formed, gives readiness and facility in action: If our mentality is pagan, then readiness and facility in acting on the natural plane; if it is Christian, then readiness and facility in acting supernaturally.

In a parallel way we distinguish different mentalities among the various national groups. For example, the English have practical genius, the French intellectual acumen, the Germans thoroughness. Now an individual develops his mentality from his environment. He does so almost effortlessly; and when his mentality is formed he exercises its powers with great facility. A Frenchman does not have to stop and ask himself what he must do to think or speak or act as a Frenchman. He does this spontaneously, in virtue of his national mentality. So to those who have a Christian mentality, acting supernaturally comes natural, so to speak, while those with a pagan mentality do not rise above natural conduct.

Moreover, a mentality is quasi-permanent; once it is formed it is difficult to change. Only a deep conversion and a daily spiritual struggle can banish the pagan mentality. The reason for this permanency is that once we have formed principles of action we tend to retain them until convinced of their falsity. Furthermore, when, inspired by natural principles, we go on to form habits of natural action; those



habits are difficult to root out, too, especially the habit of acting from natural intentions. (For once we have formed an *intention*, it tends to persist. The *attention* of the mind flits from one thing to another, as the eye goes from one picture to the other on a movie strip. But an intention, which is formed in the will, tends to remain until retracted.)

Suppose that a man becomes tired and wishes to rest. On one side of the street is a tavern; on the other side is a tabernacle: to which will he go for refreshment? He is free—and yet he is not free: his choice will be determined by his mentality. If he has a pagan mentality, then the Church and tabernacle can mean only tedium to him, not refreshment. If he has a Christian mentality, he will know the words of the Savior, *Come to Me all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest.* (Matt. 11, 25) Knowing these words and having cultivated a relish for spiritual things, he will turn as spontaneously to the tabernacle for true repose as does the man with the pagan mentality to the tavern for a delusive and transitory pleasure.

## 2. Axioms of the Pagan Mentality

Since the pagan mentality is based on certain false principles or axioms of thought and action, it behooves us to become aware of these axioms in order to expel or exclude them.

Always and everywhere the basic principle of the pagan mentality is, "Eat, drink, and make good cheer!" In other words, the pagan mentality urges to "enjoy the things of the world." Among Christians, this mentality brings forth a theological truth in support of this false maxim by saying, "The things of this world are good; they come from God; therefore they should be received gratefully and enjoyed."

Now while it is true that the goods of this world are from God and should therefore be received gratefully, as St. Paul himself tells us (I Tim. 6, 17), still it does not follow that we are therefore to enjoy the things of the world in a merely sensual way as the pagans do. We should not use Catholic theology to justify pagan philosophy. What the positive attitude of the Christian should be in regard to the creatures of the world will be treated when we take up the subject of Samples. Meanwhile, it is sufficient to notice that the Sacred Scripture directly condemns this pagan principle when it tells us that since as Christians we are *dead* to the world, we should *mind NOT the things of the world.* And the Liturgy (as in the Collect for the Mass of the Sacred Heart) also teaches us to pray for the grace to "despise earthly things and love those heavenly, *despicere terrena et amare coelestia.*"

Other axioms of the pagan mentality are as follows:

1. "Natural behavior is attractive in children."—Natural behavior, in the sense of unaffected behavior, it may readily be agreed, is attractive and praiseworthy in all. But natural behavior in the moral or spiritual sense, that is, in the sense of conformity to mere pagan standards of conduct, is certainly not pleasing to God and would not be pleasing to us either if our mentalities were Christian rather than worldly. A child who has grace and lives like a pagan is like a child

who has reason and lives like an animal. The latter causes grief, not pleasure, to his parents; and the former causes displeasure to God. The lives of child saints show us what kind of children God loves. St. Teresa of the Child Jesus said, "I have wished to give myself to God from the time I was three."

Parents and teachers use this false axiom to excuse themselves from the labor of teaching children the supernatural life and perhaps to escape the reproach of their own worldly customs. But childhood is precisely the time when God intends that habits of supernatural thinking and living will be formed. If such habits are not formed then, there is little likelihood that they will be formed afterwards.

2. The pagan mentality considers actions singly and says, "God would not condemn me for taking one piece of candy, one cigarette, one glass of beer, etc." This of course is true; only for committing mortal sin would we be condemned to hell. Still, the pagan mentality is here stating the case misleadingly. Acts of self-indulgence do not usually come singly; since they proceed from a natural mentality they proceed habitually and in great numbers. Such habitual indulgence pampers the flesh, which *lusts against the spirit* (Gal. 6, 17), thus weakening the influence of grace and preparing the way for a spiritual collapse.

One might also say, "One little germ in my lungs cannot kill me." No, of course not; but millions of germs may kill—and they usually come in millions.

3. Another axiom of the pagan mentality: "Not all natural motives lead to sin. It would be possible, for example, to teach children that they should obey the rules out of love for good order. Here is a natural motive from which no harm can come."

This is a half-truth, and very misleading; for *in practice* it is almost impossible to distinguish between natural motives that are harmful and such as are not. Many that seem at first to be harmless may have a harmful growth; in order to get children to study, parents and teachers often appeal to vanity and the competitive instinct—a method that can easily lead to great selfishness and in time bear fruit in sin.

Hence, it is practically impossible to distinguish good from bad natural motives in the actual circumstances of daily life. It is therefore best to get rid of *all* natural motives, including the good ones. Suppose that a host should say to his visitor, "I am going to put you in this room, which has just been vacated by a man suffering from tuberculosis. There are good and bad germs in the room; we do not want to disinfect it because we might kill the good germs with the bad. Be careful therefore to breathe in only good germs!" This would not be more difficult than it is to distinguish in practice between good and harmful natural motives. Notice, too, that pure natural motives are not likely to occur, at least very frequently or habitually, in imperfect and worldly souls.

Besides, the natural motives that are most effective are precisely those that appeal to selfish interests. Will boys obey rules ordinarily from an abstract love of good order? Scarcely; that is why, in training them, we appeal to their vanity, their love of pleasure and sense of competition. If good natural motives are not effective, however, supernatural motives are strong enough to move even a rude and calloused character. Criminals who will not reform out of love for virtue and the ideal of reason may be changed by the threat of hell and the hope of heaven.

4. The pagan mentality, always wishing to fortify itself with theology, also invokes the teaching of some theologians on the requirements for meritorious actions. These theologians teach that any morally good action performed by one in the state of grace is meritorious of eternal life. This would of course include any good action done from a natural motive. From this teaching the pagan mentality concludes that it is superfluous to bother about supernatural motives.

In the preceding paragraph we have already spoken of the difficulty involved in distinguishing good natural motives and the unlikelihood of their occurring without the blemish of selfishness in imperfect souls.

Let it be added that the theological opinion here cited to support such practical naturalism is itself far from certain. It is only *that*—an opinion, having some probability but contested by many other writers, led by St. Alphonsus Liguori, prince of moral theologians. Now it is not safe, hence not permissible, to follow a probable opinion in a matter directly concerning salvation; and since our salvation depends on our meriting it by our actions, this teaching is not safe. Hence, its truth—that is, its merely probable truth—belongs to the speculative order; it should not be followed in practice. One would not take a leaky skiff for a dangerous passage when a cruiser is available.

Accordingly, even those who maintain the truth of the above opinion warn the faithful not to depend on it in practice. Thus Father Joseph Nöldin, S.J., who defends this teaching, gives the following rule for practice: "Since this opinion, which we say is preferable, is not certain, the just man should frequently form supernatural intentions, especially the motive of love: for where we are dealing with the conditions required for merit, the probability of an opinion is of no help, but only the truth. Indeed, even if the truth of this opinion is not to be doubted, the faithful should be taught, by apt motives, to work for the most perfect intention, especially the intention of charity frequently renewed. For the more perfect an intention is, and the more frequently renewed, the more does it help; and sometimes, indeed, it is necessary, in order to strengthen the will against temptations and to fulfill constantly the more difficult laws of Christianity." (*Summa Theol. Moral.*, 21st Ed., Ratisbon, 1932, Vol. I, p. 111)

Furthermore, even supposing the truth of this doubtful opinion—even allowing that morally good actions proceeding from a natural motive are meritorious when performed by one in the state

of grace—it is still obvious that such actions would have little merit since they receive but a small actual influx of grace. Actions performed out of supernatural motives would be far more meritorious; and the more purely supernatural the motive, the more meritorious the action. Now it is a poor teacher that robs his own pupils. If we teach souls to be satisfied with natural motives we are depriving them of huge quantities of grace that they might have for but little effort.

5. The pagan mentality is fond of thinking of actions *in themselves* (*in se*) and permits all actions which are *in themselves* indifferent, i.e., neither positively good nor definitely bad. Since there is no sin in such actions, the pagan mentality allows them freely. In this way it condones all pleasure-seeking and affection for creatures that is not in itself sinful. Thus Christians act like pagans and, once again, invoke the principles of theology to justify their conduct.

It is legitimate and useful for *philosophers* to speak of actions *in themselves* (dancing, walking, etc.). They use this phrase in order to distinguish actions that are intrinsically evil (murder, theft) or intrinsically good (prayer and almsgiving) from another group of actions which contain no intrinsic factor making them good or bad and may therefore indifferently become either good or bad. Thus walking in itself is indifferent; but it becomes good when I walk to Church, bad when I walk to commit a theft. The philosophers do not maintain that such actions, when actually performed, are indifferent and therefore lacking in morality. That is to say, they do not teach that actions which considered in themselves—that is, abstractly, apart from actual circumstances—are indifferent are also indifferent in the concrete, i.e., in the actual circumstances in which they are performed.

As a matter of fact, no action in the concrete remains indifferent; in the concrete, every action is either good or bad. If the morality of an action is not determined intrinsically, as in theft or almsgiving, then it is determined extrinsically by its end (therefore its intention) and circumstances. Therefore every action, in the concrete, has a morality, either intrinsic or extrinsic.

The end and other circumstances are thus the extrinsic factors that, in the concrete, make definitely good or bad actions which, considered apart from such circumstances, are indifferent. Every action in the concrete takes us closer to God or farther from Him.

Since in dealing with the daily exigencies of life we are not philosophers studying abstractions but practical people faced with urgent problems that must be judged in concrete circumstances, we must learn to judge the morality of actions in the concrete. By judging actions which belong to concrete reality as if they were abstractions, we fall into many errors; like a cripple who would study the theory of swimming and then jump into the water but take no account of his own weakness and disability.

Suppose a mother asks someone where her child is playing, "Is there poison in that bottle?" The mother will not be satisfied should she be told, "*In the bottle*, that poison will not hurt your child." She

knows this; what she wants to know further, since she sees the child playing with the bottle, is whether he will be poisoned should he open the bottle and drink its contents. In the same way, if one asks whether dancing, or drinking, or smoking, or gambling is sinful, it is no answer to say that *in themselves* these actions are indifferent. When these actions are actually performed they no longer exist in themselves; one does not dance or drink in the abstract order, but in definite circumstances; and these circumstances invariably make the action good or bad.

Of the various circumstances that define an action in the concrete, the chief one is the end, which is determined by our motives or intentions. Thus in judging the actual morality of these indifferent actions we must above all look to the motives that inspire them.

Finally, as we have just seen, if the motives of such actions are morally good but only natural, then very probably at least the actions remain natural. To raise them to the supernatural level, at least with any security, we must act from supernatural motives.

## The Sermon on the Mount: Jesus Speaks of the Supernatural Life

At this point in our study, having defined the supernatural life and given the chief rule for living it—the rule of supernatural motivation—it is opportune to look at the same matter as Jesus described it in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. V, VI, VII). In this Sermon indeed will be found the official promulgation of the doctrine set forth in the preceding pages. A study of the Sermon on the Mount will also give us a useful summary of this doctrine.

As a preliminary to systematic study, let us make two useful distinctions. We are dealing with actions—specifically, with the distinction between natural and supernatural actions. Jesus clearly distinguishes these two kinds of actions and he marks out the elements contained in them. In any action it is possible to distinguish three phases or parts: first, the end, which is some good chosen by the will and taken as the object of subsequent efforts; secondly, the means, which includes whatever is selected and disposed to obtain the chosen end; and thirdly, the result of the action. For example, the end of an artist is the creation of a work of beauty; the means he employs is a brush or scalpel; the result is a statue or picture of some person, say, of a saint.

The second distinction is concerned with the end itself. Actions, as we have just observed, are directed to some end; and the end is some good thing. Altogether, scholars have classified in three groups the goods which may be chosen as ends. These are, first of all, external goods—whatever is extrinsic to the human person—such as money and fame. Secondly, there are bodily goods—food and drink, comfort and pleasure. Finally, there are the goods of the soul, or interior goods, which comprise whatever is desired or pursued by our interior powers of mind and will, such as knowledge or human love and joy.

With these distinctions in mind it is possible to show, first, that Jesus condemns natural actions and in fact the whole natural mentality. He condemns natural actions in their end, in their means, and in their result. On the other hand, He defines the supernatural mentality by pointing out to us a supernatural end, the necessary supernatural means, and the supernatural result which He desires.

### 1. Jesus Condemns the Pagan Mentality

This means that He condemns natural actions in their end, in their means, and in their result. And in condemning the natural end,

He condemns the pursuit of external goods, bodily goods and interior goods.

He condemns the pursuit of external goods. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* (Matt. 5, 3) And in St. Luke (6, 24) He gives the corresponding condemnation, *Woe to you rich! for you are now having your comfort.* He also condemns the love of worldly fame, *Woe to you when all men speak well of you!* (Luke 6, 26)

Jesus also condemns the pursuit of bodily goods. *Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth.* (Matt. V, 4) St. Thomas teaches that meekness is opposed to anger; so that we should understand by the meek, who receive Our Lord's blessing, those who bear quietly and patiently the loss of the comforts and pleasures of this world. This second beatitude as given by St. Luke, refers even more directly to bodily goods, *Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied.* (Luke 6, 21) And the reverse of this blessing: *Woe to you who are filled, for you shall hunger.* (Luke 6, 25)

Thirdly, Jesus condemns the pursuit of interior goods (of the natural order). *Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.* Those who mourn are those who have been deprived of earthly contentment and joy by afflictions. They are blessed because they are more likely to be detached from worldly happiness and therefore better disposed to receive supernatural joy. But the prosperous and happy in this world are unlikely to have much concern for the pursuit of divine things. Therefore Jesus says, *Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.* (Luke 6, 25)

Again, Jesus, besides condemning the end of natural actions, condemns the means used by the pagan mentality to gain its ends; that is to say, He condemns natural motives. The first and chief means for obtaining an end is the intention to obtain it. Suppose my end is to get to New York and the means available is the railroad. Although there were a train passing my door every minute, I will stay where I am, and of course New York will remain where it is, unless I first of all form an intention of making the trip. The use of other means—buying a ticket, checking baggage, etc.,—follows in virtue of that first intention. In condemning natural motives, therefore, Jesus condemns the means that is of primary importance in pursuing natural ends.

First of all, Our Lord lays down a broad principle in condemnation of natural motives; then He gives no less than three examples to illustrate it. The principle and rule is this: *Take heed not to practice your good before men, in order to be seen by them; otherwise you shall have no reward with your Father in heaven.* (Matt. 6, 1) This means that we should never act out of hope for an earthly good,—i.e., for a natural motive; if we do, we forfeit a supernatural and eternal reward. Then follow the three illustrations: *Therefore when thou givest alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and streets, in order that they may be honored by men. Amen I say to you, they have had their reward . . . Again, when*

*you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites, who love to pray standing in the synagogues and at the street corners, in order that they may be seen by men. Amen, I say to you, they have had their reward . . . And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, who disfigure their faces in order to appear to men as fasting. Amen I say to you, they have had their reward.* (Matt. 6, 2-5-16)

Last of all, Jesus condemns the result of natural actions. The result of natural activity would be natural righteousness or justice. Now the Scribes and Pharisees may be taken as a type of this natural justice; this was what they taught and stood for. And Jesus condemns it, saying, *I say to you that unless your justice exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.* (Matt. 5, 20)

In speaking thus Jesus does not deny the Scribes and Pharisees a certain kind of justice, but He says that what they have is not sufficient for salvation. *The Scribes and Pharisees have sat on the chair of Moses. All things, therefore, that they command you, observe and do. But do not act according to their works; for they talk but do nothing.* (Matt. 23, 1-3) The great crime of the Scribes and Pharisees, from which all their other offences followed, was their rejection of the supernatural. Hence Jesus, while not rebuking them inasmuch as they had done well, condemns their failure to observe the highest law. *Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you pay tithes on mint and anise and cummin; and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, right judgment, mercy and faith. These things you ought to have done, while not leaving the others undone.* (Matt. 23, 23) The fact that the Scribes and Pharisees did not in practice conform perfectly even to the standards of natural justice, falling into hypocrisy, likewise resulted from their neglect of "the weightier things of the law" and simply illustrates the important truth, to which we have already adverted, that apart from grace and correspondence with grace—that is, unless we live on the supernatural plane—we cannot perfectly observe even the natural law.

Thus Jesus condemns the pagan mentality lock, stock, and barrel. He goes completely contrary to the philosophy of the world, which, now as then, gives all its devotion to seeking the goods of fortune, the goods of the body, and the natural goods of the soul.

## 2. Jesus Defines the Supernatural Life

After removing from men the various kinds of natural good as objects of effort, Jesus replaces these goods with a supernatural end and good which all men are to seek. This new end is proposed in the fourth beatitude, *Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied.* (Matt. 5, 6) Justice is the supreme good which the human race is directed henceforth to strive after.

Now justice in the Scriptures means holiness, or sanctity. Consequently, holiness is now fixed as the good of all human life and effort. And since holiness is a divine attribute, we are being instructed here to reproduce and imitate the divine holiness, in a word, to live divine



lives: and this is assuredly a fitting destiny for those who possess a share in the divine life.

The fact that the fourth beatitude thus commands us to reproduce a divine attribute helps to a correct understanding of the beatitudes that follow: These, too, would have us emulate divine attributes. Since God is all merciful, we are told to be merciful; since God is the God of purity, All-pure, we are likewise directed to be pure, not only in outward conduct, but clear to the roots of our actions; since God is the God of charity and peace, we will be blessed by Him only if we too are peacemakers. As children of God, sharers in His life, we are in truth to be imitators of God, living as divine beings.

Besides fixing a new supernatural end, Jesus also specifies that we should act from supernatural motives, even as He has condemned natural motives. In other words, just as on the one hand He rejects the natural means for obtaining natural ends, so on the other He designates the supernatural means that are necessary to obtain our supernatural end; and these are supernatural motives. Thus, after He has warned those who give alms not to do so to be seen by men, He adds, *But when Thou givest alms, do not let thy left hand know what thy right hand is doing, so that thy alms may be given in secret; and thy Father, who sees in secret, will reward thee.* (Matt. 6, 4) We are thus to perform our good works to be seen by God, that is, from a supernatural motive.

Two other illustrations of this rule are given: *But when thou prayest, go into thy room, and closing the door, pray to thy Father in secret; and thy Father who sees in secret, will reward thee . . . But thou when thou dost fast: anoint thy head and wash thy face, so that thou mayest not be seen by men to fast, but by thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father, who sees in secret, will reward thee.* (Matt. 6, 5-18) Although the mode of seeking for earthly rewards may differ today, the principle indicated by these illustrations still holds: to gain a supernatural reward we must labor out of supernatural motives.

Finally, in defining supernatural actions, Jesus demands a supernatural result. *You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.* (Matt. 5, 48) He has already told us that we must pursue holiness. Now he makes it clear that the holiness He desires is divine holiness: we were told that the holiness taught by the Scribes and Pharisees is insufficient; now we are told that we must strive to be holy as God is holy. This we can attempt to do because through grace and the virtues of faith, hope, and charity we have become partakers of the divine life and activity. *You are gods.* (Psalm 81, 6)

What has been set down here may be called the outline or skeleton of the Sermon on the Mount. The rest of its teachings are built around this outline as flesh is put on the human skeleton. We will bring the present chapter to an end by going at once to the conclusion of the Sermon, leaving the rest of it to the reader's private study and meditation.

*Everyone therefore who hears these my words and acts upon them, shall be likened to a wise man who built his house on rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it was founded on rock. And everyone who hears these my words and does not act upon them, shall be likened to a foolish man who built his house on sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and was utterly ruined. (Matt. 7, 24-27)*

The one house fell, not because of the tempests and floods, but because it was built on sand. The other house, built on rock, was strong enough, as houses must be, to withstand the elements. Similarly, souls fall into sin, not because they are tempted—souls must be strong enough to withstand temptation—but because they are built on sand. Those built on rock will be able to withstand the assaults of temptation. What, then, is to be understood by those built on sand and those built on rock? Clearly those built on rock are they who live supernaturally, that is, who base their lives on the teachings that Jesus has just expounded: *who hear these my words and act upon them*: the doctrine of supernatural living is rock. On the other hand, those who build on sand are the ones who ignore this doctrine—*who hear these my words and act not upon them*; that is to say, they are the ones whose mentality is natural, who seek natural ends, act from natural motives, and are content with natural goodness. Men fall into sin, therefore, and are ruined because they base their conduct on the shifting sands of natural principles and motives.



## The Christian Mentality

St. Paul not only tells us to *put off the old man* but he adds that we should *put on the new man*; and he explains what this putting on of the new man means in the practical spiritual order when he says, *Be renewed in the spirit of your minds*. Elsewhere he further describes the renewal that should take place in the Christian: *For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus*. (Phil. 2, 5) Not only are we to put aside the mentality of the natural man, but we are to acquire a new manner of thinking and acting proper to the supernatural man. We are to have *the mind of Christ*. (I Cor. 2, 16) This is the Christian mentality.

We have already learned that in forming a mentality both the mind and the will play a part; the mind by pointing out to the will that which is good, and the will by loving the good thus known; the mind also by supplying conviction and principles, the will by translating these principles into action and by developing habits in accordance with them. What we must do, therefore, to form a Christian mentality is to form a supernatural bent of mind and action, so that the actions and habits appropriate to Christian living will become as spontaneous to us, as natural (so to speak), as almost mechanical, and therefore as difficult to change or break as are the habits of self-indulgence fostered by the pagan mentality.

The change that we must effect in our thinking, going from a natural to a Christian mentality, may be compared to the process of learning a new language, such as occurs in the case of an immigrant coming among us. As the immigrant must learn English to get along in his new surroundings so must we learn new modes of thought and action to adjust ourselves to the new world into which we are transported by grace. And if there will always remain a trace of foreign accent in the immigrant's English, even after he has been naturalized, as there will also always remain in us, alas, the imperfections of the natural man, nevertheless just as the immigrant may with diligence gain fluency in our tongue, so may we, supernaturalized citizens in God's kingdom, gain fluency in the language of this kingdom and ease in its customs, saying with St. Paul, *Our conversation—or, our citizenship, as the new translation has it—is in heaven*. (Phil. 3, 20)

### 1. Axioms of the Christian Mentality

To the basic axioms which rule the pagan mentality we may oppose other axioms characteristic of the Christian mentality. Three such fundamental rules may be enumerated, drawn from the teaching of St. John of the Cross.

"First, let him have an habitual desire to imitate Christ in everything that he does, conforming himself to His life; upon which life he must meditate so that he may know how to imitate it, and to behave in all things as Christ would behave.

"Secondly, in order that he may be able to do this well, every pleasure that presents itself to the senses, if it is not purely for the honor and glory of God, must be renounced and completely rejected for the love of Jesus Christ, Who in this life had no other pleasure, neither desired such, than to do the will of His Father, which He called His meat and food. I take this example. If there present itself to a man the pleasure of listening to things that tend not to the service and honor of God, let him not desire that pleasure, neither let him desire to hear them; and if there present itself the pleasure of looking at things that help him not God-wards, let him not desire the pleasure or look at these things; and if in conversation or in aught else so ever it present itself, let him do the same. And similarly, in respect to all the senses, in so far as he can fairly avoid the pleasure in question; if he cannot, it suffices that although these things may be present to his senses, he desires not have this pleasure. And in this wise he will be able to mortify and void his senses of such pleasure, and leave them, as it were, in darkness, and having this care he will soon profit greatly.

"Thirdly, strive always to choose, not that which is easiest, but that which is the most difficult; not that which is most delectable, but that which is most unpleasing; not that which gives most pleasure, but rather that which gives least; not that which is restful, but that which is disconsolate; not that which is greatest, but that which is lowest and most despised; not that which is a desire for anything, but that which is a desire for nothing. Strive not to go about seeking the best of temporal things, but the worst. Strive thus to desire to enter into complete detachment and emptiness and poverty, with respect to that which is in the world, for Christ's sake." (1)

The most comprehensive of these rules is the first, as it is also the most perfect. Since Christ shared our humanity that we might share His divinity, the whole object of Christian living is to conform to Christ and to imitate Christ. The second rule simply shows explicitly how this ideal of Christlike living is to be carried out in that most pressing problem, the use of the creatures among which we are placed; we are told not to use them for pleasure, not from natural motives. The third axiom indicates that to live Christlike lives and use creatures supernaturally we must rise not only above sin but also above nature by mortifying its inclinations.

## 2. Forming a Christian Mentality How God Presents Himself to the Mind

God presents Himself to the mind as knowledge, the science of divine things; for the mind grasps things to be known—its food is

(1) *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, trans. and ed. by E. Allison Peers, London, Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1933, Bk. I, Chap. 13.

truth. This science of God, which is called theology, is both speculative and practical; that is, it tells us something of God in Himself and it also tells us what we must do to approach God. And of course it would be of little profit to know God theoretically if we do not use our knowledge to serve Him and seek union with Him; indeed, it is through being united to Him that we will in the end know Him most perfectly. This is the reason for the importance of practical theology.

Following St. Paul, we may liken this practical theology to architecture. For we are temples of the Holy Spirit. *Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?* (I Cor. 3, 16) To build such a temple, each of us must work *according to the grace of God that is given (to him), as a wise architect.* (I Cor. 3, 10) As wise architects, we should proceed as follows:

The first thing the architect does is to make a decision to build, at the same time determining what it is that he will build. If he has not formed any such intention, then there will be no building at all. And of course he cannot wait until the building nears completion before he decides what he wants—hospital, or house, or cathedral. His designs and his procedure will be determined from the start by the end-result he has in view; so that he must envision this end-result from the very beginning.

Similarly, we must decide from the start what it is we want to do in the spiritual order. Now men have always brought the best and most precious materials to God's service trying to build temples worthy of God's majesty. So should we decide at the start to build a perfect temple, that is, to aim at Christian perfection.

We must *first* decide to become perfect. Therefore, let us not say, "First I will get rid of mortal sin, then of venial sin; and finally, if I accomplish that much, I will begin working to remove imperfections." We must rather desire perfection and labor for it from the very beginning. Jesus said, "You therefore are to be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Thus to seek perfection is not presumption; it is simply realism. We have seen that an architect cannot proceed unless from the beginning he has a clearly defined idea of what he intends to build. So also when you take a journey, although the destination is the place where you actually arrive last, it has been in your mind from the first; if it had not been, you would not have taken the journey. Similarly, although Christian perfection will not be attained all in a moment, but is rather the crown and the completion of an entire life, still it must be intended from the start or it will never be attained at all.

Having decided what it is that we are going to work on, we must next draw up plans. To do this we should study the science of the spiritual life as this is set forth in the works of spiritual masters and illustrated by the lives of saints. Architects, before they attempt to make plans for some new construction, study the works of other builders and travel all over Europe to see and study the great Cathe-

drals. For a parallel reason spiritual reading is a necessary part of Christian living.

The next step is to dig out the sand of natural affections for creatures and natural motives, in order to set the foundation of our structure on rock. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, has explained to us that by sand is meant natural motives and natural habits of living, whereas the rock on which we must build is the doctrine of the supernatural life.

After we have set the foundation, we may begin with the superstructure. This is made up of all our daily actions. The great concern in raising this superstructure must be to use only first class materials. If a builder, running short of steel beams, would substitute wooden planks for them here or there, his building would not last very long. Similarly all the materials for our temple—our daily actions—must be of an even quality, and that the very best. In a word every action should be supernatural; and we should therefore strive to eliminate from our actions all natural motives, which make them imperfect and insufficient. Natural actions, if we use them in building, are like straw and old planks, while what we need is steel and stone.

The final step is this: in order to finish and perfect our temple, we must keep everything "plumb" just as good workmen do by setting every piece of material against a plumb line or level. If they were to fail to do this, the building would be both insecure and unbeautiful. Now the plumb line in the supernatural life is the ideal of perfection. It should be our purpose to make every action perfect. This should be accomplished first, by doing the action well—no slovenly work for God. Secondly, we should perform every action from a supernatural motive. A perfect action, in the supernatural sense, is one that is done out of love for God.

Such minute care for every action may seem to some a great burden. It is really not so. We must learn to do this habitually; and to do it habitually is to do it with facility and even with joy. In a well-built house every brick and every board is in place—measured and set with great accuracy. Yet we do not give the workmen any special decorations for doing this. We take it all for granted, as the normal product of skill and experience. So, in working for God, we must learn to work rapidly and well—in virtue of habitual dispositions and ever-increasing facility. Let us not be always interrupting our work to pity ourselves because we have such an exacting Master. We are, after all, *unprofitable servants*. (Luke 17, 10) As for our Master, He is indeed exacting but only in the way that any Father, anxious about his children, may be called exacting. In any case it is for our benefit that He is strict; the success of our undertaking will not make *Him* happier or richer or more perfect, but it will assuredly make *us* happier and richer and perfect. We are building a house for Him, but He really does not need our house; we are the ones who will benefit by it.

## How God Presents Himself to Our Wills

To our wills God, first of all, presents Himself as their final end. He is the Supreme Good towards which everything in our lives should be directed. This means that, as we hope that all our desires will one day be satisfied through union with Him, we should now refer all our desires and actions to Him. Since we are working towards union with Him in eternity, so should we be referring our deeds to Him now as to their final end. In other words, since death changes nothing, we should begin now to live a life of union with God, so that, when death overtakes us, the union having already begun, may be continued and consummated. *For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.* (Phil. 1, 21)

Secondly, God presents Himself to our wills in the First Commandment. In giving us the precept to love Him, God provides for us the means of being united with Him already on earth. Love is union, and obedience to the commandment of love therefore unites us to God. Thus St. John says, *God is charity; and he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in Him.* (I John 4, 16) St. Gregory the Great tells us in one of his homilies that he who loves God with his whole mind already possesses God. Indeed, Jesus Himself assures us of this: *If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to Him and make our abode with him.* (John 14, 23)

Thirdly, God presents Himself to our wills as grace. Grace, we do not forget, is a share in the divine nature. In giving us grace, therefore, God infuses into us a share in His own life. This union of our humanity with His divinity is in imitation of that wonderful union of humanity and divinity that characterized Jesus. Although the divine nature is not united to us as closely as it is in that altogether special union of the human and divine natures in the person of Jesus, still our possession of the divine nature is altogether real and brings God truly to us—or rather, elevates us to God.

Fourthly, God is present in our souls as their indwelling Guest. We have seen how we are to build a temple, a temple in which God will reside, and this temple is in our own souls. St. Paul himself, we have seen above, assures us that we are temples of the Holy Spirit, and we can have the confidence given to us by our faith that the Holy Ghost comes as a living Presence to dwell within us together with grace if we keep the divine commandments. Therefore, we ought to turn our minds and hearts away from useless and trivial things, attending rather to this Guest within our souls. How flattered and happy we are when some distinguished personage condescends to visit us in our homes, how anxious we are to leave nothing wanting in our hospitality! How much more ought we to exercise hospitality when the great God Himself comes into our souls!

It is hard to imagine that anyone would be so discourteous even to an ordinary visitor as to leave him shift for himself while the host goes off to the kitchen to play with the cat or the canary. Yet we do



this when we become absorbed in secular interests to the neglect of the Divine Person Who dwells within us. Even if a housewife were forced to leave a guest to prepare dinner, she would nevertheless be back and forth from the kitchen to speak to him or render him some small service. Perhaps she would come into the parlor with paring knife and pan, doing some of her work there, anxious not to miss any of his conversation; or perhaps if he is a familiar visitor, she would invite him into the kitchen to talk to her as she works.

Now it is true that we cannot spend all our days on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament nor be withdrawn from work and wholly occupied with God. Alas, we have many tiresome and insistent duties to perform. But could we not imitate the ingenuity of this housewife? Even as we work we could dart many a glance, many a quick affection of the heart, to our interior Guest. We could do all our work in His presence; and we would not even have to run from kitchen to parlor since wherever we go He is with us.

Nor can it be said that such frequent glances at the Holy Spirit, such frequent affirmations that we will do all for Him, distract us from our duty or lessen the quality or quantity of our work. These duties absorb, more or less, the attention of our mind; but they need not, and should not, absorb the affections of our heart: our affections should rather be reserved for the end, the good, for which we work. A man may do some difficult and tedious work, not because he loves it at all, but out of devotion to his wife and family; and this devotion helps, and does not hinder, the doing of his work. He may have a picture of his wife before him, glancing at it lovingly many times each day in the course of his duties. He thereby loses a few seconds for his employer. But do you think that his employer will object, or that this loss of time will injure the quality of the man's work? On the contrary, his affection for his wife, and the thought of her, will be an inspiration to accomplish well duties that may of themselves be tedious and onerous.

When a man travels he stops occasionally to refresh himself with food and drink. Strictly speaking, this is a loss of time, since, if he did not stop, he would be farther along on his journey. But is not the strength and refreshment gained by stopping worth the slight delay? Indeed, without such pauses, or the prospect of them, he might lack the energy to continue his journey or even to undertake it in the first place. So also loving attention to God and even frequent prayerful pauses keep us at our duties, however difficult or troublesome, and makes us perform them well also, since we dare not offer inferior workmanship to Him.

A modern writer tells about a man in Paris who always walked about with his hat in his hand in honor of the Trinity dwelling within him. We need not adopt the singularity of going hat-in-hand, but we should at any rate strive to walk about recollected and ever aware of that loving Presence within.

# The Fullness of Christian Life

## 1. The Call to Sanctity

*You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.* (Matt. 5, 48) Several times now we have come across these remarkable, these truly amazing, words of Jesus. If we wish to understand the full meaning of the Christian life, it is necessary to study more explicitly and in detail the doctrine contained in these words. Now the perfection of the Christian life is holiness; and holiness, as we have learned in studying the Sermon on the Mount, is the end which Jesus fixes for the Christian life.

Thus perfection, identical with holiness or sanctity, is the goal which *all* Christians should pursue. Mark: *all* Christians, not only Carthusians. These words were addressed to all. Jesus calls all men to sanctity, not only a select few.

Moreover, he calls all men to *divine* holiness. We are not to be as holy as Carmelites, or as saints, or even as angels: we are to be holy as God is holy. If it is impossible for us to reach the infinite *degree* of God's holiness, it is nevertheless possible—because of grace, which is a share in the divine life—to share in the divine holiness and imitate it. Thus to reproduce the divine holiness in our own lives is the supreme object laid before all of us by God Himself.

There is, therefore, just one kind of Christianity for all, for laymen and religious alike. It is a malignant error which derives the obligation to pursue holiness from the priesthood or from religious profession, thus limiting this obligation to a select few and leaving the majority of Christians to flounder in mediocrity and worldliness. Religious orders were founded by men; the duty to seek holiness can come only from Christ: this duty does not then, in the first place, come from religious profession (or even from the priesthood, which was of course instituted by Christ) but, more basically, from baptism itself. All men are intended by God to be Christians; all Christians are called to be saints. Moreover, since death changes nothing, we must become saints in this world; only if we attain sanctity here, during our time of probation, can we hope to be numbered among the saints in eternity.

## 2. The Nature of Christian Perfection

It is necessary to be quite clear about objectives, otherwise our efforts to reach them will be haphazard and ineffective. A man could not make a profitable business trip unless he were clear about where he should go and what he would like to achieve. It will be similarly useful, if not necessary, in our spiritual lives to have a definite idea of

our purpose. If perfection, broadly speaking, means holiness, even our efforts to attain holiness, however well-intended, are likely to be random until we know clearly what precisely is meant by holiness; or at any rate, these efforts will be more direct and intelligent if we have such knowledge.

St. Paul says that charity, or love, is *the bond of perfection*. Charity is a *bond* because it unites us to God; it is a bond of *perfection* because in uniting us to Him, it brings us to our last, our final and highest end in life; thus it completes us, or, in a word, perfects us. A thing is perfect (St. Thomas further explains—II: II, 184, 1) when it fulfills the end for which it was made; a knife is perfect when it cuts well, a pen is perfect when it writes well. Men will be made perfect, therefore, by that which unites them to God, Who is their Last End. Now it is charity, or love, that unites us to God. *He who abides in love, abides in God, and God in him.* (I John 4, 16)

Christian perfection, therefore, consists primarily and essentially in love. Holiness, or sanctity, therefore, also consists primarily in love. Perfection, holiness, love—these are practically synonymous. The other virtues which belong to the fullness of Christian perfection, are in relation to charity as lesser jewels that are used to provide a setting for a magnificent diamond. Surely this makes our knowledge definite! And joyous as well! He advances in holiness who advances in love; he is perfect who can truly say that he loves God with his *whole* heart, his *whole* mind, his *whole* soul, his *whole* strength.

We see here answered also the question as to whether perfection is possible. In commanding us to be perfect, Jesus is telling us to do something that every day we assert is impossible. Mere human perfection is in truth impossible to us—even the best of men falter and make mistakes. But oddly enough, divine perfection is possible. This is because this divine perfection consists above all in love. Is there anything that comes easier or more spontaneous to us than love? And our power to love is raised to the supernatural plane by divine grace.

St. Thomas describes very precisely the kind of perfection that is proper and possible to us as wayfarers on earth. We cannot love with the boundless intensity with which God loves—thus we cannot be as perfect as God; for God is infinite and we are finite. Nor can we love Him as perfectly as the saints and angels in heaven; for their affections are engaged wholly and uninterruptedly in loving God, while the necessities of bodily existence prevent such devotion in our case. But what we can do is to remove from our hearts whatever is opposed to the love of God or even hinders the swift flight of our affections to God. We grow in love, and therefore advance in perfection, by detaching ourselves from creatures.

Our understanding of perfection thus not only makes our spiritual goal perfectly clear, but it also gives us a definite practical daily procedure. The lowest degree of perfection requires that we remove from our souls whatever is wholly incompatible with charity, namely, mortal sin; and to do this we must love nothing more than God, nothing as

much as God, nothing contrary to God. The highest degree is to love God with our whole hearts—with total and perfect love. Between these two terms there is an infinite number of degrees or steps of love. Every time we remove from our hearts some attachment to a creature, however trivial this may be, we advance a step in love. Every time we mortify some desire or affection even for a good thing, we are making progress in perfection; for such attachments hinder our affections from going wholly and at once to God. On the contrary, to retain deliberate attachment or affections for creatures is to come to a standstill spiritually. A soul with voluntary attachments trying to make spiritual progress is like a man trying to make a long and wearisome journey through sticky mud. Or better, as St. John of the Cross describes it, he is like a bird that is prevented from flying by a silken cord.

### 3. The Duty of Tending to Perfection

Often careless Christians seek to evade the duty of seeking after perfection by asserting that this pursuit is of counsel only and is not a precept. The question then arises: are we *bound* to strive for perfection by a precept, or are we merely *urged* to seek after it by a counsel?

First, as to the meaning of the terms: A counsel is a virtuous course of action recommended by the Gospels but not prescribed as a strict obligation. Poverty, chastity, and obedience, which religious voluntarily bind themselves by vow to practice, are the three great counsels. A precept, on the other hand, is a commandment setting forth an obligatory course of action, and not only a recommended optional virtue; for example, the precept to keep holy the Lord's day.

Really, two questions arise from this distinction. First, is perfection a precept or a counsel? Secondly, what is the relation of the three counsels just named to Christian perfection?

To answer the first question—Is perfection a precept or a counsel?—we have but to keep in mind that Christian perfection consists primarily in love. We ask then: is love a precept or a counsel? Jesus Himself answers in replying to the lawyer who asked Him what to do to enter eternal life. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with all thy strength. This is the greatest and first commandment.*

Since love is *the greatest and first commandment*, and perfection consists primarily in love, the duty of tending to perfection is clearly and undeniably, not a counsel only, but a precept. The opposite doctrine, which leads to spiritual relaxation, is without real authority in Sacred Scriptures or traditional Catholic teaching.

Thus does St. Thomas Aquinas, greatest of the Church's doctors, explain the duty of perfection; and his doctrine is adopted by Pius XI in his encyclical on the Third Centenary of St. Francis de Sales:

"Christ has constituted the Church holy and the source of sanctity, and all those who take her for guide and teacher must by divine will, tend to holiness of life—"This is the will of God, your sanctification," says St. Paul. What kind of sanctity? The Lord Himself declared it

when He said—"Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Let no one think that this is addressed to a select few and that others are permitted to remain in an inferior degree of virtue. The law obliges, as is clear, absolutely everyone "in the world without exception."

This doctrine is also specifically applied to married people by the same Pope in his Encyclical on Chaste Wedlock:

"This outward expression of love in the home demands not only mutual help, but must go further; must have as its primary purpose that man and wife help each other day by day in forming and perfecting themselves in the interior life, so that through their partnership in life they may advance ever more and more in virtue, and above all that they may grow in true love towards God and their neighbor, on which, indeed, 'dependeth the whole law and the prophets.' For all men of every condition, in whatever honorable walk of life they may be, can and ought to imitate that most perfect example of holiness placed before man by God, namely Christ, our Lord, and by God's grace to arrive at the summit of perfection, as is proved by the example set us of many saints."

One important difference should be noted between the precept of tending to perfection and other precepts. Other precepts—for example, to keep the Sabbath holy—bind here and now; to omit them at all is to commit sin. On the other hand, the precept of perfection does not bind us to particular acts here and now; it rather binds us as an end towards which we should all tend as the supreme goal of our lives. The fullness of Christian perfection cannot be realized at once; it is the result of long development; it is the culmination and crown of the Christian life. But by our daily lives and actions we should be constantly advancing towards this goal.

#### 4. Precepts and Counsels

The difference—and the relationship—between the precept of perfection and the three evangelic counsels is this: The precept determines the *end* of Christian life—holiness—towards which all Christians must tend. The counsels are concerned with the *means* of attaining this end; they in fact point out the *best* means of reaching the height of Christian perfection. But no one is obliged to adopt the *best* means for reaching this end and therefore for carrying out this precept. All that is of obligation is that some adequate and proportionate means is adopted. As we have just seen, the married state is also an adequate and proportionate means; and it may be added that any honorable occupation in the world is also an adequate and proportionate means.

Suppose that a man dies in New York, leaving a will in which he divides his fortune between two nephews who live in Chicago; but he adds as a condition that they must leave Chicago and take up residence in New York. They go at once but take different means of traveling: one goes by train, the other hastens by air. This, of course, they may do, for the will fixes only their destination or end, leaving them to choose their mode or means of travel. So it is with us on our

pilgrimage through the world. The Father decrees that, to obtain our inheritance as His children, we must all direct ourselves to one and the same destination: perfection, holiness. But he does not set any fixed rule as to *how* this is to be accomplished; He does not rigidly determine the *means*. Indeed, He establishes several possible ways, one more perfect than the other, and while inviting some to adopt the more perfect way, He requires of all only that they take some way that is suitable.

In general, there are two ways of Christian life, two means which men may use in striving for perfection. The one is the more perfect way, the way of the Christian religious, who may be compared to the man who rushes off by airplane to obtain his inheritance. The other is the way of the Christian laity, who may be likened to the heir who goes to New York by train. The religious, by binding himself to observe the three counsels, casts aside in one final dramatic gesture all those earthly goods that tend to attract the affections of the heart and thus hinder loving souls from running towards sanctity as swiftly as they would like. But the layman, although perhaps moving more slowly, since he remains among the things of the world, and is thereby prevented from concentrating all his energies directly and at once on the service of God, is nevertheless urged on by the precept of perfection to that one same goal, holiness of life, without which no one can see God.

Let it be added, too, that although laymen are not bound by the letter of the counsels, since they do not take religious vows, they are nevertheless bound by the spirit of these counsels and the interior virtues of which the vows are the perfect expression. Thus laymen, although not bound to practice actual poverty, and usually prevented from doing so by family obligations, are certainly bound to cultivate the spirit of poverty, which is the same as detachment from the goods and pleasures of the world. They are bound to practice chastity according to their state. Finally they are obliged to observe obedience to lawful authorities and, further, to cultivate submission to all the decrees and providential arrangements of God.

## 5.. The Rich Young Man

A misinterpretation of the incident related in the Gospel concerning the rich young man is largely responsible for the widespread error asserting that perfection is a counsel only. To the young man's query as to what he must do to enter eternal life, Jesus replied, *If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come follow me.* (Matt. 19, 16-21) From the word "if", it is wrongly inferred that the pursuit of perfection is optional, and not of strict obligation.

However, the word "if" does not denote an option or a condition here; it is consecutive, i.e., it indicates a consequence. When a doctor says, *"If you wish to save your life, you must undergo an operation,"* he does not entertain any doubt that you wish to live. He simply indi-

cates a consequence of this wish; his "if" is not conditional, but consecutive; it means, "*Since* you wish to live, here is what you must do." The words of Jesus are to be understood in the same way. This is clear, not only from the context, but from the other Scriptural passages in which holiness and perfection and love are enjoined as mandatory; this passage cannot be understood in a sense contrary to other revealed teachings but must rather be interpreted in accordance with them. Moreover, the "if" does not occur at all in Our Lord's answer to the young man as this is reported by St. Mark and St. Luke. In these accounts, which give the identical teaching, but in a slightly different grammatical form, Jesus is quoted as saying, "One thing is lacking to thee . . . sell all thou hast and come, follow me." Thus in pointing out the conditions necessary for eternal life, Jesus is adding a higher requirement to the young man's obedience to the natural law.

Perhaps part of the confusion in understanding this passage is caused by the words, "Sell what thou hast." These do indicate the counsel of poverty, which the Savior also urges upon the young man. But they do not imply that perfection itself is a counsel. On the contrary, according to St. Thomas, Our Lord's presumptory "Come, follow me" is an imperative invitation to friendship and love; and it is love, as we have seen, which constitutes the essence of Christian perfection.

## 6. The Degrees of Perfection

A common evasion of the duty to strive after holiness comes from the fact that there are various degrees of holiness among the blessed. Because Jesus said that there are many mansions in His Father's house, careless souls pretend to find a justification for their negligence. They are not ambitious for the highest degree.

A similar evasion is sometimes derived also from the fact that perfection is at least substantially present in all those who possess sanctifying grace and infused charity; for, it is argued, this is enough to be saved.

Now while it is true that perfection is essentially present in all who have infused charity, even though they have not arrived at a high degree of virtue, it is plain also that this perfection is embryonic only. The essentials of human life are also present in an embryo; but the embryo is nevertheless not a complete and mature human being. Moreover, the embryo is under a law of growth; and when growth ceases, death has set in. Similarly although Christian perfection begins with "the state of grace," he who has but the lowest degree of grace has not yet the plenitude of Christian life. And the supernatural life must develop towards this plenitude; it, too, is under a law of growth; as we have seen elsewhere, not to go forward is to go back.

Therefore, although perfection is present essentially in all who have sanctifying grace, no one may deliberately limit Himself to this degree of perfection. All must seek, in accordance with Our Lord's command, to reproduce and imitate the absolute divine holiness: *You are to be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect.* Not only in

these words, but also in the very precept of love, it is evident that we may not measure or limit our efforts to obtain perfection: the insistent repetition of the word *whole* in this precept—*whole* heart, *whole* mind, *whole* soul, *whole* strength—shows that we must endeavor to love God without limit, hence to aim at the highest perfection.

Furthermore, the precise degree of holiness which we shall obtain is God's gift to us and is determined by our endowment of grace; it is not therefore to be determined by *our* choice. Our part is simply to correspond with God's grace; and we may take it for granted that our greatest efforts will lag far behind the divine generosity.

To put the matter differently, we may distinguish between perfection in the order of intention and in the order of execution. In the order of intention—that is, in the intention of the will and in our own spiritual efforts—there are no degrees of perfection: our duty is to intend and labor for perfection without limit. The degrees of perfection belong to the order of execution and are determined by God. In a school-room, it is the teacher's business, not the pupils', to award marks and prizes. It is the pupil's task to use his talents and energies to work for the reward; and if he relaxes his efforts he will receive a low mark and lose the prize. So it is God's business to measure out the endowment of grace and the degree of glory. And for us to be careless is to risk losing what God has planned for us.

To those who deliberately refuse the pursuit of holiness St. Augustine says, "He who says he has done enough has already perished." That this statement is no idle threat but has a solid doctrinal basis we know from what has been said in the chapter on the law of the flesh. Here let us note further only the warning of Sacred Scripture to the mediocre: *I know thy works; thou art neither hot nor cold. I would thou were cold or hot. But, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to vomit thee out of my mouth.* (Apocalypse 3, 15-16)



## SECOND PRINCIPLE

The Glory of God



## The Glory of God

In order to attempt a trip to the moon, a man would have to solve two problems: he would have the difficulty of getting to the moon in the first place; and secondly, once arrived at his destination, he would have to adjust himself to altogether different conditions of life. Similarly, we Christians have a twofold problem upon rising to the supernatural world; the first is the difficulty of getting to a sphere which is above our human powers; and this difficulty we have been considering up to now. Secondly, there is the problem, once we are elevated to the divine plane, of adjusting ourselves to our new environment, that is, of living as divine beings. In the supreme rule of supernatural motivation we have to a large extent shown how this second problem is to be solved also. Still, there remain some difficulties and particular points of application. Especially, there is the problem of our dealings with creatures. We are, in truth, to live as divine beings, but in a world of creatures—in a world in which most of our daily dealings are with creatures, and not directly with Divinity. That we are not to allow our affections to become absorbed in creatures, that we are in fact to be detached from creatures and mortify the pleasure we find in them—these are lessons already learned. We are then *not* to love creatures—except in a supernatural way, which is rare and difficult, and possible at all only to those who are detached. But it might well be asked then, what *are* we to do about these creatures? What is their use in the supernatural world? How are we to treat them in order that we may live as divine beings? These are the questions that will be answered by the study of the second great principle of the Christian life, which we now take up—the Glory of God.

### 1. What God's Glory Means For God

The Councils of Trent and of the Vatican tell us that God's principal intention in creating the world, as also in elevating rational creatures to share in the divine life, is His own glory. Thus the doctrine of God's glory discloses to us the ultimate secret of all creatures: their final purpose; they were created to glorify God, that is, to manifest His supreme goodness. We may note in passing that the purpose of a thing is its deepest secret, and the knowledge of such purpose is the most important datum of information that we can gain of it. Thus, if you do not know the purpose of a tool or instrument, you could not use it at all, or might easily destroy it, like a child who uses his father's watch as a hammer. On the other hand to know what a thing is for is to be able to use it intelligently.

When men act it is to obtain some good. But God, who is already infinitely good, needs and can receive no further perfection. He acts, on the contrary, solely to share and diffuse His goodness. All things whatever, therefore, are to be regarded as particular and created manifestation or reflections of the measureless goodness of God. By thus revealing this divine goodness, they glorify God; and this is what is meant when it is said that creatures are made to glorify God. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims the work of His hands.* (Psalm 18, 2)

Further, the divine glory is the directing idea of God's creation. If a craftsman intends to make a saw, he cuts teeth into it that it may be fitted for the purpose intended. When a thing is made for a purpose, it must be designed and constructed to fulfill that purpose. God, therefore, whose final purpose is His own glory, so designed and fashioned creatures that they can and do glorify Him.

The divine purpose of course includes man himself, who is also intended, then, to glorify God. The only difference between man and the other creatures in this respect is that man, having mind and free will, can glorify God knowingly and freely, with knowledge and love, with praise and obedience and adoration. And of course, since man's mind and will are elevated by grace to the divine plane, his endeavors to glorify God may and should also be supernatural, and this is accomplished, above all, in faith, and hope, and charity. In fact, this supernatural manifestation of the divine goodness is the highest of all; no other creatures (except the angels) can glorify God as perfectly as men; and all creatures are in the last analysis given into man's service that he may render to God this highest glory.

Finally, God's glory is His own continual preoccupation. Men tend to use God's creatures for their own selfish purposes—that is, for *their* glory rather than God's. But God does not permit this and sets Himself to prevent it; He is determined that men shall not deflect creatures from their true mission of manifesting His own divine and infinite goodness. This is illustrated in a remarkable way in the Book of Judges (Chap. 6) where the history of Gideon is related. Gideon was chosen by God to overcome the powerful enemies of the Israelites although, as he confessed, *Behold my family is the meanest in Manasses, and I am the least in my father's house.* (Judges 6, 15) But God wanted the victory to be attributed to divine powers and not to human prowess; He chose a weak instrument that the Jews would have no occasion to glory. Moreover, after Gideon had gathered a great army, God bade him send the most of them home, and gave him the victory with a handful of unarmed men: *lest Israel should glory against Me, and say, 'I was delivered by my own strength.'*

Since God does not change, the same divine principle and policy is found in New Testament times. In fact, St. Paul clearly states that this is ever God's way: *For see your vocation, brethren, that there are not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble. But the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that He may con-*

*found the wise, and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the strong, and the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible, hath God chosen, and things that are not, that He might bring to naught things that are.* And St. Paul then closes this remark by giving the reason for this policy, so strange to our human "wisdom": *that no flesh should glory in His sight.* (I Cor. 1, 26-29)

There have been many illustrations of this divine policy in the history of Christianity. First no doubt, after Jesus Himself, is the Blessed Virgin herself: what greater mission than hers in the world has there ever been, and what more humanly humble instrument to accomplish it? There are many other saints to illustrate the same lesson: St. Margaret Mary, an uneducated girl whom God chose in preference to bishops and pontiffs to spread devotion to the Sacred Heart; St. Joan of Arc, St. Catherine Laboure, the children at La Salette, Lourdes, Fatima. Of course God uses great and talented men, too—like St. Augustine and St. Thomas—but only when they are humble, as little children, not seeking their own glory, but only that of God.

## 2. What God's Glory Means For Man

If the doctrine of the glory of God discloses to us the deepest secret of the universe of creatures, it introduces us to the still deeper secret of God's motivation in creating the world. Therefore, it shows us how we should use creatures if we would live and act according to the divine plan. We are to be perfect *as the heavenly Father is perfect* (Matt. 5, 48) and indeed *imitators of God*. (Eph. 5, 1) Hence, we should respect the divine intention and design in regard to creatures; we should use creatures in order to glorify God.

Why we should thus glorify God may be further discussed under three heads.

First the divine glory is man's happiness. The simplest way of explaining this truth is to say that happiness is a reward which God gives to those who serve Him. Just as an employer pays wages to those, and to those alone, who work for him, so God rewards with happiness those who labor to manifest His goodness.

A better understanding of the matter can be gained if we realize that in working for the divine glory, and thus striving to promote God's purpose in creating the universe, man likewise fulfills the deepest purpose of his own nature. For man likewise was created to glorify God and in so doing he perfects himself: and this highest perfection is his happiness. If you take a bow and draw it over a violin without any skill, you produce only screeches; but if you know the nature and possibilities of this instrument, and use it accordingly, you will produce the most glorious music. Likewise, only when we use our nature according to the potentialities given to it by its Creator, both in the order of nature and of grace, can we achieve that true harmony of life which is called happiness.

Many persons unfortunately think that in dedicating themselves

to holiness they are bidding good-by to happiness, at least in this world. They think of happiness and holiness as lying at the end of different and divergent roads; their error comes from the fact that they confuse true happiness with worldly happiness or with mere sensual pleasure. In truth, happiness and holiness lie on the same road; they are one and the same destination. Thus, while God's primary purpose in creating is His own glory, His secondary purpose is man's happiness; and these two purposes are always realized together, are in fact inseparable.

Sensual pleasure it is, on the other hand, that after offering man an immediate gratification, leads him away from true happiness, and brings him instead to tedium and disgust, and often into despair. This is the lesson that St. Augustine teaches from his own experience in the *Confessions*; and it is the lesson taught by many others likewise.

Secondly, the divine glory offers to man a means at once of showing appreciation to God for His gifts and of understanding actions of God that would otherwise be incomprehensible.

Let us consider these points in order. The only concrete way we have of thanking God for His innumerable gifts and favors is to praise and glorify Him in a right use of His gifts. If we fail to do this, then any thanksgiving we may offer to Him will be a matter of words only. On the other hand, by glorifying God in the right use of His creatures, we are doing all that we can in a practical way to demonstrate the reality of our appreciation.

Moreover, when we praise and thank a human benefactor for his gifts, this leads to further favors; as when you praise a cook for her baking, she presses you to take more of her pastry. So too, by glorifying God, we induce Him to continue and multiply His favors.

Again, the glory of God is a means of understanding many of God's actions that would otherwise completely mystify us. Thus we hear people say they do not understand why God does not give more grace to sinners, or how God can punish them. The reason why they cannot understand this is that they are thinking only of God's mercy; these divine visitations are indeed not to be explained in terms of our heavenly Father's infinite mercy. But the glory of God, as the final purpose of the universe, will help us to understand. God's glory demands that sinners—say, Judas—save themselves with the sufficient graces given to them. And if God is glorified in the mercy which He dispenses to His friends, He is also glorified in the justice with which He punishes sinners.

Finally, the glory of God should be *man's* continual preoccupation. As God is preoccupied in procuring His glory, so men, in imitating God by living as divine beings, should likewise be constantly concerned with manifesting the divine goodness. Accordingly St. Paul gives us the following rule of daily behavior, *Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God.* (I Cor. 10, 31)

There are two ways in which we interfere with the divine glory, thus failing to carry out our part in the divine plan: First, by using

creatures merely for our own bodily pleasure; secondly, by making creatures serve our own vainglory. By these two motives, besides depriving ourselves of merit or greatly decreasing it, we rob God of the glory that He desires to obtain from creation.

Since the final purpose of creation is the divine glory, it is therefore not correct for Christians to say that creatures are here for our enjoyment, or try to obtain a theological sanction for their sensuality by saying that, since God made creatures, they are good and we should enjoy them. God did form the creatures of the earth, and He made them good, but He did not make them simply to serve man's sensual pleasures; He made them for His own glory. It is true, as we have just seen, that man's happiness is God's secondary end in creation and that therefore God intends men to use His creatures in order that they may obtain happiness; but this happiness itself belongs to the supernatural order and is obtained precisely by glorifying God.

If the motive of sensual pleasure spoils so many of our daily actions, the motive of vainglory spoils even the holiest works. Those laboring in the apostolate, although engaged in labors that are objectively holy, often gain but little spiritual benefit because they labor, not for God's glory, but for their own. *For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ*, is St. Paul's curt condemnation of such laborers in the vineyard. (Phil. 2, 21) Much of the activity in parishes and other religious organizations is vitiated by the self-seeking of those engaged in it; even what calls itself Catholic Action is often so corrupted. Nor is the harm confined to the personal spiritual loss of those who so act. It includes also a withholding of the divine favor from their works, hence the fruitlessness of much apostolic labor. For God is continually preoccupied with His own glory, as we have seen in the case of Gideon, and He will not tolerate that any flesh should glory in His sight.

Thus our personal vanity and self-seeking prevents our actions from being conduits of grace in the same way that high-resistance wire hinders the passage of electric current. And since the work of the apostolate is essentially supernatural, a work of grace—the conversion and transformation of souls—such resistance to the passage of grace through our works prevents these labors from receiving real spiritual energy. Here is why so many apostolic works fail, why, despite great outward display, they produce little or no real fruit.

We reveal negatively that we are acting for our own glory rather than God's when we desire praise and thanks and encouragement for our work, or when, for lack of these, we become dejected and discouraged and even discontinue our labors. If we are really laboring for God's glory, we will not care when we gain no glory for ourselves. Thus the real test of whether we are truly laboring for God's glory, and not our own, is willingness to persevere in good works despite adversities and want of appreciation.

Let us conclude with a word of reassurance to those who may wonder at God's determination to obtain His own glory. When God

acts for His glory, he does so to manifest, diffuse, and communicate His goodness to creatures. He does not act to *obtain*—He *never* acts to obtain, but to *give*. Others are the beneficiaries of God; God is never the beneficiary of His creatures. When God acts for His own glory, He procures our happiness. He adds nothing to His own happiness or perfection, which were infinite from all eternity. Still the divine truthfulness and holiness demand that men should not take the credit of their created goodness to themselves nor use other creatures simply for their own pleasure, disregarding God's plan. Men must rather learn to live their own lives, exercise their own talents, and make use of irrational creatures in accordance with the design fixed by God from all eternity. A father is not guilty of vainglory when he teaches his children to respect him; right order demands that he do so, and he would be remiss in his duty if he were to fail. Similarly, truth demands that men should honor God and respect His ordinances; and it demands **that** God, Who is very Truth, should also require this.

# The Samples

Once we are convinced that our proper activity in the supernatural world consists in glorifying God, there is still the practical necessity of knowing *how* to glorify Him. In precisely what way are we to go about accomplishing this task? Just what are we to do?

To answer this question we may distinguish between the divine essence and the divine action. (Of course, God is a simple being, with absolutely no distinction of parts, but we may usefully make such distinctions as the present one because our finite minds cannot grasp in one glance all of the infinite divine attributes.) We may glorify God in His divine essence, that is, in the perfections which constitute His divinity; and we may glorify Him, secondly, in His activity, that is, in His dominion over the world. The doctrine of Samples, which we now take up, teaches us how to glorify God in His perfections; the doctrine of Divine Providence, or of God's Supreme Dominion, which will be studied in Part Two, teaches us how to glorify God in the activity by which He governs the whole universe.

## 1. Creatures—Samples of the Divine Attributes

We live in a world of creatures and have a natural tendency to seek our satisfaction in the enjoyment of creatures. Now our supernatural vocation requires that we rise, not only above sin, but above the whole order of nature by detaching ourselves from all the good things of nature and the pleasures found in creatures. Yet, since God is Pure Spirit, it is difficult for us to rise to the contemplation of Him, difficult to overcome our earthly tastes for creatures and give all our affections to Him.

Accordingly, we must learn to use creatures as means of approaching God; if we allow our affections to tarry in the creatures themselves, we so far remain on the natural plane and stop the exercise and growth of charity. For, as St. Thomas says, man is placed midway between the good things of earth and those of heaven; so that the more his heart is attached to the one set of these goods, the less affection does it have for the other. (*Summa Theol.* I II, 108, 4)

Now creatures need not interfere with our loving God; if we use them as God intends, they become stepping-stones to Him. By observing the good qualities of creatures, we can come to some dim appreciation of the perfections of God. All creatures are made by God, all come from the divine mind, all are modeled on the ideas of God's mind, and therefore all in some measure represent the perfections found in God Himself. As we can tell from the work of an artist that he has humor, pathos, delicacy, power, or other qualities of soul, so



can we learn from God's varied creation something of His mercy, His goodness, His truth, His beauty.

Here, then, is the way in which Christians should use creatures: not merely as means of sensual and selfish enjoyment, as pagans do, but rather as a means of rising to the knowledge of God.

The Sacred Scriptures teach us about God from creatures. *He that planted the ear, shall he not hear; or He that formed the eye, doth He not consider?* (Psalm 93) The eye and the ear are here considered as reflections of the divine knowledge.

*But all men are vain in whom there is not the knowledge of God; and by these good things that are seen could not understand Him that is, neither by attending to the works have acknowledged who was the workman. For by the greatness of the beauty of the creature, their Creator may be seen so as to be known thereby.* (Wisdom 13)

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those men who in wickedness hold back the truth of God, seeing that what may be known about God is manifest to them. For God has manifested it to them. For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes are clearly seen—his everlasting power also and divinity—being understood through the things that are made.* (Rom. 1, 18-20)

All of these texts clearly show that God expects men to rise from the knowledge of creatures to the knowledge of Himself, and even that He will punish those who fail to make this ascent from the material to the spiritual, from the creature to the Creator.

Thus, all creatures may be regarded, in their excellences, as reflections, images, vestiges of the Creator. Or to put it differently, they may be called *samples* of the Creator. As St. Francis de Sales says, "And from thence (i.e., from amazement at God's marvelous works) we pass on to most holy complacency, rejoicing that God is so infinite in wisdom, power, and goodness, which are the three divine attributes, of which the world is but a small evidence or, as it were, a *sample*." (*Love of God*, IX, 2)

A sample, the dictionary says, is part of anything, presented as evidence of the quality of the whole, as a sample of wine. So every creature is, not indeed a part of God, but a visible evidence of His goodness and even of the specific character of His attributes—of His kindness, His tenderness, His love, His power, His majesty, His beauty. As merchants give samples to customers in order to demonstrate to them the high quality of the goods kept in stores and warehouses, so God gives to men in creatures samples of the good things that wait for them in heaven, intending thereby to assist them in raising their minds and hearts to celestial joys.

## 2. How the Samples Are to Be Used

The whole universe, we may now see, is a vast catalogue of samples, placed before us by God in order to give us some idea of the treasures reserved for His children in their heavenly home. Our intel-

lects, appraising the excellences that are found in every order of creatures, are like salesmen that place before their clients catalogues of samples in order to excite a desire for their wares. Our intellects, looking at creatures, can tell us something of the divine perfections which God invites us to enjoy in heaven—and even on earth to a great extent, by a life of union with Him.

A salesman is not interested in selling a customer the sample itself. One would not attempt to wear a sample of cloth, nor cut out a picture of a coat in an advertisement and try to put it on. The value of the sample is that it tells of something else, of the goods that the salesman has elsewhere in his store. So with the samples of heavenly happiness: they are not put here by the Creator to be enjoyed for their own sake, but rather to give us some knowledge of a more perfect kind of happiness destined for those who live on the supernatural plane. When we become attached to the sample itself, forgetful of the heavenly good that it represents, we are as foolish as a customer who would take a little sample of cloth and try to wear it. This is why, although creatures are good, we should *not* become attached to them.

In order to use the creatures of this world as an ascent to God, we should compare and contrast their limited goodness with the infinite goodness of God. This may be done in three ways.

*In duration.* The pleasures of this world—i.e., eating candy, taking a glass of wine—last but a moment. On the other hand, there awaits us in heaven a joy corresponding to these of which these are samples, but the heavenly joy will last for all eternity. Thus the transient pleasures of this world give us some dim notion of eternal happiness; but because they are transient, the likeness is very remote—the joys of earth are but samples.

*In quality.* When it is said that the pleasure of eating candy or drinking wine is a sample of heavenly happiness, this may seem like a crude conception. It is crude, because heavenly joy is above all spiritual. Therefore, the comparison of earthly pleasures with heavenly ones needs to be corrected and purified. This is done by comparing the samples to heavenly joy also in point of quality. The joys of heaven are of a quality far superior to those of sense; indeed of an altogether higher order, of the spiritual order. In this respect also, then, the creatures of the world are not to be loved for their own sakes; they are only samples of a good that is immeasurably greater.

*In Intensity.* When it is said that heavenly joys are spiritual, many persons might at once lose interest in them! Such persons would say that they desire a more solid and substantial happiness. Hence, we must complete our comparison of creature-joys with the good things of the supernatural order by adding that in point of intensity also creatures are only samples of eternal joys. That is to say, not only are the latter of a higher quality but they give more perfect satisfaction, a more intense happiness, than the other. If one little ray of God's goodness, such as is contained in a creature causes us so much pleasure, what—we should ask ourselves—what will be our happiness when we possess

the plenitude of divine perfection? The greatest joy that may be derived from creatures, so the Scriptures teach us, are as nothing compared to the supernatural happiness promised by God to His children. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.* (I Cor. 2, 9)

Therefore, contrary to the notion of the pagan mentality, spiritual joys are much more absorbing, much more intense, than those of earth. A scholar of cultivated taste gets more real satisfaction from reading the classics than does a semi-literate person from reading cheap stores; yet the sensual man cannot understand or appreciate the scholar's pleasure. Now in the same way the pleasures of the spirit are more delightful than those of the flesh; but it is hardly to be expected that a sensualist would think so! *But the sensual man does not perceive the things that are of the Spirit of God, for it is foolishness to him and he cannot understand, because it is examined spiritually. But the spiritual man judges all things.* . . . (I Cor. 2, 15-16)

Two important differences, St. Gregory the Great points out, may be observed between earthly and heavenly pleasures. In the first place, earthly joys are pleasant chiefly in anticipation, while their possession is often a disappointment. Heavenly joys, on the contrary, are anything but pleasant in anticipation, since so much self-denial is required to obtain them, but their actual fruition is wholly satisfying and delightful. Again, the more we get of earthly joys, the less we want of them—in the end they lead to satiety and often to revulsion. With the joys of the Spirit, the opposite is true: the more we get of them, the more eagerly do we desire them. (See homily for Sunday within Octave of Corpus Christi, *Roman Breviary*)

### 3. Jesus Taught the Doctrine of Samples

We have seen above how the Scriptures hold that men are to learn of the Creator from creatures. It is not surprising, then, that Jesus in His instructions used creatures to raise the minds of His hearers to spiritual things, pointing out the likeness of the latter, although in a higher order, to everyday objects about Him. Thus He used the protecting wings of a hen over her chickens to show the loving care of God for men (Matt. 23, 37); He used the mansions (John 14, 2) of the rich as likenesses (or samples) of heavenly happiness.

In another place (John, 4) the Divine Teacher makes use of the water at the well of Jacob in order to raise the mind of a sinful woman to the things of God. The cool, refreshing qualities of the water from the well are taken as a sample of happiness with God. In the words of Jesus, the material water is a likeness on a lower plane of the *living* or life-giving water, which, if men will but drink of it, can satisfy their thirst so completely that they *shall never thirst*. According to St. Teresa, this life-giving water is union with God, enjoyed in this life through prayer and springing up as a *fountain unto life everlasting*.

Our Lord used the same example when He said, *If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink.* (John 7, 37)

When the Apostles offered Our Lord food (after His interview with the Samaritan woman) He said, *My food is to do the will of Him that sent Me.* What food does for the body, conformity to the divine will accomplishes for the soul: food is a "sample" of the divine will.

Elsewhere Jesus recurs to the use of food as a likeness of divine things. He says, *Labor not for the food that perishes, but for that which endures unto life everlasting, which the Son of Man will give you.* He goes on to take bread as a symbol of faith, which is then represented as nourishing the soul in the manner that bread nourishes the body: *I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger, and He who believes in me shall never thirst.* (John 6, 35) Finally, continuing in the same thought, He uses material bread also as a sample of the celestial bread that He promised to give in the Eucharist: *For My flesh is food indeed and My blood is drink indeed.* (John 6)

Again, He makes bodily rest the sample of eternal repose with God, *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.* (Matt. 11, 28) He also likens eternal happiness to the paschal banquet (Luke 22, 15) and even to any ordinary banquet, while He likens the servants of the banquet to God Himself, *Blessed are those servants whom the Master, on His return, shall find watching. Amen I say to you, He will gird Himself, and will make them recline at table, and will come and serve them.* (Luke 12, 37) Finally, He likens earthly treasures to the more precious ones of heaven. *Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither rust nor moth consumes, nor thieves break in and steal.* (Matt. 6, 20)

Assuredly, then, we should learn from our Divine Master to rise from the sight of creatures to the contemplation of God.

#### 4. The Use of Samples

It is clear, then, that we are to use creatures not for our sensual enjoyment, but in order to know and love God's goodness. We are given these samples of divine goodness, but precisely because they are samples, only samples, we should tend as far as possible to give them up, preferring the enjoyment of that supreme good which they represent.

Nor is it of any use to say, "These creatures come from God, they are good—therefore let us enjoy them." It is only because creatures are good that they can be samples of God; if they were evil they could teach us nothing of Him. Hence the doctrine of samples, and of the renunciation of samples, does not deny the goodness of creatures but rather presupposes this fact and puts it in high relief.

Although it is not always possible nor permissible to renounce creatures (more exact rules will be given in later chapters), still it may be said that, when it is possible, the highest use of creatures is to return them to their Creator unused. And it is precisely because they are good that there is merit in their renunciation. If I tell God that since I

do not like (say) apples, I will give them up for His sake, there is no merit in this; to gain merit I must give up something I like, something that is good. In the same way that a man must tell His wife that he loves her above all other women, even the most beautiful, and not merely more than some vile or hideous creatures, so must we prefer God to the most attractive creatures and be ready to renounce them for love of Him.

Creatures are, so to speak, photographs of the Creator, each having some likeness to Him. Now we do not love a photograph for itself, because of the paper it is printed on, but rather because of the person whom it represents. Similarly, creatures are not to be loved for themselves, but for the sake of God.

It is not that God gives us creatures only to see us renounce them; He gives us creatures to teach us of Himself. We cannot in fact always renounce them, although such renunciation, as just observed, is their highest use. Still, even when we use them, we should renounce them interiorly, by means of detachment, that we may use them in truth for God's glory and not for our pleasure. *Those who use this world should be as those who use it not.* (I Cor. 7, 31)

St. John of the Cross speaks of creatures as crumbs that fall from the divine table. (*Ascent*, I, 6) He has reference to the text (Matt. Chap. 15) in which Jesus, in answer to the Canaanite woman who asked Him to cure her daughter, replied, *It is not good to take the bread of the children, and to cast it to the dogs.* But she said, *Yea, Lord, for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters.* St. John of the Cross, interpreting this text in a spiritual sense, says that the crumbs are creatures, since they contain some fragments of the divine goodness; but those who eat of the crumbs, that is, those who seek their enjoyment in creatures, are dogs, because the children of God sit at the table with Him and enjoy the divine banquet. So the pagans love and enjoy the creatures of the world, but the true children of God reserve their affections for the divine goodness itself, of which the creatures are but imperfect reflections.

## CHAPTER 12

# The Samples

### *Application*

There are many ways in which the doctrine of samples will help us spiritually if we carry it over into practice. In this chapter we will enumerate some of these good effects.

#### 1. It Cuts Criticism to the Root

One reason why we so often criticize and judge others is that we compare them among themselves; and, as a consequence, we say that they are "too kind," or "too harsh," "too lenient" or "too severe." The mistake comes of comparing the samples (human beings are also samples!) among themselves, or horizontally. Since the samples are intended to teach us of God, we should compare the qualities we find in others to God, that is, vertically. Thus we should say, "This man's kindness—seemingly excessive—is but a sample of the divine kindness." Or, "This person's severity—which to me appears extreme—is but a sample of the divine justice—that justice which I must one day face to render an account of my life!" In this we are led to cease criticizing and at the same time to raise our thoughts to God.

(It may appropriately be mentioned at this point that the doctrine of motivation, which was studied under the First Principle, is also most useful in overcoming the habit and tendency to judge others. The way in which we perhaps most frequently fail in this matter is in attributing evil or unworthy motives to them. Now it is simply impossible to know why others act unless they should themselves disclose their motives to us. On the other hand, we know that motives are of the most decisive importance in determining the morality and merit of all human actions except such as are intrinsically evil. Thus when we attribute low motives to others we are judging of a matter concerning which we lack information on the most important fact of all.)

#### 2. It Teaches Us the Right Use of Creatures

Creatures are to be used to glorify God; and we do this when we use them to know and praise God, and, finally, to love His goodness. If we use creatures for another end, if our motive is other than the glory of God, then we abuse them. Disorder first enters the universe—not when we commit mortal sin, which is rather the extremity of disorder—but as soon as our motives are directed to any good other than the glory of God. Such disorder may occur when we use our own talents (which are creatures and samples) for our own pleasure or out

of vanity; or when we use other creatures for mere pleasure. This does not mean that pleasure is evil. But since we get our motives from what we love, the motive of pleasure indicates an attachment for a creature, hence a use of God's creatures for ourselves rather than for God.

Thus there is spiritual disorder and an abuse of creatures, even when we fall into imperfections. (See Chapter V) It is a mistake therefore to see an abuse of creatures only in mortal and venial sin. Disorder begins with imperfections, although these are actions that are not morally evil: their disorder is negligence or sluggishness in obeying the great commandment of love. Once we are raised to the supernatural world, all our actions should be referred to the love of God, all creatures should be used to manifest His goodness.

### 3. It Teaches Us the Right Use of Pleasures

St. John of the Cross tells us, it will be recalled, that "every pleasure which presents itself to the senses, if it is not purely for the honor and glory of God must be renounced and completely rejected." Pleasure is not evil, but it is a subordinate and instrumental good, a means and not an end. As a means it should be subordinated to an end, not taken as an end in itself. Thus, the pleasure of eating is subordinate to the end of eating, i.e., health, and ultimately to the glory of God. When, however, we act from a *motive* of pleasure, we are attributing to pleasure the goodness and dignity proper to an end. When we eat for mere pleasure, for example, our wills are not directing the action to the end and good that eating was intended by the Creator to serve. Hence a motive of pleasure indicates the abuse of a creature, an imperfection at least as just observed, since in the supernatural world all that we do should be referred to the glory of God. "Whatsoever pleasure, then, presents itself to the spiritual person from sense, and whether it come to him by chance or by design, he must make use of it *only as a means to God*. . . ." (*Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, III, 24, 6)

It may be asked, then, whether we may never enjoy pleasure. The answer is, of course we may. It is only a question of keeping right order in our spiritual lives. A Christian also enjoys the pleasure of eating—but he does not eat to obtain this pleasure. Even to breathe is a pleasure, especially when the air is good: and one need not cease breathing, or seek only bad air, to be mortified!

Perhaps our rule of action may be clarified and summarized by a distinction which we take from St. John of the Cross between voluntary and involuntary pleasure. (*Ascent* I, 12) The pleasure we should mortify is voluntary pleasure; but we need not and we really cannot mortify involuntary pleasure—it is always a pleasure to eat, for example, even though the pleasure is not the motive for eating. At the same time, the Saint cautions us to be inwardly detached from involuntary pleasure, otherwise our affections will cling to it and it will soon become voluntary, diverting us from our single-eyed pursuit of God's glory. (*Ascent* III, 24)

Let it be added: in saying that pleasure should not be a motive and end, it does not follow, nor is there any thought of maintaining here that Christians may not engage in recreation. Legitimate recreation is not merely pleasure, even though it brings pleasure, but a true utility, even a necessity, that may be easily referred to the glory of God. How the supernatural man will go about taking his recreation is a matter that will be taken up in a subsequent chapter. (Part Two, Chapter XVIII)

#### 4. It Shows How to Restrain the Lust of the Senses

The doctrine of the samples teaches us how to raise our minds to God, not dallying in the enjoyment of creatures. By regarding all creatures as samples of God, and God Himself our true Good and End, we are taught and encouraged to put aside our craving for mere sensual enjoyment in creatures. In this way we moderate and control the sensual taste for creatures, while developing a taste for the goods of the supernatural world. So also when a man cultivates a taste for literary classics, like the poetry of Shakespeare, he loses all relish for the crudities of popular adventure stories.

Joy in spiritual things is opposed to delight in the pleasure of the body: *For the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other. . . .* (Gal. 5, 17) Accordingly St. Thomas remarks that "the more our minds are raised to the contemplation of spiritual things, the more are they withdrawn from things of sense." (*Contra Gentiles*, III, 47)

St. Gregory the Great writes on this matter as follows:

"Almighty God, when He is now known through desire and intellect, dries up in us every fleshly pleasure; and whereas aforetime we seemed to be both seeking God and cleaving to the world, after the perception of the sweetness of God, the love of the world grows feeble in us, and the love of God alone waxes strong; and while there increases in us the strength of inmost love, without doubt the strength of the flesh is weakened.

"The sweetness of contemplation is worthy of love exceedingly, for it carries away the soul above itself, it opens out things heavenly, and shows that things earthly are to be despised; it reveals things spiritual to the eye of the mind, and hides things bodily." <sup>(1)</sup>

#### 5. It Develops the Life of Contemplation

As the doctrine of Samples, by teaching us not to seek enjoyment in creatures, restrains the lust of the senses, so, on the other hand, it develops the life of contemplation by schooling our mind to make a swift ascent from the limited goodness found in creatures to the infinite goodness of God. In this way the attractiveness of creatures,

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<sup>(1)</sup> St. Gregory the Great, quoted by Abbot Butler, *Western Mysticism*, 1st ed., N.Y., Dutton, 1924, p. 94.



instead of being a snare to our human affections, and a hindrance to an interior life of prayer becomes a means of cultivating such a life. Every excellence found in creation becomes an opportunity to raise our thoughts to God.

Even distractions may thus be made to serve the life of prayer. For distractions come from a preoccupation with earthly goods and pleasures, which intrude their attractiveness on our attention while we are trying to raise our minds to God. Instead of fighting these distractions head-on, so to speak, which is difficult, since we have a natural appetite for the good things that cause the distractions—it is more useful to recognize the attractiveness of the creatures that distract us and then use them as a ladder to God. We may say, for example, "If this sample is so attractive, what must be the beauty of God!" Thus, gradually, all the senses, instead of being sources of distraction and affections for creatures, hence imperfections, become so many transmitters of knowledge concerning the divine attributes.

In this manner we may prevent voluntary distractions. Because of the weakness and limitation of the human mind, it is impossible to rid ourselves entirely of involuntary distractions. Yet even involuntary distractions can be considerably thinned out if we purify our hearts of attachments for the pleasures and goods that cause our distractions. Accordingly, progress in prayer depends largely on the mortification of our affections; and as we have seen in the previous section, the doctrine of samples helps here too.

Obviously, while we may thus use the goodness of creatures to develop the life of contemplation, we must be careful also not to allow our affections to be entangled with these creatures. St. John of the Cross gives two rules for so using them without injury to the spirit. Here are the rules:

a. We may indulge in the use of creatures in order to love God, if their attractiveness raises us *at once* to the enjoyment of God without causing us to pause in the enjoyment of the creatures for themselves. "Until a man has succeeded in so habituating his senses to the purgation of the joys of sense that from his first motion he is gaining the benefit aforementioned of directing all his powers to God, he must needs deny himself joy and pleasure with respect to these powers, so that he may withdraw his soul from the life of sense." (*Ascent* III, 26, 7)

b. There are two means of union with God: the remote means, and the proximate and proportionate means. A remote means may be any creature, especially religious objects, and would include religious stories and movies. The only proximate and proportionate means of union with God in this world is faith. (*Ascent* II, 9, 2) In the life of a Christian, as he advances in the spiritual life, there should be a tendency to give up progressively the remote means of union and to devote himself more and more diligently to the one proximate and proportionate means until he lives wholly on the supernatural plane

guided by faith alone. Then he may use, but will not be inclined to use the remote means unless these are necessary or useful for his spiritual welfare, or perhaps for the welfare of others with whose training he is charged.

An adult who would persist in dressing as a child, or in holding on to the pastimes of a child, playing with marbles or dolls, would be ridiculous. Not less ridiculous in the spiritual order are those who should be approaching spiritual maturity and yet persist in occupying themselves with the trinkets of the religiously backward or immature. *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought as a child, I understood as a child. But when I became a man, I put away the things of a child.* (I Cor. 13) As we grow spiritually, we should more and more live by the theological virtues; the remote means are for children. St. Paul includes among "the things of a child," even such high gifts as the charismata—the gift of languages, of prophecy, of curing, and the like; what the perfect Christian should live by is faith, hope, and charity.

These rules will answer the question as to how far we may profitably use literature, art, music, religious novels and movies to develop the spiritual life.

## 6. It Teaches How to Deal With Temptation

The love of God involves an act of preference by which we choose God over creatures. When we are tempted, a creature, with all its attractiveness and power to give pleasure, is placed before us, providing an opportunity to choose between Creator and creature. When we put aside the forbidden pleasure, we are making a choice of God over creatures. When we give in to temptation, we choose a creature over God; and this is why we sin. Thus, in each temptation God, as it were, says to us, "Which do you prefer—Me or this sample?" By choosing God over the sample one then makes a precious act of love. Lovers are fond of declaring their love for each other; if we really love God, we will likewise delight in declaring our love for Him by acts of preference, not in words alone but by a difficult act of choice. As lovers also rejoice to hear the repeated protestations of love from their beloved, so God desires to see our repeated proofs of love: this is why He permits temptations to occur over and over; and by understanding this, the soul can grow strong and fervent in love by overcoming temptation.

Thus, when one is tempted against faith, God says, "Which do you prefer—your own puny reason or My infinite Wisdom, of which your reason is but a sample?" When one is tempted to anger by having his will contradicted, God is saying, "Which do you prefer—your own selfish little will, or My divine will, all-wise and all-good, which is manifested in the daily trials of life?"

Temptations against purity, being particularly attractive, provide a specially good opportunity to show one's love for God over creatures. Marital union is indeed the supreme sample of the soul's union with

God; in earlier chapters we have seen how we may learn the love of God by studying the relationship between spouses. A temptation against purity, therefore, is an opportunity to choose God over this sample, that is, over conjugal union when this is separated from the divinely fixed conditions in which it may be legitimately enjoyed.

Clearly, then, temptations against purity are not to be considered inherently shameful: they do not reflect any congenital weakness on the part of the one so tempted. Such temptations spring from nature itself and, if they are vehement, simply indicate a strong power of affection, a talent for which one should thank God as he would be thankful for a forceful mind; and then strive to give this power of affection to God instead of squandering it on creatures, especially on forbidden creature-pleasures.

## 7. It Explains the Failure of Spiritual Effort

So much time, money, and effort are expended on religious education; and the results, as all admit, are not proportionate to the effort. So much energy is put into various apostolic works by a great variety of Catholic organizations; and yet the world becomes more and more pagan rather than more and more Christian. Why is this? Because religious education and apostolic effort are too often based on a false assumption, a fact which is clearly indicated by the doctrine of samples.

Briefly, the reason for the fruitlessness of our labors is simply a lack of ardor and energy in our devotion, a blight that keeps the life of charity from exercising, growing, expanding. And this blight results from the false rule which tells Christians to be satisfied with avoiding mortal sin, while freely allowing them to give their affections to the pleasures of the world. Hence, since, as St. Thomas says, "the more the human heart gives itself to one object, the more does it withdraw itself from others," the love of created goods, cultivated and practiced on principle, prevents the growth of charity, prevents the Christian life from expressing itself with fervor and devotion and eagerness. And this comes about from the false use of creatures, from ignorance of the doctrine of samples.

The human will is a blind faculty and stretches forth to love what the mind presents to it as good and lovable. If the mind is filled with earthly goods, and preoccupied with their attractiveness, then the will spontaneously gives itself to the love of these goods, and withdraws itself from the love of God. To love God, the mind must be filled with God; then, possessed by the knowledge of God, the will runs forth to embrace His divine goodness. But how is this to be accomplished—how is the mind to be filled with God—in view of the fact that we cannot see God, that we live surrounded by created goods? Only by the knowledge and conviction that these created goods, instead of being intended to attract our desires and affections to themselves, are samples of the divine perfections, and are therefore intended to teach us of God, Whose infinite goodness, then, and not merely the participated goodness of creatures, is to be loved by our wills.

But religion teachers do not usually teach their pupils this. They teach rather that it is necessary only to avoid sin, while permitting and even encouraging a worldly love of creatures. Such teachers and such teaching keep the life of charity enfeebled while they prevent the growth of that zeal and devotion which issue from charity. And it comes from the failure of teachers to impart the rudimentary truth that creatures are not to be loved for themselves but are samples of God's perfections.

As for Catholic organizations, they quite frequently make a frank appeal to worldliness—that is, to the love of sports, dancing, eating and drinking, and other creature pleasures—in order to enlist and interest members. And then it is wondered why these organizations lack vitality and produce nothing for Christ! It cannot be repeated too often that the love of things earthly is opposed to the love of things heavenly, and the more the heart gives itself to the former, the less it has for the latter. Catholic organizations that use worldliness as a "bait" nullify from the start their spiritual effectiveness. And, once again, it all comes from ignorance of the fact that the goods of earth are not the proper objects of our affections but rather only samples of that Object, which is God.

## THIRD PRINCIPLE

### The Folly of the Cross



# The Folly of the Cross

## 1. The Doctrine and Law of the Cross

At the very heart of Christianity stands the Cross, together with the doctrine which the Cross implies and symbolizes. For the crucifixion is not merely a historical event, important but long since over, and therefore without immediate personal significance to us. In addition to the fact that Christ was crucified for us, we are also in a sense to be crucified with Him. *With Christ I am nailed to the Cross.* (Gal. 2, 19) Indeed, it is through being crucified with Christ that we are to gain the salvation won for us by Christ's crucifixion: *always bearing about in our body the dying of Jesus, so that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh.* (2 Cor. 4, 10)

The doctrine and law of the Cross and their application to all are without doubt stated in Our Lord's own words, *If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.* (Luke 9) This was spoken, it is interesting to observe, before Jesus was Himself crucified. Thus, even before His own Passion He could find no more direct or forceful way of describing the practical demands of His new religion than by calling up the picture of the cross with all the privation, pain, and humiliation that it signifies and entails.

The doctrine of the Cross may be summarized in two propositions:

First, in order to possess the goods of the supernatural order we must renounce, at least interiorly, the goods of the natural order: we must die to nature. This means that supernatural life arises from the destruction and death of the natural man, just as in olden times it was thought that from the ashes of an old phoenix a new bird would arise. Of course this death to nature does not mean that we may in any way injure or suppress nature or its proper activities; these are good, we have seen (Part I, Chapter III), and in harmony with our supernatural destiny. The death and destruction we speak of here is accomplished in the moral and spiritual order—it is a death to natural desires, natural affections for creatures, natural attachments, natural motives and a merely natural happiness in the goods of this world.

Secondly, this death to the natural man does not follow in the first place from the fact of sin. It is independent of sin and would be necessary even though there were no sin. It follows, in the first place, from man's elevation to the supernatural order. It is because we are raised to the supernatural order that we must *die*, by detachment, to the goods of the natural order; it is because we have been re-created in grace that we must renounce affection for creatures and strive rather to

love God with our whole hearts; it is, first of all, because we are children of God that we must cease acting as children of this earth; it is primarily because, as divinized beings, we are to love God with all our hearts that we must cease to derive the motives of our actions from the love of creatures.

To these two basic propositions we may add a corollary: In proportion as we die to nature will we possess supernatural life. What vitality and energy we have in the supernatural world will depend on how far we die to nature and its desires, affections, and motives. If one does not die at least to the moral disorders to which our nature is prone, then the life of grace cannot exist in him at all. If anyone limits himself to the avoidance of such disorder, leaving the irrepressible vitality of his appetites to go otherwise without restraint, then the life of grace will at best eke out a meager and precarious existence in his soul. Such a one will be constantly in danger of sin and even, as we have seen, likely to fall into sin. But more than this (and what is to the point at present) his supernatural life will not have freedom to expand, act, grow, increase to perfection. Only to the extent that one dies to nature—to natural desires, affections and motives—will such development be possible.

### Why "the Folly of the Cross"?

The practice of the doctrine of the cross, through detachment from the goods of the world, seems foolish to the natural man, who desires to have the goods and pleasures proper to himself. Accordingly, *the sensual man does not perceive the things that are of the Spirit of God, for it is foolishness to him. . . .* (I Cor. 2, 14) That is why, following St Paul, it is correct to call this doctrine *The Folly of the Cross*. *We for our part preach a crucified Christ—to the Jews indeed a stumbling block and to the Gentiles foolishness. . . .* (I Cor. 1, 24)

Therefore, if we wish to follow *the mind of Christ* rather than *the wisdom of the world* (which is death) we must become *fools for Christ*. (I Cor. 4, 10) *For my thoughts are not your thoughts*, says Eternal Wisdom through Isaias (Chap. 55, 8) *nor your ways my ways. Therefore, let no one deceive himself. If any one of you thinks himself wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may come to be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.* (I Cor. 3, 18)

### 2. 'The Reason For the Folly of the Cross

Why is it that we must die to the natural man in order to live in the world of grace? What is the reason for this grim necessity? It follows from the very fact that we have been elevated to grace and destined to supernatural glory. From our elevation to the supernatural order there follows the need to renounce, at least interiorly by universal detachment, the goods of the natural order. For the pursuit of supernatural good involves, on its reverse or under side, a renunciation of merely natural goods: just as flying above the earth means leaving

the earth. And this renunciation is difficult, so difficult as to be a kind of death. Indeed, the painfulness of death consists precisely in our separation from all that we love; by detachment or interior renunciation we anticipate this final separation in a spiritual or "mystical" death: mortification. Accordingly, we will grow and reach maturity in the life of grace in the measure that we die to the desires and affections of nature for earthly goods.

Speaking generally, it is a universal, a truly cosmic law that life can rise only from death and that, conversely, there must be death before there can be new life. It is only in dying that plants spread their seed broadcast; it is only in dying that seeds germinate; it is only in dying and decaying that old plants provide food and substance to the new shoots; so that in truth life arises from death. There would be no spring with its new life had there not been an autumn and winter with their decay and death.

This cosmic law was stated by the ancients in axiomatic form as follows: The corruption of one thing is the generation of some new thing, *corruptio unius est generatio alterius*. The whole world of physical nature, as anyone can observe if he will look about, is dominated by this principle. The poet Francis Thompson states it thus:

"I do hear  
From the revolving year  
A voice which cries:  
'All dies;  
Lo, how all dies! O seer,  
And all things too arise;  
All dies, and all is born;  
But each resurgent morn, behold, more near the  
Perfect Morn.'"

Now our elevation to the supernatural plane by means of grace places us under this cosmic law even in our spiritual lives. For the new life of grace requires—if it is to continue and to mature in us—that we die to the life of mere nature. In St. Paul's words, to become a new man, we must *put off the old man*.

Jesus Himself indicates that this universal law applies to our spiritual lives when He gives us the law of the cross. For the law of the cross is only the law of life-from-death applied to the spiritual order. *If any man wishes to be My disciple, let him deny himself and follow Me*. We are to deny, not only sin, but ourselves—our natural selves, which are good. In a word, we are to imitate Jesus, whose mortification consisted, not in renouncing disordered inclinations, since He had no disordered inclinations, but rather in renouncing the satisfactions of His immaculate human nature and in the sufferings of His unblemished human faculties. And He placed us under the same necessity: *He who loves his life, loses it; and he who hates his life in this world keeps it unto life everlasting*. (John 12, 25)

Among spiritual writers, St. John of the Cross, the Doctor of the Church who is most clear and insistent on the need for universal de-



tachment as a condition for spiritual progress, derives his teaching on the matter from the universal law of life-from-death: "Wherefore, he says, "as in natural generation no form can be introduced unless the preceding, contrary form is first expelled from the subject, which form, while present, is an impediment to the other by reason of the contrariety which the two have between each other; even so, for as long as the soul is subjected to the sensual spirit, the spirit which is pure and spiritual cannot enter it." (*Ascent* I, 6) Thus the "form" of grace requires, if it is to live and prosper in our souls, that we die to the "form" of nature: the "old man" must die that the new man may live and thrive. This is why, in order to live Christian lives, we must die to our desires and attachments for the goods of the natural world, as also to the natural motives that issue from these attachments.

### 3. Sin and the Folly of the Cross

Mark well: we have described the basis for the duty of universal detachment, and therefore the basis of self-denial, without speaking of *sin*. We have shown that the deepest foundation for detachment and self-denial is *not* sin. In fact, we have established the necessity, the urgency, and the universality of these duties without, so far, even mentioning sin.

Many writers derive the duties of mortification, poverty of spirit, and self-denial chiefly or even exclusively from *sin*. In this way they misconceive and misrepresent the whole Christian life; they dislocate and distort Christian spirituality. With such a misconception, they can never understand the urgency and universality of detachment. They cannot grasp or even admit that self-denial is absolutely coextensive with the Christian life—that it is in fact the necessary condition for the continuance and growth of that life. They cannot understand that Christians should deny themselves, not only in regard to sin and the disorders that lead to sin, but also in all affections for the goods and pleasures of the world. Since they see self-denial as a duty imposed by sin, they hold that it applies only to sin or the disorders that lead to sin; they urge no further mortification. Further, since hatred of sin is not the only element in the Christian life, or even the chief one, these teachers are prone to regard self-denial as an occasional or merely seasonal practice for the Christian, and they are prevented altogether from seeing that it is in truth the underside of love, demanded by divine charity itself, and therefore fully coextensive with this love.

Sin does not impose and did not originate the duty of living a supernatural life. God Himself, apart from sin, created man and raised Him to the plane of grace. He thereby placed upon man—again, apart from sin and before sin existed—the duty of living supernaturally. And the supernatural life itself demands, not only that we rise above sin, but that we rise above the love and the pursuit of the goods of nature. Sin was an accident, not part of God's plan: it was man's sorry contribution to the universe. But God planned man's supernatural destiny apart from sin. Even had there been no sin (which, certainly,

God did not want) God planned to give to men—and did give them—sanctifying grace with its accompanying supernatural duties and destiny.

A group of people would never plan to take a ride in order to have an accident; but they would plan to go in order to enjoy, say, a picnic. But if they were to go picnicking, and have an accident on the road, then they would take care of necessary repairs and continue on their way. So neither did God plan on sin: His plans for man's happiness were formed independently of sin. But man did sin and God foresaw that he would; and therefore, in His plans, He also made provision for the reparation of sin in order that men might not be hindered from enjoying the glorious destiny originally desired for them.

So sin must be repaired; and all of us must be freed from sin in order to rise to the supernatural world and follow our calling as God's children. But it does not follow from this that the need of dying to the natural love for the goods of nature follows from sin. This duty follows already from our supernatural destiny which is anterior to sin. What sin does is to provide an *additional* reason for self-denial; it gives a motive for the special virtue of penance, which is now made necessary by sin. Furthermore, the effects of original sin, which wounded our nature, and the bad habits and inclinations engendered by actual sin make detachment and self-denial more difficult now than they would otherwise have been. But neither original nor actual sin are the primary cause of duties which would have followed, in any event, from the very life of grace. Indeed, had men been obedient and made the renunciation required of them from the beginning by the new life of grace, it would not now be necessary for them to do penance for sin; for penance in this sense is the attempt to reverse and undo the effects of their first disobedience and their failure to live as God desired.

#### 4. Examples of the Folly of the Cross

The best way to show that the duties of detachment and self-denial follow, not in the first place from sin, but rather from man's elevation to the supernatural life, is by means of concrete instances.

The first instance is that of the angels. God created them and raised them to the supernatural order, as He was to do afterwards with man. Moreover, God gave them freedom of will and a period (although but an instant) of probation. They were to be tried and, according to the issue of their trial, they would be rewarded or punished. We do not know the nature of the trial. There is an old belief that they were given a prevision of the Incarnation and told to adore Jesus Christ. In any event they were not asked simply to abandon any sinful or disordered tendencies; there was no sin or disorder in them. They were expected to give up their own angelic (and very perfect) judgment to practice faith in God's word; they were expected to give up their own angelic wills to conform entirely to the divine will. If it is true that they were granted a vision of Jesus, then, with all their keen intelligence, it would have seemed a disorder for them as purely spiritual beings to

adore One Who was apparently a mere man: only faith in God's word would have lifted them beyond the limitations of their high but finite intelligences. Thus, independently of sin and disorder, the angels were required by God to renounce the two greatest goods of the natural (angelic) order, the judgment of their intelligences and the inclination of their wills. The elevation to grace, which they then enjoyed, their possession of faith and charity, required of them this supreme sacrifice and self-denial.

A second instance is found in the history of Adam and Eve. Our First Parents were raised to the supernatural order from the beginning of their lives. From the beginning, therefore, they were expected to live supernatural lives that they might merit a supernatural reward. They, too, were tried; and they were tried by being submitted to the law of the Folly of the Cross. They were told not to eat of the fruit of one tree, but they were given no human explanation. It was the very sort of a command that would tease their reasons. They were expected to renounce mere reason for a life of supernatural faith and to renounce their human wills to do the will of God. Thus, independently of sin, and before sin had come into the human world, they were expected to deny themselves: they were told to renounce the supreme goods of the human order—their reason and will; it was already demanded, therefore, that they be detached from the highest goods of the natural order. And that they failed (and that some of the angels failed also) shows how difficult was their self-denial even apart from the disorders which are now in us as a result of original sin.

Certainly, then, it is clear that the duty of detachment and self-denial—the sacrificial element in Christianity—does not follow from sin. Rather, sin itself, instead of being first, *follows* from man's failure to practice the self-denial that was necessary by reason of his original elevation to the supernatural order. Of course, as already noted, sin added another motive for self-denial and brought a new kind of self-denial into existence—that special kind which is specifically directed to reversing the disorder of sin and is called penance in the narrow sense.

The Blessed Virgin Mary also provides an example of the law of the Cross. There was no sin or disorder in her; in virtue of her Immaculate Conception she was wholly exempt from these. Yet she lived a detached, self-denying, mortified life. What was she detached from? From the pleasures and satisfactions of even her immaculate human nature; that is, from all the goods of the natural world. The self she denied was a self without blemish; the nature she mortified was a nature without stain or disorder. We then do not sufficiently imitate her when we avoid sin; we imitate her only when we also renounce the goods of the earth and when we derive our motives not from the love of creatures but from the love of God.

The final and supreme example is that of Jesus Christ Himself. Although His humanity was spotless, Jesus also submitted to the law of the Cross. His mortification consisted, not in the renunciation of

sin or disordered inclinations—to think so would be a blasphemy—but in renouncing even the legitimate satisfactions of His human powers. If we renounce only sin and disorder, we do not yet imitate Jesus. To imitate Jesus we must live divinized lives, refusing to allow our human nature anything apart from grace and the will of the Father.

## 5. Why We Must Die to the Natural

It may still be asked, "Why does grace demand that we die to natural attachments and motives? What is behind this grim law of life-from-death. The three following reasons may be assigned:

*The Glory of God demands it.* God's final purpose in creation and re-creation, as we have seen, is to manifest His glory. And this glory demands that nothing enter into Him, that is, into the life of the Trinity, unless remade by Him.

When we know an object, that object is, in a sense, in our minds. When we know a tree, for example, the tree enters our minds. But the tree does not enter our minds materially, in its trunk, roots, and branches; materially, it remains where it is, in the yard. It enters the mind spiritually, that is, according to the spiritual nature of the mind. The Scholastics put this truth as an axiom: "When one thing is received into another, it is received according to the manner of the one receiving it." A material object is spiritualized when it enters our minds. Similarly, human beings must be divinized to enter into the Trinity. Thus the glory of God demands that men, to enter the Trinity, must be elevated, transformed, divinized.

*The Sanctity of God demands it.* Sanctity, or Holiness, is the love of good; and sanctity belongs, above all, to God; it is an attribute of God, whose love for good is boundless. The sanctity of men is but a reflection of this divine sanctity, as the radiance of a crystal is but a reflection of the brightness of the sun.

In respect to man, God's holiness is supernatural; thus, to enter heaven, man must be supernaturalized, divinized, penetrated through and through with the radiance of the divine holiness. Such a transformation means an abandonment of the quest for merely human goods, a renunciation of the love and attachment for such goods, an entire devotion to the love of supernatural good, of God: this is a death to nature.

The principle of grace is implanted in the soul when grace is infused into it: grace is the principle of holiness. As grace, therefore, like a living seed, grows and spreads and takes possession of the soul, so does holiness increase—and so does the death to natural goods steadily advance. And without such holiness *no one will see God.* (Heb. 12, 14)

*The Love of God demands it.* Love, the true love of friendship, demands equality. This is why there is no love of friendship, but a mere love of benevolence, between man and beast. Between parent and child, however, as also between spouses, there may be a love of friendship because they are equals.

Similarly, if we are really to share the life and love of the Trinity, we must become as gods, we must be divinized, we must love as divine beings. This is why God infuses divine life into us and gives us, in charity, the power to love God as divine beings, as sons and spouses. As this charity develops by its own inner life, it causes us to turn to God more and more exclusively, at the same time turning away from all that is not God. That is, it causes us to withdraw our affections from all the goods of the natural order: *for we are dead and our life is hid with Christ in God.* (Col. 3, 3)

Hence the life of grace causes in us a death to nature; the growth of the *new man* to the maturity of Christian love and holiness brings about the death of the *old man*: *Dying and behold we live!* (II Cor. 6, 9)

# The Folly of the Cross

## *Application*

In the last chapter we have described the law of the cross in a general way, illustrating what has been said by a few passages from Sacred Scriptures. Now we will consider the two supreme statements of this spiritual law of life-from-death as given by Jesus Himself. And Our Lord's teaching in the matter will show us how we may effectively reduce the doctrine to practice.

### The Vine and the Branches

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-dresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he will take away; and every branch that bears fruit He will cleanse, that it may bear more fruit. (John 15, 1-2)*

Jesus here, from the fullness of His knowledge, points out a striking and concrete instance of the law of life-from-death in the order of nature; and at the same time He applies it to man's spiritual life as the law of the cross.

A farmer when he goes through his vineyard or orchard cuts off the dead branches of his vines or trees as useless. This is sensible and to be expected. But his behavior when he sees living and fruitful branches is not so easily explained, at least by the inexperienced. For he cuts off the living branches also! Why? To make them more fruitful. This is the secret of pruning, which is a practical application of the law of life-from-death. The dead branches, since they are worthless, are simply cut off and destroyed. The living and fruitful branches are cut back that they may bring forth more fruit. There is no explanation of this strange fact except the law of life; and Jesus cites it as an illustration of the great law of supernatural life which He wishes to teach us.

God is the vine-dresser, we are the vines: united to Jesus, we have a share in the divine life through Him. If this life produces no fruit, that is, no good works, God will punish us by afflictions. Yet if we produce good works, we will still not be exempt from trials and sorrows: God will apply the principle of pruning to us: He will prune us by trials and afflictions, not to destroy or punish us, but that we may bear more fruit. Thus the sufferings of life serve a double purpose: they are a punishment for the wicked and a pruning, a purification for the good.

Once, when the family and neighbors of St. John Bosco lost all their vineyards through bad weather, the simple peasant mother of the Saint, explaining the catastrophe to her son, stated the divine law

clearly and sufficiently: "God has given us these beautiful grapes, John, and now He has taken them away. This is a punishment for the wicked and a purification of the good."

When evil men are afflicted, no one is surprised at this: they deserve punishment. In fact, good men, as King David often complains in the Psalms, are likely to think that the evil prosper too much, that they are not afflicted enough! On the other hand, good men are often confused and disturbed when *they* suffer. What is the reason for this? "What have we done to deserve this?" they ask. "We are friends of God and surely God should treat His friends more considerately!" Alas, they are ignorant of the principle of pruning, they do not know that life comes from death, they do not accept the law of the cross. If they did, they would realize that God has another purpose in sending afflictions besides punishing sinners. He uses these afflictions also as a pruning-knife to make the holiness of the just more fruitful, to make them grow in faith and perseverance, in humility and patience, in courage and meekness and love.

Note, too, that the principle of pruning would seem foolish to one unfamiliar with nature; we take this strange fact for granted only because familiarity has dulled the freshness of our perceptions. But we would see its strangeness were the farmer to explain his actions by saying, "I am cutting this tree lower to make it grow higher!" Or, "I am cutting the fruit and even the branches from this tree to get more fruit!" One might logically think: the more branches, the more fruit—nurse every branch carefully. But the farmer knows from experience that this is not so. Thus, in truth, the law of the cross, of life-from-death, of gaining through giving, of riches through renunciation,—this law ever appears as folly.

### The Example of the Seed

*Amen, amen I say to you, unless the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone. But if it die, it brings forth much fruit.* (John 12, 24)

Did you ever reflect that when you plant a seed in the ground, it dies? Yes, under the action of sun and soil and moisture, it corrupts and dies. But lo, as the process of decay goes on, a new life appears. The seed dies, but a new plant comes into being. Jesus, Master of all the secrets of nature as of grace, noted this; and He used it to illustrate and explain the generation and growth of supernatural life; He pointed out this instance of the law of life-from-death, so manifest in nature, and once again applied it to the order of grace. Thus, supernatural and divine life arises and grows as we die to the mere life of nature.

Jesus is speaking on the eve of His passion, which He is thus explaining beforehand. *He* is the grain of wheat, by whose death redemption and eternal life will come to men: were He not to die, then He would "remain alone," i.e., men would not be able to share in His divine life, His glory, His joy.

The Church, in the Missal, applies this text also to the death of martyrs, to show the spiritual fruitfulness of their death. "The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians." But the law applies not only to martyrs, but to all Christians. It applies, therefore, not only to the violent, dramatic, heroic surrender of life in martyrdom; it applies also to all those renunciations, to all those daily foreshadowings of the separation of death, to all those daily deaths, which are implied and demanded by the supernatural life. By such deaths to our natural affections, we gain eternal life. Jesus Himself gives this law such universal application when He says, immediately afterwards, *He who loves his life, loses it; and he who hates his life in this world, keeps it unto life everlasting.* (John 12, 25) And St. Paul applying this summarizes his own life, and the life of every true Christian, when he says, *I die daily.* (I Cor. 15, 31)

Consider a farmer with his grains of wheat. He can do one of two things with them. On the one hand, he can keep them on a shelf or perhaps have his wife make cookies with them. On the other hand, he can plant them. If he eats the wheat (or the cookies) he enjoys a momentary pleasure; or if he simply keeps the wheat, he gets the satisfaction of showing his produce to visitors. But he gets no crop from it. If, however, he plants the wheat, and only if he plants it, he will get a crop; otherwise it will *remain alone*. Yet, to reason alone, without experience, it would seem foolish to plant the wheat; the farmer seems to be throwing the seed away when he puts it in the ground to corrupt. But the farmer knows that he will get rich if he practices enough such foolishness!

Human reason apart from experience, that is, by mere logic, would never guess that life comes from death. Men learned this by trial and error; and if those scientists are right who trace out the origins of human history, it took men a very long time to learn this secret of nature. If you explained to a person unfamiliar with agriculture—say a visitor from Mars—that the farmer is throwing the seed away because he wants it, and even wants more of it, the stranger would doubtlessly think you mad. Reason tells us to keep what we have, accumulate it and enjoy it. But the farmer knows better! He practices the folly of the cross on the natural level.

Moreover, the farmer sows good seed, not diseased or rotten seed. Only good seed will produce a large and healthy crop. And he sows the seed cheerfully, whistling while he works. And this despite the fact that he is mortifying himself in sacrificing all the pastries his wife could bake for him from this wheat. But he makes the sacrifice easily and gaily—because he hopes to get a crop and become rich. Finally, the farmer is really prodigal in throwing away and burying this beautiful wheat: he is not sparing or thrifty here. He keeps back no more than is necessary for his immediate use. He knows that, *he who sows sparingly shall reap sparingly.* (Cor. 9, 6) And he wants a great crop!

Now we see what we are to do with the good things of the world! If we reach for them greedily to enjoy them at once, we are like the



farmer who has all his wheat made into cookies! Better to forego a momentary pleasure and plant a crop for eternity. Thus all the goods of earth are as "seeds" which may be either enjoyed at once or planted for eternity by renouncing an immediate pleasure. This is to accept and practice the *foolishness of the cross*: it is to act contrary to the inclination of mere human wisdom which bids us to "eat, drink, and make good cheer"; it is to *sow*, by renunciation, the enjoyments of this life in order to *receive a hundredfold and possess life everlasting*.

As the farmer sows his seed cheerfully because of his hope for a great crop, so ought we not to fret and complain over the sacrifice of earthly pleasures but rather give them up readily and gaily for the joyous anticipation of a heavenly harvest. This is true Christian joy: to make sacrifices joyfully; and not as some would have it, to be exempt from sacrifice and "eat, drink, and make merry" like the pagans—or like the farmer who eats all his seed.

And we should sow generously, not sparingly, realizing, again like the farmer, that he who sows sparingly will reap sparingly and, to reap plentifully, we must sow generously. The more of this earth's pleasures that we sow, the greater will be our harvest of heavenly delights.

Finally, we must learn from the farmer's willingness to sow *good* seed. We must sow the *good* things of the earth, *lawful* pleasures, *blameless* joys. If we sow only sin and evil, we are like the farmer who sows only rotten seed. Rather should we sow our attachments even to good things—otherwise how can we expect to get a good crop? Jesus' parable of the seed is the most cogent answer to those who would reduce the practice of Christianity to an avoidance of sin, satisfied with the renunciation of forbidden and evil pleasures. If no more than avoidance of sin is required, how can this be compared aptly to the sowing of *good* wheat? Above all, how can it be compared to Jesus dying in His own blameless humanity?

### What to Sow

In general, as Our Lord says, we should sow our "life" on earth—if not by bloody martyrdom at any rate be the daily sacrifices which, if generously and perseveringly made, add up to a surrender of our whole lives to God. We may "sow" any of the goods and pleasures of the world. The creatures are seeds which, when sown, will grow into a crop of eternal life. Or, since creatures are samples or likenesses of the joys in heaven, by sowing them we assure ourselves of a crop of heavenly joys. However, it will be especially profitable to sow the following creatures.

*Sow Money.* By sowing money we reap the treasures of heaven. In this way, too, we *make unto ourselves friends of the mammon of iniquity*—that is we make earthly money serve our eternal interests, that we may afterwards be *received into everlasting dwellings*. This is why you should give generously to the Church and to charitable causes. By such generosity you throw money away or waste it, as the world reckons; that is, you give up what it might gain for you; and in this

way you are "dying" to this creature-good. Since money is the most prized of the goods of the earth, you should be the more careful to sow it.

If you support the Church only by eating cake at a bazaar; or if you give to charity to gain publicity—that is, if you demand an immediate return for your money—you are like the impatient farmer who gobbles up his wheat at once in cookies and makes no provision for the future. A little patience and foresight—and faith!—will gain a great crop for you.

Not that it is necessary to wait until eternity for returns on our sowing! God promises a hundredfold even on earth. Accordingly, when you need money or other material necessities, the way to get them is to sow them! Suppose that an institution (or an individual) needs money; it should "sow" money! That is, it should give to the poor, and it will reap what it needs. This is foolishness according to natural reason, but it is the wisdom of God. Even poverty should not prevent one from sowing money: if one needs money, the way to get it (according to the plan of God) is to sow it.

The sowing of money is so valuable because in sowing it we sow also the pleasures and comforts and luxuries it could obtain for us.

*Sow time.* Almost as precious as money, is time. Indeed, there is a saying that "time is money." And people are continually complaining of how little time they have for all the things they have to do, especially for works of devotion. Nevertheless, faith teaches us that we should sow this valuable commodity: to gain eternity, we must sow time.

We may sow time by "wasting" it or throwing it away (as the world judges) on God. This may be done by giving time to the service of the poor; or by giving our time directly to God in attendance at Mass and other devotions, in spiritual reading, and in prayer. If we have a real desire for eternal life, this is how we must gain it, no matter how busy we may be.

Really, the fact that one is very busy is an added reason for sowing time. For in virtue of Our Lord's promise of the hundredfold in this life, the way to gain even time is to sow time!

If circumstances do not permit attendance at daily Mass, they can never prevent giving some time to spiritual reading or mental prayer. Especially to be recommended is the practice of devoting some time each day, even up to an hour each day, to mental prayer. Mental prayer is silent communing with God, meditation on the things of God. *Could you not then watch one hour with Me?* (Matt. 26, 40)

That we may be willing to sow time in prayer, it is necessary to have a clear idea of the supernatural character of the Christian life. We must be convinced that our human efforts, no matter what natural excellence they may have, are in themselves simply worthless for obtaining eternal life, whether for ourselves or for others. Such a conviction will humble us and cause us to throw all our reliance on God;

and it will show us the need of sowing time in prayer, by which we gain divine assistance.

*Sow Judgment.* More difficult to sow than money or time—and more necessary, too—are the interior goods of judgment and will. Our judgment and wills are the last citadels of the pagan, the goods to which we are most attached and which we are most reluctant to renounce. Yet precisely because of this greater attachment, it is the more necessary to sow them.

We sow our judgment when we do not seek to impose our judgment on others and when we give in easily to their judgment. Of course it is sometimes necessary to defend truth and principle, sometimes necessary for those in authority or with responsibilities of office to impose their ideas on their subjects. But outside of such necessary cases there is much opportunity for all to give up their personal judgments (which are often but prejudices) in matters of little concern; there are many occasions for compromising on non-essentials, for avoiding altercations over trivialities, for giving in to others in indifferent matters or differences that involve no real moral principle but only a clash of judgment.

We may also sow our judgment by patiently bearing contradiction, and best of all, by willingly giving up our own judgment of affairs when our superiors give us a command.

By sowing our own judgment we will reap divine wisdom both in this world and in the next.

*Sow the will.* Hardest of all to sacrifice, harder than giving up one's judgment, is the renunciation of our own will; for men cling obstinately to their own wills even after they have lost their judgment or have been shown that their own judgment is false. We sow our wills by abandoning self-will, by renouncing the determination to follow our own inclinations and desires at all costs.

To sow our wills we must be ready to bear calmly contradiction from others; we should readily give up our own way of doing things when no real moral issue is involved, i.e., in all good or indifferent matters. Above all, we should give up our own wills by obedience to superiors.

In general, we should be ready to act contrary to our natural bent. *Agere contra*—Go against natural inclination—is a motto given to us by great spiritual guides.

And, like the farmer who sows his wheat, we should whistle as we work!

*Mark this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Let each one give according as he has determined in his heart, not grudgingly or from compulsion, for 'God loves a cheerful giver.'* (II Cor. 9, 6-7)

## Summary and Conclusion

Let us imagine a family gathered in council—father, mother, and elder brothers—lovingly planning for the future of a younger member. The father envisions for his offspring a career, as a scholar or doctor, we will suppose; the elder brother promises the financial help necessary to realize this ambition; the mother contributes her own wise and loving counsels to safeguard and advance the interests of her child. Such a scene may serve to illustrate the loving designs of the Blessed Trinity formed from eternity for our spiritual welfare. They desire for us a career in the Trinity itself, nothing less—a destiny in which we shall share in the boundless, shadowless, endless bliss and immeasurable love of the Three Divine Persons. Now to accomplish this it was first of all necessary to create a race of creatures capable of possessing such a sublime destiny. Accordingly, God the Father, in His omnipotence, creates the angels and ourselves. But true love demands equality: and it is the design of the Trinity that the love binding us to them will be the truest and highest. So the Father decrees further that we shall be given a share in the divine life—grace—that we may love the Three Persons, not only as creatures, infinitely inferior to Them, but as true sons and spouses, raised to the dizzy height of a kind of equality with Them. It is given to the Son to carry this plan into execution: He, being God, becomes man that we men may share the divine nature, may become as gods. It falls also to the Son to cancel out the malice of sin, by which men rebelliously tried to wreck the plan of mercy in their regard. Finally, it becomes the office of the Holy Spirit, by carrying grace into our souls, actually to elevate us to the divine life and to supply also all the other assistances we need to persevere on that high plane of existence.

Thus, to live in the Trinity becomes the final and highest goal of our lives. The desire that we should all reach this goal was what inspired the last, priestly prayer of Jesus, *That all may be one, even as Thou, Father, in Me and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us.* (John 17, 21)

We need not, nor should we, wait until eternity to dwell in the Trinity. "Now is the acceptable time, now is the time of salvation." Since death changes nothing, we should even now be directing all our lives and actions to the Trinity, as to our last end, we should now be living in the presence of the Trinity, we should now be sharing in all their activity, their wisdom, and love, and joy.

Indeed, Jesus promises that, to His friends, the Three Persons will come and dwell as guests. *If any man love Me, he will keep My word,*

and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. (John 14, 23) And St. Paul adds that we are in truth temples and dwelling places of the Most High: *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?* (I Cor. 3, 16) If St. Paul here speaks especially of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person, this is not to exclude or neglect the presence of the Others (Who had been so clearly included in the "We" of Jesus) but simply to appropriate to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth and love, His special office of guiding and sanctifying souls.

Christians indeed are to walk in God's presence and strive for holiness because the three divine Persons in all their perfection are really and personally present in the souls of God's friends and followers, sons and spouses!

The principles studied in this first part of *Applied Christianity* should be of the greatest assistance to us in our efforts to live in the Trinity. They enable us even now to share in the life and activity of the Trinity. Let us see how.

Three great truths have been explained: man's Supernatural Elevation, the Glory of God, the Folly of the Cross. Since the Glory of God is realized both through creatures taken as samples of the divine goodness and through God's Supreme Dominion (which has yet to be studied) it follows that the spiritual life may be reduced to four great practical principles: the Supernatural Destiny; the Samples and the Supreme Dominion, as manifesting the Glory of God; the Folly of the Cross. By carrying out these four principles in practice, we share within ourselves, and reproduce within ourselves, the activities of the Three Divine Persons.

We enter into the Trinity through the humanity of Christ; for Christ, as the prayer of the Offertory of the Mass tells us, became a sharer in our humanity that we might become sharers in His divinity. Now by living supernatural lives we divinize our humanity, thus realizing the design of the Incarnation. The doctrine of the supernatural life is therefore the doorway to the Trinity. Jesus Himself says, *I am the door.* (John 10, 7) Accordingly, our first principle, man's supernatural elevation and destiny, corresponds to the Sacred Humanity of Jesus.

The Son of God is called by the Scriptures the Glory of the Father—*the brightness of His glory and the image of His substance.* (Heb. 1, 3) If we in turn seek to glorify God, as the doctrine of God's glory teaches us to do, then we share in the activity of God the Son and reproduce His activity.—Now we have risen from the humanity of Jesus to His divinity.

Thirdly, by means of the Samples and the Supreme Dominion, we go from the Son to the Father, penetrating still deeper into the Trinity. By the Samples we are enabled to contemplate the perfections of God, and by the Supreme Dominion, as shall be seen, we enter into His supreme governing activity, which is especially attributed to the Father.

Finally, through the Folly of the Cross we share in the activity of the Holy Spirit. For the Folly of the Cross prompts us to renounce earthly things for the love of things heavenly. And the Holy Spirit is the very Spirit of love, in Whose activity we then share when we exercise ourselves in love.

To summarize:

The Supernatural Destiny	corresponds to the humanity of Jesus.
The Glory of God	corresponds to the divinity of Jesus.
The Samples	correspond to God the Father.
The Supreme Dominion	corresponds to God the Father.
The Folly of the Cross	corresponds to God the Holy Spirit.

A further word must be said here about entering the Trinity. If it is through Jesus that we are introduced into the society of the Three Divine Persons, it is through the Mother of Jesus that we may best approach Him. *Through Mary to Jesus!* is the watchword of all who earnestly strive to lead the Christian life. Therefore a true and ardent devotion to the Blessed Mother is an important, and indeed indispensable, element in supernatural living. The Church offers to her faithful a number of ways in which they can practice such devotion; most recently, Pope Pius XII has sanctioned the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, as revealed to the children of Fatima. Among many books on our Blessed Lady, that of St. Louis Grignion de Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, is especially valuable to show the practical importance of this devotion to Christian living, as also to set forth its solid doctrinal basis.

The subject of devotion to Our Lady, a great one in itself, lies beyond the scope of this book; but we may at any rate briefly notice how Our Lady is related to the supernatural life which it has been the purpose of these pages to describe.

It was through Mary that God gave His Son to the world. *And God does not change*: it is still through Mary that God gives His Son to the world. As men received Jesus through Mary at the time of the Incarnation, so today also men, in consequence of the first fact, receive Jesus in their souls through Mary. Further, as God does not change, so neither does His plan of salvation change. The order of instruments in the sanctification of souls remains ever the same. The humanity of Jesus, joined to the divine nature, is the primary instrument of sanctification and salvation; and Mary is the secondary but important and closely associated instrument, for the obvious reason that it was she through whom Jesus, conceived of the Holy Ghost, was born according to His humanity; it is through her, then, that we possess His humanity and may be united to it, through her also then that, by means of His humanity, we may be united to His divinity.

Thus it is evident how Mary is instrumental in raising us to the supernatural life, and how necessary is devotion to her if we are to stay on that plane of living. She exemplifies as well the other three basic principles of Christian living. Assuredly she glorifies God, and that with wonderful perfection; more perfectly indeed than any other creature—

only less perfectly than Jesus Himself. She herself tells us of her office of glorifying God, *My soul doth magnify the Lord*. . . . (Luke 1, 46).

Moreover, she is a most wonderful likeness of the divine perfections, not alone in her admirable and unblemished human qualities, but above all in her fullness of grace and sanctity, which makes her a supreme sample of the divine holiness itself.

To her, too, has been communicated by God some participation in His Supreme Dominion over souls. For this reason Pope Pius XII has consecrated the whole world to her Immaculate Heart. And we therefore will do well to acknowledge her sovereign power by re-echoing and reaffirming that consecration in our own hearts.

Finally, she provides for us a perfect illustration of the Folly of the Cross, for she renounced all the goods of this world, together with her own human judgment and will, for the love of God. Her own words, "Be it done unto me according to Thy word" reveal to us the innermost secret of her holiness. It was a perfect and complete sacrifice, a sacrifice in which she renounced all human interests and quietly but resolutely echoed the words put by the prophet into the mouth of her Son to indicate the perfection of His sacrifice: "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God."

In concluding this preliminary statement of basic principles, we thus return, having come around full circle, to the great truth with which we began, the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. With the help of revelation we obtained a glimpse of the Three Divine Persons planning to create man and give him the opportunity to participate in Their own blessedness. We further saw how, in pursuance of that plan, mankind has been elevated to a life and destiny that are supernatural and divine. Now we see that even on earth it is the purpose of the supernatural life to have us dwell in the presence of the Trinity and enter into Their activity. Already on earth, in anticipation of the joys of heaven, we should in some measure realize the purpose expressed in Our Lord's prayer, *That they all may be one as Thou, Father, in Me and I in Thee; that they all may be one in Us*. (John 17, 21)

## Part II

# The Principles Combined

“Dying and Behold We Live!”



The Samples Again





# Dying and Behold We Live!

We may fittingly begin this Second Part with the following words of Newman:

*"Thus in the Cross, and in Him Who hung upon it, all things meet; all things subserve it, all things need it. It is their center and interpretation. For He was lifted up upon it, that He might draw all men and all things unto Himself."* (*The Cross of Christ, the Measure of the World*," PAROCHIAL AND PLAIN SERMONS, Vol. VI)

We have been engaged in the study of basic truths concerning the supernatural life; and in the doctrine of the Cross we have come to the heart of Christianity, the very center and climax of Christian truth. Therefore, what was said previous to our taking up the doctrine of the Cross should be considered as a preliminary sketch of the several principles described. Since these principles find their deepest meaning and interpretation only in the Cross, it is now necessary to re-examine them in the light of the doctrine and law of the Cross. This is the task that lies ahead.

In the Cross, then, all the great truths we have been studying converge and quite literally *cross*; and from the Cross, and the Crucified One upon it, they again radiate, to light up every part, yes, every niche and cranny, of human existence.

*"In the Cross is salvation; in the Cross is life; in the Cross is protection against the enemy.*

*"In the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness; in the Cross is strength of heart; in the Cross is joy of Spirit.*

*"In the Cross is the treasure of virtues; in the Cross is perfection of holiness.*

*Go where you will, seek what you will, and you shall not find a higher way above, nor a safer way below than the way of the Holy Cross."*

(*The Imitation of Christ*, II, 12)

## The Love of God

Our interest in the love of God is not simply to describe its beauty in an abstract way, while failing to go on to its practice—something that happens but too frequently. Our concern here is rather to gain practical rules and principles that will help us actually to love God with fervor. When we talk about the love of God without doing what is necessary to love God, we are like men who talk of health while making no effort to observe the rules of health, or like those who praise learning but do nothing to obtain it.

### 1. How We May Love God

Now we love God by knowing Him, esteeming Him and coming to union with Him.

*We Come to Love God by Knowing Him.* Knowledge of God is the first step towards loving God. Such knowledge, we have already learned, comes through creatures, which are likenesses of the divine perfections.

If this is true of creatures in general, it is particularly true of our fellow-men: these are the noblest creatures, hence the most perfect likenesses of God. Therefore, it is especially through our neighbor that we are enabled in this world to see God and to love Him. Hence love of God and love of neighbor are bound together indissolubly; and our practical and immediate way of loving God while we are on earth is to love His image in our neighbors.

For this reason the love of God and the love of neighbor are placed together in the two great commandments given by Jesus. These two loves, indeed, come from one virtue, the virtue of supernatural charity, which presses us to seek union with God both directly through an interior life of prayer and indirectly as visibly imaged in our neighbors.

Moreover, since the only way we can see God now is in our neighbor, the practical, concrete test of whether we love God is whether we love our neighbor. So true is this that Jesus, having summarized His religion in two commandments, which He called "the Law and the Prophets," goes still further, reducing the practice of Christianity to one commandment, the love of neighbor: *Therefore all things whatever you would that men should do to you, even so do you also to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets.* (Matt. 7, 12) St. Paul later insists on the same truth: *he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.* (Rom. 13, 8)

That we simply cannot love God without loving our neighbor is asserted by St. John: *If anyone says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar. For how can he who does not love his brother, whom he*

sees, love God, whom he does not see? (I John 4, 20) Moreover, this love of neighbor must be practical, expressing itself in deeds, *He who has the goods of this world and sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, how does the love of God abide in him? My dear children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and in truth.* (I John 3, 17-18)

Since the love of God and of neighbor spring from one virtue, the practical measure of anyone's love for God is his love for his neighbor. To exclude a neighbor from our love is to exclude ourselves from God's love; it is like closing a door with ourselves on the outside. *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.* (I John 3, 15) Indeed, it may be said with exact truth that one's own love for God is equal to the love that one has for the man whom one loves least (or hates most). *For with what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you.* (Luke 6, 38)

### We Love God by Esteeming Him

Esteem is but the beginning of love and differs from love's fruition as dawn differs from the noonday sun. Esteem is like the first stirrings of steel filings drawn by a magnet, whereas love in its fullness, which is union, is rather like the meeting of the filings with the magnet.

Now this esteem for God is shown by preference, that is, by the choice of God over creatures with all their goodness and attractiveness. Such preference is the beginning, the first step of divine love: once we know His goodness, from creatures, we must prefer Him to every created goodness: thus we detach ourselves from other goods in order to tend towards union with His supreme goodness. In the same way a man, when he marries, leaves father and mother and home to cleave to his wife.

Newman, in a sermon describing the mediocrity of most Christians and the want of ardent love in their lives, ends by indicating the cause of this spiritual tepidity. He says:

"These are some of the proofs which are continually brought home to us, if we attend to ourselves, of our want of love for God. . . . If I must, before concluding, remark upon the mode of overcoming the evil, I must say plainly this, that, fanciful though it may appear at first sight to say so, *the comforts of life* are the main cause of it; and much as we may lament and struggle against it, till we learn to dispense with them in good measure, we shall not overcome it." (*Parochial and Plain Sermons*, V, 23)

It seems fanciful indeed to ascribe so huge an evil as the widespread spirit of religious indifference to such an apparently trivial cause as the comforts of life. Yet the comforts of life (or the attachment to them) are the practical index to the love of the world; and worldliness certainly reduces divine love, or stunts its growth. Behind an apparently trivial appearance Newman's spiritual genius here discerns and discloses in an eminently practical form one of the deepest principles of the spiritual life. Here is that principle as stated with

startling clarity by St. Thomas (I II, 108, 4): We are placed midway between the good things of heaven and those of earth; so that the more we are attached to the one set of these goods, the less do we love the other. Obviously, as we increase in the love of God, our love of creatures decreases, and *vice versa*.

By worldliness, then, or by attachment to the comforts of life, we fail to make a practical preference for God over all other goods, we fail to show esteem for Him; and since we are so reluctant to abandon the attractions of God's rival, the world, we cannot advance spiritually, towards union with Him. And not only do we fail, by such want of esteem, to exercise and grow in that direct charity by which we love God for His own sake; we also are hindered from practicing indirect love for God as He is reflected in our neighbor. For it is precisely because of the love of earthly goods that men are divided against one another and so do not live in charity. *From whence are wars and contentions among you? Are they not hence, from your concupiscence?* (James 4, 1) That is, from your desires for earthly goods and pleasures.

## In Loving God We Seek Union with Him

Love is consummated in union, as we see in the fact that lovers do not rest content until they are united in marriage. So our knowledge of God in creatures, especially in our neighbor, and our esteem for Him, should lead us towards union with Him.

Now union with God is attained perfectly only in the next world in the Beatific Vision. Here it is accomplished most perfectly and directly in prayer, which itself becomes more and more perfect, uniting the soul ever closer to God. It is because union with God is thus made possible by prayer that prayer forms such an important part of the Christian life, as we can see from the lives of the saints. And our prayer should become, no mere catalogue of petitions, but a striving for union with God.

Indirectly we may attain to union with God by loving our neighbor and serving God in him. Thus both the contemplative life of prayer and the active life of serving God in our neighbor tend towards divine union. And we are bound and oriented to both kinds of life and both modes of union by the commandments of God Himself: to prayer and direct union by the command to love God with all our hearts, to indirect union by the command to love our neighbor as ourselves. Meanwhile, a practical way in which we can in this world strive for constant union with God, even the highest, is by endeavoring to join our will to His in all things, as will be seen more fully when we take up the study of the Supreme Dominion.

## 2. Characteristics of the Love of God

*The love of God is exclusive;* that is to say, we should love God only. The precept of love says that we are to love God with our *whole*

heart. This means that we should empty it of affections for things other than God. God is a jealous God.

Hence: "No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other: or he will sustain the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Matt. 6, 24) Although many Christians attempt to carry water on both shoulders, by trying to love both God and the world, it really cannot be done—Jesus teaches clearly enough that the two loves are incompatible. *He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth.* (Luke 11, 23)

If you are tempted to object to the idea of God being jealous, reflect that it is He Himself Who describes Himself with this word, *For I am the Lord thy God, a jealous God.* . . . (Deut. 5, 9) Of course God does not suffer because of our failure to love Him, as a jealous lover would suffer at the infidelity of his beloved: God is jealous in the sense that He demands our exclusive love.

This does not mean that attachments for creatures are wholly incompatible with charity. Still such attachments hinder the exercise of charity, retard its growth, prevent it from reaching its fullness. We should increase in love every day until we die, every day until we reach that perfection of love possible to us on this earth, when we will be able to say truthfully that we love God with our *whole* hearts. To do this we must rid ourselves of the attachments and affections for creatures that meanwhile prevent such exclusive love.

It might be objected that this demand for an exclusive love of God is contradicted by the law which binds us to love our neighbor. Yet in fact charity towards our neighbor obliges us to love him as an image of God, by reason of God's goodness; for charity is a virtue by which we love God on account of His own goodness, and our neighbor on account of God. Thus all love for our neighbors, including of course the members of our own families, should be supernaturalized by being centered in God and motivated by His goodness: in this way nothing is withdrawn from the exclusive love we owe to God.

*The love of God is active.* If a child makes a gift to his father, the father appreciates the gift even though he himself has supplied the money that purchased the gift. In a similar way, God gives us, in charity, the power to love Him in a manner exceeding our natural powers; yet He invites and expects us to show our love for Him despite the fact that it is He Who enables us to do so.

Since charity is infused into our soul by God without any merit on our part, there is a danger of thinking that we need do nothing about it, only preserve it as God has given it to us. But charity is an active virtue that demands exercise. Jesus teaches us that the practical test of love is doing the divine will. *He that hath My commandments, and KEEPETH THEM: he it is that loveth Me.* . . . *If any man love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him.* (John 14, 21-23) St. James adds in warning, *Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.* (James 1, 22)

As a typist is paid, not for having the habit of typing, but for exercising it; as an athlete is rewarded, not for having prowess, but for demonstrating it, so God gives us charity in order that it may be the dynamic principle of our actions, and our eternal reward will be measured according or not as this has really been the case in our lives. If the typist and the athlete neglect to exercise their skills, these will soon be lost through disuse. Similarly, as we have seen in Chapter Five in dealing with imperfect actions, the law of the flesh will gradually undermine and finally destroy charity if this virtue is not kept active.

In the parable of the talents (Matt. 25) Jesus clearly and unmistakably taught that He wants us to labor for the increase of the endowment of grace given to us. The man given one talent was punished although he carefully preserved the talent and returned it to His master. Similarly, those who neglect to use the gifts of God may expect to find themselves liable to punishment.

*The love of God is urgent*; that is, we should begin to love God at once, and to exercise that love by abandoning the love of creatures, not putting off such conversion until later. By putting it off, we insult God. Suppose that a man would propose marriage to a girl and she in answer would say, "I am young and popular now, and I do not want to be tied down. Wait until I am old and ugly, then I will marry you." It is precisely in the fullness of her youth and beauty that the lover desires her—it is then that her love is most worthwhile. Similarly, we ought not to put off loving God until we are old and worn out; we should show our love for him in the fullness of our powers, by renouncing the pleasures of the world when we still have the capacity to enjoy them, by turning from the world, which is God's rival, when the world is trying to allure us from God.

Suppose that James, although he is married to Mary, lives with Martha instead. Mary, who loves James despite his infidelity, writes to him and asks whether he loves her, and, if he does, why he does not come home to her. Now James, we will imagine, answers, "Of course I love you and some day I will come home to die with you!" It is in this manner that we speak to God when we put off conversion to the last, meanwhile seeking our happiness in embracing the joys of the world.

Furthermore, such delay in giving our love to God may well prove fatal. God leads the soul from grace to grace; thus if the soul loses grace today, it loses, not one grace merely, but the whole series of graces that would follow successively upon the acceptance of each. God also may withdraw grace from those who habitually neglect it, just as a person would stop giving valuable gifts to a child who destroys them as fast as he receives them. Accordingly, a soul that wantonly and habitually neglects grace can scarcely expect the grace of conversion at the end. *God has given them a spirit of stupor until this present day, Eyes that they may not see, And ears that they may not hear.* (Rom. 11, 8)

Let us imagine, however, that the grace of final conversion would be given to a man after a long life of neglect and worldliness. The soul that has spent all its energies loving the world, and knows no other

love, will find it difficult to change suddenly now. God on His part is merciful and willing to forgive; but can the soul itself change? If James leaves Mary and, falling in love with Martha, lives with the latter for thirty years, he would experience a difficulty in suddenly expelling this love for Martha from his heart and returning to his love for Mary. A priest might insist on his going back to his lawful wife, and Mary on her part might be ready to receive her faithless spouse again; but could James make the change? Now a man who lives a long life loving the world would experience the same sort of psychological difficulty, not to say impossibility, in suddenly transferring his affections from the world to God. He would be like a person who, running full speed in one direction would turn suddenly in mid-air (if this were possible) to go full speed in an exactly opposite direction. Grace is indeed powerful, but it does not constrain our freedom nor exempt us from disposing (under its action) our own hearts; nor may we neglect the ordinary duties of Christian living in presumptuous reliance on a very miracle of conversion at the end.

Asked by a priest, the worldling or sinner on his deathbed would assuredly profess a desire to go to heaven or avoid hell—he would be a fool to speak otherwise! He has always lived a worldly life, avoiding discomfort; he will not now entertain with enthusiasm the thought of the acute and continuous discomforts of hell. But is this frame of mind evidence of that supernatural charity and contrition which are necessary for salvation? Does such a one have that minimum love of God, that preference for Him above every creature, which is required for salvation? Can he really, with his weakened powers and imperfect perceptions, not to mention his habitual neglect of grace, make this sudden, violent, and (for him) heroic change? It is at any rate not a possibility that we should place much confidence in: *Now is the acceptable time.*

The parable told by Jesus of those who were taken into the vineyard at the eleventh hour and given the same wage as those who began to work at the third hour, is sometimes taken as an excuse for putting off conversion. But nothing in Sacred Scripture can be understood as condoning negligence or carelessness. The parable in question simply teaches that God reserves it to Himself to call some men at the eleventh hour. It certainly does not promise a special call at the eleventh hour to those who have been neglecting the divine invitation from the third hour.

*The love of God is absolute.* The precept of love, by telling us to love God with our whole hearts, presses us to strive for the totality and perfection of love. St. Thomas explains that although we are not obliged to attain to this totality of love all at once (which in truth would be impossible) we must at any rate tend towards it constantly as our end and goal. For this reason, as we have just observed, we should grow in charity every day until we die.

The absolute character of divine love is the answer to those who plead for moderation in religion. These persons, who actually defend mediocrity and tepidity under the pretence of moderation, constantly

remind us that every virtue lies in following a happy mean between two extremes; as fortitude is a mean between cowardice and rashness. On the basis of this principle, they oppose all ardor in charity, they discourage mortification, they oppose detachment as unnecessary if not wrong, they regard the pursuit of perfection almost as evidence of fanaticism.

Now it is true that the moral virtues of the natural order lie in the happy mean. However, this rule emphatically does not apply to the theological virtues of the supernatural order. We are not to believe in God, or hope in Him, or love Him in a moderate degree, but without limit. The measure of these virtues is God Himself, Who is illimitable. The only thing that imposes a restraint on us here is our capacity to love; since this capacity is finite, our wildest excesses will fall pitifully short of the infinite love which God deserves. St. Bernard gives us the rule that applies to the virtue of love: "The measure with which to love God is to love Him without measure." We need fear no extremism here. Rather, in this matter we should cultivate extremism as a strict duty—a duty enjoined upon us by "the first and greatest commandment," namely, *Love the Lord thy God with thy WHOLE heart. . . .*

Furthermore, what is true of charity is inevitably true also of that virtue which is simply the reverse and underside of charity, that is, detachment. As we should strive to love God totally and absolutely so should we strive to be wholly detached from all things other than God. Any deliberate attachment, however small, hinders the growth of the love of God. In fact, we grow in love by emptying our hearts of affections and attachments for creatures. Precisely by emptying our hearts of earthly affections we make room in them for ever greater infusions of divine love. *If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*" (I John 2, 15)





# Contempt of the World

## Doctrine

### 1. Contempt of the World the Scriptural Teaching

The Scriptures themselves teach us contempt of the world. *Do not love the world, or the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* (I John 2, 15) Plain words, these, and certainly in strong contrast to the teaching of those who say, "Love the world and enjoy the things of the world—as long as you avoid mortal sin!" The Scriptures teach us to avoid not only such love for the world as is involved in mortal sin—which is the extremity of such love, the very idolization of earthly goods: we are simply not to love the world at all. *For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is ruin, their god is the belly, their glory is in their shame, they mind the things of earth.* (Phil. 3, 19)

Even the best things of the world are not to absorb our love. So St. Paul: *But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remains that those who have wives be as if they had none; and those who weep, as though not weeping; and those who rejoice, as though not rejoicing; and those who buy, as though not possessing; and those who use this world, as though not using it, for this world as we see it is passing away.* (I Cor. 7, 22-31) These words, addressed to all men and not to Carthusians only, demand detachment from ordinary human sorrows and joys, as also from the goods of what is now called business or secular life; of the married, it requires detachment (which we shall describe more fully in a moment) from their spouses. In a word, the highest interior detachment is here set forth as the goal for all men.

The love of God, we have seen, is best understood by the example of love between bride and bridegroom. When a man and woman are married, their love belongs henceforth exclusively to each other; accordingly, should a married man give his love to a woman other than his wife, he is an adulterer. In a similar way, the Scriptures teach that when a man is married to God by charity, and then gives his affections to God's rival, the world, he is an adulterer. *Adulterers do you not know that the friendship of this world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of this world becomes an enemy of God.* (James 4, 4)

To break, by mortification, from the love of the world is a thing painful to nature; likewise to renounce the desire and affection for creatures by detachment is a galling and mortifying task. St. Paul speaks of it as a *crucifixion* to the world, thereby stating as vigorously as pos-

sible the attitude of the Christian towards the world. "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world!" (Gal. 6, 14)

## Contempt for the World is Taught in the Liturgy

How the Liturgy also inculcates contempt for creatures may be seen especially in the Collects of the Mass, where we are so often taught to ask for the grace to "hate earthly things and love things heavenly, *despicere terrena et amare coelestia.*" *Despicere*, the word which is invariably used, means to despise. From many possible examples, this Collect from the Mass for Wednesday in the fourth week of Lent may be cited. *Vouchsafe, Omnipotent God, that holy devotion may cause joy in those who are chastised by voluntary fasting: so that with their earthly affections diminished (terrenis affectibus mitigatis) they may the more easily gain things heavenly.*

This prayer contains a number of important points. It shows, for one thing, that the purpose of fasting and of all penitential works is to cause a lessening and weakening of affection for worldly goods. It shows, further, that it is *through* a lessening of earthly affections that we can rise to an affection for supernatural good. Thereby it reveals the basic principle that guides and demands contempt for the world, the principle which was given in the preceding chapter in the words of St. Thomas: We are placed midway between goods earthly and goods heavenly; so that the more we are attached to the one, the less can our affections embrace the other. Finally, this collect shows that fasting and detachment are not opposed to Christian joy; in fact it indicates clearly that such joy, which arises from the possession of spiritual goods, is produced precisely by fasting from material pleasures. Surely this doctrine is a rebuke to those worldly-minded Christians who identify Christian joy with gratification in the goods of sense.

In the Postcommunion for the Feast of the Sacred Heart, the very feast of divine love, we ask that we may, having tasted of the sweetness of the Sacred Heart, *learn to DESPISE earthly things and love those heavenly.*" We are also to learn from the saints, for example St. Paul, *to despise things earthly and love ONLY those that are heavenly.*" (Collect, June 22) We ask a similar favor from St. Philip Benitus (August 23), namely, *to learn from his imitation to despise the good things (prospera) of the world and always to seek for those of heaven.* From the Collect for the feast of St. Peter Damian we recognize that it is *through* contempt of earthly things that we may attain to everlasting joys. This will answer to those who assert wrongly that the love of God should in practice precede the contempt for creatures and that the hatred for creatures will spontaneously follow from the love of God. On the contrary, although love of God is without doubt first in importance and the very reason and goal for detachment and contempt for creatures, still the contempt for creatures should be first *in practice*, for it is the means whereby we may advance in the love of God. We

always use the means first, in order to gain our end. We must use the saw before we can have the table.

Finally, it is worth noticing that Confessors of the Church are praised in the Divine Office because they despised the world and earthly goods, *Hic vir despiciens mundum et terrena. . .*

## 2. The Meaning of Contempt for the World

To have contempt for the world does not mean that one should cultivate or practice an active hostility towards the things of the world or go about demolishing them. What is meant is that the love of God involves, on its reverse side, a withdrawal of love for the goods of the world. A Christian should therefore be detached from these goods, indifferent to them; and he should regard them as contemptible, as nothing, in comparison with the supernatural good to which God has destined him. Thus St. Paul, speaking of his former worldly prosperity and position, said, *The things that were gain to me, the same I have counted LOSS for Christ*. He here not only calls worldly goods loss, but gives the reason for this, his norm of comparison: *for Christ*. And he goes on, *Furthermore, I count ALL THINGS to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord*. And finally, to show how deep is this contempt in one who truly loves God: *for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but as DUNG that I may gain Christ*." (Phil. 3, 7) Over all the pleasures of the world, the Apostle writes those two words, *loss* and *dung*.

By "the world" may be understood two things: either the creatures made by God; or the things made by men, their handicrafts and art, their political and social institutions, their customs, laws, and in a word, whatever they employ their intelligence and skill to plan and bring into being. In which sense, then, are we to practice hatred for the world? In both senses! But are not the creatures made by God good? Indeed, the Scriptures themselves tell us this: "And God saw all the things that he had made, and they were very good." (Genesis 1, 31) This truth has been insisted on in an earlier section, in which we saw that creatures are samples of the divine perfections; and of course if they were not good, they could not be samples of God.

Nevertheless, we should not love them for their own sakes: not because we deem them evil—quite the contrary; but because, as children and spouses of God, we are to love Him with our whole heart. By natural affection for the creatures of the world we descend from the supernatural plane and act in a manner that conflicts with our supernatural calling.

The things made by men and all human institutions are also in themselves good. Still, we should not love them for themselves, or naturally: our affections are for God. Whatever we use, whatever we make, whatever we plan and organize should be done for love of God.

Basically, therefore, it is not a question of good or evil: it is a matter of love: we should not love the things of the world lest our hearts be lured from God. However, not only does the love of created

things, whether God-made or man-made, hinder us from living on the supernatural plane, but it also in the end leads towards evil: for sin, we know, is a turning towards creatures and a turning from God. Another reason, then, and a strong one, for practicing contempt of the world.

Finally, in the case of things man-made, these, although good in themselves, in the abstract, are often stained with evil in the concrete and in practice. For men are sinners and they too often introduce the wickedness of their hearts into their creations and institutions. This is almost invariably the case with worldly and sinful men: only the saintly, the purified, will even attempt to purge their works of evil. Thus, in this sense the man-made world, in the concrete, is often evil and must then be hated as such. For example, politics, the science and art of government, is in itself good and useful; but in the concrete it is often a synonym for graft and corruption. An economic system is good in itself and necessary to sustain life; but in the concrete it is often the occasion and means for injustice. Literature and art are good in themselves; but in the concrete they are often filled with evil and tempt men to sin. The world thus understood is not to be despised only because it tends to lure our affections from God, but because it is in itself evil.

The words of Jesus, *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son* (John 3, 16) do not conflict with the doctrine of contempt for the world. This is obvious; for there can be no contradiction in divine truth, and we have seen how vigorously the inspired word teaches us to love *not* the world. When Jesus says that God loved the world, He of course meant that He loved the souls of men living in the world, that "they may not perish but have life everlasting." But in another sense, such as we have explained, Jesus reveals Himself as hating the world; He called the devil the prince of this world (John 16, 11); worse yet, He refused to pray for the world (John 17, 9)—and there could be no more terrible condemnation than this.

### Dives and Lazarus

*Dives was clothed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day.* (Luke 16, 19) Jesus does not state in His parable that Dives ever committed a grievous sin against the moral law. He was guilty of worldliness; yet when he died he was *buried in hell*. There was no precise point in his life, so far as we know, when he committed a particular mortal sin. Yet his whole life was a turning towards creatures and a turning from God—which is the definition of sin. His turning towards creatures lay in his dressing and feasting sumptuously; his turning from God was in his refusal to help Lazarus—in his failure to love the image of God in his neighbor. Dives did not observe the commandment of the love of God, and he was condemned. He was very respectable and never committed a great crime; yet he was wholly irreligious. His constant, ingrained love of the world caused him to neglect the "first and greatest" commandment of God.

In another passage, Jesus threatens damnation to those who fail

in the duty of charity towards their neighbor. *Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you did not give me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take me in; naked, and you did not clothe me; sick and in prison and you did not visit me.* (Matt. 25, 41-43) None of these things considered in themselves constitute mortal sin, but all of them taken together as a practice and a policy certainly mark a neglect of the great commandment of love, a turning from God. Hence the condemnation. And we know from the parable of Dives what brings about such neglect of God: worldliness, love for the pleasures and comforts and elegancies of life.

On this whole subject it will be profitable to consider the words of Father Frederick William Faber:

"When our Blessed Lord describes the days before the Flood, and again those which shall precede the end of the world, He portrays them rather as times of worldliness than of open sin. Men were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage: and He says no more. Now none of these things are wrong in themselves. We can eat and drink, as the apostle teaches us, to the glory of God, and marriage was a divine institution at the time of the Flood, and is now a Christian Sacrament. In the same way when He describes the life of the only person whom the gospel narrative follows into the abode of the lost, He sums it up as the being clothed in purple and fine linen, and feasting sumptuously every day. Here again there is nothing directly sinful in the actions which He names. It surely cannot be a mortal sin to have fine linen, nor will a man lose a state of grace because he feasts sumptuously every day, provided that no other sins follow in the train of this soft life. The malice of it all is in its worldliness, in the fact that this was all or nearly all the lives of those before the flood, of those before the days of anti-Christ, and of the unhappy Dives. Life began and ended in worldliness. There was nothing for God. It was comprised in the pleasures of the world, it rested in them, it was satisfied by them. Its characteristic was sins of omission. Worldliness might almost be defined to be a state of habitual sins of omission. The devil urges men on to great positive breaches of the divine commandments. The passions of the flesh impel sinners to give way to their passions by such dreadful sins, as catch the eyes of men and startle them by their iniquity. Worldliness only leads to these things occasionally and by accident. It neither scandalizes others, nor frightens the sinner himself. This is the very feature of it, which, rightly considered, ought to be so terrifying. The reaction of a great sin, or the shame which follows it, are often the pioneers of grace. They give self-love such a serious shock, that under the influence of it men return to God. Worldliness hides from the soul its real malice, and thus keeps at arm's length from it some of the most persuasive motives to repentance. Thus the Pharisees are depicted in the Gospel as being eminently worldly. It is worldliness, not immorality, which is put before us. There is even much of moral

decency, much of respectable observance, much religious profession; and yet when our Blessed Saviour went among them, they were further from grace than the publicans and sinners. They had implicit hatred of God in their hearts already, which became explicit as soon as they saw Him. The Magdalen, the Samaritan, the woman taken in adultery,—it was these who gathered round Jesus, attracted by His sweetness, and touched by the grace which went out from Him. The Pharisees only grew more cold, more haughty, more self-opinionated, until they ended by the greatest of all sins, the crucifixion of our Lord. For worldliness, when its selfish necessities drive it at last into open sin, for the most part sins more awfully and more impenitently than even the unbridled passions of our nature. So again there was the young man who had great possessions, and who loved Jesus when he saw Him, and wished to follow Him. He was a religious man, and with humble scrupulosity observed the commandments of God; but when our Lord told him to sell and give the price to the poor and to follow Him, he turned away sorrowful, and was found unequal to such a blessed vocation. Now his refusing to sell his property was surely not a mortal sin. It does not appear that our Lord considered him to have sinned by his refusal. It was the operation of worldliness. We do not know what the young man's future was; but a sad cloud of misgivings must hang over the memory of him whom Jesus invited to follow Him, and who turned away. Is he looking now in heaven upon that Face, from whose mild beauty he so sadly turned away on earth?" (*Creator and Creature*, p. 363 ff.)

### 3. The Supernatural Love of Creatures

Since creatures are samples of the Creator, there must be some way in which they may be loved by those also who live on the supernatural plane. In fact some of the saints, like St. Francis of Assisi, were marked by their love for creatures.

It is indeed permissible—even commendable, a very exercise of charity—to love creatures if we love them supernaturally, on account of God, as manifestations of God's goodness, without withdrawing our love from God. This is the way in which the saints love creatures. But worldly men love them selfishly, or sensually, or for their own natural goodness. The saints prepared themselves for the love of creatures by a long process of mortification, detachment, purification. We must do the same if we are to love creatures in the manner proper to our supernatural state.

If you were to watch a skilled surgeon perform a delicate operation, you would not fancy yourself equipped by this experience to perform the same operation, say, on your brother. There is a long training, a practiced skill behind the apparent ease and sureness of the surgeon's movements. So we must not attempt to imitate the liberty of the saints until we have attained to their detachment and purity of motive.

What we have learned of the love of neighbor helps us to understand the love of other creatures, too. For our neighbors are loved as

samples of God's goodness, the most perfect likenesses of God about us. Other creatures are to be loved similarly, on account of God, as lesser likenesses. To love them from another motive is to descend from the supernatural plane of living.

"They alone are able truly to enjoy this world, who begin with the world unseen. They alone enjoy it, who have first abstained from it. They alone can truly feast, who have first fasted; they alone are able to use the world, who have learned not to abuse it; they alone inherit it, who take it as a shadow of the world to come, and who for that world to come relinquish it." (Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. VI, Sermon, "The Cross of Christ.")

To some, the doctrine of hatred for the world seems difficult, even monstrous, because it would appear to require logically that we hate the members of our own families. Yet we know that Jesus would have us love all men—and this love would surely include our brethren. In the principles before us we may see the solution of the difficulty. We may and should love our relatives, but here also with the love of charity, supernaturally, on account of God. We will not love our parents, wives, husbands, brothers and sisters as the pagans love theirs. The virtue of charity teaches us to love God on account of His goodness and our neighbor *on account of God*. Are our relatives and friends, and they alone, to be excluded from the universal scope of charity? Are we to love all other men supernaturally, but relatives and friends only naturally? By no means! Our love for these should also be ennobled by being raised to the supernatural plane. This means that although our powers of affection, like all our physical activity, remain natural, our motives are taken from God and are supernatural.

Accordingly, we are to renounce the mere *natural* love of our brethren. Indeed, there is a sense in which we must *hate* also our fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers. Jesus says, *If any one comes to me and does not HATE his father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.* (Luke 14, 26) St. Paul tells the married, we have noticed, that they must preserve complete detachment as regards merely natural affections: the married are to be *as those who are not married.* (I Cor. 7, 30)

Nor need it be feared that in renouncing mere natural motives for loving our families our affections will be weakened or atrophied. Quite the contrary. Mere natural love, such as pagans and worldlings have for one another, which proceeds from natural motives, is weak, imperfect, filled with selfishness, rarely lasting. If a man loves his wife only because she is pretty, what will happen to this love when the prettiness vanishes? If children love their parents only because of benefits received, does this not reveal love for themselves rather than for their mother and father? At best the loftiest natural love that one might have for another is infinitely below supernatural love, which is a sharing in the divine love. The love of Jesus, especially for His mother, was the most perfect of all human loves. Yet it was wholly supernatural: human



indeed in the sense that Jesus was truly human and acted with human powers, but supernatural nevertheless in its principle and motive. In loving those to whom we are bound by ties of love or friendship, as in all other matters, we can do no better than imitate Jesus.

# Contempt of the World

## Application

In the preceding chapter we considered the attitude of the Christian towards creatures in a general way; in order to go now to particulars, it is necessary to classify creatures and examine each class by itself. Creatures, or samples, from the point of view of their use in the supernatural life, may be divided into four groups: Necessary, Indifferent, Captivating, and Forbidden Samples.

### 1. Necessary Samples

Certain creatures are needed to sustain life or to assist in our work: These are the necessary samples, i.e., food, clothing, rest, utensils, tools, and the like. It is impossible to "sow" these necessary samples, or at least all of them, because their use is indispensable to us.

What principle should guide us in our use of the necessary samples? The very same principle that guides the farmer when he sows his seed! The farmer knows that the more he sows, the more he will reap; hence he is anxious to sow as much as he possibly can. Still, he cannot sow *all* of the wheat—if he does, he will starve. Accordingly, he tells his family to use what they need, not stinting them; but at the same time he will permit no waste or extravagance, for he knows that whatever is not sown will not bear a crop. So should we use the creatures necessary to us; we need not be niggardly but may freely use whatever promotes health or efficiency. At the same time, we should bear in mind that whatever is not sown will not bear a crop for us in heaven.

How can we know precisely what samples are necessary and which ones we should rather sow? Again the farmer will guide us: he cannot figure out mathematically just how many grains of wheat should be sown; but his desire for a crop and for money will bring it about that he will sow as much as possible. Just so, although our *minds* can discover no exact formula for determining which creatures are necessary and which are not, our *hearts* if they are really set on obtaining a heavenly harvest, will move us to sow as many of the creatures as we can, reducing ourselves to necessity. Mark this: *He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly.* (II Cor. 9, 6)

It is well to keep in mind, therefore, that the most profitable use of creatures is to sow them by renunciation; for this is the most direct way of using them to gain a supernatural crop. If such renunciation is not possible or permissible, but we are rather compelled to use the creatures because of duty or the necessities of life, or simply because of

their utility to our legitimate ends, then we can sanctify their use indirectly, as we have learned, by means of supernatural motives; in this way we are in a manner still sowing them, or at least the affection for them, interiorly, by detachment.

## 2. Indifferent Samples

The principles that should guide us in the use of Indifferent Samples were given in Part One, Chapter Six. There we saw that while certain actions considered in themselves—that is, in the abstract, apart from the actual circumstances in which they occur—are indifferent, they are never indifferent, but always either good or bad, when viewed in their concrete circumstances and reality. Thus, swimming is a thing indifferent in itself; but in the concrete it will be good if its end or circumstances are good; and it may be dangerous and even evil in certain circumstances, for example, in the case of mixed bathing when there is immodesty of dress and even of conduct. Clearly, to assess the moral and spiritual value of any action we must view it, not in the abstract, stripped of all its modifying circumstances, but in the concrete as it actually occurs.

The same principle applies to all recreations. For recreation is not of course incompatible with a supernatural life, and the contempt of creatures does not require an abandonment of recreation. Indeed, recreation may be considered a necessary sample: some recreation is necessary for bodily and mental health: besides exercising and refreshing the bodily powers, it also helps the mind, doing for it, as St. Thomas observes, what sleep does for the body. The use of recreation within proper measure, therefore, is an act of virtue.

But from a moral or spiritual point of view, recreation is an indifferent sample: indifferent in itself, it always becomes, in practice, either good or bad according as its end and circumstances are good or bad. This would hold for example, of going to the theatre, of dancing, or drinking. On the one hand these actions may be lawful; but they may also be sinful: they are to be judged according to the circumstances in which they are found. And it is certainly wrong and misleading and dangerous to souls to give a general and indiscriminate approval to all such recreations by saying only that they are in themselves indifferent.

Still, even when all objectionable circumstances are removed from an action—e.g., going to the theatre, dancing—and it is engaged in for some good natural end—even then a Christian, with his supernatural vocation cannot rest satisfied. A Christian life is not merely a good natural life, not merely a super-sinful life; it is a *super-natural* life.

Now we know that the way in which we may supernaturalize any good or indifferent natural activity is to perform it from a supernatural motive. This applies also to recreations. Even our recreations should be taken on the supernatural plane; or, to put it differently, we must not leave the supernatural plane to take our recreation. Here also we must

act from supernatural motives; here also we should labor to divest ourselves of natural motives, such as arise from the love of natural goods.

Now following such a rule is not without difficulty. In fact, although recreations are themselves easy and pleasurable, the ability to engage in them supernaturally and without spiritual loss is a real test of the mettle of a Christian. It is the very pleasurable nature of the activity that creates the hazard and makes it a test. Because recreation is so attractive and pleasurable we are very prone to become attached to it; and as long as we are attached to it we will not be able to take our recreation supernaturally, as Christians. For we get our motives from what we love; and if we are attached to our recreations we will in practice draw our motives from them, that is, from a created good, rather than from God.

This brings us to the rule for recreating supernaturally: not only must we see to it that our recreations are free from sin and occasions of sin, but also we must avoid attachment to them. If we are attached to them they become a source of imperfection, of spiritual mediocrity and deterioration. What we must ask ourselves, in using any recreation, is whether we are attached to it, whether therefore we are capable of really using it for the love of God. Let us apply this rule now to particular activities.

*Games and Sports.* We may engage in games and sports without fault provided our *affections* are not involved in these games or our hearts *attached* to them. The fact, then, that they may be, even in practice and in the concrete, free of sin, does not mean that they may be engaged in freely without any further restraint. We must also be detached from them, disposed to make use of them for love of God. Merely to state this rule is to reveal how far we have declined from supernatural thinking, therefore from the mind of Christ, in such matters. Generally, all that we look to is whether an activity is sinful or not; and even here we too often confine our judgments to actions considered in themselves, in the abstract, where they are indifferent—and where they do not actually take place.

In practice, then, our rule is that of the motive; we may engage in games and sports from a motive of utility, but not from a motive of affection. This does not mean that we should restrict ourselves to activities that are uninteresting; for then, as St. Francis de Sales observes, they would not be a recreation, since recreation requires a diversion of mind. But our hearts should not be attached to these games; even while at play we must love God.

We may know that we are attached to games and sports and are not merely using them for our welfare when our minds are filled with them at times other than those allowed for recreation, when we become too absorbed in winning, when there is inordinate jubilation or sorrow in winning or losing, when they are prolonged beyond measure or interfere with our duties. Recreation is necessary, as even St. Thomas says; but, as St. Thomas also says, it is necessary like salt: a little goes a long way.

There is a story, probably apocryphal, of a saint who on being

asked while he was taking recreation at billiards what he would do if he knew that he would die in a few moments, replied that he would continue to play billiards. The story is often taken by the worldly-minded as a justification for continual occupation with play. Actually it indicates something quite opposite and may be taken as an illustration of the principles set down here on recreation. It shows that when we are truly detached, we are as much in God's presence when we play as when we pray. That was why the saint said he would continue to play: he was already in God's presence, he was even then practicing virtue, including the virtue of detachment. He was not acting from mere love of pleasure, as we so often do, which causes us to think instinctively, and rightly, that we are unready in such circumstances to meet our Creator and Judge, like a person who is caught dirty and unkempt by a distinguished visitor.

*The Theatre and Motion Pictures.*—Of course, before plays or movies can be even considered as recreation for Christians, they must be free of anything morally objectionable: indifferent in themselves, they are too often evil in fact. Nevertheless, a Catholic makes a great mistake if he thinks that because movies are morally unobjectionable they may be enjoyed by him without further caution; here, too, he must strive not only for natural virtue, but must rather remain on the supernatural plane. While it may be well for Catholics, in order to protect public morals, to ally themselves with all decent men in outlawing absolutely what is morally evil from entertainment, nevertheless they should not think, as they very often do, that such a criterion of judgment, i.e., that entertainment is not morally evil, is an adequate standard of conduct for the sons of God.

Movies, too, must be judged by the supernatural standard: we should ask, not only whether they are morally evil, but also whether we have an attachment or affection for them, whether therefore we are using them for the love of God or simply for the love of pleasure. If we are attached to them, then clearly they cramp and impede the life of charity, hindering spiritual progress. It is very easy and quite usual to have an attachment for the movies; indeed it is quite common nowadays for people to be passionately attached to them and to whatever pertains to them, i.e., the careers and private lives of movie actors and actresses.

Not only should one watch to see that he is not attached to this sort of entertainment; his spiritual instincts as a Christian should impel him to avoid any entertainment that is itself worldly. There are certain movies which, although containing nothing definitely evil and therefore perhaps described as "morally unobjectionable", are definitely pagan in their outlook: they subtly place the supreme value upon money, pleasure, the comforts of life, beauty of person, fashion, earthly fame and prosperity. In other words, they represent *this* world as a paradise and use its pleasures to turn the minds and hearts of their patrons aside from their true supernatural destiny. It is unnecessary to tell a true Christian that he ought to avoid such movies (which perhaps comprise the largest number); a true Christian would be stifled

in such an atmosphere. Catholics, it may be mentioned here, should be warned against movies that make light of the sacrament of matrimony or condone divorce; not only are these worldly, they are downright evil. It is hard to understand how any married Catholic layman who believes that matrimony is a sacrament can be entertained, and not rather indignant, when he sees the movies treat with mockery and contempt an institution which our Lord has sanctified and given into the special custody of Christian laymen, especially those who are married or look forward to marriage.

A final word on this subject: anyone seriously striving to have the mind of Christ will hardly be disposed to admire or imitate, or even to be interested in, the worldly and positively evil lives of movie idols.

*Dancing.*—In the abstract, dancing is neither good nor bad, but indifferent. However, no one dances in the abstract; and dancing, in actual life, done in concrete circumstances, is always either good or bad. St. Francis de Sales warns Philothea against dancing as a recreation, pointing out that it involved grave moral dangers even in the seventeenth century Catholic France. These dangers are multiplied many times today because of the accompaniment of frankly sensual music, the fact that dancing takes place often in questionable and even disreputable places, and particularly because modern dancing involves rather intimate embracing between unmarried persons. All this in addition to such dangers as those pointed out by St. Francis, i.e., that it usually takes place at night, under cover of darkness, and is generally accompanied by vanity. There is, then, a real likelihood that dancing may be evil in the concrete. And it is therefore misleading to souls to give a broad approval to all dancing on the theory that in itself it is indifferent.

Yet for a Christian who lives on the supernatural plane, the decisive criterion for judging whether or not one should dance is whether or not one has an affection or attachment for dancing and its accompanying vanities. One should dance, if at all, from a motive of utility, not from a motive of love; one should also dance, if at all, for love of God. St. Francis de Sales even suggests some points of meditation for Philothea to dwell upon while dancing, as, for example, how she could be more usefully occupied.

It goes without saying that since the love of creatures is the cause of sin, to guard against affection for dancing and other entertainments is the best way to avoid the sins that might be connected with them: in this way you kill the weed of sin at the root. On the other hand, if one is satisfied only to avoid sin, then besides the fact that he thus acts on the merely natural level, he fails to guard against those affections for creatures which, if left unmortified, will certainly betray him eventually into sin.

*The Styles.* The distinction between natural and supernatural modes of conduct intervenes also to determine our judgment as to whether a certain style befits a Christian man or woman. Usually styles are condemned only when they are sinful; and the spiritual perceptions of worldly people are so badly dulled that they have a hard time

recognizing even the grossest sins—a condition of soul which they euphemistically refer to as "broadmindedness." Many Catholic women go very far today in following the styles without (apparently) suspecting any danger of sin. The Holy Fathers, however, have seen distinct moral danger in modern styles and customs. For example, Pope Pius XI, speaking of conditions after the first World War, wrote, "For all can see how widely spread among men of every age and condition are restlessness of mind, intractability, discontent, how universal are indiscipline and distaste for work; how levity among women and girls, license, particularly in dances and dress, has gone beyond all bounds. . . . (*Ubi Arcano Dei*) The same Holy Father, in the prayer of reparation which he promulgated in honor of the Sacred Heart, would have us say, "*We are now resolved to expiate each and every deplorable outrage committed against Thee; we are determined to make amends for the manifold offences against Christian modesty in unbecoming dress and behavior, for all the foul seductions laid to ensnare the feet of the innocent. . . .*"

However, here once again, styles are to be condemned not only when they are indecent and immodest, but also when they are worldly. Women (for it is women who are chiefly responsible for this abuse) should not dress to please the world, but rather to please God. When their affections are taken up with clothes and styles, and they think only to please the world, or their own vanity, their conduct ill befits Christian women. Their motive indicates whether they are living as Christians or pagans. "Be not solicitous therefore, saying:'. . . 'What are we to put on?' For after all these things do the heathens seek." (Matt. 6, 31)

Because so many Catholics today live by a false principle—to avoid only grave sin—they behave just like the heathens in this matter of dress. The right principle is to avoid worldliness in dress, and keep one's affections from being absorbed in fine clothes. Christians should without doubt keep themselves decently (and modestly) clothed, but from a supernatural motive—because they are temples of the Holy Ghost. They should follow the styles from a safe distance, as if they were following an enemy, which they are; for the world and the fashions of the world are indeed our enemy.

The desire to be stylish leads many women including Catholics to adopt styles that are an abomination. Today, the pagan worship of the body is carried to such an extreme that many styles which are considered as quite ordinary can only with the aid of an insensitive conscience be freed from the taint of sin. It should be remembered that interior sins against purity are just as malicious as external sins. Jesus says that if a man looks upon a woman to lust after her, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matt. 5, 28) St. John Chrysostom notes that of course the same law holds for women and he adds that if women dress to attract the lust of men, they are just as blameworthy as the men, in fact more so.

*Drinking.*—Like dancing, drinking, while indifferent in the abstract, is not done in the abstract; and in the concrete, where it is done, it is either good or evil—frequently evil. The steady determination of too many Catholics to consider drinking only in the abstract prevents them from seeing or acknowledging the dangers that accompany actual indulgence in alcoholic drinks. How many young people, taught only that drinking in itself is indifferent, form habits that weaken their character and too often lead them to ruin!

In fact, to speak of drinking as being in any sense evil, and to urge restraint in the use of liquor is to expose one's self to the charge of Puritanism. This fear of being considered Puritanical thus causes Catholics to condone or ignore real evils and leads them to outlaw the practice of mortification from the Christian life. But the Puritanical teaching that such actions as drinking and gambling are inherently evil, a belief allied to the dangerous heresy that matter is evil, is vastly different from the position that gambling and drinking, while indifferent in themselves, are always either good or bad in practice. Catholic teaching holds the latter; and experience adds that these activities are, in the concrete, quite frequently evil.

It is a most unfortunate error that regards all preaching of restraint and self-denial as Puritanical and dissuades many who sincerely wish to imitate Jesus from carrying the cross of voluntary mortification.

Still, although drinking may be evil in the concrete, it is again not for this reason that the Christian will in the first place be on his guard when using liquor. He will rather recognize the ease of forming an attachment for this sample, however indifferent or good in itself, and he will realize that by forming an attachment and acting for the love of this creature he will descend from the supernatural plane of conduct. A Christian, then, will drink alcoholic beverages only if he finds some utility in them, not simply out of affection for this sample. *Stop drinking water only*, St. Paul advises Timothy, *but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and for thy many infirmities*. (I Tim. 5, 23) The Apostle here in truth permits and recommends the use of wine, and he also gives a motive of utility: *for thy stomach's sake and for thy frequent infirmities*. Some who abused this text were reminded also by St. Bernard that St. Paul had said "a little wine."

*Smoking.* This is the last of the indifferent samples that will be considered here. Smoking also is indifferent in itself, considered apart from the circumstances in which it occurs. Considered in the concrete, however, smoking, like all human actions, will be good or bad. It differs from the other actions we have considered in that it could scarcely ever be grievously evil; but circumstances may make it at least venially sinful—such circumstances as intemperance, sensuality, injury to bodily health.

But the spiritual man judges smoking from the supernatural level and inclines to avoid it because it is so easy to form an attachment for this creature. Some may object that it is a very small attachment. This is readily granted, but the next paragraph will reveal that such small



attachments can have a spiritual effect out of all proportion to their size. Moreover, this attachment, while small in itself, is important because, like the attachment to drinking, it is so general: the harm it causes is very extensive.

### 3. Captivating Samples

When a person buys, say, a coat, he does not try on all the coats in a store. This would be useless and would take too long. Instead, the salesman shows him the coats that are his size and lets him choose from these.

God, in testing our love for Him, acts in a somewhat similar way. We are to prefer God to every creature; but life is short, and God does not take each of us through the whole universe, showing us every creature and asking us if we prefer Him to each and every one. Instead, He places before us—or allows the devil to place before us—samples that are, so to speak, our size, that is, creature pleasures for which, whether because of temperament or education, we have a special attraction and relish. Each of us must prove and exercise our love by choosing God in preference to the particular good that attracts us personally; and we grow in love by breaking the attachment, through mortification and the cross, for our captivating samples.

Tastes differ: and the pleasure that attracts one person will leave another wholly indifferent. It is the spiritual task of each of us to find our own captivating samples and overcome our attachment for them. Above, we have enumerated some good and indifferent samples, which are the most likely to engage our affections and do so quite generally. Still it might happen that one would have an affection for none of these things yet be deeply attached to some other creature, i.e., to books, or reading, or science, or music, even to religious articles or activities. Even the most useful or necessary samples may also prove to be, in individual cases, Captivating Samples. In this case, although we cannot renounce the sample itself, we can (and should) purify our will of the attachment for it; and this is accomplished through the principle of supernatural motivation.

What spiritual significance is to be found in attachments to our captivating samples? Will they have harmful effects spiritually? Definitely yes. St. John of the Cross teaches that so long as a soul retains a deliberate habitual attachment for any creature, no matter how trivial this attachment may be, such a soul can make *no progress* in the spiritual life. He writes:

"Some habits of voluntary imperfections, which are never completely conquered, prevent not only the attainment of divine union, but also progress in perfection."

In a memorable passage the holy doctor explains and graphically illustrates this doctrine:

"These habitual imperfections are, for example, a common custom of much speaking, or some attachment which we never wish entirely to conquer—such as that to a person, a garment, a book, a cell,

a particular kind of food, tittle-tattle, fancies for tasting, knowing or hearing certain things, and such like. Any one of these imperfections, if the soul has become attached and habituated to it, is of as great harm to its growth and progress in virtue as though it were to fall daily into many other imperfections and casual venial sins which proceed not from a common indulgence in any common and harmful attachment, and will not hinder it so much as when it has attachment to anything. For while it has this there is *no possibility* that it will make progress in perfection, even though the imperfection be extremely small. For it is the same thing if a bird be held by a slender cord or by a stout one; since, even if it be slender, the bird will be as well held as though it were stout, for so long as it breaks it not and flies away. It is true that the slender one is the easier to break; still, easy though it be, the bird will not fly away if it be not broken. And thus the soul that has attachment to anything, however much virtue it possesses, will not attain to the liberty of divine union." (*Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, I, 12)

St. John lists two effects that these attachments have in the soul. First, they stop all spiritual progress, bringing even the most virtuous souls to a standstill. Secondly, these attachments initiate a process of moral deterioration that will almost certainly end in sin. For in the spiritual life, as in all life, there is no real standing still—one either grows or declines, progresses or retrogresses. One attachment leads to others; the affection for creatures thus grows; and since this affection is a disposition towards sin, the soul's momentum towards sin also increases. Here is why an attachment for a small thing, like smoking, may in the end have the most terrible consequences for the soul; it opens the way to other attachments, such as gambling or drinking, of a more serious character; and all indulgence in such sensuality further weakens a soul in its struggle against impurity.

Moreover, when a person retains even one deliberate attachment, he not only commits an imperfection, but he also loses, in that very act, the only practical principle that can keep him on the supernatural plane of living; and, having lost this, his descent to the natural plane will now be swift and sure. The principle that he loses, in holding on to even one deliberate attachment, is that the natural love of creatures is opposed to the love of God; with its corollary, which states that a Christian, bound to love God with all his heart, should not act from natural motives. When one loses this principle, which would have him renounce, at least interiorly, things which are good also, he can find no other rule for spiritual guidance than that which bids him to avoid sin. He has thus stepped down from the supernatural plane of judgment and action to a standard of natural virtue.

To the two effects of voluntary attachments listed by St. John we may therefore add a third, in a way more terrible than the others: these attachments cause us to lose the whole perspective of the supernatural life, they mark an abandonment of the basic principle of supernatural living, they throw us back to the plane of natural activity.

This is why great numbers of Catholics today not only live worldly, self-indulgent lives, aiming at best to observe the natural law, but also have lost the very notion of what is meant in practice by the supernatural life.

## Forbidden Samples

The Forbidden Samples are the creatures whose use (or better, whose misuse) God has forbidden under pain of sin.

### 1. Why They Are Forbidden

If creatures are good in themselves, being reflections of the divine glory, why has God forbidden their use in certain circumstances? Sometimes, indeed, the "Thou shalt not's" of the Commandments are represented by the irreligious as the arbitrary decrees of a tyrant; even Christians may at times be tempted to regard them as arbitrary and capricious—scarcely necessary constraints upon our freedom: as though a mother should say to her child, "You may take any jar of jam you want except the third, sixth, and eleventh on the fourth shelf from the bottom!" Has God any more reason than this to forbid us certain goods and pleasures which He Himself has created?

First of all, it may be observed, God does not really forbid the use of any creature totally. What He forbids is that man should use a creature for a purpose other than that for which the creature was made by Him. All creatures are intended to manifest God's glory: when we use them for an end other than this, we misuse them; when we exclude this glory altogether, which is what happens in mortal sin, we set ourselves in direct opposition to the divine plan for creatures.

How does sin oppose and even exclude the divine glory? To answer this it must be borne in mind that each creature, besides its general purpose of glorifying God, has a special purpose proper to itself. Each creature, then, is to be used for this peculiar and special purpose, and for no other; and in this sense, that it is to be used for no other purpose, it is forbidden. Marriage, for example, is intended to propagate the human race and, in the supernatural order, to increase the Mystical Body of Christ. In order to realize these ends God has made marriage sacred and family life permanent. He consequently forbids sexual union apart from marriage and family life, that is, in a way that would hinder His divine plans; but He does not simply and absolutely forbid sexual union. Hence, the prohibition of sexual pleasure outside of marriage and family life does not imply that sexual union is evil; on the contrary, we have seen it is the most perfect symbol and sample of the soul's union with God and has been elevated by Our Lord to the dignity of a sacrament. But the misuse of sex constitutes an interference with the divine plan, motivated by nothing higher than man's self-will and his desire for pleasure.

Of course, God in so acting intends not only His own glory, but the good of the creature. That He institutes marriage as He does not

only manifests His glory but promotes the good of the creatures concerned—of the married couple, of the children born of marriage, of society itself. This is also true of all creatures whose use God has surrounded with conditions and prohibitions. Thus, in obeying the commandments of God, we should realize that we are not submitting to a mere arbitrary rule but are rather conforming to those inner laws of being which will bring our lives to their highest possible perfection.

Now holiness consists in the conformity of our will to the divine will. Hence the Christian, in his efforts to attain holiness, will use creatures, not only ultimately to manifest the glory of God, but also to realize through them the special purposes intended by God. Out of love for the divine will, out of desire to conform always to this will, the Christian will respect the conditions and prohibitions fixed by God. He will not regard these prohibitions as arbitrary, but will rather will them himself in union with God's will. His obedience will be interior, spontaneous, free; not sullen and protesting.

## 2. The Extent of Conformity to God's Will

If one really loves God, if he really wishes to keep his will in union with the divine will, he will always and in all circumstances use creatures in the way intended by God. He will not wish to depart from the divine will at all: he will not only wish to avoid mortal sin, but will not take even a single step away from the divine will by deliberate imperfections or venial sins. For one who really loves God, therefore, for one who desires entire conformity with the divine will, the rule which tells us to avoid mortal sin and is satisfied with doing only this, is inadequate and unsatisfactory. Three reasons may be given for this inadequacy.

### This Rule is Without Love

The rule, "Avoid sin, but enjoy the things of the world," is without love. An example will make this clear. Suppose that a man, instead of staying at home with his wife spends all his time at his club or other places of amusement and also seeks the companionship of other women. When his wife reproaches him for not loving her, he protests indignantly that he does love her and, as proof, offers the fact that he does not divorce her! We do the same thing when we seek our joy in the pleasures of the world while protesting that we love God since we do not divorce ourselves from Him by grievous sin. True and ardent love does not content itself with refraining from divorce; it expresses itself in tenderness, it seeks unbroken union, it labors to please the beloved in as many ways as possible.

Or suppose a man would say to his mother, "I am going to strike you, but don't be alarmed—I am only going to injure you and will not kill you! When we love anyone, we do not wish even to injure him. So that, if we tell God that at any rate we will not destroy the divine life of grace He has given us, although we will freely and

frequently injure it by our imperfections, this does not show a very real or ardent love for God on our part.

It may be objected, however, by one content to follow the rule to avoid mortal sin only, "Still, all that is necessary to enter heaven is to remain in the state of grace; as long as I am in the state of grace, I have all the *essentials* of supernatural life."

In answer to this objection, let us imagine that the man in the above example, having struck his mother repeatedly, is asked if he has killed her. "No," we will suppose he answers—"No, she is not dead—she still has all the essentials of life!"

A soul may have all the essentials of supernatural life—grace and infused charity, and the other infused virtues—but this life may nevertheless be in bruised and bleeding condition (so to speak), and liable any moment to die. This is in fact the condition of many souls: shot through with affection for creatures, which is a disposition towards sin (because sin is a turning towards creatures and a turning from God), they are ready to fall into sin at the first breath of temptation. Here is why many find it so extremely difficult to avoid spiritual death through sin: they are half-dead already.

To preserve life in the physical order it is necessary to have elements besides those absolutely essential. As long as the breath continues and the heart is beating, the bare essentials are present; but only the essentials are present, and they will not be there long, if one lacks food or air or is losing blood continually or has a disease that is spreading unchecked. In the supernatural order also the soul needs more than the bare essentials of supernatural life if it is to continue living in a healthy condition. Besides grace and the infused virtues, which are the essentials, it is necessary that the virtues be exercised and that the proper conditions be provided for this exercise: there is need of prayer and mortification and detachment by which love of God is strengthened and a check is made to that affection for creatures which besides hindering the exercise of all the virtues, and of course of charity, also exerts a constant pull towards sin. Without these necessary and integral elements, the soul may have all the "essentials"—but not for long.

Another difficulty, similar to the preceding, is, "Despite all that you say, as long as I avoid mortal sin, I will not go to hell."

Strictly speaking, this is true—as an abstract doctrinal statement. The difficulty is in avoiding mortal sin in the practical order. A person, warned against some habit detrimental to bodily health, might similarly reply, "As long as I do not die, why should I worry?" The truth is if he continues to disregard the rules that promote good health, he is very likely to die. So it is correct to say that one who avoids mortal sin will be saved; but any person who freely indulges in affections for creatures and natural motives, which dispose the soul towards sin, will not be able even to avoid sin indefinitely.

A misunderstanding should be avoided here. When it is said that a Christian should not be satisfied *merely* with avoiding sin, it is not

to be concluded that the avoidance of sin is easy. In fact, it is difficult—even the avoidance of grave sin against the natural law is difficult. And those who allow themselves the liberty of loving creatures and enjoying creature-pleasures will find it all the more difficult, if not impossible. It is really only with the help of grace, and in correspondence with grace—that is, by living supernatural lives—that we are enabled to preserve fully even natural virtue and natural law. As Chesterton says in one of his poems, it is only Christian men who preserve even heathen things.

A third (and final) objection against the doctrine that love will not be satisfied with the rule to avoid sin and enjoy the things of the world: "Sanctifying grace, together with the virtues, including charity, is infused into the soul at baptism—infused without effort or merit on our part. All that we need do, therefore, is to preserve grace; then we will be certain to obtain salvation."

Yes, indeed, if we do this, we will certainly gain heaven. The objection contains a theoretical truth. The difficulty again is in the practical order: it will be a considerable feat, a real miracle, to preserve charity if we do nothing to preserve it. Picture a group of children playing in mud puddles; then imagine another child, all washed and dressed in white, sent out by its mother to play with these children with the advice, "Enjoy yourself, son, with the other children—only don't get dirty!" This is exactly like placing a soul, cleansed and sanctified with grace, out in the world and saying, "Enjoy yourself—only preserve grace, do not commit sin." The world is evil, the devil is its prince: the world is a huge mud puddle; "the whole world is in the power of the evil one." (I John 5, 19) Will it be easy to preserve innocence here? Even the good things of the world—do not forget—lure our affections from God and in so doing start us on the road to sin.

The error in all these objections comes from a confusion of the theoretical and practical orders, from a failure to distinguish between what is true in theory and what is necessary in practice. As a matter of doctrine it is quite true that, if we avoid mortal sin and preserve grace, we will be saved. But when we set out to reduce this doctrine to practice, we must allow for difficulties in the way, weaknesses in ourselves, the necessities of life in the supernatural order: we must exercise the virtues, we must devote ourselves to the pursuit of spiritual health, which is holiness. Above all, we must rid our hearts of that affection for creatures and purge our actions of those natural motives which will otherwise lead us towards sin and undermine that grace which it is so necessary to preserve.

### **This Rule is Impracticable**

In practice, if we seek only to avoid mortal sin, we will not know where to draw the line. While by means of definition it is easy enough to show the difference between imperfection and venial sin, and again between venial and mortal sin, *in practice* the dividing lines between them are often vague and shadowy and difficult to ascertain. For ex-

ample: how many chocolates may I eat before I commit an imperfection? How much can I eat before I am guilty of gluttony? How long must I ignore a person before I commit a sin against charity? A grievous sin? When precisely is stealing a mortal sin? What ill-luck must I wish or what injury must I cause another before committing a venial—or a mortal—sin against charity or justice? When is criticism a sin against charity, when a sin against justice? When does sensuality become a sin of impurity? Finally, although it is easy to define the difference between a mental reservation and a lie in the abstract, how can we tell them apart in the concrete? These, and a thousand other questions like them, are almost impossible to decide *in practice*. As a consequence, if we wish merely to avoid mortal sin, we will not know exactly where to stop. Or if we curtail ourselves more sharply, resolving to avoid also venial sin, we still would have difficulty deciding how much leeway we may allow ourselves and when we should stop our indulgence.

Even when we take into consideration the three conditions required by Catholic theology for mortal sin, we still cannot fully overcome the practical difficulty. These conditions enable us to make the theoretical distinction but cannot be relied upon to give us decisive help in making a practical judgment. Let us show this by examining the three conditions.

*Grievous matter.* In the concrete it is often impossible to know if there is grievous matter. How much may I steal and still go to Holy Communion tomorrow? It is hard to say: theologians engage in endless discussions on this question and end by saying that it depends on circumstances. How much may a man drink and still go to Holy Communion the following morning? At what point exactly do familiarities between members of opposite sexes become sinful? When gravely sinful? In looking at one of the picture magazines that are so popular today, when would one commit an imperfection through sensuality? When a venial sin? When a mortal sin? When does a man who delays paying a debt commit a grave sin against his creditors?

In all these cases it is impossible to determine exactly where mortal sin begins: yet they are matters which sooner or later involve mortal sin. Hence it is possible in such cases to commit mortal sin without knowing it—i.e., one knows that an action is sinful but does not know at precisely what point it becomes gravely sinful.

*Sufficient Reflection.* How can we decide in practice whether there has been sufficient reflection? The mind is spiritual and there is no precision instrument available for measuring it; no micrometer can determine this sufficiency. Sufficient reflection is present as soon as we know we are going in the wrong direction, i.e., away from God. But when this takes place, or whether it takes place at all, are matters difficult to decide. Accordingly, if we depend upon this rule ("avoid mortal sin") to solve our problems, it will rather create new problems. We will ever be doubtful and worried in conscience, anxious about our confessions.



*Full Consent of the Will.* This condition is present when, knowing that we are moving in the wrong direction, we consent to that movement away from God. But the will is as difficult to measure as the mind: there is no instrument to tell us, no calculus that enables us to figure out exactly, whether our consent is full or not. Again, we are left in a state of doubt, uncertainty, and anxiety.

To sum up: While the distinction between mortal and venial sin is important doctrinally (since only mortal sins merit everlasting punishment), it does not offer us a really practical or satisfactory rule for living a Christian life. We must look elsewhere to find such a rule.

### This Rule is Not Given by Jesus

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount does not discuss how much a man may steal without committing mortal sin; He says, "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth. . . ." Thus He teaches complete detachment, even from necessary things, as when He says, "Be not solicitous what you shall eat or what you shall put on." Again, Jesus does not discuss whether impurity is always mortally sinful, or when it is not; He asks for entire inward purity and holiness; He desires that we should not take the smallest step in the wrong direction. "If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. For it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish rather than that thy whole body go into hell."

Jesus did not merely forbid grave external (or internal) sins against chastity; nor did He discuss when familiarities between the sexes become sinful. He taught complete purity of heart. "Whosoever shall look upon a woman to lust after her hath already committed adultery with her in his heart." Again, "Blessed are the pure of heart."

Jesus did not distinguish between mortal and venial sins of speech. He said, "Let your speech be yea, yea: No, no: and that which is over and above these is of evil."

Finally, Jesus did not discuss when it is legitimate to fight another, and when sinful; he did not define what constitutes grave injury of another, nor assert that it is necessary to avoid only such injury. He said, "You have heard that it hath been said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' but I say to you not to resist evil; but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other. And if a man will contend with thee in judgment, and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him. And whosoever will force thee one mile, go with him another two."

While the distinction between mortal and venial sin is certainly presupposed and contained in the teaching of Jesus, it is rather like the way in which the degrees of latitude and longitude, while measuring a country, are not visible on the landscape. Jesus does not make this distinction the burden of His practical teaching. Nowhere does He tell us to be satisfied with avoiding mortal sin. Nowhere does He tell us to be satisfied even with avoiding venial sin. Always He exhorts us to the

most perfect purity and loftiest holiness: "You therefore are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

### 3. The Right Rule for Christians

The rules and principles that should guide us in the supernatural way of life have been given many times in these pages. They are repeated now by way of summary and in contrast to the false rule that is now being criticised. Two rules may be given, although they are but the positive and negative, the obverse and reverse, of one truth.

First, the end and goal of the Christian life is holiness or perfection. "You shall be holy because I am holy." (I Peter 1, 16) Not only is holiness the end proper to the supernatural order, to which we now belong, but its pursuit is really the only practical way of avoiding sin. In order to achieve even the lowest degree of Christian perfection, we need to aim at the highest. A man who walks in the mire will not find it easy to keep his shoes clean, but one who flies in an airplane above the earth will have no difficulty. Similarly, one who lives on the natural plane, attached to creatures and loving the world, will find it very difficult to avoid sin; but one who lives on the supernatural plane, beyond the causes of sin, will be able to avoid evil more readily.

The second rule is the rule of motivation: we should act always from supernatural motives, eliminating mere natural motives. By acting from supernatural motives we correspond with grace, activate charity, and advance towards perfection. By ridding ourselves of natural motives we remove from the soul that affection for creatures which hinders the exercise and growth of charity while at the same time it moves us in the direction of sin.

*Not that I have already obtained this, or already have been made perfect, but I press on hoping that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not consider that I have laid hold of it already. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind, I strain forward to what is before, I press on towards the goal, to the prize of God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3, 12-14)*



## The Samples and Sin

If we are to practice contempt for the world, in the sense that we are to regard even the good things of the world as nothing in comparison to God and so not give our affections to them, then we must be ready with a more resolute and positive contempt, a real hatred for the forbidden samples, that is, for creatures inasmuch as through sin they turn us from God. Contrition, which is the proper attitude of the Christian towards sin, is defined by the Council of Trent as a grief of mind over sin committed and a detestation of it, together with a resolve not to sin again. If a Christian on the one hand is to love God, on the other he should hate sin and grieve over it. Moreover, one who desires to advance spiritually will wish to develop such hatred of sin, remembering how the saints wept over their sins and did great penances for them, although their sins were often very small and apparently trivial in comparison with others that occur quite commonly without shocking us very much.

### 1. Hating Sin through Hating the Samples

In regard to sin, then, the practical problem of the spiritual life is this: how can we develop a deep and intense hatred for that which is so opposed to God?

Now it will be at once apparent how the doctrine of contempt of the world shows us the way to despise sin, and the practice of this contempt will make the detestation of sin, not indeed easy, but at any rate a practical possibility, something within the reach of our powers aided by grace. For if we are accustomed to practice contempt for creatures and are habitually mortified in regard to them, using them for utility but not for mere pleasure or from affection, then we will be prepared to hate those forbidden pleasures that have caused us to sin in the past or might now or in the future be a source of temptation. Even if we were so unfortunate, because of our weakness in a sudden fierce assault of temptation, to fall into sin, we would have the preparation of mind and habit of mortification that would enable us to turn against sin once we had recovered ourselves and grace would move us to repentance.

At the same time, our present point of view will make evident how difficult it will be, not to say morally impossible, for a worldly man to have true contrition or to experience repentance. For a worldly man is one who loves creatures, who seeks his enjoyment and happiness in the pleasures afforded by creatures; he lives his whole life in the embrace of creatures: how then, when he sins, as he is almost certain

to do, can he now hate these very same creatures and grieve over the sinful pleasure he has taken in them? For a worldly man to repent after he has sinned would be almost as remarkable as if the swift strong current of a stream were suddenly to reverse itself and surge uphill as powerfully as a moment before it had rushed downwards. A worldly man is not mentally prepared to repent, for he has no notion of the doctrine of contempt for creatures; his whole mentality is opposed to this effort—since creatures are good, he reasons, we should love and enjoy them. Nor has he any practice in such contempt. To repent, he must reverse, not a single sinful act, but the whole current and course of his past life. It is not, in truth, absolutely impossible for him to repent and hate sin; but that he will be able to do so in the circumstance is at the least very unlikely. His chance of repentance, then, when worldliness leads him into sin, as it is almost certain to do, is in fact rather small: not because God will not receive him, since God will always receive the repentant sinners, but because through the wrong habits of a lifetime he has made it difficult for himself to change. After a tree has grown up, its shape cannot be changed; but it can be shaped when it is a sapling. Therefore, while it is well to encourage ourselves, and all sinners, with the thought of God's boundless mercy to sinners, we must not forget, when we plan the practice of the spiritual life, to take cognizance of this practical difficulty, the moral or psychological difficulty we may call it, of repentance in the case of those who live worldly lives and are attached to creatures.

This difficulty of repentance will also help to explain why worldly people are so indifferent to grave sin while the saints are deeply grieved by the slightest fault. It will explain how worldly people become so spiritually insensitive to sin that they can see no malice in it at all. They are so attached to the pleasure derived from creatures that they cannot become indignant over this pleasure even when it offends directly against the will of God.

Judas and Peter affords us examples, respectively, of the fact that repentance is difficult to those who love the world but proceeds as it were spontaneously from those who love God. Peter sinned by denying Jesus in a moment of weakness when overtaken by a frightful and unexpected catastrophe; but because he really loved Jesus, he was able to accept the grace proffered him and repent as soon as he saw clearly what he had done. No doubt Judas, too, loved Jesus in the first days of his vocation; but he retained an attachment for money, an attachment that grew until it finally outweighed his love for the Son of God. After he had sinned Judas did not repent. He did not love Jesus before, that is, immediately before, the act of sin, hence he did not love Him afterwards. And why should he? What had happened to effect such a change of heart? Sin? Sin works in an opposite direction, strengthening, increasing the love of creatures, carrying this love to its wildest excess. The act of sin would not teach him to love God.

It may be objected that sin is in itself a thing odious, a perversion, a monstrosity; and therefore easy to hate.—Now of course, sin *is* a monstrosity—from God's point of view and in its contradiction of

divine love; but to appreciate this deformity, one must take God's point of view and live by divine love! To the sinner, sin, or the creature that causes him to sin, is, not monstrous, but beautiful: he loves it beyond all things else; this is why he sins with it, disregarding the conditions imposed by God for its use. He chooses this created good as his supreme good and final end, turning his back deliberately on God. What causes the sinner to sin, in fact, is the very creature he loves most; and now, in order to repent, he must have a sincere and sovereign hatred of this thing he so excessively loves. Truly a complete and difficult reversal: And the act of sin, once again, does not make such a reversal any easier. Here also the case of Judas serves as an illustration. He was not merely required, for repentance, to practice contempt for creatures in general; in particular he would have to abandon, to repent truly, his love for money, which was precisely the creature for whose love he had turned away from God. There is thus no salvation without love. There is no repentance without love. To repent and to be saved one must exercise at least this lowest degree of love, preference of God over every creature. This much is implied even in imperfect contrition. One is required to choose God, not only in preference to any and every creature, but precisely in preference to that creature which in sin has been loved above God. And, as we have said, if one has not such love for God before sinning, one is not likely to have it afterwards; sin does not teach or create love for God. In practice, we must learn to love God by detachment from the samples and by mortification. In this way we are enabled to repent of past sins, to prepare for repentance in the future should we be so unhappy as to fall into sin through weakness, and finally, to hate all sins, those of others as well as our own, and offer our penances for all.

## 2. Buying Spiritual Goods with the Samples

Not only may we realize the horror of sin by detachment from even the good samples: in the same way we may learn, by experience, the value of grace and of divine love. All give lip service to grace and charity, protesting with facile piety, that these are the greatest of God's gifts; but too often we show in practice how little real appreciation we have of these supernatural gifts when we fail to correspond with actual grace, when we undermine sanctifying grace by negligence and venial sin, and, finally, when we throw away altogether this sanctifying grace, this sharing in the divine nature, by mortal sin. How, then, can we learn to appreciate the value of God's supernatural gifts? Here is one more spiritual problem confronting an earnest Christian; and the answer to it is found, again, in the doctrine of the samples.

An Indian child who has found a gold nugget will give it to a prospector for a few beads or trinkets. Since the gold has cost the child nothing, he has no appreciation of its value. But the prospector, who has left home and comfort, and undertakes a life of danger and hardship simply in order to find gold, has a very real appreciation of its value. Our appreciation of the value of anything depends on what it

has cost us. A gimcrack that has cost us a few pennies we lose without many tears; but the loss of something for which we have paid a high price in money or labor causes us real sorrow.

From these parallels we may gain a lesson valuable for the Christian life. We have so little appreciation for God's gifts because we have paid so little for them: we will learn appreciation in proportion as we pay for them.

Now as we appraise the value of earthly goods by means of money, we may know and love God, and therefore learn His value, through creatures, through the samples; and we may therefore obtain the gifts of God by means of the samples. The samples, in other words, are like money; and the more we "pay," by giving up the samples, the more will we appreciate God whose goodness we enjoy in return for this sacrifice. Even when we buy material goods we must give up our money—we cannot spend it and keep it too; and the fact of our giving up what represents so many pleasures and comforts, or so much labor and trouble, is what makes us value what we spend our money for. In giving up the samples, then, we are like a man spending money. And the more we spend to gain and increase God's gifts, the more will we have a vivid realization of the value of those gifts.

How much should we be ready to spend for the commodities of the supernatural order? They are so precious that we should be willing to give up *all* material goods. Jesus teaches us that we should carefully reckon the cost of eternal life; He shows by parables that we are very foolish not to do so: *For which of you, wishing to build a tower, does not sit down first and calculate the outlays that are necessary, whether he has the means to complete it? Lest, after he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish, all who behold begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish!"* And then, after thus warning us to be ready to pay the cost for so priceless a good as eternal life, He goes on to tell us what this cost is, *So, therefore, every one of you who does not renounce all that he possesses cannot be my disciple.* (Luke 14, 28-33) It is a high price indeed! A Christian should be ready to renounce, at least interiorly by detachment, all the goods of the world. He must be ready to say with St. Paul: *I count ALL THINGS to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord.* (Phil. 3, 8)

### 3. Samples of Hell

As the pleasures of earth are samples of heaven's joys, so the pain involved in renouncing earthly pleasures is a sample of that terrible unending loss of God and of happiness in hell. Thus, to give up smoking is a sample of hell: it enables us to experience in some slight measure the awful sense of loss experienced by the damned, a loss not only of a minute created pleasure but of the vast infinite Good which is God. So every affliction, from a headache to the loss of a friend, wife, parents, child, is also a sample of hell: a sample of eternal loss, a sample of infinite pain.

To form an idea of hell, we should compare the pain we experience here, by renunciation or by loss, to the pain of hell; and we may do this in the manner in which we compared creatures, the samples of God's goodness, to God. That is, we may compare these earthly sufferings to eternal suffering, according to duration, according to quality, and according to intensity.

Thus, every pain experienced on earth, like every pleasure, is transient, while the suffering of hell is eternal; so that sufferings here, in the matter of duration, give us a dim idea, and only a dim idea, of the eternity of misery in hell. Further, as material pleasures are but a sample in quality of the immeasurably loftier spiritual joys of heaven, so bodily pain here is but a sample of the more subtle and penetrating suffering that will afflict the souls in hell (although, after the resurrection, the bodies of the damned will also share this pain). Finally, the suffering of hell will be infinitely more intense than suffering here—it will be an everlasting prolongation of pain that each moment seems unendurable. To gain some notion of the intensity of the suffering in hell, recall that suffering in your life that was greatest, consider yourself as experiencing it in its maximum intensity, multiply it by infinity, prolong it for eternity. Then decide whether you would prefer this, or would perhaps rather put up with the relatively infinitesimal pain that is involved in renouncing some earthly pleasure! Here is one case in which the doctrine of the samples is true in reverse, one case in which it is better to take the sample than to wait for that vaster thing which the sample teaches us of!

Suppose that a woman loves her husband too much, i. e., to the extent of sinning with him; her plea is that she would otherwise lose his love and that she cannot bear to be separated from him. Now we know that every joy in this world is a sample of the joys of heaven. Accordingly, the love from which this woman cannot bear to be separated is but a sample of the love this woman might have enjoyed in heaven—for God is infinitely more lovable than her husband. The woman, having committed sin, however, does not go to heaven, but to hell, where she is deprived of the attractions of God. If separation from her husband was unbearable on earth, how vastly more unbearable will be her separation in eternity from the infinitely perfect God! Most men already in this world experience something of the emptiness of earthly joys; even worldly and sinful men will realize it in the next. And so, this poor woman, with the paltry joys of sense no longer at hand to bemuse her, and their worthlessness now undeniably clear to her, will suffer more frightfully than ever before: the insatiable craving of her soul for happiness and love, put off so long with trifles and substitutes and samples, will now assert itself in all its elemental power and urgency, while she is forever turned away from the one sole source of goodness and joy. She would have done better, clearly, to put up with the separation from her husband, when being with him was sinful, than now to be compelled to endure endlessly this immeasurably greater loss. So should we all be prepared to put up now with the pain of



giving up sinful pleasures, or even lawful pleasures, than later to suffer the awful loss experienced in hell.

To be sure, some may question whether it is useful to meditate on hell at all; much more, then, will they question the value of bringing home to ourselves the tortures of hell in so direct and graphic a manner as is here proposed. But the saints meditated on hell and they proposed this meditation to others. So St. Ignatius places it early in his *Spiritual Exercises*. His purpose was the practical one of changing worldly men into apostles and saints; and for accomplishing this he realized the decisive value of the Church's teaching on hell. Similarly, St. Francis de Sales placed a meditation on hell at the beginning of his *Introduction to a Devout Life*, seeing in it a powerful means of getting men started to live a more devout life. Those who do not wish to hear much of hell are (aside from infidels) the worldly and sinners; for they recognize in the doctrine of hell a challenge to their way of life; a strong conviction of the reality of hell and a vivid realization of its horror, would certainly make them change their habits of living.

Undoubtedly Christianity offers more noble motives to her children than the fear of hell. But there is no more powerful deterrent from sin for weak and imperfect men than fear of hell's eternal flames, especially when the allurements of temptation are overpoweringly strong. Even in the lives of saints the fear of hell was often a final deterrent from sin. The martyrs did not choose martyrdom because of fondness for torture. In the end they chose to suffer martyrdom for the faith rather than suffer the pains of hell for denying the faith. They chose the sample of hell in preference to hell itself. Here, we repeat, is the one preference for something of this world over eternity that we all will be wise to make!

## FOURTH PRINCIPLE

The Supreme Dominion of God



# The Supreme Dominion of God

## 1. The Importance of the Doctrine

Love is perfected in the union of the lovers. Human lovers are not content with occasional meetings, are not satisfied until they are bound together for life in marriage. Likewise God draws souls who love Him to union with Himself and these in turn seek eagerly for union with Him. Such union will be consummated only in the final espousals of the soul to God in the Beatific Vision, in heaven. Meanwhile, however, faithful Christians will ardently pursue such union, as men separated from loved ones will hurry eagerly to rejoin them at every opportunity.

Now the most perfect union with God in this life is in prayer, especially in that intimate prayer known as contemplation. In its most intimate form, however, this prayer is only enjoyed by those at the summit of perfection. We have also seen how we may attain to an indirect union with God through the knowledge and love of our neighbor. But devout souls look about to see if there are not yet other ways in which they may enjoy union with God, making this union, so far as possible on earth, continuous. And another mode of union is in fact opened up to us by the Doctrine of the Supreme Dominion of God, or God's Universal Providence, which we shall now study.

In love there is a union of wills; and if in our present state a perfect and immediate union with God is not possible, it is at any rate possible to unite our wills to God in all the occurrences of life: so that, even apart from our prayer life and the immediate service of our neighbor, we may remain in union with God's will in every incident in our daily lives. Here, then, already in this world, will be a foretaste and anticipation of heaven—a life of union with God. What we must learn to do, in practice, is to discern the divine will in all actions and events, distinguishing it from grosser elements.—And it is our faith, assenting to the doctrine and fact of God's Supreme Dominion, that reveals to us the divine will running like a golden thread through every event, great and small; but this thread is quite hidden from the mere natural mind working without faith. Thus the doctrine of the Supreme Dominion, showing us the way to a union of our wills with God's, introduces us into a new world, or rather transforms all that happens in this world with a new and sublime meaning, bringing us to the very anteroom of heaven.

Moreover, to increase in sanctity, which means to increase, above all, in charity, there is need for a corresponding growth in faith; for all the virtues grow together, like the fingers on the hand. Indeed, since love proceeds from knowledge—we can love only the good that we

know—faith precedes charity; and therefore, to grow in charity, one must also, and first of all, grow in faith. For this reason, when one resolves to pursue sanctity, as all Christians should, God responds to this aspiration by sending him the means to grow, first in faith, then in charity. He does this by sending many afflictions. It is hard to see the will of God in unpleasant happenings, easier to see it in that which pleases us. Who will not agree that God is good when there is nothing but sunshine? Who will not find it difficult to avoid complaints when the days are dreary and gray and there are many trials? But by learning to discover the divine will in its more obscure and difficult manifestations, we exercise our faith, thus growing in this virtue. And of course, each new discovery of the divine will gives us a fresh opportunity to unite our will to God's; and as the discoveries become more numerous, as they will when we live more and more by pure faith, we will be enabled to attain, so far as the conditions of this life will permit it, to a life of continual union with God, which is the ideal of the saints and the beginning of heavenly happiness. *Do not, therefore, lose your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of patience that, doing the will of God, you may receive the promise: For yet a very little while, and He who is to come, will come and will not delay. But my just one lives by faith. And if he draws back, he will not please my soul.* (Heb. 10, 36-38)

## 2. The Meaning of the Doctrine

The doctrine of the Supreme Dominion means, briefly, that God rules every creature and regulates all the events of life: *powerfully*, so that He really achieves His divine end; *sweetly*, so that He does not constrain any creature or violate its nature but moves it accordingly to the laws that govern its inner being, laws which He Himself has made. Let us examine this doctrine in greater detail.

*God gives existence to every being.* To every creature God gives its special nature and existence. This includes both animate and inanimate creatures, and rational creatures also, our fellow men. To the latter He gives temperament and hereditary peculiarities.

Now if we were to criticize a table, we would insult, not the table, but its maker. And if we criticize our neighbor, it is not merely the neighbor that we injure, but God, who made our neighbor as he is. Thus if we find reason for complaining about the temperaments and dispositions of others, we are (if we view the matter with the help of faith) really criticizing God. We should rather be contented with others as God has made them and live in peace with them regardless of temperamental differences.

Moreover, we should be satisfied with the qualities and talents that God has given to us ourselves; otherwise we are like children, who when given one kind of candy, instead of thanking their benefactor, cry for a different kind. So we show ourselves ungrateful to God when we spend our time wishing for other talents, other dispositions, other conditions of life.

*God gives action and movement to every creature.* Not only does God give existence to every creature, but He also sustains them all in existence. Further, He gives them the power of movement and then assists them in exercising that power. Without this assistance, which is called concurrence, men would not be able to act at all; without it, one would not be able, literally, to lift a finger or take a step. Thus, all the actions of all creatures may be said to come from God and fall under the rule of His Providence.

This universal providence includes of course even the free actions of men. For God gives to men, not only their bodily powers and their minds, but also free will; and He assists them, or concurs, in the exercise of this faculty. In so doing, God does not cancel or suppress human freedom, but rather utilizes it for His own purposes. A carpenter, before using a saw, does not strip it of its teeth, which give the saw its special value and perfection as a tool; on the contrary, the carpenter rather employs the saw according to its proper nature, i.e., he keeps its teeth sharpened to cut wood. So God, in ruling men, does not violate their nature, but rather governs them according to their nature, which is intelligent and free. Therefore, He does not strip them of their freedom, which would take from them what is most perfect and distinctive, but rather uses this freedom to achieve His end, which of course, is to manifest His glory, that is, to communicate His goodness, in this case on the supernatural plane by sanctifying His rational creatures.

In the supernatural order God concurs in our actions by sending actual graces that initiate, assist, and complete them. Accordingly, all the good that is accomplished in the supernatural order may be said to come from God also. *For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will.* (Phil. 2, 14)

What about sin? Does God will it? May sinful actions be said to come from God? Certainly God does not will sin directly. Nevertheless, God permits sin. Nor does He permit willy-nilly, as we do—because we cannot prevent it. He permits sin because He wills to permit it; because, having given men free will, He accepts the hazard that goes with this gift; because also, by His wisdom and power, He can use even sinful actions to accomplish good, thus manifesting His glory all the more remarkably. Even to sinners God gives existence and the power of action; He also concurs in their action,—otherwise they could not even sin. But He does not share in their malice: this comes from the sinners themselves. What God does is to use the actions of sinners without being touched by the malice of the sinners. In this He is like a great general who is able to utilize the movements of his enemies to accomplish his master plan. A later chapter will say more of how God uses even sin in His providential rule.

In a word, those who live by faith will be able to see the will of God in *all* the actions of *all* creatures. *Now we know that for those who love God all things work together unto good, for those who, according to His purpose, are saints through His call.* (Rom. 8, 28)

*God gives direction to every being.* God's final end in creating

the world, we know, is to manifest His glory, or communicate His goodness. The various orders of creatures accomplish this by fulfilling the special purposes of their diverse natures; but they accomplish it above all through men, at whose service they are placed and in whom they are gathered up and used to glorify God in the highest possible manner by means of supernatural holiness.

Men, too, besides their final purpose of glorifying God by holiness, are given special purposes and functions on earth; all men have work to do, good to accomplish, important contributions to make to the welfare of their brethren and the glory of God; indeed it is in carrying out the tasks assigned men that they attain holiness and so glorify God. For men to know this purpose in the providential plan is quite different from knowing and following their vocation; they may live according to their vocation and still not know clearly the special mission God has assigned to them. The latter will be known perfectly only in eternity where we will be able to see all the events of our lives in the setting of that plan by which God has directed them. Meanwhile, these events often look like a great hodge-podge of disconnected happenings, of painful and stupid accidents, without any principle of unity. Here again we must live by faith, leaving it to God to direct daily actions and happenings towards the accomplishment of whatever good He would have from us. And of course, in the end, all is directed towards our sanctification and His glory. Already faith enables us at times to trace, at least imperfectly, the divine wisdom and goodness in the apparently haphazard events of our lives.

It is said that the craftsmen who make the famous oriental rugs weave these rugs from behind; they themselves therefore do not see the beautiful designs which their skilled fingers produce, but they know that the design is visible on the other side. So we cannot see the designs we are weaving by our daily actions, but God can see them and in fact He is directing our actions, like a master weaver, to create a pattern and design; and in eternity we, too, shall see the unity that is now hidden from our eyes.

The practical lesson to be drawn from this consideration is evident. We must not complain about the circumstances of our lives; we should not fret that we are neglected or forgotten; we should not judge our lives useless or worthless or trivial; we ought not to become discouraged by the seeming unimportance of what we do nor wearied by endless petty duties assigned to us. All these things, if done in a spirit of faith, are being gathered into a design conceived by the Master Artist Himself.

In the following five chapters will be seen how the general truths outlined in this present chapter apply in detail and in practice. We may conclude these introductory remarks by giving the reasons why the doctrine of the Supreme Dominion is most appropriately taken up in this place.

When the doctrine of the Glory of God was described, it was seen

that one of our chief ways of glorifying God is by means of the Supreme Dominion.

By faith in the Supreme Dominion, by tracing all happenings back to the divine will, we make a practical recognition of God's power, as of His wisdom and goodness; and we glorify Him in this recognition. Still, we did not take up the Supreme Dominion when studying the Glory of God. That would have been the logical place. But we were not yet fully prepared for a practical recognition and application of this doctrine; and therefore, since our purpose here is practical, logic was allowed to yield to the demands of practice.

To do God's will we must be prepared to give up our own will. It is not enough to know God's will; we may know it and still not do it. Doing God's will means sacrificing our own. Now what deflects us from the will of God is the love of creatures, which causes us to act to please ourselves with creatures. Our attachments for creatures cause us to act from natural motives rather than from the supernatural motive of doing the will of God. Therefore, as long as we do not recognize the need of detaching ourselves from creatures, there is little likelihood that we will be able even to recognize the will of God in practice, especially where it is a matter of choosing among good or indifferent objects. And as long as we are voluntarily attached to creatures we will be, not only unable, but also unwilling to give up our own pleasure to do the will of God. For this reason we can understand the practice of the Supreme Dominion only in the measure that we understand and accept the doctrine of detachment. Not that we should defer doing the will of God until we are fully detached! In practicing detachment we are already doing the will of God. Nevertheless, faithful adherence to the divine will presupposes a certain detachment and mortification; and progress in conformity to the divine will is possible only in the degree that we become detached from creatures. In this sense, the doctrine of the Supreme Dominion is a relatively advanced principle of spiritual living and its study is most fruitful when there is a realization of the need for detachment.

Furthermore, the doctrine of the Supreme Dominion is the supreme manifestation of the law of the Cross and for this reason it is best understood in relation to the Folly of the Cross, as the daily almost uninterrupted opportunity to practice this Folly. The Folly of the Cross teaches that we should renounce, at least interiorly, attachment to the goods of the natural order for the love of God. The two natural goods to which we are most attached, which we are therefore most reluctant to renounce, are our own judgment and self-will. Now to live by faith in God's Supreme Dominion is to give up our own human judgment and allow ourselves, in very trying circumstances, to be guided by God's word alone; it is, at the same time, to give up our own will in order to conform in all things to the will of God. Thus the doctrine of the Supreme Dominion, showing us both the need of giving up our own wills and how it is to be done, leads us to the most difficult of all renunciations in the Christian life, the very renunciation at which Satan

and his followers balked, and which also proved the undoing of Adam and Eve. Thus the doctrine of the Supreme Dominion leads us to the very summit of the Christian life on earth, the summit of Calvary. It will lead us also beyond this summit, as faith likewise teaches, to the brightness of eternal glory; for *through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of heaven.*" (Acts 14, 22)



# The Supreme Dominion God's Intention

We glorify God in His Supreme Dominion chiefly in trials and afflictions, for, as already observed, it is relatively easy to see God as the cause of pleasant and consoling events (though here, too, there is opportunity to exercise faith), more difficult to see Him in tribulations. Hence it is a special test of faith to be able to see the divine will in trials and a test of charity to embrace the divine will in trying circumstances.

Two questions here present themselves for examination: The first is the question of God's intention—*why* does He afflict us? What does He mean to accomplish by the numerous trials He sends to His friends? The second question concerns *how* God carries out His intention, especially how He afflicts us through our fellows, using them as blind instruments.

## 1. The Divine Plan: Like to Him

Four levels of creatures may be distinguished: the inorganic, which have physical and chemical activity; the vegetative, which nourish and reproduce themselves; animals, which have the ability to move about, together with the faculties of sense knowledge; finally, those creatures having intelligence and free will, angels and men.

All of these diverse kinds of creatures come from God: they were created by God. They all likewise return to God: by acting in accordance with the nature given to them. They manifest the divine glory and so tend to God as their final end. Like a fisherman that casts his line and then reels in his catch, God casts forth His creation from Himself but then brings it back to Himself by implanting in every creature a tendency to seek Him.

However, in this movement back to God, the only creatures that will actually enter God's presence and be united to Him in eternal friendship are those having intelligence and free will—in a word, those having a spiritual nature. Men return to God immediately (we leave the angels out of account) by possessing Him through knowledge and love, while the lower orders of creatures return to Him only mediately, that is, through men; men gather all the lower levels of creation within themselves and restore them to God.

To explain: Inorganic substances do not return to God immediately. They are gathered up into the plant order just above them; for plants nourish themselves on elements taken from the earth. Then the plants in turn, by offering themselves as food to animals, are gathered

up into this higher order of creation. Finally, man uses all three of the lower orders to sustain himself. In fact, man recapitulates in his own nature all the three lower orders: in him the elements of inorganic matter are formed into a living body, having vegetative and animal functions, by a soul that is spiritual and therefore capable of union with God.

But man himself does not possess God on his own human level. He, too, is caught up on a higher level. He is divinized that he may glorify God in a manner proportionate to God's goodness, that is, in the divine or supernatural order. Man, therefore, becomes as a god, a son of God. *We know that when He appears, we shall be LIKE TO HIM, for we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope in him makes himself holy, just as he also is holy.* (I John 3, 3)

The whole universe, then, is in a continuous process of returning to God, of assimilation to God, of becoming *like God*. Each order assimilates the order lower than itself, that is, makes it like itself (*ad simile*, to make like). Lifeless elements are assimilated by plants; that is, they are made like the plants, are transformed into the higher nature of the plants. Then the plants are assimilated by the animals, and the animals by man. Finally, man is assimilated by God; that is to say, he is made like unto God by grace and that holiness of life which is the product of grace: *We shall be like to Him*.

One difference in this process of assimilation should be noted in the highest level. Man, in being assimilated, is not lost in God, does not simply become part of God. His higher spiritual personality is immortal and is preserved even in the transformation it undergoes through grace and union with God.

Such is the divine plan for glorifying God in creation. But a question remains: Why does God wish to assimilate man to Himself? Why does He make us like to Himself? Why does He thus draw all creation back to Himself, climaxing the process of divinizing men?

St. John, in the text just quoted, gives us one reason why we must be divinized: "For we shall see Him just as He is." An adequate knowledge of God, such as will be realized in the Beatific Vision, requires a certain equality, so to speak, with God—in a word, requires that we be raised to the divine plane. A dog cannot have an adequate knowledge of his human master, nor sympathize with the latter's human problems, because the dog's knowledge, while real and good in its own order, is altogether below the spiritual order to which his master's human soul belongs. Similarly, as human beings we are infinitely below the divine order. We are human and natural; God is supernatural and divine. To see God "as He is"—which means on God's level, and which is accomplished finally in the Beatific Vision—we must be raised to the divine plane of existence.

Another reason why we are made *like to Him* is that true friendship is possible only between equals; therefore, to be united to God in friendship, we must be raised to His level. All real friendship presupposes a certain equality, whether of taste or age or condition in life. Hence, there cannot be true friendship between a man and his dog:

there is a much lower kind of love which St. Thomas calls concupiscence. Only if the dog could receive a human soul and mind could there be friendship between them. Again, a man cannot make his servant a friend; for in making him a friend, the servant becomes an equal, and so the man loses a servant. So, too, there cannot be true friendship between a king and a commoner; if the king marries a commoner, she ceases to be a commoner, she becomes his equal, she becomes his queen. Likewise when God loves us, He raises us to His level, He makes us equals, gives us a share in His divine nature, makes us *like to Him* and, as the Apostle adds, imposes on us the duty of becoming holy, *just as He also is holy*.

## 2. The Manner of Assimilation

With the above facts before us it is possible to understand—dimly, in the manner of faith—God's intention in directing all the circumstances and events of our lives, especially in sending the suffering which forms so large a part of human existence.

Everything, in order to be assimilated to the next higher order of being, must undergo a complete transformation. This amounts to saying that its own proper existence and qualities must be destroyed that it may put on the qualities proper to the higher order. The chemicals of the soil are destroyed when they are assimilated into the plant; i.e., they lose their own special mode of existence and are transformed into something quite different, a living, organic body. When the plant in turn is assimilated by an animal to the latter's level of existence—say, when a head of lettuce is eaten by a rabbit—the plant is also destroyed in its own proper existence by being transformed into a rabbit. If a hunter should see the rabbit, he will wish to raise it to the human level, by eating it; and to do this he shoots the rabbit and removes from it whatever is indigestible. This is the price the rabbit must pay to become a man!

There is a further and final step in the process. When God sees the hunter, God wishes to raise him (and every other man) to the divine level, to the status of a son of God, that he may enjoy friendship with God. The man must undergo a complete transformation: he is to be divinized; and to be divinized, he must also in a sense cease to be a man. As the hunter, before he can eat and assimilate the rabbit, must kill it and remove inedible parts, so God, in order to divinize man, must remove from him whatever is in opposition to his supernatural destiny. Of course, in the case of man's assimilation to God, man always retains his personal identity; he is therefore not simply absorbed in the divine substance nor identified with it, as the pantheists hold. He is assimilated to God in the sense that he is made like to God and sees Him as He is, as St. John teaches.

Therefore, in order to sanctify us and transform us into divine beings, God destroys the paganism in us, the natural man. Our human substance and activity of course (see Part I, Chapter III) always remain intact. The annihilation we must undergo is in the moral and

spiritual order, in the sphere ruled by the free will. It is an annihilation of natural desires, motives, and attachments for creatures. Now by means of sufferings of all kinds God is able to break our attachments for created goods. Indeed, suffering is nothing other than a painful breaking of an attachment to some good of the natural order. And the doctrine of the Supreme Dominion teaches that divine Providence regulates sufferings to the end that human hearts may be emptied of earthly affections to make more room for the love of God.

This is the reason for all afflictions. It is the reason we must bear sickness, poverty, pain, reproach, injustice, humiliation. All these are gathered up by the divine plan to make for our sanctification. *For those who love God, all things work together unto good.* (Rom. 8, 28) The Scriptures also give the reason: *Flesh and blood cannot see God; neither can corruption possess incorruption.* In order to possess divine love we must be purged of earthly affections. Suffering is the keen blade that God uses in cutting out of our hearts whatever hinders Him from taking full possession.

It is evident that, in the divine plan, suffering is sent not only to sinners but to the just as well. Therefore, besides being a punishment for evil, it is also a purification of the just. It is sent to the good to make them better, to make them saints. How foolish, therefore, for good Christians to expect an exemption from sorrow! How foolish for them to complain that their sins do not merit such grievous trials. *Whom the Lord loves He chastiseth; and He scourgeth every son that He receiveth.* (Heb. 12, 11)

### This Doctrine in Scripture

Many passages of Sacred Scripture indicate the Providential purpose of affliction. Each person may gain instruction and consolation in trial by discovering and meditating on these passages for himself. Here it will be sufficient to mention a few of the more important texts.

In the Book of Judith we read how God prepared Judith for becoming an instrument in His hands for the deliverance of His people. Judith was a beautiful woman, very rich and prominent. To prepare her for His work, God first took her husband, then inspired her to live a life of great austerity for many years, thus detaching her from the goods of the world. When she was fully purified, God used her to free her people from the tyranny of Holofernes. Since God does not change, He prepares and purifies men in the same way today. Judith explained to the elders of the Jews how God was trying His chosen people through the many afflictions sent upon them; and she exhorted them to resist discouragement: *And now, brethren, as you are the ancients among the people of God, and their very soul resteth upon you, comfort their hearts by your speech, that they may be mindful how our fathers were tempted [i.e., tried] that they might be proved, whether they worshipped their God truly. They must remember how our Father Abraham was tempted, and being proved by many tribulations, was made the friend of God. So Isaac, so Jacob, so Moses, and all that have*

pleased God, passed through many tribulations, remaining faithful. But they that did not receive the trials with the fear of the Lord, but uttered their impatience and the reproach of their murmuring against the Lord, were destroyed by the destroyer and perished by serpents. As for us, therefore, let us not revenge ourselves for these things which we suffer. (Judith 8)

Notice God's intention as here indicated, i.e., "that they might be proved." Abraham was tried that he might be "made the friend of God." Again, "all that have pleased God" were given severe trials of faith, passing "through many tribulations, remaining faithful." Thus the trials of the *just*, and not of sinners, are explained already in the Old Testament; that is to say, trials are explained without its being said that they are a punishment for sin.

Tobias was tried and proved in a similar way. This great and holy man was blinded by the hot dung of a swallow—surely a stupid and needless accident, to judge it by human standards, that interrupted and indeed ended a most useful career. And yet the angel Raphael explained to Tobias afterwards how this "accident" had been used by Providence to perfect his virtue; *And because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee.* Mark the curious sequence of thought, the unexpected logic—curious and unexpected to the human point of view, which would tend rather to call it illogical: not, *in spite* of the fact that you were acceptable to God, you were tried; but *because* of that fact. Further: not merely that you *were* tried, but that it was *necessary* that you be tried: necessary, of course, because God is holy and those who see God must be holy too. Here is another explanation of suffering and tribulation that does not make it only a punishment of sin. And the inspired word applies the principle here given to all God's friends, *But this EVERY ONE is sure of that worshippeth Thee*, that his life if it be under trial, shall be crowned; and if it be under *tribulation*, it shall be delivered; and if it be under *correction*, it shall be allowed to come to Thy mercy. (Tobias 3, 21) We shall be crowned only *if* we are tried, shall be delivered only *if* we suffer tribulation, shall share God's mercy only *if* corrected by suffering. There is no other way: *dying and behold we live.*

Those who wish to serve God in any special way are warned by Ecclesiasticus (2, 1-10) that they will be severely tried: *Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation. . . . Take all that shall be brought upon thee; and in thy humiliation keep patience. For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation.* This same illuminating example—i.e., that trials purify men as fire is used to purify gold and silver—was later used by St. Peter (I Peter 1, 6-7) as we have elsewhere observed.

The New Testament is filled with passages containing the same message, i.e., that suffering is intended by God to purge our souls of the dross of earthly affections. No need to repeat at this point but well to recall those texts in which Jesus teaches that we must be pruned like trees or die like seeds in the ground. This death and this pruning

take place not alone by voluntary renunciation and mortification, but also, and chiefly, through the trials by which God mortifies and cuts our affections for health and riches, for pleasure, for friends, for relatives, for life itself, by separating us from them one by one. Let us here see how St. Paul applies this doctrine to the trials of life. (See Hebrews 12, 1-13)

He first tells his correspondents that they should live by faith in the midst of the trials surrounding them, *looking on Jesus the Author and finisher of faith*. Then he quotes that astonishing, almost incredible, but inspired word of the Old Testament, *Whom the Lord loveth, He chastiseth; and He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth*. St. Paul gets rid of the difficulty that this text suggests by pointing to the example which it gives: *God dealeth with you as His sons: for what son is there whom the father doth not correct?* Put this way, the mystery of a God, Who is a Father, sending sufferings to His sons certainly looks less mysterious! Faith helps us to understand. A father loves his son; and for that very reason corrects, disciplines, chastises him. When a father sees his son acting in a manner that is not fitting to a reasonable being, he disciplines the boy, straightening out unmanly traits that the lad may become a man of strong character. So God does not chastise us out of cruelty, nor even for our sins alone, but from his desire to purify us of whatever does not befit a divine being.

So necessary is this chastisement to us that St. Paul says, *But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are made partakers, then are you bastards and not sons*. Affliction is so surely a mark of divine favor that, if we do not feel it, we must consider ourselves as being excluded from God's favor: bastards, not sons.

Finally, the Apostle indicates the purpose of affliction: to lead men to holiness: *Now all chastisement for the present, indeed, seemeth not to bring with it joy, but sorrow; but afterwards it will yield, to them that are exercised by it, the most peaceable fruit of justice*. (Remember, justice means holiness.) And holiness is wholly indispensable to those who would see God: Follow after peace and holiness; without which no man can see God.

### 3. Where the Purification Takes Place

*In the Lower Appetites*.—Our desires naturally tend towards creatures and the pleasures of earth. By afflictions God restrains and purifies these desires as well as the passions that proceed from them. The tendency to seek pleasure in eating and drinking is mortified and corrected by sickness, which prevents such enjoyment. The tendency to take complacency in human beauty is corrected by sickness and advancing age. By such means God instructs us how to restrain and control passions, teaches us that true happiness is not in their satisfaction, takes our hearts away from the joys of earth. If God did not thus turn our hearts away from the sensible delights, these would in time turn us away from God.

*In the Reason.*—God purifies our natural reason by faith. He sends us trials for which our natural minds can find no explanation. He wants us to accept these trials in a spirit of faith without any other explanation than that which faith allows, i.e., that God uses them for our sanctification. In this way reason is mortified and faith exercised.

Besides the necessity, which follows from our supernatural destiny, to rise above reason, this mortification of reason is also necessary to purge and correct that darkness which in practice and in the concrete so commonly blinds reason and leads it from its true course. In other words, there is a false wisdom and false prudence which our reason tends to accept; this is the wisdom of the world which would deflect our intelligences, then our other powers, to a pursuit of the goods of earth. The reason must therefore be purified of its tendency to follow the deceitful earthly wisdom; and here also it is faith that effects this purification—faith which guides itself by the divine will rather than by the inclinations of natural wisdom, and which, despite contradictions and unprepossessing appearances, finds good in all that God wills.

*In the Memory.*—The memory is a storehouse in which we keep the pleasures of this world, seeking in this manner to prolong the life of joys that are essentially transient. In order that we may be emptied of such human consolations, and look for happiness where alone true happiness is to be found, in God,—in order that this may be done, our memories must be emptied and mortified, and this is accomplished also by afflictions. The memory must be emptied of earthly pleasures in order to make room for the hope of heavenly joys; and as the memory of earthly joys turns to ashes, through the trials that snatch them from us, the hope of eternal happiness increases. Therefore, as the intellect is purified by faith, so the memory, as St. John of the Cross teaches, is purified by hope. To this end God sends all kinds of trials; our memory becomes a "hope chest" filled with disappointments—emptied, in other words, that it may be filled with the hope of eternal bliss.

*In the Will.*—Our wills must also be purified, and this is effected by charity. To fill the heart more and more with charity, God must empty it of earthly affections. This He does also by afflictions, which separate us from earthly goods, at the same time turning us to God, to find joy in His love. God even arranges to have us surrounded by misunderstanding, malice, hatred; so that, looking about for love, and not finding it in creatures, one is inclined to turn more and more to the Creator. Thus the will gradually learns, as the result of life's experiences, that it can find true, deep and lasting happiness in God alone.

## A Difficulty

How can God's love be genuine, it is asked, since He makes His friends suffer? Indeed, the amount of suffering in the world is used by the anti-religious as an argument against the very existence of God. When *we* love anyone we try to spare him pain; how then can God deliberately cause pain to us if He truly loves us?

The reason that friends do not cause suffering to each other because of their love is that they are already equals. On the other hand, we are not God's equals; and to see Him and love Him as He is, we must be raised to His level, which involves our elevation by sanctifying grace and a painful withdrawal of our affections from goods and pleasures of the natural order. Only when thus raised to God's level can we love Him as a friend and spouse.

If the matter is considered more carefully, it will be seen that human love also tends to remove inequalities between lovers. If a prince marries a kitchen maid, she ceases to be a kitchen maid and becomes a princess; else the prince renounces his title and authority to live at her social level. If a millionaire marries a pauper, she ceases to be a pauper in the very act of marrying the millionaire. And if the maid and the pauper were unwilling to relinquish their humble station, they would not be able to enjoy the advantages of riches and nobility. So also, to love God we must be divinized; and that this may be accomplished we must cease to be merely natural in our desires, motives, affections. God sends pain and suffering precisely to sever such natural affections, that we may be able to possess the fullness of His love. Those who speak of the duty of loving the goods of earth, such as home, country, relatives, without at the same time acknowledging the still higher duty of detachment from all such things, are simply unable to understand the purpose of suffering in the divine plan as they are incapable of appreciating that plan itself. They see suffering only as a punishment for sin, thus misconceiving the whole order of salvation.

To return to the difficulty. The example given by St. Paul in the text cited above (Heb. 12) shows that even in the case of human love, those who love sometimes cause pain to those whom they love. It is *because* the father loves his son that he disciplines and chastises him. Therefore, even the statement of the objection is false; human love does not always protect its object from pain.

Where two beings of wholly different orders are involved, the inequality is very great, and there is all the more need for a destruction of everything in the lower being that hinders its transformation into the higher. The hunter shows his love for the rabbit by eating it: in order to be assimilated to the higher level of life, the rabbit must forfeit its own proper existence. To be assimilated to God, we, too, must cease to be human: not in our substance or physical activity, which always remain human but in our tastes and affections, our aspirations, our standards of conduct, our ideals. Only thus does our conduct accord with our now divinized humanity.

Although a man and his dog belong to totally different orders, it may be said (to pursue the objection further) that the man does not wilfully inflict pain on the dog, and unlike the hunter who kills his quarry, neither does love in this case cause him to kill his pet. In answer to this, it may be said, first, that this love of a man for his dog, as for all irrational things, is not a love of true friendship but a mere concupiscence by which the dog is loved, not for itself, but in reference to its master's welfare: there can be no true friendship between



them precisely because they belong to such vastly different orders. Secondly, it should be recalled that the lower order is destroyed by the higher when the process of assimilation takes place: the hunter may not kill and eat his dog, but he does kill and eat the rabbit; and simply because, in this case, his own welfare dictates this different course. Finally, even in the case of the dog, its master will chastise it in order to remove objectionable "traits."

Paradoxical as it may appear, although only to a superficial view, there is no truth more certain than that he whom the Lord loves, He chastises; those who are not chastised are bastards, and not sons.



## The Supreme Dominion of God In Persons: Blind Instruments

In directing the events of life towards man's sanctification, God uses, not only natural causes, like sickness and natural catastrophes, but also the free actions of men. Even men He uses as instruments in effecting His purpose, and this, as we have seen (Chap. XXI) without violating their freedom. For God, Who is closer to man than man is to himself, there is no difficulty in penetrating to the root of human freedom and directing man's free actions. It would be as senseless for God in using men as instruments, to remove their freedom as it would be for a typist, before setting to work, to destroy all the keys of her typewriter.

Not only are men used as instruments by God in His work of sanctification: they are *blind* instruments. For although they are responsible for their actions, in virtue of their knowledge and personal liberty, they are nevertheless not privy to God's plans nor aware of the manner in which He is using them to benefit the souls of others (and their own souls, too). The Jewish leaders in killing Christ were responsible for the blood of an innocent Person—for the frightful crime of deicide. Yet they had no idea of how their wicked actions were being taken up by God and used to effect the redemption of mankind. Hence Jesus could say, *Father, forgive them, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO*. Pilate, Caiaphas, Herod, the Roman soldiers, the Jewish rabble, the Pharisees, were all, in spite of themselves, blind instruments in the hands of God.

God may therefore be compared to a surgeon who in operating causes us pain but does so for our own eventual good. Nor do we hold the instruments responsible for hurting us, but rather the surgeon who uses them; and despite the pain we are eager to thank the surgeon rather than blame him. In the spiritual order God similarly causes us pain, but for our own spiritual good. He wishes to remove from us whatever hinders or hurts perfect spiritual health; this is why by trials He severs those affections for creatures which hinder the life of charity. To have these attachments cut by trials is painful; but we should be convinced, through faith, that it is God Who causes such trials; and faith also reassures us as to the reason for them. In His divine surgery God uses many instruments, chief of which are our neighbors, whose actions He uses to strip us of attachments, especially to our own judgment and will. We should not then blame the instruments, but rather the Divine Surgeon Who uses them; and Him we should praise and thank, not indeed for the pain itself, but for the holiness which we will gain for accepting the pain patiently.

We should remember, too, that if we suffer much from the operation, this likewise is not the fault of God, the Surgeon, but is rather our own, because we are so imperfect, so attached to the good things of the world, so reluctant to relinquish them. If an operation takes a long time, it is not the doctor's fault—but the patient's, for being so sick! If it takes God a long time to purify us, this is not God's fault but our own, for our long failure or reluctance to learn the lesson of detachment from the goods of nature and our own selves. As a surgeon ceases his work when the operation is finished, so God will not try us further after we are purified.

Following St. John of the Cross we may also compare the soul to a statue that is being carved by a number of workers under the direction of a master craftsman. They chip and cut, hammer and polish, from this side and that; and we can imagine that the stone, were it endowed with feelings and speech, would strongly object to the procedure; yet under the skilled direction of the master, it is being changed into a thing of great beauty, representing let us say, some saint. So our neighbors are used by God, the Supreme Artist, to fashion us, not into mere images of saints, but into real saints. One neighbor mortifies us in what he thinks of us, another in what he says to us, still others in what they do to us; and God uses all these actions to cut away the rough edges of our personalities and the deformities of the "old man," until at length there appears the new creature promised by Jesus.

How God uses men as blind instruments belongs ultimately to the mystery of Divine Providence. Still, the divine method in using human actions can to some extent be known by meditating on the doctrine of Providence. Such meditation will also assist us to live by faith in our daily lives where we are confronted by numerous opportunities to see and accept the divine will.

## 1. God Controls Our Antecedents

Our temperament, talents, sensibilities, while largely "accidents" so far as we are concerned, are not accidents to God, Who controls them all. In fact, there are no such thing as "chance" happenings if we view them in relation to God. We say that things happen to us "by chance" because they are outside our intelligent control; but they are not outside God's wise and beneficent direction. The effects which sunlight creates when it colors the clouds or a body of water or when it touches a mountain peak, are sometimes described as a "chance", yet every microscopic detail in such a happening occurs in obedience to invariable laws fixed by the Creator. A leaf as it falls from a tree, blown willy-nilly this way and that, obeys exact physical laws, and these come from God.

Similarly the character, the make-up, the natural traits and antecedents of every person are determined by God, or by laws whose ultimate control is in God's hands. Science has discovered how such a complex thing as human heredity is governed by biological laws. And the Scriptures permit no doubt that God directs all things with a most

tender solicitude for each man's eternal welfare. So much so that Catholic teachers often rightly say that God exercises more care in the guidance of one soul than in His governance of the whole physical universe. *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's leave. But as for you, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.* (Matt. 10, 29)

## 2. God Matches Our Natural Qualities With Those of Our Neighbors

God purifies us through the dispositions of our neighbors, placing us in the situations and among the persons that will best mortify the paganism in us. If I put a dog and a cat together, I do not cause them to fight; but I am certain that they will fight. God's knowledge penetrates to the depths of every temperament and personality; He knows what will happen when He puts various temperaments together; and He puts us with those best fitted to sanctify us! One person has a slow, easy-going disposition; another is a high-strung, nervous type. God puts them together under the same roof—perhaps He seals their union with the sacrament of matrimony!—and waits for them to massacre the paganism in each other. The number of combinations is infinite; and God arranges them all for the spiritual benefit of those concerned.

Nothing is left to chance. Just as a skilled surgeon knows the use of every instrument and uses each one with care and precision, so God in His work selects just the right instruments and uses them with the greatest precision and delicacy. We should not think, then, that even the least detail of our situation escapes God's loving attention. *Not a hair of your head shall perish.* (Luke 21, 18) We are where God wants us to be and with whom God wants us to be and in exactly the circumstances the divine wisdom has chosen as best for us. If we wish to advance spiritually, there is no use complaining, rebelling, running away. Instead we should try to extract all the sanctification we can from every incident of our lives. And the amount of sanctification which these incidents can yield is really unlimited—or, rather, is limited only by our own faith, by our ability to see the divine will working in all these events.

When a man is undergoing surgery, he does not get up and leave the operating table because the operation is painful and he thinks he would like to have another doctor. Neither should we try to run away from the Divine Surgeon's knife, as He works to remove the imperfections of the natural man from us, by wishing for other conditions of life, other associates, other superiors: those we have are precisely the instruments God has chosen for our special needs. Nor will other circumstances help; if an invalid should run away from the surgeon's knife, the work will still have to be done elsewhere. The surgeon will have to go after him, or another surgeon will be called to finish the work. And if we flee from suffering in one place, we shall but find it in another. The Divine Surgeon will follow us and His surgery, with

new and perhaps sharper instruments, will cut and probe in our new condition as deeply as before, perhaps more deeply because of our refusal of His surgical skill at a less critical stage!

God, therefore, directs every situation, all the people in them, and all the various activities and interchanges in each. Some chess players, despite the great difficulty of the game and the almost infinite number of possible moves, play many games at once, passing from board to board, making difficult moves quickly, and winning most of the games. In a similar but far more perfect way God is Master of every "move" in all the homes, schools, convents, rectories, offices, factories—in every possible situation in the world. In all circumstances He arranges everything for the advantage of His friends. *Now we know that for those who love God all things work together unto good, for those who, according to His purpose, are saints through His call.* (Rom. 8, 28)

### 3. God Purifies Us by the Stupidity of Others

The natural man lives by reason, the supernatural man by faith. In order to cure the natural man of this almost irrepressible tendency to live merely by reason, and in order also to purify reason, teaching it to be docile to the leadings of faith, God arranges that we be surrounded by stupidity and folly, which offend reason; thus are we taught to live by faith, trusting in God to guide us in spite of difficulties and contradictions—indeed, by means of such difficulties. Wonderful is the magic of divine Providence!

To the pagan, who follows only reason and common sense but has no higher guide, stupidity and folly are an abomination. But they should not offend or discourage a Christian, who lives by faith, and therefore does not mind if his judgment is contradicted—indeed, he will welcome such opportunities to place His reliance on the strength and wisdom of God, as He governs the universe.

Our judgment and reason are contradicted when our associates or friends or co-workers hinder us from carrying out our own ideas. Especially is our judgment mortified when we are given a command by a superior which goes against our own ideas and requires us, if we are to be obedient, to renounce our own opinions and views.

An example will show the difference between a pagan, who lives by reason, and a Christian, who lives by faith. Suppose you are reading by candlelight and some one blows the light out. You are angry, for that is the only light you have and you cannot read without it. But suppose you are reading in broad daylight and yet keep a candle burning; you will then not care if some one extinguishes the candle, for you can still read by the far better light of day. So a pagan who has only common sense to guide him is greatly distressed when someone contradicts him and prevents him from carrying out the judgments of his common sense; but a Christian, guided by the superior light of faith, which can find God's will directing all events, is not troubled when his mere natural wisdom is contradicted.

Folly is a favorite means used by God to supernaturalize our judgment and subordinate it to the rule of faith. The folly of those around us, constantly offending our common sense, makes us "sow" or mortify our natural judgment, which of itself and in the concrete tends anyway to become what St. Paul calls "the wisdom of the flesh" and is therefore opposed to the true wisdom of the Spirit. Such mortification should be done as other mortifications are done, i.e., quietly, willingly, without complaining. When we complain we show that we really are clinging to reason; and so we lose the merit of sacrifice.

Because our natural judgment is hard to kill, God expends much trouble in purging it. This is why there is so much folly about us: We need so much mortification in this respect! Here, too, is the reason why we are so constantly tempted to criticize the doings of others: they offend our reason. If we have faith we will realize that in the end God will direct all aright; and we will cease complaining and criticising.

We should bear in mind also that what *we* call folly is often a relative thing. What *we* call folly may not be really so—regardless of how confident we are of our own common sense. While I call Jones a fool, Jones is at the same time earnestly describing me as a fool. Who is to judge between us—Brown?—whom we both think a fool? Thus, while others are mortifying us by their folly, we may take it for granted that we are as painfully mortifying them by ours!

For sowing our human wisdom, we will reap divine wisdom. God deals with us as He did with the Israelites when He kept them wandering in the desert for forty years. This was to all appearances a senseless and useless delay; but by means of it God taught them unforgettable lessons of His power and providence.

#### 4. God Purifies Us by the Malice of Others

This is one of the most difficult principles to accept in practice; therefore it provides a most excellent exercise for our faith. God's Providence rules all things, as we have seen—even men's free actions; it rules, then, over those free actions which are sinful. This means, not that God wills evil or approves it, but that He is able to utilize it to accomplish His own divine purposes, the sanctification of souls and the manifestation of His glory. God thus circumvents (so to speak) human evil and directs actions that proceed from malice to the accomplishment of good.

To accept this truth in practice, and not only in theory, we must be able to see (by faith) the will of God in the malicious actions by which our neighbors afflict us. We must be prepared to perceive the divine will in reproaches, injuries, insults, humiliations, by which we are made to suffer. It is precisely by seeing the divine will where it may be seen only with the greatest difficulty that our faith merits most. St. Peter says, *This is indeed a grace, if for consciousness of God anyone endures sorrows, suffering unjustly. For what is the glory, if when you sin and are buffeted, you endure it? But if, when you do right and suffer, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. Unto this, indeed, you have been called. . . .* (I Peter 2, 19-21)

When one is injured through the sin of another, God does not will the sin, but He does will the purification of the one who suffers as the result of the sin. Accordingly, He arranges that those who are striving for virtue will gain spiritual advantage from the sins and malice of others. God (for example) does not will Brown's sins, but He knows that Brown is an unjust man; so He puts Jones, who is striving to be a saint, in Brown's vicinity and the latter's injustices will help to strip Jones of self-love and his attachments to earthly goods. When David was stoned and cursed by Semei, some of the King's followers wanted to kill the rebellious subject. But David said, *Let him alone and let him curse: for the Lord hath bid him curse David: and who is he that shall dare say, 'Why hath He done so?'* (I Kings 16, 10)

A typical example of how God works through the injustices of evil men to sanctify His friends is found in the Old Testament history of Joseph. This great patriarch, when a boy, was maliciously sold into slavery by his brothers; but by means of this, very treachery God brought Joseph into Egypt where he was raised to a place of power and became the means of preserving his brethren, hence the whole Jewish people, from extinction.

In a similar way all the incidents of our own lives, including the injuries received from others, work to fulfill the will of God and should therefore be received as from God. When Joseph, after he had become a great man in Egypt, was reunited to the brothers who had betrayed him, he said: *Be not afraid and let it not seem to you a hard case that you sold me into these countries. For God sent me into Egypt before you for your preservation. . . . And God sent me that you may be preserved upon the earth and may have food to live. Not by your counsel was I sent hither, but by the will of God.* (Gen. 45, 5-8) Joseph was a man of faith able to see the workings of Providence in the wicked actions of his brothers.

The supreme example of the truth that God accomplishes His purpose even through the evil He detests is found in the redemptive act of Our Lord. The death of Jesus, through which mankind was saved, was willed by God the Father; yet it was accomplished by the malice of His enemies. His murderers were free and responsible; yet Jesus prayed to the Father, *Not My will, but Thine be done.* He looked beyond the actions of His persecutors to see the all-holy will of God utilizing these actions to carry out the divine plan. *The chalice which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?* (John 18, 11) He does not here say that His enemies had filled His chalice of suffering, but the Father. St. Peter summarizes the whole matter, indicating the responsibility of the evil men who murdered Christ, but showing also how they were blind instruments in the hands of God, when he says, *The same Christ being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you by the hands of wicked men have slain.* (Acts 2, 23)

Even the devil works under the Providence of God; so that we may and should see the divine will working through the temptations by which the devil tries to ensnare us. In other words, the devil, in spite of himself, labors for God and helps to carry out the divine purpose. By



trying us, He perfects us in virtue, and so labors for the salvation of our souls. As doctors of old used leeches to suck poison from the body, so God uses the devil to remove from us by trials our love of self and of creatures. All this is beautifully illustrated in the history of Job. This great saint was tried severely by the devil, but only with God's permission and as far as God permitted. Job emerged holier than before, a man of the most heroic faith and patience: "Even though thou dost slay me, still will I trust in thee." When the trial was over, God called the devil off, and Job was left in peace. God acts always the same; He therefore deals with His friends today as He dealt with Job.

To some this doctrine of God working through all events may at first sight seem fatalistic. They will be tempted to say, "If this is so, then there would be no need to improve ourselves or correct others." But such an inference may not be drawn from the doctrine of Divine Providence. While we should by faith see the divine will in all the actions that afflict us, we must at the same time labor to correct our faults and those of others for whom we are responsible. God is like an artist who leaves his work to be finished by his disciples that they may learn his methods and style. God leaves His universe in many ways unfinished that we may cooperate in His creative work and so glorify Him. Nevertheless, He meanwhile rules the universe, and faith urges that in all things we acknowledge this dominion.

In the chalice of Jesus there were physical afflictions, stupidity, and malice. And in the chalice of His disciples there is the same bitter draught, the same unpalatable mixture of pain, stupidity and malice: *Of My cup you shall indeed drink.* (Matt. 20, 23) With Jesus we must therefore learn to say, *Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given Me?* (John 18, 11)



## The Supreme Dominion of God In Superiors: Obedience

The favorite instruments of God in His work of purifying souls are our superiors. The reason is not far to seek. Our superiors, by compelling us to follow their judgments, enable us to mortify our own judgements; by imposing their will on us, they give us the opportunity to mortify our own will: and, as we have seen, our judgments and wills are the two highest natural gifts that we have to renounce, the ones to which we tend to become most strongly and tenaciously attached, as they are also (and for this very reason) the goods whose renunciation for the love of God brings us most benefit. An instrument that can cut our attachment to these two highest goods, the very goods that tempted the angels, and our First Parents when they were still faithful, is a most valuable means of sanctification. The Divine Surgeon uses it as such. As a human surgeon, when operating, needs many and varied instruments but relies chiefly on a keen-edged knife, by which he makes the incision, so God also, while employing many instruments, uses the superior as a surgical knife to cut away pride of judgment and self-will.

Of course our superiors will have no such effect on us unless we obey them. While superiors are likely in any case to cross and try us, it is only through obedience that they can actually become the means of bringing us to sanctification. For it is only when we obey that we allow the superior really to mortify our judgment and will. Otherwise, if we rebel, or submit unwillingly, there is no true obedience at all but constraint, hence no true interior mortification.

The first sin, that of our First Parents (as also that of the angels) was one of disobedience. And Jesus Christ, the second Adam, reversed and healed that primal disorder by an act of obedience. *For just as by the disobedience of the one man the many were constituted sinners, so also by the obedience of the One the many will be constituted just.* (Rom. 5, 19)

The obedience of Christ went to the extreme. *He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to death on a cross.* (Phil. 2, 8) Without doubt the deepest secret of Our Lord's own spiritual life was an entire and unreserved surrender of His own will to the Father's. His first recorded words were, *Did you know that I must be about My Father's business?* (Luke 2, 49) He summarized His whole code of action when He said, *I do always the things that are pleasing to Him (i.e., My Father).* (John 8, 29) And at the very end, *Yet not as I will but as Thou willest.* (Matt. 26, 39)

A Christian, then, in imitating Our Lord will try to reproduce also His perfect obedience. Yet he will do this not only to imitate His

Master, but also because he is joined to Our Lord as to the Head of the body of which he himself is a member. As the body, or any of its members, cannot be severed from the head and still live, so the members of Christ's body may not separate themselves from Him and still have spiritual life.

How perfect obedience is in comparison with the other virtues as a means of sanctification can be realized by comparing the good renounced by obedience with the good renounced by the other virtues. By poverty we renounce external goods; by meekness and patience and bodily mortification we renounce the goods of the body; but by obedience we renounce the goods of the soul, the gifts of mind and will; and since these are the highest gifts of all, their renunciation is also the most meritorious. Indeed, the Scripture tells us (I Kings 15, 22) that *Obedience is better than sacrifice*; and yet we know that the offering of sacrifice is the highest form of adoration. St. Gregory explains this apparent contradiction and the reason of the superiority of obedience by observing that when victims are offered in sacrifice, the flesh of another, an animal, is slain, whereas in obedience our own will is sacrificed.

In olden times when a king would come to one of his cities, the loyal inhabitants would give him a key to the city gate. Since only with such a key was it possible to enter a walled city peaceably, this rendering up of the key to the prince was the most effective way possible of placing the whole city at his feet. In a similar way, when we by obedience give up our own wills to God, we are giving up the key to the citadel of the soul; and thereby in the most effective way possible we place all our gifts and talents at the feet of our Lord.

### 1. The Terms of Obedience

When you listen to the radio, you hear the voice of some distant and distinguished speaker, say, the President of the United States; but you do not hear him personally—he is not in the room with you: the radio is the instrument which relays his voice to where you are.

In a similar way, God manifests His will to us; but He does not ordinarily do so directly or personally, but rather through created means which He Himself has established. And the most ordinary instrument which God uses to convey His will to us is our superior. In fact, *There exists no authority except from God, and those who exist have been appointed by God. Therefore he who resists authority resists the ordinance of God; and they that resist bring on themselves condemnation.* (Rom. 13, 2)

The superior, then, may be called the visible term of obedience; but the invisible term, seen only by the eye of faith, is the divine will. The Sacred Scripture itself distinguishes these two terms and describes how we are to conduct ourselves in reference to each, when it says: *Slaves, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not serving to the eye as pleasers of men, but in singleness of heart from fear of the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it from the heart as for the Lord*

*and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.* (Col. 3, 22-24)

Thus supernatural obedience demands and presupposes an act of faith, and is at the same time also an exercise of faith. It is only faith that enables us to see beyond the persons and commands of our superiors to the Person and the will of God. Our faith, in this matter, is guided by such passages as those just quoted from St. Paul's letter to the Romans; and it acts by assenting in a very practical way to the Supreme Dominion of God as this rules us through the commands of our superiors.

Moreover, as it makes no difference whether a radio is high or low, green or red, square or round, so long as it has the essential function of a radio and brings to us the programs we wish to hear, so in a similar way the human qualities and even shortcomings of our superiors are of little importance so long as they communicate to us the divine will. Therefore, we should not criticize their human qualities, saying that our superiors are imprudent, or harsh, or kind, or this or that. All that matters to us on the supernatural plane is that these superiors convey the divine will to us; and this they invariably do (provided only of course they do not command what is evil). Above all, we should not make our obedience hinge on the possession by our superiors of natural qualities acceptable to us, for in that case we would not be exercising faith at all but only following our natural inclinations.

As faith discloses the divine will to us hidden under a human exterior, love darts forth to embrace this will in obedience. Thus obedience makes for progress in the whole spiritual life, and what is to the point here, enables us to glorify God in His Supreme Dominion operating through human superiors.

## 2. The Kinds of Precepts

The commands given by superiors may be classified in two groups: those which are agreeable, and those which are disagreeable. It must be our care to accept both these kinds of commands with equal alacrity, obeying in disagreeable things as promptly as in those which are agreeable.

The reason for this is plain. If we obey only in those matters which are pleasing to us, then we but follow our own bent and inclination; we do not live by faith. Hence our obedience would not be supernatural but natural. It would also be very imperfect, causing us to pick and choose among the commands given to us, accepting only those we like, complaining about those that are difficult and unpleasant, and tending constantly to rebel in the case of the latter.

For a similar reason we should not try to draw or induce our superiors to command what we want. If we do, then the superiors are obeying us and not we the superiors. Here too, we would be following our own inclinations rather than the way of faith.

It is a mistake for teachers of the young to assert that all the commands of superiors are agreeable, or to try to make all such commands

seem pleasing and reasonable; it is equally a mistake to represent superiors as humanly attractive so that they will be the more readily obeyed. At the very least, this is to take away from subjects the opportunity of practicing faith, as it is also to make obedience depend on the amiability of superiors and the pleasantness of their commands. Moreover, it is simply not true that all superiors are amiable and their commands easy and delightful to obey. Even good and just superiors are encompassed by the limitations of human life—have but finite prudence, are fallible and peccable. Yet these limitations, provided only that superiors do not command what is in itself evil, do not compromise the principle of authority which they bear in their persons and which gives force to their commands. Moreover, we have seen that it is part of God's plan to sanctify souls by placing them with the persons most likely to prune and purify them. This applies also to superiors: God will give us as superiors, not those who are most agreeable, but those best fitted to try us, cross us, purge us.

That a superior humors and pampers his subjects is no sign that he is a good superior. It rather indicates the opposite. A good superior is one who seeks to enforce the divine will whether or not it accords with the views and inclinations of his subjects, leaving it to the latter rather to fulfill their duty of living by faith.

Since God wants to perfect us, He will cross us in a thousand ways—in our attachments for creature pleasures, in our pride of reason, in our self-will. And our superiors will be of course His favorite instrument in so purifying us. Especially beginners in the spiritual and religious life will feel the pain of this purifying action exercised by God through superiors. For beginners are the most imperfect souls, the most attached to the goods of the world and to themselves; therefore in their case especially the commands and persons of superiors (if the latter are really doing their duty) are not at all likely to appear pleasant and amiable. It is therefore an error to try to obtain obedience from children, or novices in religion, or tyros in the Christian life, by dwelling on the agreeable characteristics of superiors and their desire to do what is best for their subjects. These subjects too often seek not what is best for themselves but only what is most pleasant.

The truth of the matter is this: the mortification, the dying, the shattering, the annihilation that the natural man in all of us must suffer will take place very largely through obedience. Knowing this, we should not dwell on the charming persons and good intentions of our superiors, but rather look with the second-sight of faith at the divine will, in its infinite goodness and wisdom, made manifest in our particular circumstances through our superiors. It is only faith in the Supreme Dominion, confidence in the divine will, that will enable us to persevere in obedience in the midst of difficulties. And let us add: it is only when we are perfect (not when we are imperfect, not when we are beginners) that obedience will seem easy. For then our own wills will be fully in accord with the divine; then there will be no more attachments for the divine will to sever and, in severing, cause us pain. Until then, however, we must live in the darkness of faith and the sufferings

involved in the mortification of the natural man. In a word, obedience is easy to the saints, to those, that is, whose wills are wholly purified; to those however who have not yet arrived at this happy state, obedience is ever difficult, a true sacrifice, a veritable death and mortification.

### 3. Kinds of Obedience

It is possible, from our present point of view, to distinguish three kinds of obedience which mark also the ascending perfection of this virtue.

First, there is *the obedience of judgment*. We obey according to the obedience of judgment when, having received a command, we test its reasonableness by our own judgment and then obey on the basis of this reasonableness. Such obedience is hardly obedience at all; certainly it is not supernatural obedience, which is guided by faith in God's Supreme Dominion rather than by mere reason. One living on the supernatural plane, therefore, will not bother about this obedience, realizing its total inadequacy to attain the end which he is pursuing.

Then there is the obedience of faith, which derives its principles and motives from the world revealed by faith. This is the obedience described in this chapter, to cultivate which will be the aim of the true Christian.

A more perfect kind of this obedience of faith is *blind obedience*. It consists in this, that we obey without question, deliberately closing our eyes to the frailties of our superiors and suspending judgment on the suitability of their commands. Of course blind obedience presupposes that the command itself is not evil; but other than this it makes no judgment, but commits itself wholly into the hands of the superior—or rather, it commits itself by faith wholly into the hands of divine Providence who rules us and cares for us through our superiors. Certain persons, who judge only by reason, tend to regard blind obedience as inferior, saying that it lacks all moral discrimination. In fact it acts with the most refined discrimination since its blindness is only to the considerations of natural prudence whereas it acts according to the higher light of faith.

Still more perfect is *foolish obedience*, which is so called not because it is in truth foolish but because we obey our superiors even when in *our* judgment their commands seem senseless. Thus, by practicing foolish obedience we fly right in the face of our own judgment and prudence, and throw ourselves entirely on faith. It is this fact, that foolish obedience proceeds purely from faith, that makes it so completely supernatural.

In the lives of saints we sometimes read of how certain superiors gave foolish commands to their subjects, as when St. Francis of Assisi told one of the most dignified of his early followers "to turn round and round as children do" on the road which they were traveling. Such commands seem foolish but they are a testing and proving of virtue, of faith and humility as well as of obedience. St. Alphonsus says that such commands are really no more foolish than the pacing and exercising given to horses: even though such exercise is to no immediate purpose,

and the horse wins no prize, it prepares the horse for the race when it may gain a prize. So even apparently trivial and foolish exercises in the virtues prepare us against the day of real trial. Without resorting to any obviously foolish antics, all of us in our daily lives and tasks are told by superiors to use methods or observe procedures which in our own judgment seem inferior or will not work at all. It may even be that our own experience in the matter is much greater than that of our superiors; so that it takes a real act of faith to obey them. As we practice such foolish obedience we should be reassured by the example of Jesus, Who although even as man in possession of infused wisdom, not to mention the infinite divine wisdom that was His as Son of God, nevertheless was, as the Scriptures say, "subject to" Mary and Joseph who in spite of their moral perfection were necessarily limited in their knowledge and prudence.

The history of Naaman the leper, the general and favorite of the Syrian King, affords a striking example of how God works through this foolish obedience. (4 Kings 5) Naaman, although a heathen, went to the Jewish prophet Eliseus to obtain a cure for his disease. Eliseus did not even see him but sent a messenger telling him to wash seven times in the river Jordan. At this, Naaman was indignant, for the whole procedure did not accord with what he considered the conduct proper to a prophet and the honor due to himself. And the command itself also seemed extremely foolish; he could not see what benefit could be derived from bathing in such a contemptible stream as the Jordan, asking, *Are not the Abana, and the Pharphar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel, that I may wash in them and be made clean?* So, following his own judgment, Naaman started off in a huff to Syria and the rivers of Damascus. Only when his servants persuaded him to obey Eliseus because of the latter's power as a prophet of God—that is, in faith—did the Syrian general, acting against his own judgment, consent to bathe in the Jordan; and it was only after he had done, not once, but seven times what was to him a foolish thing and was in fact inadequate to the effect desired, namely, the healing of leprosy, that God did cure him. It is in the same way that God deals with us: He does not appear to us directly as we would wish in our pride, but sends His commands to us through others, our superiors. These commands often seem, and may be, as humanly foolish to us as the one given to Naaman. We obey, not because of our faith in superiors or their commands, but because of our faith in God Who can do all things even with the most inadequate and contemptible instruments.

What is said in this chapter on obedience applies not only to priests and religious, who are more particularly bound by the vow of obedience, but also to all laymen, who, while lacking the special obligation of the vow, are nevertheless bound to practice the virtue of obedience, which is so important a part of the total perfection of the Christian life. Laymen also must obey their superiors, both civil and ecclesiastical, not only by an external compliance with what is commanded, which would be mere servility, but by an exercise of the Christian virtue of obedience.



# The Supreme Dominion of God In the Human Will

If the purpose of the Christian life is union with the divine will, it is through our own human wills that this union is to be effected. That is to say, our wills must be brought to conform to the divine; by thus submitting themselves to the divine will, our human wills glorify God in His Supreme Dominion.

To bring about conformity of our wills with God's, it is useful to know something about the human will.

## 1. What the Will Is

The will may be defined as the "rational appetite." There are, in fact, two appetites in man: the one is his sensible appetite, which reaches out to enjoy the good things of the sensible order; the other is the rational or intellectual appetite, which desires the higher goods presented to it by the mind. The instinctive desire for food is in the sensible appetite, while the will, which is a spiritual faculty belonging properly to the spiritual and immortal soul, seeks goods of a higher order—goods such as virtue or happiness.

The will, then, exists on the same plane as the mind. Like the mind, it is a spiritual faculty of the human soul; mind and will together may be thought of as the right and left "arms" of the soul, that is, the powers through which the soul acts to attain its goals. The will, however, is blind, and in this it differs from the mind; it depends on the mind for light and guidance, choosing such goods as the mind presents to it. This is why, in order to love God, it is important that the mind be filled with the knowledge of God rather than with the knowledge of the attractiveness of creatures.

The first and most elementary act of the will is *desire*: the will first desires the good that is revealed to it by the mind. A man, for example, desires happiness. The will next sets to work all the other faculties, over which it has control, to attain to happiness in the manner in which the person thinks this can be accomplished. Thus the will directs and controls our actions. Finally, the will reposes in the goods for which it has striven and in which it expects to find happiness. This last climactic act of the will is *love*; for love is the act of the will when it possesses the good it has desired; and *joy* is the product of this possession.

From this analysis we easily see how necessary it is that the will, in order to love God wholly, be purged of love for earthly goods and, more radically, of the desire for these goods. For this reason St. John

of the Cross gives great emphasis, not only to the doctrine of detachment from earthly affections, but also to the purification of desire.

## 2. The Difference Between the Will and the Sensible Appetite

As the will on the one hand is the seat of all love, so on the other it is the seat of sin: it is in the will alone that sin is consummated. It is important to remember this in order that we may deal calmly and effectively with temptation. Temptations usually proceed, not from the will, but from the lower appetites. And precisely because they proceed from the sensible appetites they are, so far, *only* temptations. Temptation becomes sin only when the will embraces the forbidden sample. Of course, certain temptations, as to vanity or pride, may arise in the will itself, enamored of its own goodness; but these, too, become sinful only when the will desires and consents to them.

The essential difference between the will and the sense appetite is this: the will is free, but the sense appetite is not. Suppose that I feel hungry; now I am not free *not* to feel hungry—I cannot get rid of the hunger by an act of the will—hunger is a necessity of my bodily nature. But I am free to decide whether or not I will eat, what, and how much I will eat. That I am hungry for meat on Friday is of itself no sin, even if the desire is very strong and persistent; for this is mere instinct and appetite. Only when the will capitulates to the desire of lower nature is there sin. Similarly, we cannot by a mere exercise of will suppress any instinctive or sensible appetite, as for sleep, for drink, for any other gratification. These appetites exert their demands whether we will or not: it is only when we deliberately will them to excess or in forbidden circumstances that we sin.

It is necessary for our peace of mind to understand this distinction clearly. Sin is always and only in the will, never in the instinctive appetites. The most persistent temptations, originating in our sensible nature, do not become sins until they are freely and deliberately consented to by the will. The inclination of the appetites to a sinful act, as for example in temptations to impurity, does not constitute sin even though it is vehement and pleasurable. If the forbidden act or object were not pleasing there would be no temptation, for temptation is precisely the attraction exercised on our appetites by some object that is good but forbidden. As long as the will says, "I do not want this pleasure," there is no sin.

The imagination also, which forms attractive images from the data supplied by the senses, can also be a source of temptation: but it cannot be responsible for sin, because the imagination likewise lacks freedom. The fact that one is disturbed by evil imaginings, however vivid and insistent, does not make one guilty of sin. Indeed, the mind itself, which draws its materials from the senses, may be afflicted with foul and sinful thoughts, without committing sin. Thoughts of evil and forbidden objects are not sinful unless the will desires them, consents to their presence, rejoices in the forbidden pleasure they offer. Moral evil is always finally in the will. This explains how it happens, as we

read in the lives of many saints, that even those closest to God were sometimes tempted very violently by foul and blasphemous thoughts and imaginings yet retained the most angelic purity.

Still, while we bear in mind the distinction between will and appetite, we should at the same time realize that the will is influenced by the appetites; and the will therefore can be greatly aided and strengthened in carrying out its responsible task of conforming to good and rejecting evil if the appetites are moderated and restrained. For this reason, mortification of the sense appetites is helpful to the will. If you need a drink, wait five minutes. If you want a particular cut of meat you may leave it to another; in short, practice fasting and abstinence in many ways that offer themselves daily in order to gain and hold sway over the appetites and passions of bodily nature.

The *Spiritual Combat* points out that our rational will stands midway between the divine will and our sensible appetites. Both the divine will and the sensible appetites "court" the rational will, so to speak; each of them wishes the will to choose the good which it offers, as rival lovers both strive to win in marriage the object of their affections. As Christians it is our task to raise our wills to unite with the divine will, turning away from the allurements of sense pleasure.

### 3. The Will is Our Citadel

The human will is a fortress, absolutely impregnable, and we are safe as long as we stay inside it; but the moment that we try to leave the will, in order to argue with temptation, the devil will certainly make trouble for us.

The will is impregnable because no one can force our wills or enter into them without our leave. Even God stands aloof, as it were, from the human will, respecting the freedom with which He himself has endowed it, holding out graces to it invitingly, but not forcing their acceptance. The devil himself cannot force his way into our wills. He tries to seduce them by picturing an illusory good from the mind or imagination where he can enter and hold sway.

When God gives us some command or lays some duty upon us, and we, instead of obeying promptly, step outside the will to examine it with our intellects, we give the devil an opportunity to deceive us with falsehood. Hence we should make it our rule not to enter into the intellect to argue over the divine decrees but simply obey them promptly and in blind faith.

It would be puerile to object that this practice would suppress the exercise of the intellect. It would not suppress the activity of the intellect where this activity is legitimate; it would not hinder the activity of the intellect even in matters of faith, where through pious meditation our minds may and should learn all they can of divine wisdom. But the policy here advocated would suppress unseemly curiosity about things which God has hidden from our view. Above all, it would prevent us from subjecting divine ordinances to the measure of our feeble judgments: it would thus prevent us from repeating the sin of the

Fallen Angels and our First Parents, who rejected the divine command because they could not understand it with their natural intelligences.

If Eve had not strayed into the intellect, but had rather remained in the will and obeyed God blindly as she should have done, the devil would not have been able to deceive her. The devil on his part wanted to bait her into leaving the safety of the will to enter the intellect, where he could argue with her and overpower her. When she gave as a reason for not eating the forbidden fruit that God had commanded them not to do so, the devil immediately asked her "Why?" hoping that she would leave the security of her will and begin to reason. *WHY bath God commanded you, that you should not eat of every tree of Paradise?* (Genesis 3, 1) When Eve allowed herself to be drawn away by that *why* from perfect obedience to what she clearly recognized as a divine command, she opened the way for the devil to deceive her by his superior intelligence. She failed in faith and fell into sin.

While God asks us the *why* of our actions, we must not presume to ask Him the why of His. He has a right to demand of us an account of our motives, but we have no right to demand the reason for His actions. Enough that we know that a command comes from God.

Thus, if God sends us consolations in the spiritual life, we should not ask why. If we do, the devil will suggest that we are becoming saints and so cause us to fall by vainglory. If we ask the why of afflictions that come to us, the devil will suggest that God has abandoned us or that our sins are beyond forgiveness, and so cause us to sin by discouragement or despondency. What we must do in all such circumstances is to live *by faith*, trusting wholly in God's wisdom and goodness, realizing that whatever He does is for our real benefit. *For those who love God all things work together unto good.* (Rom. 8, 28)

When a soul gives itself to God, it is troubled by all sorts of interior trials. There will be "nights", i.e., periods of darkness in which it will be deprived of light concerning spiritual things; it must then be faithful to duty guided by faith alone in God's promises. There will be periods of aridity, or dryness, in which it gets no joy or consolation from spiritual things—a loss which leaves it wretched indeed since it has already deprived itself voluntarily of the consolations of earthly pleasure. By means of darkness God purifies our reason and exercises our faith; by means of aridities, He purifies our wills and exercises our charity, for He then teaches us to love Him for His own goodness and not merely for the consolations He provides for us.

In such afflictions we should do what we do in the analogous circumstances of daily life. When night comes, we do not scream or carry on about it; we wait quietly until the morning, when the light will reappear. When traveling through a desert, it does no good to complain; we must simply be patient until this part of the trip is over. When going through a tunnel, it does no good if we become excited and panicky; we must wait until we emerge into the light on the other side. So in all the trials incidental to a spiritual life we must proceed

tranquilly in the spirit of faith. *Cast all your anxiety upon God, because He cares for you.* (I Pet. 5, 7)

As for temptation, it is always the harbinger of grace, the herald that announces God's coming. When God wishes to come to a soul, He first sends temptation to purify it; every increase in the divine life of grace presupposes further purification. *But the God of all grace, Who has called us unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will Himself, after we have suffered a little while, perfect, strengthen, and establish us.* (I Peter 5, 10-11)

#### 4. The Will is Our Sanctuary

As only the will can commit sin, so on the other hand only the will can perform acts meritorious of eternal life. And the reason is the same: only the will is free. Hence, actions of the senses and other faculties—eating, for example, or the work of the mind or any work—are not of themselves virtuous and meritorious, but become so when they are offered freely by the will. Aptly, then, may we compare the will to a sanctuary into which we must bring whatever we wish to offer to God.

In ancient sanctuaries the victims were offered by an immolation or destruction which signified man's renunciation of proprietorship over the gifts offered and indeed of proprietorship over himself. In the sanctuary of the will also, in order to offer our actions and goods to God, there must be a similar immolation: an immolation of the affections by which we would hold on to created goods for ourselves, an immolation of the natural motives by which we would use and enjoy things for our own pleasure. Without this immolation of natural attachments there can be no true offering to God; unless there is a sacrifice of self-will, there can be no real devotion to the divine will.

It is possible to see now how the doctrine of motivation developed in Part I, in which it was shown that we must renounce natural motives, even good ones, since all natural motives imply and reveal an attachment for creatures—it is possible to see now how this doctrine prepares us for the acceptance and practice of conforming our will to God's will. Only in the measure that we give up our own human will are we capable of uniting ourselves to the divine will. Whoever thinks that he can hold to his human will, by enjoying creatures as he desires, and yet fully conform to the divine will, is certainly deceiving himself.

Some persons, upon reading the doctrine of conformity with the divine will, accept it gladly saying that here is true spirituality. Yet they reject as "too negative" what has been written in Part One about mortification and the cross, about the renunciation of natural attachments and motives. In thus speaking, while pretending to be fond of what is lofty and elevated, such persons reveal how shallow are their notions of spirituality and how they have allowed their worldliness to carry them into delusion. Unless we are prepared to give up our human wills—that is, the desires, affections, and motives that spring from them—indeed, unless we are practiced in giving these up, then the

most sublime truths that may be written or spoken about doing the divine will are for us only dreams and grandiose talk.

The sacrifice of Jesus, St. Paul points out, was superior to sacrifices of the Old Law because, for one thing, the ancient priests had offered goats and heifers for gifts whereas Jesus offered Himself. So also the offering of the will is most perfect, the supreme offering, when it gives, not other gifts, but itself, sacrificing itself completely that in all things it may do the divine will. This is the will's self-immolation: and it is accomplished when our will, seeing through faith the will of God in all that occurs, promptly submits itself to the latter, sacrificing its own pleasure. In this way, too, we conform most perfectly to the example of Jesus, Who said, *I seek not My own will but the will of Him Who sent Me.* (John 5, 30) Indeed, it is in this way that we join most fully in the very sacrificial act of Jesus, of which the inspired writer said, *Behold I come—(in the head of the book it is written of Me)—to do Thy will, O God.* (Heb. 10, 7)

# The Source of the Supreme Dominion: The Divine Will

As men emerging from a dark cavern are guided by a thin ray of light from the entrance until at length they come out into the full light of day, so we in this world, following the innumerable clues and manifestations of God's will in human events, are at length brought to union with the divine will itself, with God Himself, the very Sun of Justice. For the whole purpose and end of life is union with God; and it is through discovery of His will in the Supreme Dominion that we are in fact brought into ever closer union with Him. Moreover, the great law governing the supernatural world is the law of charity, and it is by union with God's will, accomplished by faith in His Supreme Dominion, that we fulfill this law: for love is a union of wills.

Let us then note the great benefits that will come to us through union with the divine will.

## 1. What God's Will Does for Us The Divine Will is the Source of All Sanctity

Sanctity is a divine attribute; the sanctity of human beings is but a participation in the divine sanctity. No man can become holy of himself but must rather obtain holiness from God; the holiness of men is a supernatural gift, the reflection or refraction of God's holiness.

Now God's sanctity consists in this that He wills and loves His own infinite goodness. To be holy is to love good; to be infinitely holy is to love without limit the infinite good, which is found in God alone. When we say that God is holy, therefore, we mean that He wills and loves His own measureless good. Or, briefly, the divine holiness is the divine self-love.

To us, judging with the consciousness of our own imperfections, it might appear at first as though such self-love were a defect, whereas in God it is the very stuff of holiness. In us, too, there is a legitimate and even virtuous self-love, which is a sample of the divine self-love. This legitimate human self-love consists in this, that we love ourselves, not for our own sakes, but for the sake of the divine image and the divine life of grace that is in us: in loving ourselves thus, it is God we really love. Such self-love, even in us, is no defect but a duty, and the very measure of charity: *Love thy neighbor AS THYSELF*. Our self-love is defective when it is disproportionate to our qualities or is indulged in apart from God—when it is not motivated by the love of God.

The divine sanctity, then, consists in the divine self-love, that is, in the full conformity of God's will to His infinite goodness. If we wish to be holy, we too must will and love this infinite goodness: we must unite our will to God's in loving His perfection: and we will advance in holiness in proportion as we effectively accomplish such union. In this way the divine will is in truth the source of all sanctity.

### The Divine Will is the Source of All Efficacy

The will of God, following the wisdom of the divine mind, has ordained laws to govern the universe. This is very apparent in the natural world, and is equally true in the supernatural. To gain the effects we desire in both orders we must discover and observe the divine laws. A farmer to obtain a crop must know something of the laws of nature and cooperate with them. If he ignorantly or defiantly plants seed in cement, he will certainly have no harvest.

So also, in the supernatural world, if we desire a harvest of virtue, grace, and holiness, we must observe the divine laws that govern this world, such laws as we have been studying throughout these pages; and ultimately, we must unite ourselves to the divine will which decrees all these laws. In the measure in which we conform to God's will in such matters we will be enabled to produce supernatural effects in others and in ourselves. If we ignore the divine will, and rather direct our spiritual lives and apostolic efforts according to our own views, we may indeed make a great show of piety or activity, but will produce no real or lasting fruit.

It is from this point of view that we must understand those significant words of Jesus, *Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remain on the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.* (John 15, 4) Through grace and the infused virtues, especially charity, we are united to Jesus; but this union becomes effective and fruitful only in the measure in which our wills are united to the divine will; so that the divine vitality will come into our lives and works, including of course our apostolic works, in the measure in which we conform our wills to God's.

### The Divine Will is the Source of All Grace

This follows from what has just been said. It is the divine will which decrees that men shall have grace; it is in the measure that our wills conform to God's that we possess grace. To possess the fullness of grace to which God destines us we must bring our wills fully into union with His.

In a word, only at the point of contact where our will touches God's does the divine grace enter our soul. An electric car, no matter how large or powerful, can move only when its trolley is in contact with the wire or live rail: it runs just as long as this contact continues, stops as soon as the contact is broken, for without this contact there is no current to move it. It is thus also with a soul seeking sanctity: grace



enters the soul only when the will is united to God's. Through this contact supernatural energies pass into the soul and they stop only when the contact is broken.

We are enabled to unite our wills to God's each moment by means of the duty of the present moment; for each moment has a duty and each duty should be regarded, in the spirit of faith, as coming from God. As there is no moment without its duty, great or small, there is no time at which we may not be in union with God. In this way a continuous flow of supernatural energies passes into our souls. But the flow is interrupted as soon as we neglect the duty of the moment, that is to say, as soon as we pull our wills away from contact with God's by seeking our own pleasure rather than His.

By uniting our wills to God's in each duty we utilize what Father de Caussade fittingly calls "the sacrament of the moment": fittingly, because the duty of each moment is an outward sign that conveys inward grace.

It is with us as it was with Mary when the angel Gabriel came to her announcing that she was to be the Mother of God. As soon as she said, *Be it done unto me according to thy word*, she was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and Christ was conceived in her womb. As soon as we on our part conform to the will of God, by doing the duty of the moment, the divine life of grace is conceived or increased in us. The duty of the moment is a Gabriel that announces the coming of God to our souls.

## 2. How the Divine Will Manifests Itself The Divine Will In Itself and In Its Effects

In itself the divine will is always good, agreeable, unchangeable. The reason is that God is infinitely good, infinitely lovable, and absolutely immutable.

In its effects, however, the divine will is often disagreeable and changeable. The explanation of this is not to be found in God, as we have just seen, but in our own frailty and imperfection. The divine will *seems* disagreeable and changeable to us. In reality, the divine will is holy, but because it cuts across our self-will it seems at times very disagreeable. In reality, the divine will is unchangeable; it is we who change, in mood and in feelings, and since God appears differently to us according to our own different states, it seems as if He changes while we remain the same. In a similar way it appears to us that the sun moves around the earth, whereas in fact it is just the other way.

God manifests Himself to us, as the *Imitation* says, in afflictions and consolations. The latter are pleasant, the former unpleasant: and their alternation, besides making God Himself seem at times unpleasant, seem also to make Him changeable. The afflictions, and therefore the unpleasantness, are necessary because of our attachments to the goods of the world, which must be broken if we are to love God wholly.

The sun is always the same; yet it looks different to us at different times by reason of the clouds and mists and vapors that come between it and ourselves. So God is always the same; if He appears to change it is because of the mists and vapors that arise between Him and us, not because of Him, but because of our natural desires, and attachments, and motives. These mists shut off the view of the divine goodness; and because God sets Himself to dissolve them by means of afflictions, as the sun dissolves the mists around the earth, we are in danger of forgetting that it is God acting on us, the same good God Who sends consolations at other times.

Again, the light that streams through a window is pure and bright. If it appears darkened or impure to us, it is because of stains on the glass. So the divine will appears unpleasant to us only because of our own imperfections. One more example: A sick person will sometimes push aside as painful the gentlest hand that seeks to ease his suffering. Because of his sickness the hand seems heavy and intolerable. So does God rest His paternal hand on us, but because of our great spiritual weakness, His hand at times seems to be crushing us.

In all events, whether pleasant or unpleasant, we must school ourselves to look with the eyes of faith to the divine will behind the immediate event, as we look for the sun behind the clouds. And then it will not matter much whether the event itself is pleasant or unpleasant. "If I desire pure water only," writes St. Francis de Sales, "what care I whether it be served in a golden vessel or in a glass, as in either case I take only the water; yea I would rather have it in a glass which has no other color than water itself, which thus I also see better. What matter whether God's will be presented to us in tribulation or in consolation, since I seek nothing in either of them except God's will, which is so much the better seen where there is no other beauty present save that of His most holy, eternal good-pleasure." (*Love of God*, IX, 4) The same Saint elsewhere teaches that the way of afflictions is a surer guide to the divine will: "The traveler who is in fear whether he has the right way, walks in doubt, viewing the country over, and stands in a muse at the end of almost every field to think whether he goes not astray, but he who is sure of his way walks on gaily, boldly, and swiftly; even so the love that desires to walk with God's will through consolations, walks ever in fear of taking the wrong path, and of loving (in lieu of God's good pleasure) the pleasure which is in the consolation; but the love that strikes straight through afflictions towards the will of God walks in assurance, for affliction being in nowise lovable in itself, it is an easy thing to love it only for the sake of Him that sends it." (*Ibid.*, IX, 2)

### How God Manifests His Will

Since the duty of the moment, by uniting our will to God's is the point where grace enters the soul, it is important to know, at any given moment, what the divine will is for us, i.e., what precisely is the duty of the moment. Now the divine will manifests itself in two ways.

Of course since God is infinitely simple, He has but one will; if we speak now of two wills, this is because of the limitations of our own minds, which, unable to comprehend the fullness of divine splendor, must distinguish and divide that this splendor may be accommodated to our finite gaze.

In the first place, God may signify His will to us explicitly by means of direct precepts; this is called the signified, or expressed, will of God. God's expressed will may be known, first, in His own commandments, secondly, in the precepts of the Church, then in the counsels of the Gospel, and finally in the duties proper to one's state in life. The expressed will of God brings into play the virtue of obedience, which we have already considered, and which requires conformity to the divine will from the greatest commandment down to the smallest daily duty, including, as we have seen, obedience to the spirit of the counsels even when obedience to the letter is not required or possible. And as a mariner does not need to be always studying his bearings from the stars, but ordinarily relies on a compass, so we need not be searching the heavens for the divine will—we have an immediate practical guide to it in the duties proper to our state in life, such as the duties of wife or husband, parent, child, employee, employer, religious, priest, or in short of any lawful state of life into which we have been guided by divine Providence.

The second way in which the divine will manifests itself is called the will of good pleasure. This is the divine will as manifested in events, whether these events are really willed by Him or merely permitted and yet included in the plan of His universal Providence. Every event that occurs, since it at least has God's permission, manifests God's will and is used by Him to sanctify souls. These events may be sicknesses, contradictions, injuries, persecutions, aridities—in a word, all events whatever, whether they occur in the interior of the soul or exteriorly. Faith enables us to see God's will in all such happenings and to unite our wills to it in them. This manifestation of the divine will in events is called the will of good pleasure because in it God freely acts to accomplish His beneficent designs for His creatures.

The duty of the moment, then—or the sacrament of the moment—includes every manifestation of God's express will and every occurrence that comes from His will of good pleasure. By uniting our wills ever more perfectly to God's as revealed in such duties we continually advance towards perfection in charity.

### 3. How We Should Receive the Divine Will The Three Possibilities

There are three possible ways in which we can receive the divine will; but only one way in which we should receive it.

We can receive it as the pagans received Jesus: they simply did not recognize Him and did not receive Him at all. *He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world knew Him not.* (John 1, 10) Similarly, we may not recognize the divine will in the

commonplace duties of every day if we do not have (or use!) the eyes of faith. "He who knows that a person in disguise is the King," writes Father de Caussade, "welcomes him in a very different manner from one who seeing the exterior aspect of an ordinary man treats him according to his appearance. Similarly, the soul that sees the will of God in the smallest things or in the most desolating or fatal events receives them all with jubilation and equal respect."

Else we may receive the duty of the moment as the enemies of Jesus received Him—persecuting, mocking, blaspheming Him. So too, when the divine will brings us things little to our human liking, we may be tempted to complain, rebel, reject, even blaspheme. "What infidelity there is in the world! How unworthily do men think of God! . . . We wish to reduce God's action to the limits and rules that our feeble reason can imagine. We propose to reform it. We do nothing but complain and murmur. We are surprised at the way the Jews treated Jesus. Ah! divine love, adorable will of God, infallible action of God, how art thou looked upon! Can the divine will intrude? Can it be mistaken?"

Finally we can (and should) receive the divine will joyfully, as devout Christians receive Him hidden beneath humble appearances in the Sacred Host. And what does it matter whether we receive Him in a large or a small Host? Similarly, what does it matter whether we receive the divine will in a trifling duty or some great event? We are always looking for the divine will in great undertakings, but we may equally find it, the same divine will, with all its power to sanctify, in small things, in afflictions, in burdensome and unpleasant duties. We should disregard appearances and make an act of faith in the presence of the divine will beneath them. "If we are able to envisage each moment as the manifestation of the will of God, we shall find in it all that our heart can desire. For what can there be more reasonable, more perfect, more divine than the will of God? Can its infinite value increase through difference of time, place, and circumstance? If you are given the secret of finding it in every moment, in every event, you possess all that is most precious and worthy in your desires. What do you desire, holy souls? Let yourselves go, carry your longings beyond all measure and limits, dilate your hearts to an infinite extent, I have enough to fill them; there is no moment at which I cannot make you find all that you desire."

### Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence

Obedience, we have said, is the virtue that we are to exercise in regard to God's signified will. The virtue that is to be exercised in regard to the will of good pleasure is *self-abandonment*.

In all events which are beyond our control but well within the directing hand of Providence, we should simply cast ourselves upon the care of God with confidence and abandon. Self-abandonment, then, is a complete surrender to the divine will in whatever way this will manifests itself to us. We abandon our past to God, without bitterness

or resentment for what we may have suffered; we abandon our present to Him, embracing His holy will from moment to moment in every event that overtakes us; we abandon our future to Him with childlike confidence in His wisdom, power and love for us. St. Therese of Lisieux liked to consider herself as a rubber-ball to be used as a plaything by the Child Jesus: in practicing abandonment we do the same thing, realizing full well, too, that it hurts to be bounced about!

In thus accepting all events as coming from the hand of God we run no risk of falling into the error of Quietism or fatalism. We abandon ourselves only to events 'beyond our control, by faith seeing the hand of Providence as it guides them. As to events within our control and for which we are responsible,—here we do not abandon ourselves by drifting with the current of events: rather, through obedience and fidelity to duty we actively and diligently discharge all our obligations. For example, in sickness we accept this trial as from the divine will of good pleasure; but in obedience to the divine signified will we take all reasonable measures necessary to regain our health.

An airplane pilot guides his frail craft through storms, over mountains, oceans, chasms—all sorts of unknown and fearful dangers. If he saw all these dangers, he would surely be alarmed; if he tried to guide himself through them by sight he would be confused and panicky. But he rides high above them in the tranquil air, guided by his instruments, especially by a radio which keeps him on the radio beam, an invisible highway traced out for him in the sky. In the spiritual life also there is something like this. We are surrounded by trails, sufferings, injuries, contradictions: if we attempted to steer ourselves through by sight, that is, guided only by reason, we would be disturbed, fearful, desolate. But if we are guided by faith which is an instrument that will keep us ever true to the divine will, then we can pass through all perils in security and with great calmness of mind.

## Almsgiving: The Sowing of External Goods

As we near the completion of our study of the Christian life, as also when we near the close of our lives on earth, our minds and hearts are raised more and more confidently and singly to the great heavenly harvest on which our hopes are set. Thus we are brought back to the great central law of the Christian life, the law of the cross, the law of life-from-death, so wonderfully illustrated by the grain of wheat which must be sown and die if it is to produce more wheat. To the extent that eagerness for a heavenly crop increases in us, so must we be the more resolved to sow earthly goods, to die to them, that we may enjoy in a higher life and another world the delights which they dimly forecast and suggest. Since there are three great classes of human goods which men cherish, it is possible to distinguish three general ways of sowing in order to reap eternal good. We will conclude this work therefore by considering the manner in which we may sow the three kinds of earthly goods.

### Almsgiving

The first goods we may sow are external goods, or the goods of fortune—money and wealth. The need for poverty of spirit and detachment has already been shown: only by these virtues, which are themselves a kind of sowing, can we purify our hearts for loving God as we should. We have also spoken of the counsels by which men sow human goods—the vow of poverty, for example, by which they sow once and for all the riches of earth. Now we turn our attention to a way in which those other Christians who do not take the vow of poverty, but are nevertheless bound by the virtue and spirit of poverty, may sow their money and wealth: Almsgiving.

#### 1. The Necessity of Almsgiving

To perceive the necessity of almsgiving, it will be useful to consider this practice in the light of the four great principles of supernatural living we have studied in Part One.

#### Our Supernatural Elevation

If we view almsgiving from the merely natural point of view there is no sense in it. Why should I use my possessions to help strangers? Accordingly, there is little or no charity among the worldly. They use their money for their own enjoyment; if they give anything

away at all, it is only in trifling amounts or *to be seen by men*. But of course when generosity proceeds from a natural motive it will bring no eternal reward: *Amen, I say to you, they have had their reward.*

Most modern philanthropy, or humanitarian "charity" is purely natural and therefore not true charity at all. It is motivated by the desire for social and economic efficiency, or perhaps merely by the desire of publicity and fame; it thus seeks its reward on earth. Because humanitarian charity is natural, it also promotes such practices as birth control, euthanasia, artificial insemination, etc., in defiance of God's laws; it often involves the regimentation and humiliation of its beneficiaries. Social relief in itself is good and could be animated by the Christian spirit, and no doubt it sometimes is (though here its external form would be changed somewhat, too). As a matter of fact it is usually animated, not by Christian charity, but by the naturalistic humanitarian principles of the Nineteenth Century. Even so, whatever real good is to be found in it results from the persistence of the spirit of Christian love.

At the supernatural level, things are altogether different. Here the stranger is no longer a stranger at all. Like me he is the image of God; like me he is destined to be a *son of God*; with me he has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and is therefore bound to me by a blood tie more precious than that which binds me to my natural brother. This stranger and I, from the supernatural point of view, are members of one family, with God as our Father, Mary our Mother, and Jesus our Brother: should I not then help one who is the brother of Jesus and therefore my own true brother?

From the supernatural point of view, therefore, giving an alms is like changing money from one pocket to another, or like helping our own blood brothers. If I am bound by fraternal feeling to assist my blood brother, how much higher is the duty of helping my supernatural brother.

### The Glory of God

The Glory of God indicates two reasons for almsgiving.

In the first place, since it is our office to glorify God, what better way is there of doing this than by imitating Him? "Imitation is the sincerest flattery." To glorify God we cannot do better than to imitate Him in His attributes, including the generosity with which He lavishes His gifts, natural and supernatural, upon us.

Furthermore, not only should we ourselves glorify God, we should also use his creatures to glorify Him and incite our fellows to do the same. In almsgiving we accomplish all this, for we use money to glorify God and we also give the neighbor whom we help an opportunity to thank and glorify Him.

### The Supreme Dominion

God's Supreme Dominion extends to all our possessions as well as to our own persons. We are but stewards who will one day be called

upon to give an account of our stewardship, as the Gospel parable teaches us.

Suppose that a man sends a boy on an errand, giving him money to purchase some articles, intending to reward the child for his trouble. But suppose the boy, without waiting for a reward, takes all the money and spends it on himself; then assuredly the man would be angry and would wish to punish the boy. Now God gives us our lives and all our possessions to accomplish the errand of glorifying Him. If then we use these possessions for our own pleasure rather than the glory of God, we are exactly like the boy who takes his employer's money and we are therefore more deserving of a punishment than of a reward.

The saints, especially St. John Chrysostom and St. Bernard, offer the following counsels concerning almsgiving:

1. We are sent to help our neighbor, not to judge him. In most cases we do not have the knowledge to judge whether or not he is deserving. Therefore we should give our help while refraining from such rash judgment. There is one exception to this rule: we should not give an alms when we *know* that it will be used sinfully.

2. We should not give alms with an air of patronization, as though we were conferring a favor. We are performing a duty; and in doing it we receive a greater favor than we give. We give a material favor but in return we receive grace that is spiritual and supernatural. Therefore, instead of making the poor cringe and beg for help, the wealthy and prosperous should rather get on their knees to obtain the greater gift.

3. Similarly, instead of making the poor hunt us, we who possess the goods of the world should rather hunt them out. And when we find a poor man, we should not say, "Why should I give this man anything? Just because I happened to see him first am I to be burdened with his care?" If one were to come across a treasure accidentally, would he complain that no one else found it first? Well, he who has found a poor man to be helped has found a spiritual treasure for himself. Let him rejoice accordingly.

## The Folly of the Cross

The Folly of the Cross teaches us to sow earthly goods in order to reap those that are heavenly. For this reason we should sow money, that is, die to it ourselves by giving it to the poor.

It is sometimes said that we cannot take our possessions with us into eternity. This is not really true. We can take all of our possessions with us into heaven if we wish, and can also multiply them there a hundredfold. For the creatures of this world are samples of heavenly goods; and we know that by sowing the samples we can reap them in a more glorious way in heaven. The paradox is that to keep our goods permanently we should renounce them now! And of course the way to sow them is to give them to the poor.

In this way, St. John Chrysostom says, the poor become our porters, carrying our possessions before us into our heavenly home.



When a rich man travels, he buys furniture and works of art; but he does not use these to adorn his temporary lodgings in a hotel: he sends them ahead by porters to await him in his own mansion. In a similar way, if these are created goods that we admire, how foolish for us to confine our enjoyment of them to our merely temporary lodgings here on this earth! We should rather make the poor our porters, entrusting our possessions to them, and they will bear them before us into our heavenly homes! The most sensible thing for us to do is to travel as lightly as we can while on pilgrimage through this world, reducing ourselves to necessity while sending whatever we prize before us to be enjoyed in heaven.

## 2. The Excellence of Almsgiving

Three considerations will show us the excellence of almsgiving.

1. It manifests love for God, and this in two ways. First, by assisting our needy neighbor we show our love for Him in Whose likeness our neighbor was created. Secondly, we sacrifice the pleasures that we might have purchased for ourselves, thus exercising a preference for God over creatures. In these ways the practice of almsgiving very perfectly carries out the duty of charity, which involves at once a turning of our affections from creatures and a turning towards God. So well indeed does almsgiving fulfill our religious obligations that the Apostle James could write: *Religion clean and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulations; and to keep one's self unspotted from this world.* (James 1, 27)

2. Almsgiving is the practice of the Gospels. Jesus Himself *went about doing good*, and the poor were especially the objects of His love and solicitude.

One of the first things done by the Apostles in the early Church was the appointment of seven deacons to take care of poor widows. (*Acts* 6) Christian social work dates from that time.

The First Council of the Church, held in Jerusalem (*Acts* 15), after deciding in favor of St. Paul that Gentile converts were exempt from the law of circumcision, made this one demand of him, as he himself relates: *Only that we should be mindful of the poor; which same thing I was careful to do.* (Gal. 2, 10)

St. Paul himself also wrote a beautiful exhortation on almsgiving to his converts. *For you know the graciousness of Our Lord Jesus Christ—how, being rich, He became poor for your sakes, that by His poverty you might become rich.* (II Cor. 8, 9) It is in this passage, extending over two chapters, the whole of which should be devoutly meditated upon, that he lays down the rule that governs our sowing, *Mark this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.* (II Cor. 9, 6)

3. Almsgiving will draw all kinds of blessings upon us. Jesus promises that a cup of cold water given in His name will not go unrewarded. More than this, He promises eternal happiness to those who

perform the works of mercy: *Come, blessed of My Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; naked and you covered Me; sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.* (Matt. 25, 35-36) In the same place the Savior threatens damnation to those who fail in the office of charity to their neighbors.

Almsgiving, together with fasting and prayer, are the three works most pleasing to God, most characteristic of His friends: *Prayer is good with fasting and alms more than to lay up treasures of gold.* (Tobias, 12, 8)

### 3. The Measure of Almsgiving

The amount we should give in alms may be determined in three different ways. First, we may follow the rule given by theology, which states that we should give of our superfluous goods. This rule, good in itself, is not very practical in present circumstances, because modern standards of living and the modern pleasure philosophy have so multiplied necessities, real or fictitious, and so increased our appetites for material goods that hardly any one nowadays will acknowledge that he has a superfluity. A rise in income is quickly consumed by the purchase of a larger car, a more pretentious home, a summer cottage, a yacht, and every manner of luxury.

The second rule is the one given by the Old Testament: that we should give tithes, that is, one-tenth of our income. This is a very good rule, coming as it does from God. Christians may follow it; but we should consider it a minimum, since with the higher ideal of the Gospel and the superior opportunities of grace offered us we should be ready to do more than was required of men under the old dispensation.

The third and best rule is that which comes from the basic law governing supernatural life, the law of sowing, which we have just seen in the words of St. Paul: *He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.* Therefore we should give in alms as much as we can, since it is in this way that we will harvest the most in heaven. And further, as the same Apostle adds, *Let each one give according as he has determined in his heart, not grudgingly or from compulsion, for 'God loves a cheerful giver.'* (II Cor. 9, 7)

Those who have no money for the poor can give them time and affection; even those who do give money should also be generous in these still more precious commodities. We can sow time by visiting the poor; and, if we have nothing else to offer, we can give them personal help in their homes, solace, companionship, encouragement in their trials.

We should also give the poor of our affections. The world admires and toadies to the rich and well-to-do. Christians should love the poor, for the simple and sufficient reason that Jesus loved them and

identified Himself with them. Those who take the vow of poverty, since they make voluntary paupers of themselves, should have a special love of poverty and the poor; they should avoid preference for the companionship of the rich, as they should also avoid tastes and hobbies and recreations that can be enjoyed only by the rich. Similarly all Christians, since all are bound by the spirit of poverty, should avoid luxury and cultivate simplicity, such as was exemplified at Nazareth; and should have a high regard for poverty and the poor.

The world regards the condition of the rich as desirable, that of the poor as undesirable. The Gospel takes an opposite view *Woe to you rich! Blessed are you poor!* For this reason, G. K. Chesterton remarked, all modern welfare work is based on the assumption that we should change the condition of the poor until it resembles that of the rich, that is, it would give to the poor all the luxuries and conveniences of the rich. The Gospel, on the other hand, would rather have the rich become poor, at least poor in spirit. Jesus said that it is as hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven as it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. And despite centuries of eager exegesis spent in reducing the size of that camel and increasing the size of that needle, it still remains true, at the very least, as Chesterton said, that the state of the poor man is the more desirable from a spiritual point of view and in relation to eternal life. *But let the brother of lowly condition glory in his high estate, and the rich man in his low condition; for he will pass away like the flower of the grass. For the sun rises with a burning heat and parches the grass, and its flower falls and the beauty of its appearance perishes. So too will the rich man wither in his ways.* (James 1, 9-11)

## Mortification: The Sowing of Bodily Goods

The second kind of natural goods which men are prone to seek are the comforts and pleasures of the body. These goods too, then, are to be sown as far as possible in order to gain a harvest of spiritual goods. Sowing such goods is ordinarily what is meant by mortification.

### 1. The Necessity of Mortification

To practice mortification, which is unpleasant, it is indispensable that we have firm convictions about its necessity. And without doubt the best way to realize its necessity is to keep in mind the plan of God for man's sanctification; it is from this plan that the need of mortification immediately follows.

The plan of God the Father demands mortification. According to the plan of the Father, we are to be raised to the supernatural plane as His sons. This requires of us a course of conduct consistent with our state as sons of God; it requires that we live and act as divine beings, which involves, on its reverse side, a rising above mere human codes and norms, a renunciation of the pursuit of merely natural goods. In a word, our status as sons of God requires mortification of bodily appetites.

The plan of God the Son demands mortification. The plan of the Son demands that as He, being God, came to share our humanity, so we, being men, should share His divinity. This makes us in truth brethren of Jesus, raised up to follow Him in the divinized human life which He lived on earth and which is described in the Gospels. Once again, such a life is possible only to those who mortify the desire for earthly goods. Furthermore, as part of our imitation of Jesus and in union with Him, we are to deny ourselves daily and carry the cross after Him. In St. Paul's graphic phrases, we are to be *crucified with Christ* and *die* with Him. And of course to mortify means, precisely, to die or make dead.

The plan of God the Holy Spirit requires mortification. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify us, and He accomplishes this by transforming us through grace into divinized beings. When our humanity is divinized by grace we gain also a relish for divine things, for the goods of the supernatural order, which we should now choose and love and strive after rather than mere human goods. And this, once again, means mortification.

Mark clearly: the necessity for mortification is *not* derived in the first place from sin. Many manuals, deriving the need of mortification

either exclusively or primarily from sin, misconceive the whole divine plan and therefore the whole Christian life. Mortification does not issue in the first place from man's act but from God's: it follows from God's plan, formed by the divine wisdom from all eternity. Because men from all eternity were destined to a supernatural career and end they must sacrifice the goods of the natural order. Sin is man's free act, undesired by God, intervening to spoil the divine plan. Through this sinful act of man there arose a second need and motive for mortification: to make reparation for sin. But this second reason for mortification is quite different from the first. Moreover, it does not alter or remove the first, which still remains, and remains first. The second reason for mortification impels us to penance in the strict and narrow sense—to attempt to undo our sins, as it were, by making satisfaction for them. The primary reason urges us to mortify ourselves in the same way that the angels, and our First Parents, because of their elevation to the divine life, were required to renounce the goods of the natural order even before the Fall.

Of course in the concrete, since we are all in fact sinners, our mortification should invariably include that secondary reason and motive for mortification: penance for our sins. But our sacrifice of bodily pleasures and of all earthly goods is made necessary primarily by the very plan of God.

If our mortification is primarily or exclusively derived from sin, two baneful effects will occur in our spiritual lives. First, mortification will then be negative only and will tend to give us a pessimistic outlook: it will look only towards sin: its proper motive will be sorrow and hatred for sin and this alone: it will keep us preoccupied with sin and evil: keeping our eyes therefore fixed exclusively on the shadowed side of the Christian life. It is because sin is so generally taken as the sole motive for mortification that this practice comes to be regarded as gloomy, a thing therefore to be shunned as much as possible even in thought. The second baneful effect is that since the avoidance of sin is not the only element in a Christian life, but only a negative element, mortification is pushed into the background as a thing only occasionally or seasonally necessary. At times it is pushed out of sight altogether. We forget that Jesus said we should take up our crosses *daily*. (Luke 9, 23)

Two opposite, beneficent effects follow in our spiritual lives if we keep steadily in mind the fact that the primary necessity for mortification comes from God's plan to raise us to the supernatural and that therefore our own primary motive for practicing mortification should be taken from that same fact of our elevation. The first effect is that our attitude towards self-denial and the cross will be positive, bright, joyous. Instead of keeping our eyes fixed exclusively on the sad fact of our sinfulness, we will have our eyes upraised to our glorious destiny as sons of God. To obtain this destiny we will, like St. Paul, willingly renounce all things as but loss and dung in comparison to the good before us. We will imitate Jesus Who *for the joy set be-*

fore Him, endured a cross, despising shame . . . (Heb. 12, 2) Our spirit in the heaviest renunciations will be the happy one of a lover who eagerly leaves home and family for the love of his beloved, at the same time choosing her in preference to her most beautiful rivals, whom he willingly abandons.

The second practical effect of deriving the need of mortification from the plan of God is that we will then realize that self-denial and the cross, instead of being mere seasonal practices, are absolutely inseparable from the Christian life, coextensive with it, and therefore continuous. We will understand why Jesus said we should deny ourselves and carry our crosses daily. Every act that we perform as Christians, that is, every supernatural act involves a renunciation of natural goods, or at least of the affection and motives that come from these goods. And of course this mortification of natural affections and natural motives is the most penetrating kind of mortification of all—truly deep-therapy in the spiritual order. Thus we can avoid self-denial only by ceasing to live and act as Christians on the supernatural plane. A Christian who mortified himself on only certain days or at certain seasons resembles a man who would limit himself to breathing only on certain days or at certain seasons; for a Christian simply cannot live—or breathe—as such without at the same time mortifying himself at least interiorly in regard to natural desires, affections, and motives. And of course, precisely because of his interior detachment, he will also mortify himself externally in regard to material goods so far as this is possible.

## 2. Practical Principles Concerning Mortification

a. The obligation to mortify ourselves does not come from Church law only but from divine law as well. In making regulations concerning fasting and abstinence, the Church simply enforces and interprets the divine law. Of course the Church herself has the power to make binding laws. But to appreciate the urgency and deep necessity of mortification, it is important to realize that it derives ultimately from the divine law itself, from the inexorable law of the cross, of life-from-death.

Jesus teaches the necessity of mortification in many places. Sufficient, however, is that text which lies at the very heart of His spiritual teaching and sums up the whole practice of Christianity: *If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.* (Luke 9, 23)

b. Mortification is necessary for salvation. *Unless you do penance, you shall likewise perish.* (Luke 13, 3) This is the way in which the old Douay version translated these words. Though recent translations render it, *Unless you repent*, etc., placing emphasis on the interior virtue of repentance, which is in truth the heart and life of penance, it is not to be forgotten that the complete Catholic conception of repentance includes both interior and exterior penance. The older rendering of the Douay version was intended to contradict and cor-

rect those heretics who maintained that interior repentance is sufficient. Man is a creature composed of body as well as of soul; hence the Church teaches that all religion, although essentially interior and spiritual, must also have an outward and visible form corresponding to man's bodily nature. This is in fact the basis of the visible organization of the Church. It is also the reason why mortification, although primarily and essentially interior, should also be exterior. "But mortification in itself, and to a certain degree and in given circumstances, is of precept and necessary to salvation. This is not only true of the self-inflicted pains which are sometimes of obligation in order to overcome vehement temptations or of those various mortifications which are needful in order to avoid sin. But a definite amount of fasting and abstinence, irrespective of the temptations or circumstances of individuals, is imposed by the Church on all her children under pain of eternal damnation." (Faber, *Growth in Holiness*, XI)

c. Both exterior and interior mortification are necessary. This is evident from what has just been said. "Mortification is both interior and exterior; and of course the superior excellence of the interior is beyond question. But if there is one doctrine more important than another on this subject, it is that there can be no interior mortification without exterior; and this last must come first. In a word, to be spiritual, bodily mortification is indispensable." (Faber, *op. cit.*)

Let us add this one further thought of Father Faber: "I tremble when people speak of interior mortification, it sounds so like a confession that they are leading comfortable lives." And this one from St. Vincent de Paul: "He who makes little of exterior mortifications, saying that interior ones are much more perfect, makes one to know that he is not mortified, either interiorly or exteriorly." (*Apostle Of Charity*, by Theodore Maynard, p. 106)

### 3. Answers to Objections

The natural man is inclined to evade and shave down, if not wholly deny, the duty of mortification in a number of ways. To guard our convictions and keep our practice fervent we must be prepared to meet his sophistries. These may be stated and answered for the most part, once again, in the words of Father Faber.

a. Objection: "Some have spoken as if bodily mortification were less necessary in modern times than it was before, and consequently that the recommendations of spiritual writers under this head are to be taken with considerable abatement."

Answer: "If this means that a less degree of exterior mortification is necessary for holiness now than was necessary for the past ages of the Church, nothing can be more untrue, and it comes up to the verge of condemned propositions.

"The degree of mortification and its idea must remain the same in all ages of the Church: for penance is an abiding mark of the Church. To do penance because the kingdom of heaven is at hand is the especial work of a justified soul. To get grace, to keep it and to

multiply it, penance is necessary at every step. And when we say that holiness is a note of the Catholic Church, we show forth the necessity of mortification; for one implies the other, the first includes the last."

b. Objection: "Increased valetudinarianism in modern times makes mortification impracticable."

Answer: "We must, of course, make allowance for health. Nevertheless, the plea of health, while it is always to be listened to, is to be listened to with suspicion. We must always be jealous of the side on which nature and self are serving as volunteers. Great, then, as we must admit the consequences of a state of valetudinarianism to be on the spiritual life, a general and plenary dispensation from corporal austerities is not one of them; and we must remember also that our forefathers who troubled their heads little enough about their nerves, and had no tea to drink, were accustomed to hear from Father Baker, who only gave utterance to the old mystical tradition, that a state of robust health was positively a disqualification for the higher stages of the spiritual life."

St. Alphonsus gives this maxim: "Woe to him that loves health more than sanctity." (*Selva*, Maxims)

c. Another objection, "and one sometimes urged in behalf of priests and religious, is that modern hard work is a substitute for ancient penance . . . I do not say . . . that this objection expresses no truth, but only that it will not bear all the weight men put upon it. Certain kinds of penance are incompatible with hard work; while at the same time the excessive exterior propensities which hard work gives us are so perilous to the soul that certain other kinds of penance are all the more necessary to correct this disturbing force. All great missionaries, Seneri and Pinamonti, Leonard of Port Maurice and Paul of the Cross, have worn instruments of penance. The penalties of life, as Da Ponte calls them, are doubtless an excellent penance when endured with an interior spirit, and worth far more than a hundred self-inflicted pains. Yet he who maintains that the endurance of the former is a dispensation from infliction of the latter, will find himself out of harmony with the whole stream of approved spiritual teaching in the Church; and the brevity of his perseverance in the interior life will soon show both himself and others the completeness of his delusion. Without bodily penance, zealous apostolic work hardens the heart far more than it sanctifies it."

d. Another "class of objectors tells us to be content with the trials God sends us, which are neither few nor light. If they told us that the gay suffering and graceful welcome of these dispensations were of infinitely greater price than the sting of the discipline or the twinge of the catenella, most true and most important would the lesson be. But the objectors fall into that mistake of exaggeration, which runs through so many of the spiritual books. Because A is more important than B, they jump to the conclusion that B is of no importance at all. Because the mortifications which God sends are more efficacious and less delusive, if rightly taken, than the mortifi-



cations we inflict on ourselves, it does not follow but that these last are, not only an important, but an indispensable element in the spiritual life. We may answer them briefly as follows. Yes, the best of all penance is to take in the spirit of interior compunction the mortifications which the wise and affectionate course of God's fatherly providence brings upon us; but unless we have practiced ourselves in the generous habit of voluntary penances, the chances are indeed very much against our forming this interior spirit of penance, and therefore, of getting the full profit out of the involuntary trials God sends us."

e. Objection: Mortifications are all right for Carmelites and Trappists—we even expect them in this case—but they are not necessary for people of the world.

Answer: This is inverted logic. We must reason precisely the other way: If they are necessary for Carmelites and Trappists, how much more necessary are mortifications for those who do not enjoy the protection of a cloistered life? St. Francis de Sales, gentlest of saints, recommends corporal penances to lay people.

f. "Bodily mortification," to take a final objection, "is subject to abuse." We might expect, from hearing bodily mortification spoken of so fearfully, that men were dying like flies from fasting and using the discipline! Alas, it is not so, even among Christians; penance is not high among the causes of mortality. "This danger of the misuse of corporal austerities should not discourage their use. Even though beginners make mistakes in the exercise of bodily penance, these mistakes are corrected by time and good will with prudent direction. The awkward movements of the child must precede the assured and firm step of the adult. Corporal mortifications are to be commended in spite of the risks that attend their use." (Father Edward Leen, *Progress Through Mental Prayer*, p. 253)

#### 4. The Practice of Mortification

It is chiefly exterior mortification that we speak of here, as we have been speaking of interior mortification throughout this book. Interior mortification, in its most elementary and essential form, consists in the mortification of natural desires, affections, and motives; and this has been one of the main themes running through every chapter. In its higher and more difficult practice it is the mortification of the judgment and will, which has also been treated in various places.

Of exterior mortification it may be said that it is minor but indispensable; it should be regarded as a means at once to manifest and to cultivate interior mortification. If, however, we do not practice exterior mortification, which is easier and more rudimentary, it is quite certain that we will be unable to practice interior mortification, especially the mortification of judgment and will.

The practice of exterior mortification should be systematic and thorough, reaching all the senses both exterior and interior.

*The Mortification of the Eyes.* Because we wish to use our minds

to know God and our hearts to love Him totally, we will avoid all useless curiosity concerning creatures. It will be our object to live lives of prayer, constantly aware of God's presence; and to this end we will exclude trivialities, curiosities, and distractions that take our thoughts and, more important still, our affections, away from God. Even our material duties and the necessities of living bodily on earth are distractions from God, making it impossible for us to contemplate Him continually as do the saints and angels in heaven. But during our probation on earth we must of course put up with the limitations of human life; and meanwhile, it is possible by means of supernatural motives to sanctify the ordinary natural activity of every day. But useless distractions and their occasions should be brushed from the mind.

Since the eyes are the gateway to the mind and soul, it is by a custody of the eyes and restraint in their use that we guard the purity of the mind. To this end our eyes should be kept averted from what is merely trivial or curious or of interest only to the worldly-minded.

Even more must the mortification of the eyes be directed against whatever is suggestive or calculated to arouse sensuality and sexual passion, which is difficult enough to control without artificial stimulation from press and movies. Thus, not only will that which is evidently evil be avoided but also that which is likely to lead us to evil and indeed whatever carries us unnecessarily from the contemplation of God. *So if thy right eye is an occasion of sin to thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; for it is better for thee that one of thy members should perish than thy whole body should go into hell.*

*Mortification of the Hearing.*—What was said of the sense of sight applies to the hearing also. Our dependence on this sense should not become the occasion for admitting all kinds of distracting thoughts into the mind. We should not be interested in the news of the world—for interest betrays affection—either the world at large or our own small circle except in so far as is necessary and useful in our work or the performance of our duties. In other words, the need of a motive of utility applies here also and the habit of judging by such motives will be of practical assistance in this matter.

Nowadays the radio and television bring all the allurements of the world right into the privacy of our homes. These therefore should also be used with restraint, and affection for them mortified. They may be used for utility but not to encourage curiosity or levity. And the utility of these instruments, at least in private life, is perhaps not as extensive as is usually represented. Chesterton remarked that the irony of the radio is that it was invented in an age in which men have nothing to say. Certainly, the habit of spending hours and even whole days listening to inferior radio programs relaxes the mind and dissipates its energies, rendering impossible a life of union with God. It is especially lamentable that religious, who make a great matter of renouncing the world, bring it right back into their convents by way of movies, radios, newspapers, best sellers, and television.

Nor does an intelligent knowledge of what is going on about us require that we dissipate and stain our minds with all the gossip and trivialities served up by daily newspapers in accounts of crime, sensational stories, advertisements, and comics.

The primary motive for all mortification of the senses is the need to keep our minds and hearts pure for a life of prayer and union with God on the supernatural plane. For this reason mortification applies not only to what is evil but also to what is good although likely to turn our affections from God. The secondary but still a most important motive for such mortification is to avoid all occasions of sin.

"Musicians should exercise a check on their desire to hear music, should deliberately shut their ears to all that is merely sensuous and should refuse themselves the pleasure of hearing again in their imagination the good music that appeals to them." (Father Edward Leen, *Progress Through Mental Prayer*, p. 247)

*Mortification of the Tongue.* Connected closely with the mortification of the hearing is that of the tongue. If we are not to listen to gossip, neither are we to spend our time spreading it about ourselves. We should not be idly curious about the doings of our neighbors; whatever interrupts our union with God should be excluded from our minds unless it pertains to duty or the practice of charity. Jesus tells us that we will have to give an account of every idle word. (Matt. 12, 36) St. James goes so far as to assert, *If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.* (Chap. 3, 2) That is to say, control of the tongue is so important and so difficult that when one has achieved it he has already arrived at perfection.

If we must avoid even idle words because they interfere with an interior life, we must also mortify the tongue because it so quickly and easily leads to sin, and to so many sins. *And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity . . . placed among our members, defiling the whole body, and setting on fire the course of our life, being itself set on fire by hell.* (James 3, 6) To neglect this mortification is to make impossible any true religious or spiritual life: *If anyone thinks himself to be religious, not restraining his tongue, but deceiving his own heart, that man's religion is vain.* (James 1, 26)

*Mortification of Smell, Taste, Touch.* These three senses must be mortified because they so quickly lead to sensuality, which on the one hand hinders the cultivation of a taste for spiritual things and on the other hand disposes towards other faults and sins—for example, intemperance and impurity—that have their origin in sensuality. The sense of smell can be mortified by avoiding fastidiousness and luxury in this matter, as well as by putting up with unpleasant odors and conditions of living. The sense of touch can be mortified by enduring extremes of heat and cold so far as this may be done without injury to one's health. This sense may be mortified also by the avoidance of softness, luxury, effeminacy. By carefulness in posture and bodily carriage the touch may also be mortified; not that rest or relaxation must

be sacrificed when needed, but careless and slovenly bodily attitudes should be avoided. Finally, the sense of touch may be mortified by the use of penitential instruments, such as chains or the discipline. Such instruments have ever been used by saints and holy Christians and are recommended by St. Francis de Sales also to the laity who wish to practice devotion. These more unusual penances, however, should be practiced under the guidance of a spiritual director.

The sense of taste may be mortified by fasting and abstinence. In fact, these are the most ordinary forms of penance which the Church has approved and regulated in her basic legislation. Devout souls will wish to go beyond the minimum requirements of the Church—which they may do under proper direction if it does them no injury. To the silly objection sometimes made to those who fast and abstain beyond what the Church requires—that they are trying to be “more Catholic than the Church”—it is sufficient to point to the conduct of the saints who performed the most extraordinary penances without dreaming of being “more Catholic than the Church,” while the Church on her part has approved their practice by canonizing them. If it is further said that some saints, notably St. Therese of Lisieux, were canonized although they practiced no extraordinary penance, this simply cannot be admitted. When biographers of St. Therese state that she did nothing extraordinary, this means that she was guided in her practice by the ordinary Carmelite rule; but for the vast majority of Christians the Carmelite rule would itself be extraordinarily severe; and it is the Church's judgment that St. Therese observed this rule with truly heroic fidelity. Moreover, there was at least one kind of extraordinary penance, and that the most difficult and dangerous of all, for which she was notable—the endurance of extreme cold, by which her life was even shortened. The heroic practice of virtue is a condition for canonization.

*The Mortification of the Imagination.*—If the external senses are the gateway to the soul, it is the imagination, gathering and co-ordinating all the impressions of the outer senses, from which the mind immediately draws its data. Therefore, that the mind may be pure and its gaze kept steadily on God, there is need for a mortification of this faculty also. The fact that the imagination directly and immediately influences the passions is an added reason for restraining this faculty. The imagination may be mortified by curtailing reveries, daydreams, and idle thoughts. Moreover, it is necessary to avoid that type of fiction, sensuous, sentimental, or romantic, which is calculated to arouse the imagination and the feelings. Moving pictures should be used with reserve and according to the principles set down in an earlier chapter. Not to mention at all reading that is obscene or indecent, it will also be the practice of Christians to put aside papers and periodicals which publish reading matter or pictures likely to arouse the sensual life at the expense of the spiritual. As a soul draws ever nearer to God, it will tend more and more to lay aside all that would attract it to mere creatures.

After this description of mortification, the reader might be tempted to object, "One might as well be dead as do all this!" It is true; we might as well be dead; in a spiritual sense we *will* be dead. And that is precisely what we are about: we are studying how to mortify—or kill—the natural man, the pagan in us. To this murderous project we are committed by our baptism. *For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* (Col. 3, 3) In these last chapters we are steadying our hand for the *coup de grace*.

## Afflictions: The Sowing of Interior Goods

### 1. The Reason For Afflictions

A gardener, when he transplants a flower or shrub, preserves not only the main roots but also the numerous tiny rootlets that go out in all directions to find nourishment for the plant. These he carefully detaches from the soil, for if they are injured the plant will but starve and die in its new surroundings. In a similar way when a soul is transplanted (so to speak) from earth to heaven, its numerous natural affections for the creatures of this world must be broken off one by one; such a soul must learn to thrive on God, its affections must become re-centered in God and motivated by His goodness.

Now there are two means available for cutting off these rootlets of affection for earthly goods: the one is voluntary mortification; the other is the trials and afflictions sent by God. In order that afflictions may be understood in the plan of God, and therefore be employed in our own personal work for salvation, they should be regarded as successive separations from the various goods of this earth; for we are afflicted in that something we are fond of is taken from us; and these separations, if borne patiently, therefore become so many voluntary renunciations of created goods.

Afflictions may thus be understood as supplementing the work of voluntary detachment and mortification (or *vice versa*). In sending us affliction God takes the pruning-knife from our hands into His own—a procedure made necessary by the fact that our own efforts to sever our ties to earth are likely to be but half-hearted and timorous. If we are really to be detached, if our hearts are in truth to be emptied that they may receive God, then a more thorough purification than we ourselves can effect is required. Hence God sends the numerous trials, sufferings of life; and behind every trial, when it is examined, may be seen the loss of some earthly good. Nor are these trials only numerous in the sense that each one comes close upon the heels of the preceding, so that they become a continuous series. They are also cumulative; as time goes on, they separate us from more and more of this world's goods, instructing us, with an ever-widening circle of examples, that happiness is not to be found in the things upon which we have set our hearts; and finally in old age it comes about—or such at any rate is the divine intention—that our eyes no longer turn to the goods of earth for happiness but are fixed with ever greater steadiness beyond the horizon of this world upon the goods of eternity. Thus life is a continuous lesson in detachment; our sojourn on this earth—so fittingly

called by the Scriptures a pilgrimage—is a long preparation for that fullness of love and joy reserved in eternity. *Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.* (Acts 14, 22)

## 2. The Kinds of Afflictions

It is the mind and will that suffer ultimately even in the loss of material goods; for the mind and will naturally seek contentment and peace in the goods among which we are placed, and the loss of these goods brings a disturbance of human happiness. This is why we speak here of afflictions generally as a mortification in regard to the interior goods sought by mind and will. All afflictions are the same in their effect—separation from some earthly good. They differ according to the kind of good of which we are deprived. They differ also according as they cut more or less deeply into our souls.

*Physical Afflictions.* Under this head are all trials and sufferings pertaining to the body and bodily life; they are listed here, under the broad classification of interior goods for the reason just mentioned, that is, inasmuch as they deprive the will of its repose. Certainly health is a great good, the greatest natural good next to life itself; and its loss or diminution is a grievous trial indeed. Loss of health means inability to enjoy many of life's pleasures; it means, especially when protracted, loss of work, the forfeiting of a career, as well as that most elementary satisfaction which men normally find in exercising their special craft or skill. It may mean also the loss of self-respect and social position and the sense of achievement. And still we have not mentioned the pain and discomfort and endless tedium that are part of sickness, depriving the invalid of everything desirable and making life itself a burden.

Moreover, sickness reaches out beyond the invalid himself and brings sorrow to others around him. And as it deepens into death, it separates us from our friends and the loved ones of our families—the most cruel suffering of all and one that would be simply unendurable did not our faith give us the power to see a fuller life and a fuller love in eternity. By all such privations, by this painful breaking of the most tender and most sacred bonds, Providence teaches us to look less and less for happiness in any earthly good, to turn more and more towards the divine goodness, to see God as the one only source of love and joy, to learn that He alone must be the center and the bond of every affection that is to be true and lasting.

With physical afflictions may also be grouped all sufferings that come from the loss of material goods—the loss of riches, or of employment, or of home, or of other possessions in which the strands of our affections have become entangled. Providence uses all these "accidents" to press us on to that one great lesson and goal of life, total detachment from the earth, total love for God alone.

*Mental Afflictions.* Of course all human afflictions are in a sense mental since, as we have just remarked, it is in our minds and wills that all suffering is, in the end, registered, but the term is used here to

describe especially such afflictions as are caused, not by the loss of a visible or external good, but rather by the loss of good name, reputation, or popularity among one's fellows.

Men of principle, holding unswervingly to a predetermined course, are very likely to displease those who follow the crowd—the weak characters, the time-servers, the pliant, the evil, who readily go this way or that, resolved to please the world at any cost of principle or virtue.

All such persons, reproached by virtue and strength of character, will usually do whatever they can in envy and spite to discourage, or even to defame, those who live by principle. *For every one who does evil hates the light.* (John 3, 20) As a consequence, the supreme test of virtue and character is perseverance in the face of opposition, defamation, ridicule, persecution.

Now this is also true, and particularly true, as we are warned by Sacred Scripture, of those who live by the Gospel: *All who want to live piously in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.* (II Tim. 3, 12) "As soon as the children of this world perceive that you desire to follow a devout life," wrote St. Francis de Sales, "they will discharge arrows of mockery and persecution against you without number." This opposition may take the form of ridicule—innocent in appearance but stingingly effective—of discouragement, of calumny, of petty persecution on the part of friends and relatives or of heavier persecution on the part of those who take it as a matter of duty to oppose such an "extravagance" as loving God with the whole heart! Jesus warned that those spreading His Gospel would be especially pursued by persecution: *If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you. If you were of the world, the world would love what is its own. But because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I have spoken to you: No servant is greater than his master. If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you also . . . They will expel you from the synagogues. Yes, the hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering worship to God.* (John 15, 1-18-20; 16, 2)

It is evident, therefore, that we must not allow our conduct to be influenced by the worldly, for *the sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God.* (I Cor. 2, 14) And what if we do lose our reputation through serving the lofty ideal of the Gospel? Fame, St. Thomas More observed, is "but the blast of another man's mouth, as soon passed as spoken." Human respect—that is, fleeing from the line of duty because of opposition—is moral cowardice.

"Now to something of this kind, more or less [criticism, persecution, etc.] we committed ourselves when we took up the spiritual life in earnest. We knew what we were about. From that time we parted company with the world, never more to do aught but fly from it as a plague, or face it as a foe. Human respect, therefore, must henceforth be for us either an impossibility, or an inconsistency, or a sin." (Faber)



*Spiritual Afflictions.* These are trials experienced by those who have begun to make some progress in the spiritual life; they consist in the loss of some good or consolation pertaining to the spiritual life, a consolation to which the soul has become accustomed and attached. For example, after turning to a more devout life, one experiences great interior joy in prayer or finds pleasure in various spiritual exercises and liturgical ceremonies, learning that the Lord is sweet; or perhaps one derives happiness from the works of the active life, ministering to the sick and poor or communicating divine truths to souls. Then, suddenly, so to speak, the lights go out; the person is left in darkness and aridity; the spiritual life and all its exercises both interior and exterior become tedious and burdensome; apostolic projects, hitherto successful, now begin to fail and perhaps the very opportunity to engage in such works is lost. The soul becomes desolate and discouraged—all the more so that it has renounced the pleasures of sense and now finds them tasteless and even repugnant. (Of course there may be a great temptation, in this spiritual void, to go back to sensible pleasures—and in the natural man the taste for them can always revive!)

In this way God deprives His friends even of spiritual goods, teaching them to be detached also from these. This painful lesson is made necessary by the fact that a soul after conversion to a spiritual way of life, is still far from perfect and is almost certain to transfer his imperfections to the supernatural order. That is to say, he will become attached in a too human or natural manner to goods of the supernatural order, such as inward lights and joys or apostolic projects. He becomes attached to the consolations of God, as St. Francis de Sales puts it, and thus fails to give all his affections to the God of consolations. Now God wants us to be detached from everything except Himself and our own salvation; He wants us to love Himself with our whole heart and all other things, including even spiritual things, only in relation to Him.

Such spiritual sufferings are hard to understand by those who have not experienced them. But they are quite real and very penetrating—and therefore more purifying than all other afflictions, at least according to St. John of the Cross, who describes them poetically as the Dark Nights of the Senses and of the Spirit through which the soul must pass in order to arrive at divine union. The suffering caused by these interior trials may be compared to the grief of a man living in exile far from a dear home and not to be consoled by lovely surroundings; or to the anguish of a lover separated from his beloved and unable to find pleasure in any other friendship—and perhaps even unable to eat!

It is a great trial indeed when apostolic souls are hindered from serving Christ in the poor or from spreading the Good News of the Gospel to needy and anxious souls. It is a great trial also when someone, having given up all other pleasures to seek God, finds that the divine Presence has apparently withdrawn Itself, leaving him in lone-

liness and desolation. Yet these trials, like all others, must be borne patiently and in a spirit of faith. They must be recognized as instruments with which the Divine Physician performs His surgery on the natural man, or as shears with which the Divine Husbandman continues to prune, and indeed prunes more closely, that we may bear *more fruit*. Thus the soul should continue to perform its duties faithfully despite apparent failures, must persevere in prayer and the interior life despite the fact that this now brings more bitterness than joy. Only by such perseverance can he prove that he is willing to give up *all* things for the love of Jesus Christ. *But the God of all grace, Who has called us unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus will Himself, after we have suffered a little while, perfect, strengthen, and establish us.* (I Peter 5, 10)

### 3. How to Receive Afflictions

Suffering and affliction do not sanctify souls automatically; sometimes, on the contrary, they harden and embitter their victims. The effect they have depends in fact on the manner in which they are accepted. There are three possible ways in which afflictions may be received.

First, we can receive them like the pagans. To the Stoics, for example, it was a matter of pride not to flinch in pain. They considered it weakness for a man to complain or cry out because of suffering. Their conduct had about it a certain nobility, but it was rooted in pride and resulted in harshness. Or we may bear out trials like fatalists, who of course are also pagans. We will then greet trouble with some such disposition of mind as this: "Well, it had to happen. It was in the book of fate. There is nothing I can do about it; I may as well not complain, for complaint would be senseless anyway." This way of regarding suffering creates bitterness, gloom, hopelessness.

Secondly, we may receive afflictions like the damned souls, who curse their afflictions and God for causing them. There are men on earth who, as if anticipating hell, accept their trials in the same way. They complain, murmur, curse, blaspheme.

Finally, we may (and of course should) accept afflictions as true Christians, in the meek spirit of Christ Himself. Indeed, we may bear our afflictions in union with Christ, saying with St. Paul, *I rejoice now in the sufferings I bear for your sake; and what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ I fill up in my flesh for His Body, which is the Church.* (Col. 1, 24) Although, as St. Augustine said, there is nothing lacking to the sufferings of Christ when He is considered by Himself, since His sufferings were sufficient to redeem all mankind, still when He is considered as Head of the Body of which we are members, it may be said, as St. Paul does, that there is something lacking in His sufferings until all His members have added their sufferings to His. In this way, besides extending the redemption to others, we ourselves become *heirs indeed of God and joint-heirs with*

*Christ, provided, however, we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified with Him.* (Rom. 8, 17)

Specifically, since as Christians we wish to exercise our supernatural life and activity, we should receive each trial with a threefold greeting:

With an act of Faith. Each suffering, of whatever kind, gives us an opportunity to recognize God's Providence using the events of our lives to purify us. We should say, *It is the Lord; let Him do what is good in His sight.* (I Kings 3, 18)

With an act of Hope. As God by trial deprives us of some created good, we should express our confidence in His promise to repay us a hundredfold. *Although He should kill me, I will trust in Him.* (Job 13, 15)

With an act of Charity.—God empties our hearts of affections for earthly goods, that they may be filled with love of Him. Once God's will is made known to us by faith, our own wills, impelled by love, should joyfully embrace it; for love is a union of wills. Moreover, by means of afflictions God empties our hearts of earthly affections, that we may love Him the more fully; so that each new trial enables us to love Him with a purer will and increased capacity. Thus will we be, with the Apostle, *as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.* (II Cor. 6, 10)

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword? Even as it is written, 'For thy sake we are put to death all the day long. We are regarded as sheep for the slaughter.' But in all these things we overcome because of Him Who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus Our Lord.* (Rom. 8, 35-39)

## Death: The Final Sowing

By voluntary mortification we learn detachment from earth's pleasures; by a life-long series of afflictions we learn a still deeper and more difficult detachment from the most precious goods that this world offers: from health, from the happiness of useful work, from friends, from the dear ones of our families. But this is yet not enough: we must be detached from the basis of all these goods, from human life itself, which we must also be willing to sow in the same spirit of faith in which we sow all other goods.

Jesus inculcated detachment from all life's goods when He said, *And everyone who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake shall receive a hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting.* (Matt. 19, 29) Surely a complete catalogue of this world's goods, which Our Lord would have us relinquish! And yet not quite complete! Elsewhere He says, *If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.* (Luke 14, 26) Here is the supreme, the climactic, renunciation: *Yes, and even his own life.* And of course the explanation is ever the same: *He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake, will find it.* (Matt. 10, 39) The Church in her liturgy (the Common of Martyrs) applies this teaching directly to the martyrs, who for the love of Christ have given up their lives, not only in a spiritual or mystical sense by the voluntary renunciation of this world's goods, but also literally and dramatically in the shedding of their blood.

Clearly it is true that all men, and not only Christians, must die: *It is appointed unto men to die once.* (Heb. 9, 27) What is peculiar to Christians is that they die in faith: in the faith that death, patiently sustained, will bring them to more abundant life: in the faith of the Church that through death "life is changed not destroyed." (*Preface for Requiem Masses*)

There are then different ways of regarding death. Indeed, throughout our lives, by reason of our elevation to the supernatural life, there is a double standard—one natural, the other supernatural—for deciding every problem and resolving every difficulty. We must learn therefore in all circumstances to "see double" and ever to guide ourselves by the supernatural standard. Thus men speak of happiness; and they even say, quite truly, that God wants them to be happy; but they often forget that it is above all a supernatural happiness to which God leads us. So also they speak of peace; they say it is a gift of God and expect God to help them obtain it, quite oblivious of the fact that the

peace for which they seek is often very different from that which Our Lord promises: *My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.* (John 14, 27)

So also with death; we may stand on either the natural or the supernatural plane to consider it, using either reason or faith.

## 1. The Natural View of Death

From the natural point of view, it is difficult and repugnant to think of death; for death is, in a sense, contrary to nature. Death is in fact, although from different angles, at once natural and contrary to nature.

Death is natural because the body is composed of very different and even opposed elements. These elements are brought into complex unity for a time under the influence of the soul. But because of the process of change and corruption that takes place in all material things, the disintegrating forces finally triumph; body and soul separate in death.

The soul on the other hand is naturally immortal. It has no parts, but is altogether simple and indivisible. Hence it cannot be resolved further into parts or elements. For this reason it does not die.

Therefore, death, while natural to the body, is contrary to the nature of the soul and our spiritual personality. For this reason the soul revolts against the idea of death. Indeed even the body, like all created natures, tends to conserve itself in existence. Therefore, death, although natural to the body, is repugnant to it. Furthermore, although death is thus natural to the body, it must be kept in mind that God, in creating man, did not intend that he should die. To Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was given the special (or preternatural) gift of bodily immortality. To them and to their posterity, which of course includes all of us, death is a punishment for sin. *But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of Paradise, God hath commanded us that we should not eat, and that we should not touch it, lest perhaps we die.* (Gen. 3, 3) Here, then, is another reason why it is repugnant to think of death. It is a punishment; as such it reminds us of the great primeval sin in which we by nature share; it reminds us also of the blessed state lost to us on earth through that sin.

These are what may be called philosophical reasons why we do not naturally like to think of death. To these we may add a very practical reason: we are so incorrigibly worldly, that the thought of death, sobering as it is, makes no deep or lasting impression on us. Our minds and hearts are so filled with the love of creatures that the thought of death cannot gain entrance. Even at funerals or wakes, instead of meditating on death, our thoughts and conversation are often occupied with earthly matters, perhaps earthly pleasures; perhaps we are impatient for the funeral to be over so that we can get to a ball game or in any case resume our accustomed round of secular activities and recreations. Indeed, in the worldly luxury which nowadays marks funeral arrangements in the pitiful attempt to make the

corpses themselves simulate life, there is evident unwillingness and refusal to face squarely the grim fact of death. Thus death, despite its awful significance and frequent occurrence, does not make men as serious as they should be in caring for their souls, does not after all compel them to see and acknowledge the great realities of human existence.

## 2. The Supernatural View of Death

On the supernatural plane, faith enables us to look beyond the horizon of this world into eternity; it enables us to look beyond death which is thus a portal and a passage to a more perfect life. "Life is not destroyed, but changed." True, even what we see by faith is obscure—our eyes cannot yet stand the vision of eternal glory—but at least such knowledge as we have is very certain. Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered the heart of man to know, what things God has prepared for those who love Him. (1 Cor. 2, 9)

Accordingly, standing on this vantage ground provided by divine truth, we will be far less fearful of death than of infidelity to grace which may deprive us of the bliss into which death should carry us.

Moreover, our faith teaches us, as we have observed in an early chapter (Part I, Chapter II), that death fixes the term of our period of probation. After death there is no changing; death itself changes nothing: for all eternity we will remain in that condition of soul in which death finds us, as figures sculptured in stone remain fixed forever in the position in which they were carved. *It is appointed unto man to die once but after this comes the judgment.* (Heb. 9, 27) Therefore, since we wish to be saints in eternity, that we may receive the reward of saints, we must live now in such a way that death will find us saints. To a Christian, then, the thought of death will be, not gloomy and one to be avoided, but a spur to more perfect living here. The idea of death, instead of depriving us of incentives and energy, gives us a most powerful incentive to live energetically and fully. In fact, spiritual writers have frequently pointed out that the way to perfect each action—the way to avoid carelessness and slovenliness in our work—is to act as we would if we knew that we were to die as soon as the action is over or even while it is yet in progress. Some moment indeed, and we *know not the day nor the hour*, will be our last, and we would do well to live as if each moment might be that last one.

Nor, to a Christian, does the thought of death cause sadness. A man suffering in a lonely exile is not saddened at the prospect of returning home. Now faith teaches us that in our life on earth we are *strangers and pilgrims* (1 Peter 2, 11) and that *we have not here a lasting city.* (Heb. 13, 14) This life, which the *Salve Regina* calls "a vale of tears" is but an exile; and death is deliverance, enabling us to go to our true country and home in heaven. Even our homes in this world are but temporary dwellings, like inns along the way; and they are among the great natural goods from which Jesus demands

detachment: *And everyone who has left HOME . . . for my name's sake shall receive a hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting.*" If afflictions gradually detach us from this world's goods, in death we finish in one leap the last stage of our journey from exile to our true home.

Suppose that James, having worked away from his home and wife for several years, is finally enabled to return. James has a fine photograph of his wife on his desk; and now a friend, seeing the photograph and learning that James is about to leave for home, says, "Poor James—too bad that you must leave that beautiful photograph and go back to your wife!" Will James, if he loves his wife, feel sad about leaving her photograph to rejoin her in person?

When we die, we leave but samples or likenesses of the divine goodness in order to be united to God Himself, in Whom our highest and true happiness is alone to be found. A Christian, then, will find in death more reason for rejoicing than for regret: the end of a long, tedious, laborious exile, the beginning of perfect union with Him Who *is love*. (I John 4, 16) St. Therese, in a memorable passage of her *Autobiography*, telling of the hemorrhage with which began her last fatal illness, shows how the saints approach death:

"I returned to our cell at midnight. Scarcely had I laid my head on the pillow than I felt a rush of blood surge to my lips. I thought I was going to die and my heart nearly broke with joy."

St. Paul would indicate that such words do not mark a mere excess of a too feminine piety. The great Apostle, man of action that he was, himself said, *For me to live is Christ and to die is gain*. (Phil. 2, 21) And more passionately still, *I will to be dissolved and to be with Christ*. (Phil. 2, 23)

Jesus Himself inculcates constant vigilance: *Let your loins be girt about and your lamps burning, and you yourselves like men waiting for their master's return from the wedding; so that when he comes and knocks, they may straightway open to him. Blessed are those servants whom the master, on his return, shall find watching*. (Luke 12, 35-37)

If this vigilance is not unremitting, sleepless, there is great danger that we will be caught unexpectedly: *But of this be assured, that if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would certainly have watched, and not have let his house be broken into. You must also be ready, because at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man is coming*. (Luke 12, 39-40)

For those who allow themselves to be absorbed in earthly affairs, forgetting their mortality, the Master has a threatening parable: *The land of a certain rich man brought forth abundant crops. And he began to take thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, for I have no room to store my crops? And he said, 'I will do this; I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store up all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast many good things laid up for many years; take thy ease, eat,*

*drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Thou fool, this night do they demand thy soul of thee; and the things which thou has provided, whose will they be?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich as regards God."* (Luke 12, 16-21)

### 3. Rehearsing for Death

It is recorded of the Emperor Charles V that, having retired to a monastery to end his days, he there rehearsed beforehand his own funeral ceremony, directing the arrangements himself and watching with great interest the manner in which the monks would shortly be burying him. As Christians we should all also rehearse for death; not of course like the Emperor, in a material way, which is useless—for what will we care how we look when our poor bodies are laid out?—but rather spiritually, by dying as it were beforehand. This dying beforehand, this anticipation of death, is a spiritual or mystical death. We have had it before us throughout our study of the Christian life. Already, in Chapter II (Part One) we derived the duty of detachment from St. Paul's words, *For you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God.* (Col. 3, 3) But this text teaches more than detachment, or rather, it enjoins a detachment so complete, so universal, that it deserves the name of death, which in truth the inspired writer himself gives to it. Death is the final separation from all that is good in this world, the complete severance of every tie with this earth, the final wrench that snaps off our last affections for created things, and for life itself. Death therefore is the fitting name for that act and habit of mind and heart, by which, even from youth, we anticipate this final separation by means of universal detachment and mortification. Mystical death is accomplished in the moral and spiritual order by "death" to our natural desire for created goods, by death to our affections and attachments for these goods, by death to the motions that may be derived from these goods. It is a death that comes painfully, by the endless blows of daily mortification and the keen edge of providential afflictions; it is death repeated a thousand times: *I die daily.* (I Cor. 15, 31) If the great martyrs give up their lives in one complete dramatic immolation, ordinary Christians must die a wearisome, life-long martyrdom of unseen and prosaic immolations in their daily actions and duties.

In some religious communities the necessity of dying to the world is carried out symbolically and dramatically in the ceremony of profession. The one to be professed is laid out, so to speak, before the altar and covered with a black pall; funeral candles are placed at his side, the bell is tolled, Psalm 50, the *Miserere*, is sung: he is dead and his life is hidden with Christ in God. Now the spiritual death which takes place in a special way at a religious profession when solemn vows are pronounced, occurs substantially in the lives of all Christians already at baptism. It is all Christians who as St. Paul says, are dead. *For we are buried with Him by baptism into death.* (Rom. 6, 4)



It is true that in some religious institutes the meaning of profession is symbolized by a nuptial ceremony rather than by a funeral service: the religious, garbed as a bride, plights her troth to the heavenly bridegroom. Some prefer this symbolism, with its suggestion of nuptial joy. Yet in the end both these ceremonies of profession mean the same thing. The bride-soul, for the love of Jesus, renounces the world for Him, giving Him her exclusive and total love. The soul who dies to the world does so precisely by renouncing the good things of the world also; and this thought of death, grim though it is, by no means excludes joy but it rather indicates the means of obtaining true joy. Both rites are an appropriate way of expressing the change that comes upon a soul when it gives itself to Jesus Christ. Both are sanctioned by the Church; both are based on the Sacred Scriptures. But the fact that the Christian soul is a bride of Christ—a fact that is not evaded here but has been insisted upon throughout these pages—does not exempt it from the painful necessity of dying to the world.

Alas, it may happen that natural men, dead and buried in baptism, may afterwards show disturbing signs of life! Now when a man is physically dead, he is dead; he is no more interested in the things of this world; its most important events, passing before his unseeing eyes, are as nothing to him. Accordingly, a person who is spiritually dead should also stay dead! That is to say, he should have no attachment for the goods or pleasures of the world nor manifest interest in them. If, after baptism, we continue in worldly tastes or attachments, and seek for the world's pleasures, we are like a corpse who would suddenly sit up to inquire about the baseball scores or ask for a cigar!

Besides the need to prepare for our own passage to eternity, there is another weighty reason for dying even now to the world. Each of the texts we have quoted suggests it: we are not only to die, we are to die *with Christ*. For we were buried **WITH HIM** by means of baptism into death . . . (Rom. 6, 4) Since we are joined to Christ as members to the Head, so now that the Head has died, we must die with Him. Moreover, our personal love for Him urges us to join in His sufferings and death: With us, Christ's love is a compelling motive, and this is the conviction we have reached; *if one man died on behalf of all, then all thereby become dead men* . . . (II Cor. 5, 14)

St. Francis de Sales explains this death with Christ by means of an old legend:

"A maiden on the isle of Sestos had brought up a young eagle with the care children are wont to bestow upon such affairs; the eagle being come to its full growth began little by little to fly and chase birds, according to its natural instinct; then getting more strength it seized upon wild beasts, never failing faithfully to take home the prey to its dear mistress, as if in acknowledgement of the bringing up it had had from her. Now it happened upon a day that this young damsel died, while the poor eagle was on the hunt, and her body, according to the custom of the time and country was publicly placed upon the funeral pile to be burnt; and even as the flame began to seize upon

the maiden, the eagle came up with a strong and eager flight, and, when it beheld this unlooked-for and sad spectacle, pierced with grief, it opened its talons, let fall its prey, and spread itself upon its poor beloved mistress; and covering her with its wings as it were to defend her from the fire, or for pity's sake to embrace her, it remained there constant and immovable, courageously dying and burning with her; the ardour of its affection now giving way to flames and ardours of fire, that so it might become the victim and holocaust of its brave and prodigious love, as its mistress was of death and fire." (*Love of God*, VII, 8)

In the same way the love of Christ will create in us a desire to share in His sufferings and death. So St. Paul cries out poignantly, *With Christ I am nailed to the cross!* (Gal. 2, 19)

Of course this death with Christ takes place, as St. Paul says, through baptism: it is baptism that plants the seed of death in the old man, as it also plants the seed of grace which makes us new men. But if baptism plants the seed of death, it remains our task, by voluntary mortification and the endurance of affliction, to carry out the execution. So the Apostle says, *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world.* (Gal. 6, 15) Again, *And they who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires.* (Gal. 5, 24)

Moreover Christ did not only die physically at the end of His earthly career; His whole life was a mortification—"a cross and a martyrdom," as the *Imitation* says. He sacrificed all the pleasures and satisfactions that His immaculate humanity might have claimed: *Christ did not please Himself.* (Rom. 15, 3) We therefore die with Him only when we share in His spiritual death to whatever good the world offers. *With Christ I am nailed to the cross.*

Now it came to pass, when the days had come for Him to be taken up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem . . . (Luke 9, 51) So Jesus, with full knowledge of what was to befall, started out resolutely on His last journey to the ungrateful city that would destroy Him. A little later He made a prophecy in which He showed His anxiety to accomplish the bloody drama that would redeem mankind: *But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!* (Luke 12, 50) As the fatal journey drew to its climax, even the Apostles, for all their dullness—they had not received the Holy Spirit yet—grew uneasy and tried to dissuade Him from continuing on: *Rabbi, just now the Jews were seeking to stone Thee; and dost Thou go there {Judea} again?* (John 11, 8) When they saw that He was not to be deterred, that His face was indeed set towards Jerusalem, Thomas said, *Let us also go, that we may die with Him!* (John 11, 16)

It was a courageous and beautiful profession of friendship. Alas, when the test came, poor Thomas did not live up to his bold resolution; he fled for safety with the other Apostles. But he had not yet received

the Holy Spirit. After Pentecost he behaved very differently. Without doubt he was with the Apostles when, filled with love of Jesus and with courage, *they departed from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.* (Acts 5, 41) Throughout the rest of his life he bore the burdens and sufferings inseparably connected with the Apostleship, which St. Paul graphically described in the language of the Psalmist, *For Thy sake we are put to death all the day long, we are regarded as sheep for the slaughter.* (Rom. 8, 36) A life of daily deaths, culminating in a death of martyrdom: so that Thomas did in the end prove faithful to the brave boast of his friendship.

As we also see Jesus with His face set towards Jerusalem, love will not let us do less than say with St. Thomas, *Let us also go, that we may die with Him!* Not perhaps to a bloody martyrdom—though even our contemporaries are meeting this sort of death for Christ—but the daily death to self which is carried out by the renunciation of natural desires, natural affections for creatures, natural motives, the habit of pleasing ourselves. *Let us also go, that we may die with Him!*

## Epilogue

And it came to pass when the days had come for Him to be taken up that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9, 51)

We have ended with the doctrine of the Cross, with the truth that, by sowing the goods of this world and life itself, we may gain the joys of the world above together with eternal life. It is a fitting ending, as it is fitting also that our minds should at all times be much occupied with this thought: fitting, because our lives on this earth fall ever within the shadow of the Cross, and the Cross is in fact the best symbol of our earthly sojourn.

Yet the Cross is not all; nor is it the end of all. Beyond the Cross is the empty tomb of Easter morning; after the Crucifixion come the Resurrection and the Ascension; after Jesus crucified there is Jesus glorified. Indeed, Jesus submitted to the Cross precisely that He might afterwards be glorified. *And it came to pass, when the days had come for Him to be taken up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.* (Luke 9, 51) It was by the Ascension that Jesus was "taken up" into heaven and His final glory; but it was through Jerusalem and up the hill of Calvary that He must travel. Always these thoughts are together in the Sacred Scripture: suffering and glory, glory through suffering. This is the plan of God, this is the law of the Cross. And not only is there a sequence, not only does the time of fruition and glory follow the time of suffering: there is an instrumental, a causal, connection as well: it is through the Cross that Christ enters His glory. There is, further, a singular propriety—given the divine plan of redemption, there is even a kind of necessity—in this precedence of suffering to glory, this consequence of glory upon suffering. *Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and so to enter His glory?* (Luke 24, 26) Thus did the risen Christ Himself speak to His disciples on the road to Emmaus, indicating the sequence, the instrumentality, the propriety "*OUGHT not Christ to have suffered these things . . . ?*"

God of course acts without constraint, and Jesus, on His part, suffered freely; still, once God had decreed His plan of redemption, it was a necessary consequence that the Savior should travel the way of Calvary to His glory; and in the plan itself, originating in the divine goodness, there is a wonderful fitness. Accordingly, as St. Luke tells, we hear Christ repeating to all His Apostles on a later occasion: *Thus it is written, and thus it BEHOVED Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead the third day.* (Luke 24, 46)

Now what is true of Christ Himself is true also of those joined to Him by supernatural life and love. It is through the Cross that they also must enter into their glory. As St. Paul taught his converts, *it is*

*through many tribulations (that) we must enter the kingdom of God.* (Acts 14, 22) Elsewhere, after speaking of us as children of God and joint-heirs with Christ, he stipulates the condition upon which we may enjoy this high estate: *provided, however, we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified with Him.* (Rom. 8, 17) Mark in both these texts the twin correlative ideas, suffering and glory. Mark also their invariable order as well as their interdependence, fixed once and for all by the divine plan. Our participation in Christ's glory is contingent upon our participation in His sufferings.

This same conjunction of ideas, and their invariable order and interdependence, occur in many other parts of Sacred Scripture. For example, the text that sets forth the central and essential teaching of Christian spirituality: *If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.* (Luke 9, 23) And St. Paul again, *We are always bearing about in our body the dying of Jesus, so that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodily frame. For we the living are constantly being handed over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh.* (II Cor. 4, 10-11) Nor may we omit to mention that text which the Church uses over and over during Holy Week to express in the briefest possible form the meaning of the Paschal mystery, the cycle of life-from-death: *For let this mind be in you which was also in Jesus Christ, Who . . . becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross. FOR WHICH CAUSE God also hath exalted Him . . .* (Phil. 2, 7)

There are then these two moments, these two phases, in the Christian life: suffering and joy, mortification and glory, purification and fruition. The one is negative, the other positive. The positive is the greater; it is the final good to which all the followers of Christ aspire. Yet our attainment to this final good, to glory and joy, follows only upon our submission to the negative demand, upon our willingness to bear the Cross. Moreover, the period of fruition belongs properly and in its fullness to eternity; its fullness is indeed the happiness of heaven. Our career on earth is the time of suffering, of purification, of probation. It is for this reason that the Cross best symbolizes our earthly pilgrimage and at the same time keeps before our eyes the means that we must use *daily* to gain the life of eternity.

As for the other truths which, we have seen, underlie the Christian life, these converge and culminate in the Cross. The distinction between the natural and supernatural orders is the basis and prologue to the doctrine of the Cross: for the Cross, after all, best of all teaches and summarizes the relationship of these two orders: we are to die to mere natural happiness, and to the activity that leads to it, in order to attain to supernatural happiness. The Glory of God is carried out, above all, in the supernatural order; and so we best glorify God when, renouncing the pursuit of mere natural good, we manifest God's glory by seeking supernatural good, thus realizing the possibilities of the divine powers that have been granted to us. Finally,

the great practical importance of the doctrine of the Supreme Dominion of God is that it enables us to transfix every action with the Cross, by abandoning our own will and inclination to do always the will of God; and since it is by doing God's will that we attain to union with Him, we once again enter the kingdom of God by means of the Cross. The Cross is thus the explanation of all things in this life, as it also marks entry into life eternal.

Of course while the way of the Cross coincides, broadly, with our lives on earth, it is also true that even in this world we may enjoy some beginning of heavenly happiness, in such intimate union with God as is possible in our present state. This interior joy is real—it is in fact the only true and lasting joy obtainable below, as it is a stay and a secret source of energy in all the trials of life. Yet it is but a beginning, and its perfection is reserved for another world. *We see now in a mirror in a dark manner, but then face to face.* (I Cor. 13, 12).

Meanwhile, then, we must live by faith, *looking on Jesus, the Author and finisher of faith, Who for joy set before Him endured a Cross.* (Heb. 12, 2) (Again notice the correlative ideas.) It is likewise only because of the joy set before us that we need and can endure the Cross; it is the prospect of this joy that encourages and sustains us in the dark days in which we must in all things die to self. Otherwise, without this bright vision before us, we would falter and faint along the way; the natural man in us would simply be unable to bear up under the grim necessity by which *we are put to death all the day long, we are regarded as sheep for the slaughter.* (Rom. 8, 36) By regarding, in faith, the vision of future glory, all the sacrifices demanded of us in this life will seem worthwhile, and even small. *For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, which shall be revealed in us.* (Rom. 8, 18)

As men making a long and wearisome journey are buoyed up in spirit by the thought of the happiness in store for them at their destination, so we on our pilgrimage through this world should sustain our minds and hearts by keeping them fixed on the glory that lies beyond the horizon of this world, where *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to know those things that God hath prepared for those that love Him.* (I Cor. 2, 9) It is in this way that the thought of future glory, although to be possessed fully only at the end of our journey, enters our motives from the start and in fact becomes the most powerful motive-force of all in carrying us through the labors and trials of our earthly existence. If in the order of action we must first submit to the Cross in order to obtain a share with Christ in His glory, still, in the subjective or mental order—the order of intention—we must first have an inner vision of that glory and our hearts must be set on it if we are to have the courage to go forward and upward with the Cross.

Jesus, at the time that He began to prophesy His passion, took Peter, James, and John up to the top of a mountain and there was transfigured before them. The prevision of His glory was thus granted

to the Apostles to encourage them afterwards when they would be horrified to see the mangled corpse of their Master on the Cross, would experience the bereavement caused by His death, would mourn over their own shattered dreams of greatness in His Kingdom, and would even fear for their personal safety. So, too, for us in this period of trial and probation, this time for carrying the Cross, we may keep our spirits up by looking ahead in faith to Christ's glory and to our own share in that glory. For the present, then, we must in spirit join the disciples before the Resurrection, when *Jesus began to show them that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and scribes and chief priests, and be put to death, and on the third day rise again.* (Matt. 16, 21)

## INDEX

- Actions, Doctrine of Imperfect, 29; spiritual effects of, 30ff.; three-fold make-up of actions, 41
- Activity, defined according to destination, guides, make-up, 2-3; doctrine in Scripture, 5-6; how to supernaturalize, 18-19; natural and supernatural, 1-6; three levels of, 4ff.; two meanings of natural, 20-22
- Afflictions, 178, 198-203; how to receive, 202-3; kinds of, 199; reasons for, 147ff., 198. See *Purification*
- Almsgiving, excellence of, 185; in relation to four main principles, 182-185; measure of, 186; necessity of, 182ff.; St. John Chrysostom on, 184
- Alphonsus Liguori, Saint, 38, 167, 192
- Attachments, effects of, 122ff.; to recreation, 117ff.; significance of small, 29; 32ff.; 102. See *Samples, Sowing*
- Augustine, St., 29, 32, 59
- Charity, character of, 10; effect of imperfect actions on, 32; necessity of, 9. See *Love, Sanctity*
- Chesterton, G. K., 128, 187, 194
- Council of the Vatican, 61; of Trent, 61
- Creatures, right use of, 61ff.; 67ff.; 73-74; 76, 125-126
- Death, 204-211; changes nothing, 13, 103-104; natural view of, 205; rehearsing for, 208; supernatural view of, 206-207
- de Caussade, Pere, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, 177, 180
- Detachment, 61ff.; 76; duty of, 82ff.; 105, 107. See *Afflictions, Folly of the Cross, Mortification*
- Ends, and means, 3-4; 57; of actions, 41ff.; 116
- Faber, Rev. Frederick, 200; *Creator and Creature*, 111-112; *Growth in Holiness*, 191ff.
- Folly of the Cross, 81-89; application, 89ff.; doctrine and law of, 81-82; examples, 85, 87; *seed, vine*, 89-90; meaning of, 82; reasons for, 82-84; 87-88; sin and, 84-85; what to sow, 92-95. See *Almsgiving*
- Francis of Assisi, St., 112, 167
- Frances de Sales, St., 29, 200; *Devout Life*, 138; Encyclical on, 55; *Love of God*, 10, 17, 178, 201; definition of *Samples*, 68; on mortification, 193, 196; on mystical death, 209-210; on recreation, 117-119
- Glory of God, 61-66; in relation to self-denial, 87; 212ff.; what it means for God, 61-63; what it means for man, 63-66. See *Almsgiving, Folly of the Cross*
- Goods, kinds of, 41. See *Sowing*



- Grace, 11, 23ff., 51, 87, 103, 135, *passim*; and supernatural elevation, 8; principle of supernatural activity, 2ff.
- Gregory, St., 9, 15, 51, 70, 75, 164
- Imitation of Christ*, 23, 98, 177, 210
- John of the Cross*, St. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 29, 55, 72; 83-84, 151, 156, 201; axioms of the Christian mentality, 47-48; habitual imperfections, 122-123; right use of creatures, 74, 76
- Law, of the Cross, 81-89; of the Flesh, 29ff., 34; of Love, 9, 51; natural law, 11
- Leen, Rev. Edward, *Progress through Mental Prayer*, 193, 195
- Limbo, 7-9; article, "Limbo," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 7
- Liturgy, 36, 70, 91, 108-109; and contempt for world, 108; mystical view of death, 204, 206, 208
- Living, Supernatural, not mere avoidance of sin, 10; relation to death, 13; requires hatred of world, 12, principles of, 19
- Love, of creatures, 112-114; of God, 26, 54, 78, 99-105; of the world, 109ff.; of neighbor, 26ff., 87, 99ff.
- Mary, 63, 86; *True Devotion*, 97-98
- Means, proximate and remote, 76. See *Ends*
- Mentality, Christian, axioms of, 47ff.; forming, St. John of the Cross on, 47-51; Pagan, 35-40; axioms of, 36ff.; Jesus condemns, 41ff.; meaning of, 35
- Mortification, 188-197; answers to objections, 191; meaning of, 15; necessity of, 188; practical principles concerning, 190; practice of, 193. See *Samples*, *Sowing*, *Folly of the Cross*, etc.
- Motives, 24ff., 113, 117; kinds of, 27; of pleasure, 74; must be supernatural, 24-28; natural, dispose to sin, 32-33; in practice, 37-39; *passim*
- Natural and Supernatural, Harmony between, 15-22; in regard to natural activity, 16, to truth, 17; two meanings of natural activity, 20; how to supernaturalize, 18; harmony between the three lives, 19; Conflict between Natural and Supernatural, 23ff.
- Newman, Cardinal, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. VI, 98, 100, 113
- Noldin, Rev. Joseph, S.J., *Summa Theologiae Moralis*, 38
- Obedience, 163ff.; kinds of, 167-168; kinds of precepts, 165; terms of, 167-168. See *Supreme Dominion*
- Perfection, see *Sanctity*, *Love of God*
- Pius XI, *On Chaste Wedlock*, 56; *On the Third Centenary of St. Francis de Sales*, 55; *Ubi Arcano Dei*, 120; Pius XII, 97
- Pleasure, 14; action and pleasure on same plane, 12; earthly and heavenly, 69-70, 75; in recreation, 116ff.; right use of, 74
- Purification, purpose of, 147; through others, 157-159; 163ff.; where it takes place, 150-151; work of, 150. See *Supreme Dominion*, 155
- Prayer, 52, 64, 139; contemplation, 75-76; mortification and, 195

- Samples, captivating, 122; creatures as, 67; doctrine of, 67-72; doctrine applied, 73-79; forbidden, 125ff.; indifferent, 116; necessary, 115; sin and, 133ff.; use of, 68ff., 71, 73-74; in distraction and temptation, 76-78. See also *Afflictions*, 198; *Sowing*
- Sanctity, Call to, 53; degrees of perfection or, 58-59; duty of tending to, 55-56; God's glory and, 63; Nature of, 53-55; Precepts and Counsels, 56-57; Story of Rich Young Man, 57-58
- Sermon on the Mount, 41-45; 50; 130
- Sin, 10, 12; 32-33; and Folly of the Cross, 84; "avoid sin only," 10-11, 79, 120, 126ff.; Samples and, 133ff.; source of, 32ff.; "spiritual filth," 12; see *Forbidden Samples*, 125-132
- Sowing, and Folly of the Cross, 91-92; death, the final, 204ff.; of bodily goods by mortification, 188ff.; of external goods by almsgiving, 182ff.; of interior goods by afflictions, 198ff.; sowing judgment and will, 94; money, time, 92-93
- Supernatural Life, Jesus speaks of, 41ff.; defines, 43ff.; fullness of, 53-59. See also *Natural*
- Supreme Dominion, 139-144; doctrine of, in Scripture, 148-153; God's intention in, 145-154; importance of doctrine, 139; manner of assimilation, 145ff.; meaning of, 140-144; see also *Purification*, *Obedience*, *Will*
- Temptation, source of merit, 77, 173
- Therese, St., 181, 196, 207
- Thomas Aquinas, St., 10, 32, 42, 54, 55, 58, 67, 101, 104, 108, 117, 147
- Trinity, Blessed, 4, 88; living in, 95-98; principles studied in relation to, 96ff.
- Will, divine, in itself and its effects, 177; self-abandonment to, 180-181; source of all sanctity, efficacy, grace, 175-176; source of Supreme Dominion, 175-181; three ways of receiving, 179-180
- Will, human, 169; and sensible appetite, 170; our citadel, our sanctuary, 171-173
- World, Contempt for, application of doctrine, 115-122; doctrine, 107-114; example of Dives and Lazarus, 110; Faber on, 111-112; in Liturgy, 108; in Scripture, 107; meaning of, 109; supernatural love of creatures and, 112-114

