

Treatise on the Love of God

St. Francis de Sales

Dedicatory Prayer

O Holy Mother of God, Queen and vessel of election, you are the most beloved of all creatures. The heavenly Father found pleasure in you from all eternity and destined your heart for perfect love, so you might have a unique motherly love for His Son. O Jesus, to whom could I better dedicate these words on your love?

O Mother, at your right hand is Joseph, whom your Son called “Father”. He was united to you in virginal marriage that he might help you. O, St. Joseph, how often you carried Jesus in your arms. Your soul melted away when he whispered that you were his friend and his well-beloved father.

Dedicated to Them

O Mary and Joseph, a couple without equal! In you, I place my hopes that this book will inflame the children of light with ineffable love. O well-beloved mother, Mary, and well-beloved spouse, Joseph, to you I dedicate this little work of love. I ask you to animate my heart and the hearts of all the readers so we can live once more amid the fires of love that Our Lord enkindled by his death on the cross.

Preface

The lips of the Church are scarlet and drip with honey so all would know that her teachings are made of sacred love. The scarlet is the blood of the spouse. The honey shows the sweetness of the spouse. At Pentecost, the spouse sent fiery tongues upon the disciples to show that preaching should inflame hearts.

All Teachings Belong to Love

When the sun shines upon doves, their feathers manifest many different colors which please the eye, so may this book show forth many truths. So, the Church has a variety of teachings from the Church’s pastors. Among these many colors, the fine gold of charity covers all this teaching, raising it above all other learning. All in the Church belongs to love. All light comes from the sun, but sometimes we say the sun is not shining. So, all Christian teaching is about love. However, we limit the title of Divine Love to those teachings which deal with the origin, nature, and works of love.

Some ancient Fathers wrote about divine love. St. Paul was taught about love from his heavenly visions. Those scholastics who wrote about love excelled in devotion. This would be St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure and Blessed Denis the Carthusian. John Gersen (University of Paris) was praised for describing the fifty qualities of love in the Song of Songs. He was both learned and devout.

These books flow more from love’s devotion than from learned wisdom. The Holy Spirit has inspired passions of heavenly love in St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Angela of Foligno, St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Mechtilde and St. Robert Bellarmine S.J.

I especially mention St. Teresa of Avila, who writes accurately of Love's sacred movements. Her eloquence is marked with humility and her wit with simplicity. She has made learned men appear ignorant because they cannot understand when she writes about the practice of love. God confounds the strong through the weak (1Cor.1:27) This book falls short of these other excellent works but I place it in the hands of Mary and Joseph.

My goal is to present simply the history of the birth, progress, decay, workings, qualities, advantages and excellences of divine love. Unfortunately, I will diverge from the topic. Writing amidst my daily tasks, I am like nature, which tries to produce grapes, but also produces leaves and branches that need to be pruned.

Some Points Explained

Readers often criticize writers by hasty and harsh judgments. Therefore, I want to explain some points so you can understand my goals.

1. Some readers will think that I go too deeply into the topic. However, the root is as important as the branch and the leaves. Certainly, for advanced souls, I could have omitted the first four books (out of twelve). Yet, they, too, will profit and other readers will need these four books.
2. Sometimes I quote scripture differently than the Vulgate, but I use these other versions only when they confirm the Vulgate.
3. Also, I quote the Psalms in the translation of Phillip des Portes, although sometimes departing from his translation.
4. Although I learned everything from other authors, I often don't remember the source, so I seldom give a citation.
5. I have not always clearly shown how the chapters are linked, but the reader can see their connection.
6. The chapters are short because a person is willing to go a short distance to see something beautiful. Readers, knowing that a chapter is short, will more willingly read it.
7. I addressed my first book (Introduction to a Devout Life) to a fictitious woman named Philothea. I was surprised that this kept some men from reading it. Did not St. John write his second letter to Electa? Did not the ancient Fathers write thousands of letters to women? Philothea really meant the soul, and men have souls. In this book, I write to Theotimus, which means "the human spirit" as it desires to make progress in holy love.
8. I write this book for devout souls so they can make progress. Therefore, I must explain deep truths, often generally unknown. Precious pearls lay on the ocean floor and only a few divers willingly go there. The reader must have courage to go to the ocean's floor to penetrate my words.
9. I touch on theological questions from my experiences in preaching, not from what I learned in class.
10. I write to advanced souls. In this town (Annency) a group of devout women have left the world to serve God. In preaching to them, I often speak about devotion, going far beyond what I wrote in my first book, "Introduction to a Devout Life." Much of this book, I owe to that group.

For years I have thought of writing on holy love and have done my best. If this book falls short, may God still bless your reading. I dedicate this treatise to Mary (the Mother of delightful love) and Joseph (the Father of cordial love).

I submit all my writings to the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church, the pillar and ground of truth. No one can have God as His Father who will not have the Church for his mother.

June 29, 1616 (Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul)

A PREPARATION TO UNDERSTAND THE TREATISE

1.1 THE WILL ORDERS ALL FACULTIES

God made the will to govern all the faculties so human nature would have beauty. Beauty comes when diverse things are ordered and in harmony. When troops are arranged in order, there is the beauty of an army. When distant voices are united, there is harmony.

BEAUTY AND GOODNESS

St. Thomas says that beauty and goodness are not the same thing, but they agree. Good pleases both the desires and the will. Beauty pleases the understanding. When we enjoy good, it gives pleasure. When we know beauty, it gives pleasure. We attribute beauty to the eye and to the ear (two senses of knowledge). We do not say there are beautiful smells or tastes.

To be seen, beauty requires splendor and brightness. In obscurity and darkness, no beauty is known. St. Denis said, “God is the author of beautiful harmony. His one ray of beauty spreads out, like light, to make all things beautiful.” Theotimus, beauty has no effect if there is no light.

GRACE OF HARMONY

Living things must also have good grace, with a harmony of movements and actions. In God, we acknowledge a oneness of essence (a harmony), in the distinction of persons (a movement). Also the simple divine act, which is God Himself, totally unchangeable, is harmonious.

God made all things beautiful and good. He made a subordination of one thing to another and of all things to Himself. He forms persons into families, families into towns, and towns into a government under one king. Just as society is organized, so God has placed the will in command of all the feelings, faculties and habits of the human person. Pharaoh placed Joseph in charge of Egypt. Just so, the will exercises dominion in many ways.

1.2 HOW THE WILL GOVERNS THE SOUL’S POWERS

A father guides his wife and children by his orders, (although they might not obey). He guides his servants by force and he manages his animals by bridles.

The will controls the exterior faculties as a master governs servant. These faculties must obey. For example, we can open or shut our eyes. However, the senses are different. The will does not totally control them.

VARIOUS COMMANDS

A doctor treating an infant gives directions to the mother, not to the baby. Because we cannot command the stomach not to digest, we must command the hand not to give the stomach too much food. We cannot command the eyes not to see. So, we command the head to turn away.

The intellect knows and the memory remembers. However, the will controls both. It determines what the intellect reads and what the memory is fed. Yet, the will does not have total control, because sometimes these faculties do not obey. Paul wrote, “I do not do the good I desire, but the evil which I hate.” (Rom 7:15) We often think of the evil we hate and not the good we love.

1.2 HOW THE WILL GOVERNS THE SENSUAL APPETITE

The will has power over the memory, understanding and imagination, but these do not always obey. Also, sensual desires, called “concupiscence”, sometimes do not obey. St. Bernard said that sin tempts man but the soul can refuse consent. When carried away by sin, the soul is dominated. However, if sin only gets into the sensual desire and not into the will, the soul is still lord over the desire.

The electors choose the emperor. But once elected, they are under him and he rules. So, when the will consents to a sensual appetite, the appetite becomes the ruler. The sensual appetite is a rebellious subject and the will can never defeat it totally. The will, however, can bridle it and repulse it. The sensual appetites always conceive sin. However, the will can refuse to give birth to sin.

The sensual appetite has twelve movements which are like rebellious captains. These appetites are called perturbations (when they affect the soul) or passions (when they affect the body). These appetites try to attain the sensual good and avoid the sensual evil.

PASSIONS EXCITED BY GOOD

A natural good excites love (the principal passion). A good that is absent excites desire. A good that we can gain excites hope. A good we cannot gain excites despair. A good that we possess excites joy.

PASSIONS EXCITED BY EVIL

We hate a natural evil. We avoid an evil that is not present. We fear an evil we cannot avoid. If we avoid the evil, we grow bold. An evil we know is present causes grief. Then, anger rushes to repel the evil and we feel satisfaction, the pleasure of triumph. Victory over evil exalts the spirit.

The will is ruler over all these sensual passions. It can reject their suggestions and hinder their effects or at least, it can refuse consent which would allow the evil to harm us. In the long run, even if the will does not kill, it can weaken it.

These passions remain in us, so the soul can exercise virtue and spiritual valor. The Stoics said that the passions were no longer present in wise men. They were wrong. St. Paul wrote “We have a law in our

body which resists the law of our mind.” (Rom 7:23) Augustine said that Christians have the normal passions of fear, desire, grief and joy. Even Jesus feared, desired, grieved and rejoiced (although these movements were different in Him). Jerome calls these movements in Jesus, “pro-passions”, because He suffered and endured only what seemed good to Him and as He willed. We sinners suffer and endure movements which are out of order, against our will and sometimes harmful to our souls.

1.3 LOVE GOVERNS AFFECTIONS, PASSIONS AND THE WILL ITSELF

Love precedes desire and is the first movement toward the good. We only desire what we love. Love also comes before delight, for we enjoy only what we love. It also precedes hope, for we seek what we love. It precedes hatred because we hate in evil only what is contrary to the good. All passions and affections come from love (their source and root). Passions and affections are good or bad depending on which love they come from. Passions are assumed into our love, which can be either good or bad.

FOUR PASSIONS/AFFECTIONS

Augustine (followed by others) says there are four passions and affections. Desire is love wanting to possess. Joy is love when it does possess. Fear is love fleeing the contrary. Grief is love burdened with the contrary. Christians experience all four. Just as our reason should be subject to God, so these passions should be subject to our spirit, which bridles and moderates them to serve virtue. Good love makes the will good and evil love makes it evil. Love dominates the will and makes it like itself.

CHANGED BY CHOICES

When a wife marries, she changes her state. If she marries the king, she becomes the queen. Just so, the will is changed by what it chooses. It becomes carnal if it loves carnal things and spiritual if it loves spiritual things. The four passions are the children of a will married to love. Love is the first affection and gives movement to all other affections.

The will can rule over love, only because it can choose what to love. Otherwise, no love could be either commanded or forbidden. The will is like a maiden, free to choose any husband. Once she has chosen, she is subject to him as long as he lives. If he dies, she is again free to choose. So, while a love rules in the will, the will is subject to its influences. However, if this love dies, the will is free.

The will has a liberty which is denied to a wife. The will can make a resolution to change. We can choose to have divine love reign in us, so that self-love does not rule. Or, we can forsake divine love and choose creatures. This is the adultery which God condemns so often in the Bible.

1.4 THE AFFECTIONS OF THE WILL

There are sensual and rational appetites. The sensual appetites are called passions. The rational appetites are called affections. By good affections, men love virtue, hate vice, seek knowledge, and strive for happiness after death. They surmount difficulties, avoid faults, and oppose evil. These movements are rational, the affections of the intellect.

QUALITY OF THEIR OBJECT

These rational affections are noble or spiritual, according to their object. Some affections come from sensual objects. Others come from intellectual knowledge. Others come from the teachings of faith. The highest come from a simple desire for God's truth and a surrender to His will.

There are four affections:

1. Natural affections – the desire for food, clothing, health
2. Rational affections – the desire for peace, virtue, and the contemplation of heavenly things
3. Christian affections – desires based on Christ's teachings about poverty, chastity or the glory of heaven
4. Divine supernatural affections – desires for God Himself based upon supernatural promptings

There are three divine supernatural affections:

- (a) the mind's love for the beauty of faith's mysteries
- (b) the will's love for the goods promised us in heaven
- (c) the soul's love for God, the highest good.

1.5 GOD'S LOVE HAS DOMINION

Love governs the will and the will governs every faculty. Among these many kinds of love, the love of God reigns supreme. It has total authority. If God's love does not rule, then it ceases to be.

In scripture, many younger brothers won favor, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and Joseph over his brothers. This is a great mystery. The younger gains the advantage.

DIVINE LOVE MUST REIGN

Divine love also comes after the other loves, yet it wins favor. Paul writes, "The natural was first and then the spiritual." (1Cor.15:46) The last born (Jacob) has authority. Self-love (Esau) must serve him. Divine love reigns over the soul, the understanding and the will. All is subject to heavenly love, which must reign as king or not reign at all. To survive, Divine love must reign completely. Isaac, Jacob and Joseph were supernatural children because their mothers (Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel) were all sterile. They conceived by grace and their children became masters of their brothers. Similarly, divine love is a miracle child, a gift of the Holy Spirit and not from man's will. Being supernatural, it must reign over the understanding, the will and all the affections.

SUPERIOR TO ALL

There are supernatural movements, such as fear, piety, and hope, but divine love is their superior. Divine love is the son of promise and heaven is promised to love alone. Faith sees salvation. Hope prepares for it. Only charity receives it. Faith points to the Promised Land. Hope provides manna. Only charity leads us in. Love is the Ark of the Covenant which parts the Jordan River of God's Judgment, so the true Israelites can enter the promised land of heaven.

Divine love abides in the soul's highest part and offers sacrifice to God, as Our Savior did on Calvary. From that exalted place, love is heard and obeyed by all the faculties and affections. It governs with incomparable sweetness. It has no slaves, because it brings all to obedience by its delightful forces. Nothing is as strong as love or as sweet as its strength. All the virtues moderate the soul's movements, but charity governs them all. God created man in His own likeness. He wills that, in man, all things should be arranged by love and for love.

1.6 DESCRIPTION OF LOVE IN GENERAL

As soon as the will perceives the good, she makes it her goal. In fact, good is defined by its relation to the will. Good is what everyone wills. The will is a faculty leading me to the real good, or to what the will perceives as good.

When the will perceives the good, it experiences a sudden delight called complacency. This complacency moves the will toward union with the object. Once focused on the object, the will searches for the necessary means to gain union.

A TREE AND A MAGNET

To explain, I will use the image of a tree. The tree's root is the will's desire for the good. The base of the tree is its delight in the good. Its trunk is its moving toward the good. Its branches are its efforts. Its fruit is the union or enjoyment of the good. These five principal parts make up love.

The attraction of iron to a magnet is another image. In the presence of a magnet, iron turns toward it. Then it begins to move, showing its delight. It then advances toward union and finally is joined to the magnet. These lifeless things show all of love's parts.

DESIRE AND MOVEMENT

Love is the soul's desire and movement toward the object. Yet, desire is just love's beginning. Only the movement is true essential love. Desire and movement are both love, but in a different way. Just as the dawn is called day, so, desire as love's first feeling, is called love. However, true day goes from dawn to sunset. So, love's true essence lies in the movement that comes after desire and ends in union. Desire is the good's first stirring. By movement, the soul runs to its goal. This is true love.

I'll put it this way. The good grasps the heart and starts it on the journey by the soul's desires. However, only true love achieves the goal. Desire awakens. Love acts. Desire spreads the soul's wings. Love makes her fly. Love is the heart's advancement toward good.

DESIRE AND LOVE

Because desire leads to movement, some have identified desire with love. Also, Desire preserves love and keeps it going. When desire ceases, then love ceases.

The stone's weight begins its fall and will bring the fall to completion. So, desire excites the will and completes its union with the object. Desire brings forth, accompanies and perfects love. Desire always accompanies love. However, love is not just desire. Love is a passion of the soul, a movement which comes from desire.

Movement ceases when union takes place. When the good is easily gained, the first desire quickly gains the object. This is called the love of desire. Only when the heart aspires to a distant object, is it truly desire. Desire is a seeking for what we do not have, but hope to obtain.

IMPERFECT DESIRES

Some movements are toward things which we do not expect to obtain. These imperfect desires are called wishings. An older person would say, "I would like to be young." In this wishing, the will does not take part. It is a simple wish. The person says, "This good is very agreeable but I cannot hope to gain it. Yet, I allow my affection for it to remain." These wishings approve the good, but cannot desire it effectively.

Some imperfect desires are not extremely difficult but they conflict with other, more powerful desires. A sick man might desire food, but that would aggravate his illness. It conflicts with his desire to get healthy. Jephthah wanted to save his daughter, but this conflicted with his vow. (Judges C.11) Herod did not want to behead John the Baptist, but this conflicted with his desire to please Herodias. Pilate did not want to condemn Jesus, but this conflicted with his desire to appease the crowd. Desires, when hindered by stronger desires, are called vain desires.

1.7 THE AFFINITY WHICH EXCITES LOVE

The eye sees. The ear hears. The tongue speaks. The reason understands. The will loves. Yet really, it is the person who performs all these function and who pleases himself in seeking the good.

ATTRACTION OF OPPOSITES

Human love often finds an affinity in opposite qualities. The doctor loves the sick man because he has skills that will help him. The old man loves the child's simplicity which highlights the man's prudence. Children love older people because they perceive a need for direction. Diverse flowers make a beautiful floral piece.

Love consists in a union by which each receives the other's perfections and becomes better. The head is different from the hand and the arm, yet all come together to naturally perfect one another. Those who are joyful often help people who are serious. They join together and their dispositions balance each other.

RESEMBLANCE

However, when mutual attraction is based on resemblance, love is more efficacious because resemblance is a true image of unity. Two objects equally proportioned to the same goal have a natural unity, not just union. Therefore, love's first source is an attraction or affinity.

1.8 LOVE TENDS TO UNION

In the Song of Songs, Solomon wrote of the Savior's love for the devout soul. To do so, he uses the example of the love between the chaste shepherd and the modest shepherdess. By a surprise, the bride speaks first, "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." (1:1) This shepherdess has one aim in her first expression of desire. She proclaims one goal. This is her first sigh. "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth."

THE SYMBOL OF A KISS

By natural instinct, a kiss represents perfect love. The reason is this. Like the animals, we can certainly communicate by our eyes and our face. "Man is known by his look." (Eccl 19:26) In portraits, only the face of the great man needed to be painted. However, to express spiritual thoughts that come from our souls, we need words.

We pour out our soul by speaking. "Pour out your hearts before God." (Ps 62:9) We best express our affections by words. When Samuel's mother prayed softly, Eli could only see her lips moving. She said, "I have poured out my soul before the lord." (1Kg1:15) Thus, a kiss testifies that we want our soul to be poured into another, united in perfect union.

SIGN OF UNION

Among saints, the kiss has been a sign of affection. Paul wrote, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." (Rom.16:16) Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, because this was the usual way Jesus greeted his disciples.

The kiss is a lively sign of the union of hearts. Wanting to be united, the shepherdess says, "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." As if she says, "Will the many darts of love never communicate what my soul desires? Shall I never be united heart to heart to my God? When will I pour my soul into His heart and he pour his heart into my soul? When will we live united forever?"

SCRIPTURAL ONENESS

Scripture always uses words of union. "The believers were of one heart and one soul." (Acts.4:32) Paul writes, "Preserve the unity of Spirit." (Eph.4:3) Jesus prayed, "that all may be one." (Jn.17:21) These unities signify perfect love. Jonathan loved David "as his own soul". (1 Kg. 18:1) St. Denis writes, "Love is unifying, drawing together, bringing all things to unity." St. Augustine says that he and his friends had one soul. Hatred separates. Love unites. Love's goal is union between the lover and the loved.

1.9 LOVE SEEKS A SPIRITUAL UNION

Natural unions are based on blood relationships or other likenesses. Voluntary unions come from our will. These voluntary unions arise because both parties benefit, as in a conversation.

NATURAL AND VOLUNTARY UNIONS

The union of parents with children is natural. However, they can invite a deeper voluntary union of true friendship which perfects the natural family union. Family members can also have a voluntary union of love which binds them in will and spirit. The family's foundation is a natural union, but family unity must be a deliberate action. The family invites the members to perfect the natural union by their love. Love also causes a desire for nuptial union which reciprocally increases love. In every situation, love tends to union.

But to what kind of union? The sacred spouse sought a kiss which represents a spiritual union caused by reciprocal communication. A man who loves with his will has a spiritual love and seeks a union that is spiritual. In contrast, the soul is degraded by seeking union with corporal things.

NOT LOVE

Certain passions are not love but they are an overgrowth which sprout up among love. They are superfluities which harm love and weaken love. If not removed, they totally ruin love. Here is the reason. The soul's active powers are finite. Seeking many goals means seeking each goal less perfectly. A man attentive to many things is less attentive to each one. We cannot listen to a grand piece of music and also hold a conversation.

When many objects claim our attention, we give less attention. To see more is different from seeing better. To see better, we must see less. The understanding is scattered when considering more than one topic. The action becomes divided and less perfect.

THREE KINDS

Love is sensitive, rational and spiritual. Love can act at all three levels, but is less intense than when acting at only one. As a cannon has great power because it has only one opening, so, for love's power to be strong, it must have one goal.

TWO ECSTASIES

There are two kinds of ecstasies. One raises us above ourselves and the other degrades us below ourselves. Man's nature stands between the angels and the beasts. He shares his intellect with the angels and his body with the beasts. By continual effort, man can seek rational actions and draw nearer to the angels. However, by giving himself totally to sensual actions, he approaches the beasts.

Ecstasy is a going out from self and man goes upwards or downwards. Touched by intellectual and divine pleasures, the heart enters into a more noble state and man lives like the angels. Touched by sensual pleasures, man degrades himself and lives like the animals. These men enter into a condition infinitely unworthy of their nature. When men are ravished by God and heavenly things, they lose all use of their senses, movements and exterior actions, as long as this ecstasy lasts. To enjoy God, the soul withdraws from sensual experiences.

SPIRITUAL OR CARNAL

In the opposite direction, brutish men give themselves to sensual pleasure. Spiritual men imitate Elijah, who was taken up in a fiery chariot. Carnal men imitate King Nebuchadnezzar, who was lowered to the level of the savage beasts.

A soul which practices sensual love cannot exercise superior love. (Please note: St. Francis uses “sensual love” to mean a love that violates the ten commandments. He is not condemning all sensual pleasure). Sensual love ruins true, essential love. Job’s oxen plowed the ground, but his useless donkeys ate of the pasture. While our reason seeks to love worthy objects, our lower emotions seek sensual union. This is their pasture. However, only the spirit can produce true love and true union.

Elisha cured Naaman, and refused his gifts. However, his faithless servant, Gehazi took, the gifts against his master’s wishes. Rational love, as master of our heart, refuses sensual gifts. However, our sensual appetites disobey reason and seek what true love refused. They are like Gehazi and they dishonor their master’s purity of intention. A soul which seeks sensual unions diverts herself from a true union. Seeking things from animal desire only weakens love.

DISTILLED WATER

Flowers yield a delightful smell. However, water distilled from flowers smells even better. It has a perfect scent, since the liquid is separated from the body. So, love residing in the spirit, separated from carnal desires, is exquisite.

An earthly heart often seeks a brutish love, thinking love is stronger and more solid when it is more violent and more turbulent. The sensual seeks what is gross.

Love is like fire. The clearer flame is more exquisite and less easily extinguished. Spiritual love is much more permanent, and the easiest way to ruin true love is to mix it with sensual desires. “We desire the bodily pleasures before we get them, but afterward we lose our desire. With spiritual pleasures, our desires grow greater even after experiencing them.” (St. Gregory)

1.10 THE TWO PARTS OF THE SOUL

We have one, indivisible soul which has life (like plants), has senses (like animals) and reason (like man). Each of the three levels avoids some things and seeks others. Like the animals, man has sensual knowledge which leads him to seek or to avoid some things. Sensual knowledge leads to sensual love, which is rightly called “the sensual appetite.”

TWO PARTS TO MAN’S SOUL

Man also has a rational soul with two parts, inferior and superior. (This is the teaching of Augustine and all the writers after him.) The inferior part acts according to sensual knowledge. The superior part chooses according to the judgment of spirit. The superior part is called spirit and the inferior is called sense. This superior part can follow natural light (as intelligent men do) or supernatural light (as Christians do).

These Christians base their decisions upon faith, God's revealed word, good example and inner heavenly inspirations. By the soul's superior part, we cling to God's eternal law.

In the Bible, Jacob allowed his youngest son, Benjamin, to be taken to Egypt. His decision reveals the soul's two parts. By the inferior part, Jacob grieved over his loss. By the superior part, he decided to let him go for the good of the family. When the angel told Abraham that Sarah would conceive, his inferior part said, "Shall a son be born to a man a hundred years old?" (Gen.17:17) However, his superior part believed and "it was credited to him" (Gen. 15:6) Later, Abraham's inferior part suffered great anguish to sacrifice Isaac, but his superior part courageously resolved to obey God.

CONTRARY DESIRES

We also experience contrary wills. A father sending his son to the university sheds tears at his leaving (inferior) but chooses his advancement in learning (superior). Parents are content to see their daughter married (superior) but they shed many tears (inferior). Man does not have two souls. Augustine writes "Man seems divided because he is pulled in two directions. Then, he uses his free will and decides. What he chooses will conquer, but the struggle leaves behind a feeling which we call reluctance."

JESUS IN THE GARDEN

Jesus manifested both the superior and inferior parts of his soul. Although united to the Father (superior), he still experienced sadness, grief and afflictions of heart (inferior). He suffered in his rational soul, which was sorrowful, even unto death. He prayed that the cup of the passion be taken away. This prayer came from the soul's inferior part, which suffered and caused him to ask for deliverance by His Father.

The Savior shows that the soul's inferior part wants to avoid pain. However, His superior part adhered to the Father's will, in spite of the inferior part's repugnance. "Father, not my will, but yours be done." My will means the soul's inferior part. His voluntary acceptance reveals the soul's superior part making the final choice.

1.11 FOUR DIFFERENT DEGREES OF REASON

The temple in Jerusalem had three courts, the outer court for Gentiles and strangers, the second court for Israelites, and the third court for the priests and Levites. Inside the third court, was the holy of holies which the high priest entered only once a year. Likewise, God takes up his residence deep within us, in our rational soul, the true temple. Augustine wrote, "I sought You outside of myself, but I did not find you because you were within me." Our inner temple also has three courts, the three degrees of reason. In the first, we think according to our senses. In the second, we think according to human knowledge. In the third, we think according to faith.

Besides these three, our spiritual faculty has a supreme point where the spirit submits to the truth and the will of God. This is the holy of holies.

THE SOUL'S SUMMIT

This summit of the soul, the highest point of our spirit is represented by the holy of holies. First, this summit has no windows, because reason cannot illumine this part. Light enters only by faith which produces the sight of God's beauty and goodness. At this apex, there enters only the universal feeling that the divine will should be loved and embraced, (both in general and in particular).

At this apex, the soul veils the light by her own renunciation and abandonment. As soon as she sees the dignity of God's will, she wants to close her eyes so she can more perfectly accept God's will and submit to it.

From this summit, faith, hope and love spread their powers into all the soul's faculties, subjecting them to God's authority. This supreme region is their special residence, from which their living water flows to all the inferior part.

ST. PAUL'S TWO DESIRES

This superior part has two degrees of reason. In the first level, supernatural light provide words. In the second level, faith, hope and love bring about wordless desires.

St. Paul experienced two desires – first, to be with Christ and second, to remain on earth to preach the gospel. Both desires came from his superior part. Both came from love. His choice to stay on earth came from seeing Jesus' will and accepting it. All reasoning was put aside.

By abandoning self to God's will, the soul allows faith, hope and charity to rule in this summit and the lower faculties have no powers. After the supreme court has settled a dispute, the lawyers can discuss the motives of the judges, but they cannot change the sentence. So, after God's grace has led the highest part of the spirit to give a judgment, the understanding can only think about the reasons. Lower faculties present arguments, but the soul's apex, the spirit, makes the decision. So, human reason has four parts – sense knowledge, intellectual knowledge, faith knowledge and the apex, a power to abandon self to God's will.

1.12 THE DIFFERENT LOVES

There are two kinds of love. Cupidity by which we love something for our own profit. Benevolence by which we love someone for their own good. If we already possess this good, our love is called complacency. If we do not have this good, our love is called desire.

THREE PARTS

If the other person does not respond to us, our love is called simple benevolence. If the other responds, our love is called friendship. True friendship involves three things:

1. Friends must love one another.
2. Friends must know that they love one another.
3. Friends must communicate with each other.

Simple friendship is when we have a friend, but the friend does not come before others. A friendship of dilection is when we greatly prefer this friend before all others.

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

If we prefer our friend more than others, but in proportion to our other friends, we have eminent dilection. If our preference for this friend is beyond all proportion, we have supereminent dilection. This type of love is due to God alone. We call this love “adoration”, and it belongs exclusively to God. So, in this book, I use the word Charity to mean a love of God which enjoys a supereminent dilection.

1.13 CHARITY MAY BE CALLED LOVE

Origen believed that the Bible often refrained from using the word “love” because people associated that word with carnal passions. Therefore, Scripture used the words charity and dilection instead. St. Augustine, however, shows the word love is as sacred as dilection. St. Denis favors the word love even more, saying that the Apostles used the word love more often than dilection, so that the word love would lose its carnal meaning. For human friendships they used the word dilection.

Love shows more fervor, efficacy and activity than dilection. Charity is called love and is the most eminent. For all these reasons, I entitle this book about Charity, “A Treatise of the Love of God.”

1.15 THE AFFINITY BETWEEN GOD AND MAN

When thinking of God, man experiences delightful emotions because God is the God of our hearts and He fills our understanding with pleasure. Just as the smallest beam of the sun’s light is greater than all the light coming from the moon, so the least knowledge of God fills us more than any other. When all else fails, do we not turn to God, saying that He is our friend. When in supreme danger, do we not turn to the Supreme Good?

MAN’S AFFINITY FOR GOD

This confidence in danger reveals the relationship between God’s goodness and man’s soul. This secret affinity, (known by all but understood by few), is easily explained. God created us in his image and likeness, giving us a close affinity with his divine majesty.

Our soul is spiritual, indivisible and immortal. It can judge, reason and freely will. In its ability to practice virtue, it resembles God. This soul abides in the whole body and in every part.

INTELLECT AND WILL

By his intellect and will, man can know and love himself. The intellect and will are distinct but they are united in the soul. In the Trinity, the Son proceeds from the Father, as His expressed knowledge. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son, as their mutual love. Both Son and Spirit are distinct from one another and from the Father, yet they are inseparable and united, one, indivisible divinity. Because God made man to know and love, man enjoys an affinity of likeness to God.

Man and God also enjoy a reciprocal perfection. God can receive no perfection from man, but divine goodness finds its greatest purpose in perfecting man. Man has a capacity to receive good and God has great inclination to bestow it. The greater the good, the stronger the inclination to pour itself forth and God is the greatest good.

GOD'S ABUNDANCE

The poorer a man is, the more eager he is to receive. Therefore, when God's abundance and man's needs join, the union is quite agreeable. Which is greater, God's joy as the giver or man's happiness as the receiver? Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)

A mother's breast is so full that she must offer the milk to her child. The child avidly accepts it. Necessity leads the child and abundance leads the mother. New wine ferments and cannot be contained by the skins. The breasts are even better. They press the mother to draw her child to receive her milk.

OUR EMPTINESS

Theotimus, God's abundance does not need our emptiness, but our emptiness needs divine abundance. Our poverty would remain abject if not enriched by divine goodness.

Nothing created can fill the soul's capacity. The intellect always wants to know more. The will has an insatiable appetite to love. The soul cries out, "I am not made for this world. Some infinite workman has placed this intellect and will within me. I must seek God and be united to Him because I belong to Him." Such is the affinity between God and man's soul.

If man still had the original justice which Adam lost, he would be inclined to love God above everything and he could carry this out in practice. By God's design, fire leaps up, water flows to the sea, and all things cling to earth by gravity. By God's design, man's heart clings to Him by love.

1.16 OUR NATURAL INCLINATION TO LOVE GOD

God also planted in man a natural inclination to love created things and to love divine goodness above all things. God's divine providence helps man to fulfill this inclination as much as possible.

OUR DESIRE FOR GOD

Although our human nature is deprived of Adam's original justice, yet man retains this natural inclination to love God. Therefore, our nature has a secret, natural inclination which God can excite in our hearts. When we perceive God for the first time, our will sees its desire for God and is seized by Him.

To love God as Creator, man needs God's natural help, and man's love itself would also be natural, since loving God above all else is a natural tendency of the soul.

A PARTRIDGE

Sometimes, one partridge steals the egg of another. Yet, when the egg is hatched, the young partridge follows the call of its own mother and leaves the thief partridge. She follows her first origin, which is hidden within her.

Theotimus, our heart is the same. We are formed amid corporal realities. Yet, at the first glimpse of God, the soul's inclination to love God is excited. A spark appears among the ashes and the soul experiences supreme love because God is the soul's origin and Creator.

1.17 BY NATURE ALONE, WE CANNOT LOVE GOD ABOVE ALL THINGS

A Weakened Will

Eagles have a vision which extends much further than their wings can carry them. Our souls have this natural inclination to God. However, our understanding has more light to see God than our will has strength to obtain Him. Sin has weakened our will even more than it has darkened our intellect. The rebellion of our sensual appetite disturbs the understanding. However, in the will, this rebellion stirs up revolt. The poor will is infirm and shaken by continual assaults. It cannot make the progress in divine love which the understanding points out.

THE PHILOSOPHERS – KNOWING BUT NOT WILLING

The great philosophers (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and others) had a great knowledge of God. Socrates had a clear idea of God's unity. Plato said the duty of the philosopher is to love God. Aristotle proved the unity of God and spoke highly of it.

However, these great men all lacked the strength and courage to love God well. St. Paul says "As a result, they have no excuse, for although they know God they did not give him glory as God or give him thanks. (Rom.1:20-21) They gave him titles but did not glorify him above all things. They chose vain glory instead of God's honor.

THEIR FAILURES

What a pity to see Socrates on his deathbed speak of "Many gods", when he knew there was only one. Plato, knowing there was only one God, ordered sacrifice to many gods. Epictetus speaks with such relish of God yet, like a pagan, he talks about many gods. Why was he dishonest in this important matter?

Our wretched nature is like palm trees in Switzerland. Although trying to produce fruits, palm trees need a hotter climate. So, our human heart can produce the beginnings of God's love, but only hearts which are warmed by holy charity can love him above all things.

Man, in his human nature, feels some stirrings to love God, but his will is sterile and produces no effects. The will is sick and needs the healing waters of holy love. This natural will is an abortion, lacking the generous strength needed to prefer God above all things. Paul described this state. "Willing the good is present, but doing the good is not." (Rom. 7:18)

1.18 THE USEFULNESS OF A NATURAL LOVE FOR GOD

If nature alone does not have the power to love God above all things, why do we have this natural inclination? Why does nature give us a thirst for the precious water of divine love but she cannot provide it? How good God is. He imprinted this inclination on our hearts which we should have lost all these marks of His kindness by sin. Yet, this divine joy in feeling ourselves inclined to love God's goodness remains with us.

God, in His infinite mercy, would not totally ruin us or deprive us. By this natural inclination, we can feel our oneness with him and strive to love him.

GOD'S FURTHER HELP

By this natural inclination alone, we cannot love God as we should. However, if we faithfully follow it, God will assist us. The heavenly Father will give greater graces until we arrive at his goal, the sovereign love of God. God always gives more help to whomever is faithful in the little things. This natural inclination is God's handle by which He can hold us and draw us to himself. It is a string attached to our souls which God, in His mercy, can use. This inclination is also a remembrance of God as our Creator, Who gives us a secret, inner intimation that we belong to him.

GOD'S COLLAR

Princes often put collars upon their deer, before letting them loose in the fields. Anyone who meets these deer realize they belong to the prince and are reserved for him. Years after the death of Caesar, people found a deer with a collar saying, "Caesar let me go".

This inclination to love God testifies to everyone that, at one time, we belonged to the Creator. He has let us go. Although we have free will, he still has the right to claim us, according to his loving Providence. This inclination comforts us when we stray from God, and gives us hope that we will return. God engraved this upon us, so that we have a clear mark of our origin and of God's intention to bring us back. We need only to allow divine goodness to recapture us.

THE HISTORY OF THE GENERATION AND HEAVENLY BIRTH OF DIVINE LOVE

2.1 DIVINE PERFECTIONS ARE A SINGLE AND INFINITE PERFECTION

Due to weather conditions, the sun sometimes seems to be red, or pale, or dull. We know the sun is not many colors and is not subject to changes of color. However, we speak in this way due to the variety of vapors between the sun and our eyes.

MANY TITLES

We also describe God by many titles, as if he had a multitude of perfections. When he punishes the wicked, we call him just. When he delivers sinners, we call him merciful. Because he created everything,

we call him omnipotent. Because he fulfills his promises, we call him true. Because he orders all things we call him wise.

Yet, God is not variety. He is one, simple, indivisible, unique perfection. All his perfections exist in a simple and pure unity. The sun is a clear light that surpasses all color. We imagine these perfections in God. God is the most pure perfection which is above all perfections. He bestows perfection upon the perfect.

CANNOT GIVE A NAME

Now, to assign a name to this supreme perfection is not within our power. “He had a name inscribed that no one knows except himself.” (Rev.19:12) God alone knows his own perfection and only He can name it. God is the only true theologian, able to put into words the greatness of divine perfection. God asked Samson’s father, “Why do you ask my name, which is mysterious?” (Judges 13:18) So, God says, “My name is admired but never pronounced; adored but not comprehended. I alone can express my perfection.”

Our minds are too feeble to express a perfection which perfectly comprehends all other perfections in an infinite manner.

A NUMBER OF NAMES

Therefore, we use a number of names for God, saying He is good, wise, omnipotent, etc. God is all of these in such a pure and exalted way that he contains all perfections in one, most simple perfection. Oh, abyss of divine perfections! You possess in one perfection the excellence of all perfections in such an excellent way that only you can comprehend this.

God is far greater than all his works and is beyond your power to praise him. Who can see him and describe him? Who can praise him as He is? The Lord has made all things and gives wisdom to those who fear him.” (Sir. 43:29-35) John writes, “He is greater than our heart.” (1Jn.3:20) While giving him the greatest praise, we can never praise him sufficiently. We use the most excellent names, but his name surpasses every name.

2.2 THERE IS ONLY ONE ACT IN GOD

Our faculties produce a great diversity of actions resulting in many accomplishments. Each faculty produces a different action. For example, the eye sees and the ear hears. God is quite different. God is one, simple, infinite perfection. He is one pure act, the simply pure act of his divine essence, ever permanent and eternal.

OUR LIMITED LANGUAGE

We poor creatures can only speak of God as doing a variety of acts each day. Our speech follows our weak understanding. When we see different effects, we know they come from different causes. This is the customary way of speaking and understanding.

We speak this way of God even though there is only one sole action in God. This sole act is God himself. The perfection of this one act includes all the powers needed to produce the different effects.

By one word, God created the sun, moon and stars, with all their differences. “He spoke and they were made.” (Ps 148:5) A single word filled the world with birds, with fishes and with animals.

The Bible speaks as if God repeated his words, but really, he spoke only one word. “By the Lord’s word, the heavens were made.” (Ps 33:6) His single act spread its power over all creation, although we conceive creation as God’s multiple acts. In reality, it was simply one. John put this correctly, “By the word all things were made.” (Jn 1:3)

A PAINTING AND AN IMPRINT

Imagine a man painting a picture of Christ’s birth (I write this on Christmas day). He will use a thousand touches of the brush to perfect the picture. Then, imagine a printer, who spreads this painting upon his plate. In a single stroke of the press, he instantly has a fine engraving. In one moment, he impressed all the persons in the painting. One act produces many effects.

Nature is like a painter. She has diverse acts and varied effects. It takes her time to finish. God is like the printer. By one stroke He gave being to all creatures. From his printer’s plate, he fashions all persons and all seasons. God’s unity opposes confusion. It highlights variety, and gives beauty and unity to the visible and invisible world. The universe is both uni and diverse.

A SINGLE DECISION

God’s unity gives diversity. God’s permanence gives change. God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate day from night. Let them mark the fixed times, the days and the years.” (Gen 1:14) This decision will continue to the end of time. “He spoke and they were made.” God’s one will extends its power from age to age, to all that has been, is now, and will be. This simple, eternal divine act, causes all things to exist. To him be all glory. Amen

2.3 DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN GENERAL

God does not need many acts. His one divine act is infinitely perfect and can produce a variety of works. Let us examine God’s guidance, called Divine Providence, comparing it with Solomon’s providence in building the temple and governing Israel.

SOLOMON’S PROVIDENCE FOR ISRAEL

The great King Solomon knew that religion was important to the commonwealth, as the soul is important to the body. He wanted to safeguard both religion and the commonwealth.

For religion, he decided to build a temple and establish singers and priests. For the commonwealth, he decided to build a royal court and establish administrators and judges. To guarantee peace, he established commanders and soldiers.

THREE PARTS

Solomon had knowledge and put his knowledge into practice. He built the temple and the royal court. Then he provided people that were needed to maintain the temple and the court. There are three parts, Solomon's ideas, his building and his effective management. These three were Solomon's providence for Israel.

God's providence also has three parts. First, God had a perfect knowledge of what to create. He arranged in his divine mind the universe's parts, especially men and angels.

Second, he created men and angels. Third, he provides all they need to attain eternal glory. Divine Providence, then, is God providing for men and angels the necessary and the useful means to obtain heaven. There are two kinds of Divine providence, natural and supernatural.

In his natural providence, God created animals and plants for man's use. He formed land, waters, and seasons. He created the sky and stars. All of creation helps one another. Horses carry us and we care for them. Earth sends water to the heavens, and the heavens send rain. Seeing the perfect working of nature, we cry out "Your providence governs all things." (Wis 14:3) Even in what we call a change occurrence God's providence has a hand.

STORY OF JOSEPH

Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery to ruin him. When they saw his power in Egypt, they worried if he maintained a grudge. Joseph said, "It was not really you, but God who had me come here. Even though you meant harm to me, God meant it for good, to achieve his present end, the survival of the people." (Gen 45:8 and 50:20)

The world would call this chance. Joseph called it God's design, which all things must serve. This is true of all events. All paintings have a dark side which brings out the colors.

2.4 GOD'S SUPERNATURAL PROVIDENCE FOR RATIONAL CREATURES

God arranges everything for the salvation of men and angels. Both Scripture and Church tradition describe this arranging. God made angels and men and united himself to them in the mystery of Jesus Christ. Jesus' created nature was engulfed in the divinity and became one single person.

THE MYSTERY OF JESUS

In the Trinity, the Father produces the Son and communicates his infinite, indivisible unity to him. Together, they produce the Holy Spirit and communicate to him their own singular divinity. In Jesus, the three Persons communicate this divinity exteriorly to a human nature. As a result, created nature and the divine nature are united together in one same person, even though each nature remains intact.

God chose this humanity to be united to the person of the Son so that it might enjoy infinite glory for all eternity. Having selected the sacred humanity, He decided to pour out his goodness upon others. So, He created men and angels to participate in his Son's glory.

FOUR POSSIBILITIES

God could have formed Jesus' human nature in four ways:

1. Create the body and the soul out of nothing.
2. Form the body from pre-existing matter (as with Adam and Eve).
3. Use ordinary human conception and birth
4. Use extraordinary conception, without a man's seed

He decided on the fourth way and chose Our Lady as his mother. In this way, the Savior would be a child of the human race.

God also created men and angels with free will, so they could choose good or evil. He created them in original justice, so they would choose the path to eternal happiness.

FREE WILL

This original love left the will free to choose, and God foresaw that some angels would voluntarily abandon that love and lose their glory. These angels sinned in total malice, having no excuse for their decision. At this point, God showed his justice and forever abandoned those angels who had chosen to abandon him.

God also saw that the first man would forsake God's grace and lose glory. Yet, he did not treat man so rigorously. He saw that human nature was feeble and He knew Satan captured the first man by the greatness of the temptation. He did not want all men to perish because of one. So, he had pity and showed mercy on mankind.

JESUS' SUFFERINGS

This mercy was gained with justice. God saved man by a rigorous redemption which only his Son could accomplish. Jesus did not redeem man by one act of love (which could ransom a million worlds) but by all his acts, especially by his sorrowful passion and death on the cross. God wanted Christ to be a companion in our sufferings, so we could be his companions in glory. This superabundant and excessive redemption showed his goodness. He provided everyone with the means needed for glory.

2.5 AN ABUNDANCE OF REDEMPTION

Who can doubt the abundance of these means of salvation? We have a great Savior who died for us (because we all were dead). His mercy is more powerful in redeeming the human race than Adam's sin was in destroying it. Indeed, Adam's sin provoked God's goodness. This was God's loving reaction. God regrouped his army to gain the victory. "Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more." (Rom 5:20) The Easter canticle says, "O blessed fault, which merited so great a Redeemer!" Indeed, our ruin brought us profit. The human nature received more graces by redemption than it would have if Adam had never sinned.

CONQUERING EVIL WITH GOOD

Even with divine mercy, God's Providence allowed deep marks of sin's severity to remain. These include death, illness, labors and sensual rebellion. Yet, by divine favor, we can rise above these. Death gives us contempt for the world. Illness gives us patience. Sensual rebellion leads to a thousand victories. Jesus said, "There shall be more joy in heaven over one sinner who does penance than over ninety-nine who have no need of penance." (Lk 15:7)

Being redeemed is a hundred times better than being innocent. The Savior's blood gives us a whiteness greater than the snow of innocence. After washing in the Jordan, Naaman, the leper, was even more clean than before he became leprous (2Kg:C.5) So, Theotimus, "Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good." (Rom 12:21) because "God's mercies are above all his works." (Ps 144:9)

2.6 CERTAIN SPECIAL FAVORS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

In the order of both the natural and the supernatural, God shows his incomprehensible riches by variety of things. He does not give mankind only a general redemption (by which all could be saved) but also a diverse redemption, marked by variety.

PRIVILEGES OF MARY

His greatest gift was Mary, his most holy Mother. He prepared his mother according to his liking and preserved her from the beginning. Sin spread from generation to generation but could not reach her.

She was so excellently redeemed that evil could not pour its waves over her conception (as it had done to other daughters of Adam). Sin had to stop. Just as the Jordan stopped for the Ark of the Covenant, so original sin drew back its waters in the presence of Mary, the new Ark of the New Covenant.

INNOCENCE AND REDEMPTION

Mary enjoyed the blessings of both innocence and redemption. She enjoyed the innocence lost by Adam and also the redemption gained by Jesus. She is the new garden of paradise, bringing forth the fruit of all perfections.

She is the queen, the first of the elect to enjoy God's delights. She was preserved for her son, redeemed from damnation and from all danger of damnation. She was the lovely dawn which increases into perfect daylight. She is the Redeemer's masterpiece, the first of all redemptions! Jesus preserved her from all sin (as he did the angels), from all danger of sin, and from all that could divert her from holy love. She is God's "one dove", his "all perfect one", beyond all likeness and all comparison.

OTHERS ALSO PRESERVED

God also preserved a few others like John the Baptist (and probably Jeremiah) from any danger of damnation. He seized them in their mother's wombs and established them in perpetual grace. Although

subject to venial sins they would remain firm in love. These souls, compared to others, hold a principal place next to the Savior's mother.

God decided that other special souls would be exposed for a while to the danger of losing his love (but not of losing salvation). He even permitted some saints to lose his love, for He guaranteed only that they would have love at the end of their life. These were the Apostles, King David, Magdalene and many others who were out of his grace for a time, but later were confirmed in grace until death. After their conversion, they could not lose divine love and were spouses of the heavenly bridegroom.

2.7 THE DIVERSITY OF GRACES

All human nature receives this abundant sufficiency and we are all equal in this abundance. However, God gives a great variety of favors. Christians enjoy greater means of salvation than pagans. Some Christians have more capable pastors than other Christians. These exterior means are great helps to our salvation. Our experiences show us that ordinarily, where these exterior helps abound, then interior fervor is also more abundant. So God's supernatural favors vary and everyone receives differently.

St. Augustine and St. Thomas say that angels receive favors according to their condition. There are as many graces as there are angels. Also, with men, God produces diverse graces in which his mercy and redemption shine forth.

In heaven, only each person knows his new name (Rev 2:17). Each saint is unique according to his own glory. Even on earth, each person receives a special grace. Each is singular. No two are alike. "And one star differs from another in glory." (1Cor 15:41) We will differ in glory as we now differ in grace. This variety of grace is the beauty and harmony of the heavenly Jerusalem.

DO NOT BE CURIOUS

Why does God bestow this grace on one rather than on another? Why do his favors seem to abound in a certain person? Never ask those questions. Never enter into this curiosity. All have enough, even an abundance, to be saved. Why should a creature complain if God bestows more ample graces on another? Why did God make melons larger than strawberries, or why are peacocks more beautiful than bats? Why are figs sweet and lemons acid?

The beauty of God's world requires variety. Variety demands differences and inequalities. Created things are big and small, beautiful or less beautiful. This is true also for supernatural graces. "Everyone has his proper gift from God. One of one kind and one of another." (1Cor 7:7) Do not ask why Peter did not have the graces of Paul. The Church is a garden with innumerable flowers of various sizes, colors and perfections. Their charm and their differences highlight the perfection of beauty.

2.8 HOW MUCH GOD DESIRES THAT WE LOVE HIM

Although the Savior's redemption comes in many different ways, love is the universal means of salvation. Love mingles with grace. Without it, nothing is profitable. God stationed Cherubim with their flaming swords at the gates of heaven, so only those pierced with Love's sword can enter.

JESUS' INFINITE DESIRES

Jesus has infinite desires that we should love him, so as to live eternally. Jesus said, "I have come to cast fire on the earth." (Lk 12:49) and "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment." (Mt 22:37)

The divine heart seeks our love! God passionately commands us to love him with all our power. Otherwise, we would use some pretext to divert our love.

God never removed our natural inclination to love him and this inclination does not lie idle. God commands us to use it and he abundantly provides all the necessary means to fulfill it so his command is effective.

PUBLICLY INVITES ALL

Just as the sun touches everything, so, divine goodness encourages all hearts to love. None is excluded from its heat. Wisdom cries aloud, "Children, how long will you love foolish things? I will pour out my spirit upon you. I will acquaint you with my words." (Pr 1:20-23) Ezekiel writes, "As I live, says the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn away from his way and live." (33:12)

God's life is love. "He who loves does not abide in death." (1Jn 3:14) God wants us to love him. He publicly invites all. He even goes from door to door and knocks. "If any man hears my voice and opens the door to me, I will come in to him and will eat with him and he with me." (Rev 3:20)

OVERWHELMING ABUNDANCE

God does not just give sufficient means. He gives an overwhelming abundance, as can be expected from his goodness. Paul writes, "Do you hold his priceless kindness in low esteem, unaware that the kindness of God would lead you to repentance? By your impenitent heart, you store up wrath for yourself." (Rom 2:4-5)

To convert the hard-hearted, God uses all his riches, not just some. Almost everywhere, Scripture speaks of these abundant means which God freely bestows upon sinners. The divine lover at the gate doesn't just knock. He stands knocking. He calls the soul, "Come, arise, make haste, my love." (Song 2:16) He sees if he can unlock the door. His voice is not low. He cries out loud and does so continually.

He constantly repeats the need to convert. "Be converted. Do penance. Turn to me. Live. Why do you die, O Israel? (Ez 18:30) He forgets no opportunity to show that his mercies surpass his judgments. His redemption is copious. His love is infinite. He is "rich in mercy." He "wills everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth. (1Tim 2:4) He wants no one to perish. Eternal love inspires our hearts so that we love him.

2.8 ETERNAL LOVE INSPIRES OUR HEARTS

God promised that the Savior would establish the Church, his virgin-spouse, and a true spiritual Israel. “With age old love, I have looked on you. Again I will restore you, O Israel.” (Jer 31:3)

GOD’S WIND

“He saved us by his mercy.” (Tit 3:15) Without the Father, we could never come to the Son, or to our salvation. “No one can come to me unless the Father draws him.” (Jn 6:44)

Beautiful birds, called “Birds of Paradise” have short legs and feeble feet. They cannot rise by their own power, but must wait until some wind seizes them and lifts them up. Then, they can use their wings to come into full flight. We mortals are like them. If we fall into sin (as we do when we offend God), we retain some weak desires that try to love God. Yet, by ourselves, we cannot leave sin behind and fly to God again.

GOD’S STIRRINGS

However, eternal charity gets God to reclaim us from sin. He gives us the favorable wind of his inspirations. These seize our hearts, raise our thoughts and move our desires once more into the divine air.

This first stirring of God comes unexpectedly, before we even think of it. “We cannot take credit as if anything came from us. Our sufficiency is from God. (2 Cor 3:5) With fatherly kindness, God excites our souls to conversion. Peter, stupefied by denying Christ, had no thought of sorrow. However, the cock’s voice reached his ears and the sight of Jesus came to his eyes (Lk 22:6) The gaze of Jesus pierced his heart of stone and sent forth the abundant water of tears, like Moses striking the rock in the desert.

GOD’S AWAKENING

After Pentecost, look again. Peter is bound by chains in Herod’s prison. Who will deliver him? The angel comes, awakens Peter and says, “Arise quickly!” So it is with a poor sinner. God’s inspiration comes from heaven, strikes him quickly and stirs him to rise from sin.

So, Theotimus, the soul perceives this first emotion and shock when God awakens it. God’s awakening is done in us and for us, but not by us. We are awake, but have not wakened ourselves. I know who awakens me, and calls my name. By his voice, I know him well. In this beginning grace of repentance, we do nothing. We just feel God’s touch. “In us, but without us.” (St. Bernard)

2.9 MANY TIMES WE REPULSE GOD’S LOVE

Jesus said, “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida. For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented in sackcloth and ashes.” (Mt 11:21) Although Jesus instructed these two cities and gave miraculous favors, the people refused to repent. They rejected the light.

RESPONSE AND NO RESPONSE

Also, the city of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba will convict the Jews as worthy of damnation. The Ninevites listened to Jonah and the Queen of Sheba sought the wisdom of Solomon. The Jews heard Jesus' words and saw his miracles. Yet, they remained hardened and resisted grace. Others, who have not seen Jesus, have been converted. Some come to wisdom with lesser graces, while others remain in their folly, with greater graces.

This is a great mystery! Some have many calls but do not accept God's mercy. Others, with fewer helps, follow God's inspirations. God can reasonably reproach these impenitent people because others, with lesser attractions, were converted. The gospels say that God's judgment is fair because people with many favors returned no love; while others loved after receiving fewer favors.

THE ANGELS

St. Augustine asks why some angels persevered in goodness, while others abandoned the good and fell to damnation. He says that no answer can be given except that each group made their choice by their own free will.

St. Thomas says that graces differed among the angels, with the Seraphim having the greatest graces. Yet, how did some Seraphim fall into sin while lower angels courageously persevered? Why did Lucifer fall when he was superexcellent in grace, while others remained upright? The good angels must praise God for his mercy. But to whom can Lucifer and the others ascribe their fall? Only to their own free will. This separated them from God's grace.

LUCIFER'S FALL

St. Augustine writes, "How have you fallen from the heavens, O morning star? You came clothed with the brightness of day. Grace did not fail you. You failed grace. God did not deprive you of love. You deprived his love of your cooperation. God would never reject you, if you did not reject him. Oh God, you only forsake us when we forsake you. You take away your gifts, when we take away our hearts."

If we attribute salvation to ourselves, we rob God. If we claim that he failed us, we dishonor his mercy. God says, "Your distraction is your own, O Israel. Your help is from me." (Hos 13:9) Our lacking more excellent love is not God's fault.

2.10 OUR LACKING LOVE IS NOT GOD'S FAULT

O Theotimus, we would make great progress in holiness if we received God's inspirations in their full power. A copious fountain waters a garden according to the size of the pipes. The Holy Spirit, the fountain of living water, spreads his graces in every part of our heart but only according to the pipes of will's free consent. All happens according to his will and our cooperation. This voluntary reception is a work of His grace and our consent.

Receiving In Vain

St. Paul writes, “Do not receive the grace of God in vain.” (1Cor 6:1) If a sick man holds medicine in his hand but does not take it into his stomach, it does him no good. The medicine is useless. This is how we receive God’s graces in vain. They need our consent to enter our heart. So, we receive without fruitfulness. We feel an inspiration but do not consent to it. This effects nothing.

Receiving Partially

If the sick man takes some medicine, he receives a partial effect. So, if we do not fully embrace God’s mighty inspirations, they profit us only partially. In the gospel, some disciples, wanting to bury their father or to say goodbye, did not fully accept Jesus’ call.

When Elisha blessed the widow’s jug (1Kg.17), the oil miraculously multiplied and kept flowing until she had no more vessels to fill. So, to the measure we allow our hearts to be enlarged, his sacred inspirations will ceaselessly pour forth. They will always increase heavenly love. When we cease to give consent and there is no more room, they stop.

Why Not Advanced?

Why are we not so advanced in love as Augustine, Francis, Catherine of Genoa or Frances Chantal? Is God lacking or have we not corresponded? Why did we not correspond? Because we misused our freedom. Why did we misuse our freedom? Here, we have no answer. Our lack of consent has no cause. It comes from our personal deficiency. We cannot give a reason.

Brother Rufinus said to St. Francis of Assisi, “Please tell me the opinion you have of yourself.” Francis replied, “I am the world’s greatest sinner who least serves the Lord.” Brother Rufinus said that others committed greater sins than Francis. The saint replied, “If God abandoned me, I would commit much more sin than others.”

Francis, an angel upon earth, truly believed that any sinner would better use God’s mercy than he. These saints are educated in the school of the crucifix. They all repeated St. Paul’s saying, “I am the foremost of sinners.” (1Tim 1:15)

Full Liberty

Speaking of the Prayer of Quiet, St. Teresa of Avila wrote, “Many souls come to this point of perfection, but very few go on further. I know not the cause. The fault is not God’s. He gives us the grace to arrive at this point and certainly would give us still more. It is our fault, due to the obstacles we place.” Be attentive, O Theotimus, God’s favors will never fail us. Divine inspirations leave us full liberty to follow or reject them.

2.11 FULL LIBERTY TO ACCEPT OR REJECT INSPIRATIONS

I do not speak of those miraculous graces which instantly transform sinners into saints. I leave aside those violent attractions which God gives to some elect souls, taking them from the extremity of vice to the

extremity of grace. This happened to Paul, “the vessel of election”. (Acts 9:15) Those who received this inundation of God’s prodigality have a special status.

Ordinary and Extraordinary

Sometimes, Divine Justice chastises the world with ordinary punishments (which are imperceptible). At other times, Justice sends a deluge to publicize the severity of his judgments. Divine mercy does likewise. Sometimes, his mercy gives ordinary graces to convert souls. These are scarcely perceived. At other times, however, God’s mercy overflows its ordinary banks and gives an outpouring of graces which steep the soul in blessings. In this way, the riches of God’s love appear. As his justice can be ordinary or extraordinary, his mercy also can be ordinary or extraordinary.

God himself describes his ordinary graces. He led the Israelites into the Promised Land, “I will draw them with human cords, with bands of love.” (Hos11:4) These “human cords” are not iron chains. They are enticements, attractions and inspirations, adapted to the heart’s natural freedom. The “bands of love” are delights and pleasures, like candy shown to a child. The Eternal Father delights us so that we accept the sweetness of his doctrine.

God’s mercy is all-powerful, but our free will is never forced. He touches the soul by numberless invitations and attractions, yet the will remains perfectly free. Grace seizes our hearts, but never takes away our liberty. Grace touches our spirit delicately. It has power to entice, but not to force. Even God’s holy violence does not overwhelm our will. We can consent or resist grace’s power. Our will can consent freely or resist freely. Consent to inspirations requires both grace and free will. Resistance to God’s promptings demands only free will. God handles our hearts with sweetness, giving us strength to do his will, without removing our liberty. His power both moves us and allows us not to move.

To the Samaritan woman, Jesus said, “If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, ‘Give me to drink’, perhaps you would ask him and He would give you living water.” (Jn4:10) Jesus says that ‘knowing the gift’, perhaps would lead her to ask. Even in Jesus’ presence, the woman is free to ask or not to ask.

Our Consent is Needed

The church teaches that we can reject God’s inspirations. However, we cannot stop God from giving his inspirations because He does this without our consent. He bestows favors before we even think. God awakens us from sleep. We have the power to rise from bed or to return to sleep. He awakens us without our consent, but he will not raise us up unless we agree. God gets us in motion but we can refuse to move forward. The wind moves little birds but then they must fly in the air. If they keep their wings folded the wind’s motion is in vain.

God offers us inspirations even before we think or feel them. After experiencing God’s inspirations, we can follow their attractions or refuse them. Inspirations do not force our consent.

2.12 FIRST SENTIMENTS OF LOVE BEFORE THE SOUL HAS FAITH

The wind lifts up birds by their feathers (the lightest part). If the bird moves its wings, then the wind can help it even more.

God's inspirations lift us up into the air of God's love, touching our will with heavenly delights. They unfold the will's natural inclination toward the good. This happens totally as a divine favor without the person's consent. The will perceives being moved and stirred by this heavenly wind. If it consents, how happy it is! This favorable inspiration mingles with our consent and enlivens our weak cooperation. It will bring us to the act of faith needed for conversion.

The First Movements – Imperfect Love

What a consolation to see the Holy Spirit's secret method. He pours out his light and heat! What a pleasure to see heavenly love light up the soul. The soul experiences what it does not yet perceive, until love's presence covers everything. How agreeable is this daybreak, the beginning rise of day. This experience is not day itself. These are love's movements which precede the act of faith needed for justification. These experiences are imperfect love, the first buds of God's mystical tree, the promises of fruit but not the fruit itself.

The Stages of Conversion

St. Pachimius (292-348) was a young soldier, born of pagan parents. When drafted into Constantine's army, he was sent to Egypt. The whole army needed food. The inhabitants were faithful Christians and gave food to the soldiers with such love and care, that Pachimius admired them. He asked why they were so gracious. They told him that they were Christians. Inquiring about their way of life, he learned that they believed in Jesus Christ, and that they did these good deeds believing that God himself would reward them.

Poor Pachimius had a naturally good disposition but he was still asleep in the bed of paganism. Through the Christians' good example, God was suddenly present at his heart's gate, giving him the first feelings of love's vital heat. Filled with new light and consolation, he withdrew apart, lifted up his hands and said, "Jesus, Son of God, creator of heaven and earth, if you will give me knowledge of your divinity, I promise to serve you all my life." After his promise, divine love so increased that he practiced thousands of acts of virtue.

The Christians' good example awakened Pachimius. Then, God filled him with feelings of spiritual pleasure. Then, Pachimius cooperated by withdrawing into solitude so he can relish the graces he received. God's inspirations drew him to heaven, with no concern for himself. He already knew one God, Creator of heaven and earth, but not well enough to serve him. So, he asked for more perfect knowledge.

God always moves gently, inspiring us. After we consent, he leads us. He awakens us, but waits for our consent to do the rest. "O God, I cannot move unless you move me. Once you move me, we run

together. You do not drag me, as a forced salve. You draw me and I follow because you entice me. You draw me by your sweetness, as perfume draws us in a delightful way.”

2.13 THE SENTIMENT OF DIVINE LOVE GAINED BY FAITH

Faith feels like divine love because God proposes truths to the understanding. These truths give great pleasure and move the understanding to consent. God proposes these mysteries in obscurity and darkness. We do not see the sun fully when mist covers the earth, yet we see it enough. We call this “half-seeing.”

However, when the light of faith enters our soul, it has a certain authority which makes the understanding accept the truth. Its authority gives us the highest certitude and it subjugates the intellect, so that nothing else gets a hearing.

The Beauty of Faith

Faith is really the Beloved of the understanding. Faith says to all other sciences “I am black but beautiful” (Cant.1:4) Black means the obscurities involved in revelation, because revelation does not contain overwhelming evidence. Yet, faith is beautiful in its infinite certainty. Faith says, “If mortal eyes could see me they would say I am all fair.”

We must love faith infinitely and the soul prize faith above all other knowledge. She is the queen of sciences, ruling the soul’s highest throne and overseeing all human reasonings. Two commanders of Israel took off all their robes and said, “Jehu is King”. (2Kg:9:13) In like manner, the understanding puts off all its arguments, and acknowledges faith as queen.

Faith Needed to Believe

The many miracles and clear rational explanations make Christianity credible. However, faith alone gets men to actually believe, giving delight to the will and certitude to the understanding. The Jews saw the miracles of Jesus, heard his teachings, but persisted in their unbelief. They saw the argument but did not desire the conclusion and did not accept the truth.

Faith provides a delightful assurance that helps our spirit to accept the truth. Theologians debate truths. However, once the Pope pronounces his decision, they accept the truth by the authority of the Holy Spirit who invisibly guides the Church. Theologians raise questions from their learning, but the Church answers from the Holy Spirit and gives certainty.

To conclude, God first touches our reason by a delight in the beauty of his mysteries. Then, faith brings certitude and always includes the beginnings of love toward God’s blessings.

2.14 FEELINGS OF LOVE COMING FROM HOPE

The mid-day sun gives us both light and heat. When God’s truths touch our understanding, our will immediately feels the warmth of God’s love and our natural inclination for God touches our heart with inner

desires. There is also a continual uneasiness. We cannot quiet ourselves, because we do not experience perfect happiness. When faith reveals our natural inclination for God, our soul is amazed at this beauty. “You are fair, my beloved. You are fair.” (Song 1:14)

The Search of Faith

Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for his son, Jacob. When he found Rachel to be both beautiful and gracious, he thanked God. So, the soul seeks God, without fully knowing “What He is”. When he sees that God is good and gracious, he wants to unite with this goodness forever, saying, “At last, I have found what my heart desired.” When Jacob kissed Rachel, he melted into tears for his happiness was indescribable. So, when the soul receives his first kiss of faith, he dissolves in love for this infinite beauty.

The Two Joys

Sometimes joy comes unexpectedly, without any apparent reason, and leads us to expect some greater joy. (Our angels give us this joy. They also fill us with fears when there are dangers). Later, we receive this greater joy with open arms. As we reflect, we see that the joy was a foretaste of the later joy.

Our Secret Searching

For a long time, our souls have inclinations, without knowing that they are for God. Then faith reveals their goal and the soul sees immediately that this is what his will desired. Whether we like it or not, our will always seeks the highest good. Until Paul revealed God, the Athenians sacrificed to the unknown God. Our heart has a secret instinct for happiness. We grope for it, not knowing what it is until faith reveals its presence. What a satisfaction to find the long sought treasure! We think, “Nothing contented me. I sought to love but did not know what to love, so I remained in ignorance. My inclinations made me seek but I lacked sufficient knowledge. Now I have found him whom I sought when I did not know him.”

2.15 HOW LOVE IS PRACTICED IN HOPE

When faith reveals the supreme good to the intellect, the person immediately enjoys God, although He is still absent. From this come ardent desires. The soul cries out, “Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.” (Song 1:1)

Seeking God’s Face

When a falcon sees its prey, it launches into flight. However, if still leashed, it struggles with great ardor. By faith, the soul now sees God but does not possess him. It becomes like a “deer seeking the fountain of water. When shall I appear before the face of God?” (Ps 42:1-2)

This desire would be useless if God did not someday quench our thirst. God’s delay makes our enemies ask “Where is your God?” (Ps42:4) We are like the bride, who does not immediately find her beloved. Her love planted a desire, which planted an ardor, which planted a languishing. Her heart will be destroyed if she had no hope to attain her desire. So we do not despair. God (who planted this vehement desire) has made thousands of promises. He assures us that this goal is easy to obtain if we just use the means He has prepared.

Hoping and Aspiring

These promises increase our unrest, but destroy its bad effects. God's promise that paradise will be ours infinitely strengthens our desires and weakens our fears. Our hearts remain calm. This is the root of hope. Faith assures the will that it can enjoy God if it uses the proper means. The will makes two great acts. It hopes to enjoy God and it aspires to this enjoyment.

There is one difference between hoping and aspiring. A person hopes for what another can give. A person aspires to what he himself can gain. We can enjoy God only by his favor. Yet, we must cooperate with that favor. We contribute our weak consent to his powerful grace. Our hope mingles with our aspiring. Hope predominates because gaining God depends on God's grace. Without grace we could never aspire to reach God. Aspiring is a child of our hope. However, to hope without aspiring is cowardly negligence. To aspire without trusting in God is presumption. However, when we hope and aspire, hope becomes a courageous desire and aspiring becomes a humble claim on God.

Hope and Love

Both come from love which tends to God. At this stage, the soul can hope in God more than it loves God. Hope is the loving pleasure we experience by expecting and seeking God. God is love and when faith shows me God, I love Him. Because God is still absent, I desire Him, and because I know He will give Himself, I love and desire even more. Goodness is loved because it always wants to give of itself.

At this stage, love has progressed. Desire has become hope, which is really an aspiring love. Hope expects to be with God and expects this gift from God himself. Because hope is always touching God, it is a theological virtue.

2.16 LOVE IN HOPE IS VERY GOOD BUT IMPERFECT

When we hope, we practice love for God, but this love returns to us. We see divine goodness as being for our own profit. We aim at divine perfection but for our own satisfaction. This is called love of self-interest. Certainly, we do not love God only for ourselves. If a wife loved her husband only because he provided a maid, she would really love the maid and not the husband. A soul that loves God only for herself does not love God, but herself. To love God for the good I expect from him and to only love God for that good are two different realities. To love God that he would be my highest good is a holy desire. This delights God. "My beloved to me and I to him." (Song 2:16) But to love God for only my profit means that self-love is my goal. This subordinates love of God to love of self.

Loving Self and God

Loving God from hope of self-profit is a holy and well ordered duplicity. We do not draw God into our self-seeking. Rather, we attach ourselves to God for our happiness. We love ourselves together with God. Love for self mingles with love for God, but God's love floats on the top. Self-profit is a motive, not the principal goal. We do not refer God to us but give ourselves to God. We are not his perfection but He is ours. He receives nothing from us but we receive much from him. He has abundance and we have scarcity. To love God as our sovereign good is an honorable goal.

Our Imperfect Love

Our love for animals and clothes is totally a desire for our own profit. Our love for friends, however, is reciprocal love, based on desires which both parties have. Our parents are different. As children, we depend on them, so we have a love of desire, which includes respect and honor.

We love our father because he is a father to us. This is a good example of aspiring to God by hope. We love our fathers for our good. But love's quality and quantity depends on the person's excellence. We love benefactors because they are benefactors. Then, why do we love God with this imperfect love? Because He is good and we love him as our highest good.

However, our love is not the highest. In hope, love is imperfect. It loves God only because he is good to us. This love is not powerful enough to keep the commandments or to gain eternal life. Without charity, this love from hope alone produces more feelings than results.

2.18 DIFFERENT KINDS OF LOVE IN REPENTANCE

By repentance, a man rejects sin and resolves to repair the injury as much as he is able. If a person has no intention to repair the injury, he does not sufficiently detest the sin, because he allows the effects of sin to continue.

Repentance Among Philosophers

Repentance among the pagans is usually fruitless, coming from human motives. Some philosophers even urged an examination of conscience, spoke highly of interior remorse and even described repentance very well, but they have no real examples of true repentance.

Philosophers knew that God was offended if we lived viciously. They taught others never to disobey God, nor to question his ways. Even as a pagan, this philosopher knew he had to repent of sin. His repentance resulted from natural religion, which gives us light to understand sin, but not spiritual warmth to truly repent and to repair the offense. Philosophers rarely and feebly understand religious repentance, actually teaching that the wise man did not sin. This contradicts experience.

Christian Repentance

Religious repentance is totally Christian. Pagans know it so little. True Christians fully accept the need for repenting. Christians understand that only the fool says he does not sin. Christians know that repentance comes before forgiveness. Jesus said to all, "Do penance." (Mt 4:17) Let me explain.

We offend God by our sins and dishonor him by disobedience and rebellion. God knows he is offended and he reproves evil. Understanding this, leads us to three different motives for repentance.

1. Being punished in hell and of being deprived of heaven.

Desiring heaven is honorable, as is fear of losing it. The desire is worthy and the fear is good. This double fear, of punishment and reward, leads many to repentance. Scripture mentions this motive hundreds of times.

2. Seeing the deformity of sin.

We are made in God's image and sin disfigures this beauty. We become like animals, violating our duties to God, forfeiting the company of angels, subjecting ourselves to the devil, and offending our guardian angels.

3. Seeing the beauty of virtue.

As we study the saints' incomparable experiences, we want to imitate them. Who can read of penitent saints without being moved to their own repentance?

2.19 REPENTANCE WITHOUT LOVE IS IMPERFECT

These motives are praiseworthy but imperfect. Praiseworthy because repentance is good. Yet, the repentance is imperfect because there is no divine love.

These repentances are for the soul's happiness and its interior beauty. We repent for ourselves. These repentances do not reject the love of God. They just do not include it. They do not repulse divine love, but do not contain it. They do not exclude love but it is not there.

The Good and the Better

Your will can embrace good and, at the same time, it can reject what is better, accepting the lesser but not the greater. To repent in order to avoid hell and to gain heaven is good. However, to seek no other motive would shut out the better. What father would be pleased if his son served him but never with love?

To begin a good thing is good. To make progress is better. To gain the final goal is best. Infancy is good but no one should desire to stay an infant. To begin to learn is good but no one should desire to stay a beginner. These three motives to repent are beginning wisdom, but the soul should seek perfection in repentance.

Repentance which excludes love of God is like that of the damned. Repentance which does not include love of God is imperfect. To give salvation it must be mingled with love. Paul said, "If I deliver my body to be burned, and gave all goods to the poor, but had not charity, it would profit me nothing." (1Cor 13:3) Our repentance without holy love for God profits us nothing.

2.20 TRUE CONTRITION – A MINGLING OF LOVE AND SORROW

Once, God converted water into fire. When the Jews were exiled in Babylon, the priests hid the holy fire in a cistern. After returning to Jerusalem, Nehemiah sent the priests to get the fire but they found only muddy water. Nehemiah commanded them to pour this water on the sacrifices. When the sun touched the offering, the water became a great fire. (2Macc.1:19-23)

When we repent fully, God places his sacred fire in our hearts. This love becomes the water of tears, and then the fire of his love.

Water and Fire

Mary Magdalene converted her love into tears and her tears into a greater love. Her sins were forgiven because she “had loved much”. (Lk7:47) The soul thinking of God’s goodness produces the tears of holy repentance. From this water comes the fire of divine life. Repentance is a true sorrow, which contains the power of love and can give grace. Perfect penance has two effects. Its sorrow separates us from sin. Its love reconciles us to God. Repentance reclaims us. Love joins us to God.

Sometimes, repentance and love come forth at the same time. When Esau was born, his twin brother Jacob held his foot. In this way, their birth was almost as one. The rude repentance (Esau) was born first but the gentle love (Jacob) held on tightly. The birth of love (Jacob) had already begun when repentance (Esau) was born. Sometimes, love (Jacob) overcomes repentance and makes it into consolation.

Magdalen wept saying, “They have taken away my Lord”. (Jn 20:13) Jesus then revealed himself and she tried to cling to him. Her tears found him but it was her love which held on to him. Love runs after the Savior. Repentance finds Him. Perfect love holds him. When steeped in repentance, love gains strength.

Repentance and Love

Even perfect repentance might only contain a quality of love. What quality of love can perfect repentance have? Its motive is God’s goodness, which moves us toward divine union. Therefore, repentance has a unitive quality, uniting us to God’s goodness. How does perfect repentance differ from love? Repentance comes from displeasure with evil. Love comes from desires for good. According to Scripture, repentance blots out sin, saves the soul, and justifies her. Now these are also effects of love. Perfect repentance is not love but contains the effects of love.

How can the effects of love be present when love itself is not there? The sun reflected upon a mirror produces heat even before a fire begins. So, when the Spirit reveals the greatness of our sins and of God’s goodness, our will experiences a heated desire to return to God’s grace. Repentance burns even before the sacred fire of love is lighted.

However, unless it becomes a flame of love, repentance never reaches the height of burning which unites the heart to God. Repentance must yield to love’s beginning movements. As Esau finished his birth, Jacob’s birth began because they were fastened together. Just so, the beginning of love mingles with repentance. In this moment of mingling, repentance and contrition merit eternal life.

The soul practices loving repentance by saying “Have mercy on me, O God...”. “Save me, O God.” “Make me as one of your hired servants.” “Be merciful to me, a sinner.” Some say that these prayers justify the soul. Re-uniting the soul to God certainly obtains pardon because this action contains love. By ejaculatory prayers which seek reconciliation, we lay our tribulation before God’s heart which receives them with mercy.

2.21 OUR SAVIOR'S LOVING ATTRACTIONS ASSIST FAITH AND CHARITY

A great deal of time can elapse between the first awakening from sin and the full gift of perfect belief. Remember the prayer of the father of the possessed son "I do believe, Lord, help my unbelief." (Mk9:23) He knew he believed, but not sufficiently. His words mean "I am not in the night because the rays of faith enlighten my horizon. However, my knowledge is weak and mixed with darkness."

BEING DRAWN AND AWAKENED

St. Augustine writes, "O man, if you are not drawn, then pray to be drawn." He doesn't speak of the first awakening because no one can pray to be awakened. He speaks of the resolve to be faithful to the awakening. Anyone led by God to faith must ask for the gift of faith. Who, better than Augustine, would know the difficulties between the first attraction to faith and the gift of believing fully? He had many attractions, including the preaching of St. Ambrose. Still, he created many delays and had great difficulty in resolving his doubts. His own words apply to him. "O Man, if you are not drawn, then pray to be drawn."

Our Savior draws our hearts by making the heavenly doctrine agreeable. However, our will is not immediately fastened by bonds of perfect faith. So, God exercises his power by inspirations. The devil practices his malice by temptations. Meanwhile, the soul has full liberty to consent or to reject God drawing him.

ACCEPTING HOLY LOVE

The will cooperates with grace by consenting to God's actions. This prepares the soul for justification. If we do not repulse the grace of holy love, it increases until we are totally converted. It is like a great river spreading over an open plain.

Drawn by Faith

If an inspiration to faith is not resisted, then it draws us to penitence and charity. St. Peter is our example. After his denial, Peter saw the eyes of Christ. In those eyes, he saw the invitation of forgiveness. From this, he received hope. When he left the courtyard, he considered the horror of his sin. He detested it and wept. He, then, prostrated his heart before the Savior's mercy, sought pardon, and resolved to be loyal. In these actions, Peter was led and assisted by grace. Finally, he came to a full remission of sins. He went from grace to grace. "Without grace, a man cannot run to grace." (St. Prosper)

PRAYING TO BE DRAWN

The soul, led by grace, feels the first drawings. He consents, and, then, cries out "My friend. Draw me. Take me under your arms for I am too weak to walk. If you draw me, we will run. Help me by the odor of your perfume. Reinvigorate me by your sweetness until the balm of justification is poured upon me."

The soul prays only because God excites her. After feeling attraction, she prays to be drawn. Once drawn, she runs only because the perfumes inspire her heart. Now, her course is more swift. Upon approaching her heavenly spouse, she senses his sweetness until it fills her like a sacred balm. She is surprised by this unexpected delight and cries out, "O spouse, you are balm poured into my bosom. No wonder the young cherish you."

BRINGING US TO CHARITY

This is the way that God's inspirations come. They attract us and move us to sacred love. If we accept them, they go with us and push us forward. If we do not abandon them, they will not abandon us, until they bring us to holy charity. They perform the three duties which the angel Raphael did for Tobias:

1. They guide us through our entire journey.
2. They preserve us from danger and from Satan's assaults.
3. They console and strengthen us in difficulties.

2.22 A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF CHARITY

So, Theotimus, you can see the long journey by which God leads the soul out of the Egypt of sin and into the promised land of holy charity, which is a friendship, a disinterested love. By charity, we love God for his own sake because of his sovereign goodness.

A MUTUAL LOVE

This friendship is true and reciprocal. From eternity, God has loved those who will love him in time. Our love is mutual. God knows the love we have for him (He gave it to us) and we know that God loves us. He has said it openly and we acknowledge that all we have comes from his goodness. We can continually talk with God who never ceases to speak in our hearts by inspirations and attractions.

Revealing His Secrets

He has openly revealed his secrets to his confidential friends. His crowning gift is himself, as our food in the Eucharist. For ourselves, we have continual freedom to speak with him in prayer, whenever we wish. Our whole being is with him, in him and by him.

CHOOSING TO LOVE IN A SPECIAL WAY

When we choose to love God with a special love, we have a friendship of dilection. He "stands out among thousands." (Song 5:10), in an incomparable love. Charity loves God with an esteem above all others, with a love that is infinitely more than any other love. No human or angelic power can produce this love. The Holy Spirit himself "pours it into our hearts." (Rom 5:5) Our souls give life to our bodies but the soul does not come from the body. So, charity gives life to our souls but this power does not come from our soul. Charity is a heavenly wine poured out by God's supernatural providence.

BASED IN SUPERNATURAL KNOWLEDGE

Charity does not tend to God by natural knowledge of his goodness. Charity is a supernatural knowledge based upon faith. Charity, together with faith and hope, resides in the summit of the soul. She is the queen, seated on her throne. There, she gives her delights to the soul and makes the soul open to God's goodness. The soul has the Holy Spirit as king and charity is its queen, who "sits at his right hand clothed in gold". (Ps45:10) Charity is the sun which warms both the body and the soul.

Charity is a friendship which is incomparable and supernatural. The rays of charity perfect all the spiritual faculties. It sits on the throne of the will to make the soul love God above all things. "All good things come together with charity." (Wis7:11)

PROGRESS AND PERFECTION OF LOVE

3.1 THAT HOLY LOVE BE INCREASED IN ALL

The Council of Trent says that by their good works, God's friends can increase the grace received from God.

Scripture says:

"The righteous must still do right and the holy still be holy." (Rev.22:11)

"The path of the just goes forward like a shining light and increases until perfect day." (Pr4:18)

"We should grow in every way into him, who is the head." (Eph.4:15)

"I pray that your love may increase more and more." (Phil 1:9)

Growth or Decline

All living creatures either grow or decline. Whoever does not ascend, must descend. We live among dangers and if we do not resist, we will perish. Our resisting leads to overcoming and victory. "Man never continues in the same state." (Job.14:2) Paul writes, "All run but only one gains the prize. So, run that you may attain." (1Cor9:24) Jesus Christ is the prize. Follow him and you will attain him. To follow, you must run continually, because he has finished his course on the cross.

ALWAYS WALKING

So, Theotimus, you must walk with the Savior as long as you live. Run ardently and swiftly. Following him is not enough. You must take hold of him.

"I have inclined my heart to do your will forever." The psalmist says "forever", not only for a time. (Ps.119:112) To gain an eternal reward, you must desire to do good eternally. "Blessed are those who walk in the way of the Lord." (Ps 119:112) Accursed are those who do not walk that way. We are on the way and we cannot enter by sitting down. We enter only by making our way. God said to Abraham, "Walk before me and be perfect." (Gen 17:1)

LIMITED BY OUR CAPACITY

Charity has no limits because God is infinite. If the human heart was infinite, its love would be infinite. Only the will's capacity prevents a soul from loving God as much as he is loveable. To love God as God loves us, the heart would need an infinite will (which only God has).

Charity can become more excellent in us, but never infinite, because the Holy Spirit's actions in our hearts are not infinite. The Redeemer's charity is greater than we can understand, but it was not infinite in itself, but only in its merit.

It is in the soul's greatest honor that it can grow in charity. All during human life, "Ascending by steps, from virtue to virtue". (Ps 84:6)

3.2 HOW EASY THE SAVIOR HAS MADE THIS INCREASE OF LOVE

When a holy person gives a glass of water or some bread, it seems like a little act. Yet God sees it and rewards it by an increase of charity. Little actions flowing from charity always acquire merit.

In a charitable soul, God sees both the excellent actions and the little ones, and by both, he increases charity. I say "God increases charity" because charity is not like a tree which produces its own growth. Faith, hope and charity come only from God. God alone gives increase and perfection.

Hearts Turned Upward

Having received these three from heaven, we must always keep our hearts turned upward to increase these virtues. The Church prays for "an increase in faith, hope and charity." The disciples asked, "Lord, increase our faith." (Lk.17:5) St. Paul wrote, "God can make every grace abundant for you." (2Cor9:8) When we use these graces, God makes them increase. "To him that has, even more will be given." (Mt 13:12) Jesus said, "Lay up treasures for ourselves in heaven." (Mt 6:20) The good works of fasting, prayers and alms are the coins of the kingdom.

Treasures become great by adding many small pieces (as the widow's mite). The least good work (even done without great fervor) is esteemed by God. Works cannot increase love but God (from his goodness) values these works. So, he increases charity and bestows heavenly glory.

Honey and Wax

Bees make a delicious honey, but they also make wax (which is of some worth). A loving heart brings forth the great works (honey) and also the little works (wax). God rewards all and loves us a little more because of them. The Council of Trent said that our original grace is always increased by good works. These are not just signs that we have charity, but they cause charity to increase.

The Council says that original grace grows greater by good works, meaning all good works, fervent or less-fervent, large or small. All increase charity. God's sweetness makes all our actions profitable and for our advantage. All works are for our gain.

Little works do not increase moral virtues, because someone with great generosity who gives only small gifts will lose his virtue of liberality. However, actions which come from God's charity always give increase. Everything great or small is loveable to Sacred Love. Everything about the balm tree has an aromatic smell. So, all that love brings forth tends to love.

3.3 HOW A SOUL MAKES PROGRESS IN CHARITY

Let me propose a parable about a soul who falls into sin.

A doctor espouses a young princess and brings her into his home for a conversation. Suddenly, she experiences a heart attack and dies. Because she is so dear to him, his love gives him strength to remedy the attack and revive her. When she regains her senses, she begins to stand and walk quietly with him, always with his help. He continues to sustain her until she regains her strength and can walk alone. He continues to stay by her side, fulfilling four duties:

1. He shows his love for her.
2. He continues to offer help.
3. He sustains her if she feels faint again.
4. He supports her if she walks on uneven terrain.

The soul in grace is the Savior's spouse. He quickly brings her into his home. Although honored, the soul commits sin, and falls as if dead. This is an unexpected accident. Who would think that the creature would forsake the Creator? Truly, the heavens are surprised by this. However, God runs to the soul's help. By remorse of conscience, God opens the gates of her heart. He restores the soul and leads her back. He does this without any action on her part. As the bride could not wake herself up from the spell, so, without God, the soul will remain lost in her sin. After God's mercy, she begins to consent to his actions and accepts his help. God leads her through various actions of faith, hope and repentance, until He restores the spiritual health of charity. As she begins to walk, He sustains her, allowing her to do what she is able. "By the grace of God, I am what I am." (1Cor15:10) Perfectly restored by the infused charity of the Holy Spirit, she can walk by herself. Yet she gives glory to God who has given her such vigorous health.

God's Four Helps

Certainly, by this charity we can walk in God's presence and make progress to salvation. Yet God always holds our hand in four special ways:

1. He manifests his love to us.
2. He animates us more and more.
3. He supports us against evil habits from previous sins.
4. He supports us against temptations.

By infused charity, God does not let us walk alone. He is on our path. By repeated inspirations, He urges us to use the charity which He has given us. He says to us, "Do not receive the grace of God in vain." (2Cor 6:1) "Let us work to do good to all men." (Gal6:10) "Walk before me and be perfect." (Gen 17:1)

EXTRAORDINARY TASKS

God's special assistance of charity is needed for extraordinary enterprises. For a weak charity strengthens us enough so we can gain our salvation, but to undertake extraordinary actions, our heavenly lover must push us and raise us. Otherwise, we could not ascend or go so quickly.

Saintly Examples

Look at St. Anthony going into the desert; at St. Theresa of Avila living her vow of obedience; at St. Francis and St. Louis making long journeys; at St. Frances Xavier preaching in India; at St. Charles serving the plague-stricken. These saints needed more than ordinary charity. They needed special lights and forces which pushed them to extraordinary exploits.

In the gospel, Christ loved the young man because he had charity. However, he never had thought of selling everything to follow Our Savior. Christ gave him a powerful inspiration. However, he did not have the courage to act.

In extraordinary temptations, a special heavenly help is also necessary. The Church prays “Begin our actions by your holy inspirations and further them by your constant help.” “Oh, Lord, make haste to help us.” Such prayers gain grace to do extraordinary works and also to do ordinary works more frequently.

Power Against Temptations

We must constantly resist small temptations and boldly combat the greatest ones. A legion of devils assailed St. Anthony, sustaining their attacks for a long time and with great torment. Then, his cell roof burst open and heaven’s ray made the darksome enemy troops vanish in a moment. Perceiving God’s presence, Anthony asked, “O good Jesus, where were you? Why were you not here from the beginning to relieve my pain? He answered, “Anthony, I was here awaiting the outcome of the combat. Because you acted valiantly, I will be your continual aid.” On another occasion, Anthony was beset by the devil of fornication. To overcome this, he would sing Psalm 118, “The Lord is my helper and I will triumph over my enemies.”

Our Savior told St. Catherine of Sienna that He was in her heart during a cruel temptation. She was like a captain who held the fort, but without God’s help she would have lost the battle. Jacob said, “It is the angel that delivers from all evil.” (Gen.48:16) The Psalmist says, “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall want for nothing.” (Ps.23) We must frequently repeat, “Your mercy will follow me all the days of my life.” (Ps 23)

3.4 PERSEVERANCE IN SACRED LOVE

A tender mother supports her little baby when he needs her, and lets him go when he wants to venture a step or two. Sometimes she takes his hand and sometimes she lifts him up. By the state of charity, Our Lord does the same. He lets us free, but when we need him, he supports us. “I am the Lord your God who takes you by the hand. Fear not. I have helped you.” (Is 41:13) Let us trust God’s assistance. If we yield to his grace, he will accomplish our salvation. “For God is the one who works in you, both to will and to accomplish.” (Phil 2:13)

Perseverance

This fidelity, which God bestows until its final perfection (the hours of our death), is the gift of perseverance to which the Savior promises eternal glory. “Whoever perseveres to the end will be saved.” (Mt 10:22) Final perseverance is a combination of various helps and consolations by which we are faithful

to God until the end. A child needs education, training, helps and services. The parents give these until the child grows and reaches maturity. So, likewise, is the gift of perseverance.

Conversion and Perseverance

This continuing help is not equal in all. For those converted right before death, (such as the good thief), the help is short. There was the soldier who saw one of the forty martyrs forsake his crown. He took his place. This happens often. Souls die in grace after a misspent life. They don't need much help. Their beginning gift of charity is also their final perseverance. They arrive at the port without making a voyage. In God's powerful mercy, they finish their pilgrimage in one leap. Their conversion and perseverance are almost the same. Because they attained the goal immediately, the grace can hardly be called perseverance (although we use that name). Other saints, like Anthony, Paul, John the Evangelist, needed a thousand graces of perseverance because of the variety of their trials.

Means of Perseverance

Perseverance is the most desirable gift we can hope for in this life. It comes only from God who alone makes sure that we stand, and who helps us when we fall. We must ask for it incessantly and use the means the Savior has taught – prayer, fasting, almsgiving, using the sacraments, keeping good company, and reading the Scriptures.

We have the power to persevere because God gives prayer and devotion to those following divine inspirations. Perseverance is the most precious gift of God's mercy. It does not come from our power. However, it is within our power, because heavenly grace is never lacking to the will. Paul wrote, "I am convinced that neither death or life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present or things to come...nor any creature can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. (Rom 8:38-39) No creature can snatch us from holy love, by whose power alone we can abandon our own will and do God's will.

Hope

We must place all our hope in God. If we accept his grace, He will perfect the good work He has begun in us. Jesus said to the paralytic, "Go and sin no more." He must have given the man the power to do so. God, who exhorts us to perseverance, undoubtedly also gives us the help.

Jesus said, "Be faithful to death and I will give you the crown of life." (Rev. 2:10) Paul writes, "Stand firm in faith, be courageous, be strong." (1 Cor 16:13) and "Run so you may attain." (1Cor 9:24)

We must demand this gift from God, and be filled with hope that He will grant it. "Do not cast me off in old age. When my strength fails, forsake me not." (Ps 71:9)

3.5 HAPPINESS OF DYING IN HEAVENLY CHARITY

The heavenly king brings the soul to life's end, and to the marriage bed of eternal glory. This is the fruit of perseverance. The soul is ravished when God shows her all the favors she has received in her earthly

journey. She thanks him for his hand which supported her and says publicly that she has heavenly happiness only because the Savior led her up the ladder.

She says, “Lord, you guided my way. You fed me with the sacraments and clothed me with the wedding garment of charity. You led me into this house of glory so that I could proclaim that you are God, forever and ever. You held me by the right hand, led me by your will and received me by your glory.” (Ps 73:24) Divine Providence provided this journey to eternal life from all eternity and gave grace after grace, according to the soul’s needs.

After Adam’s sin, God willed that all men should be saved by means in accord with their free will. So, He willed the salvation of all who would cooperate and he prepared graces for this purpose.

The Order of Graces

The first grace is vocation, a call to eternal life which we can choose to accept or reject. If accepted, He provides repentance. To those who repented, He gives charity. To those with charity, he provides perseverance. Then He gives final perseverance, followed by eternal glory.

This is the order of Divine Providence. From this order came our call, then our obedience to the call, then repentance, then charity, then merits, and then glory. Glory is the tip of this ladder which leads into the Father’s bosom where he receives the elect. The bottom of the ladder is placed in the pierced side of Christ on the cross.

This order was established by God’s eternal will. The Church prays, “O God, you are merciful to all those whom you foresee will be yours by faith and good works.” God’s mercy is directed toward those whom divine Wisdom foresaw would obey their call and attain that living faith which acts from charity.

The Cross, the Tree of Life

All these effects depend on Our Savior’s death on the cross. This is the tree of life and we are spiritual grafts on his tree. If we remain as grafts, we shall bear fruit, a life of grace which becomes the life of glory. If we interrupt the process and break the effects of his mercy, it makes sense that we will be cut off and cast into the eternal fire.

God prepared heaven for those whom He knew would be his. Let us then be his and He will be ours in glory! This is now within our power. To be God is God’s gift. Yet God denies this gift to no one. He offers it to all and gives it to whoever consents. See how ardently God wants you to be his! He made himself totally ours. He gave his life to save us from death. He accepted death to give us eternal life. Let us belong to God on earth, so we can be his in heaven.

3.6 WE CANNOT ATTAIN PERFECT UNION IN THIS LIFE

“O God, you have created my heart for yourself, and it will not rest until it rests in you.” (St. Augustine) “What do I have in heaven and, besides you, what do I desire on earth?” (Ps 73:25) This union which we seek cannot be gained on earth. We begin our love here, but we do not consummate it here.

The Bride’s Plan

The bride says, “When I found him whom I loved, I held him. I will not let him go until I bring him into my mother’s house and into the bedroom where she conceived me.” (Song 3:4) She finds him. By consolation, she feels his presence. By her strong emotions, she holds him. She says she will never let him go. Even so, she will not enjoy the nuptial kiss until they are in her mother’s house, (which is heaven).

See how this bride thinks. She wants her beloved to be at her mercy, a slave of love. She thinks she can lead him at will into her mother’s house. Really, he must lead her. By amorous passion, the soul can wound Jesus. The bridegroom says, “You have wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse”, acknowledging that he is a prisoner of love.

The Perfect Joining

The perfect joining of the soul with God happens only in heaven. Heaven is the wedding feast of the Lamb. On earth, the soul is espoused and betrothed, but not married. The promise is given, but the marriage is put off. Unfortunately, earth is a time when we can withdraw. Our spouse never abandons us, but we can force him to withdraw by our unfaithfulness. Only in heaven is the marriage of divine union eternally indissoluble.

While we await this great kiss of indissoluble union, our spouse gives us a thousand kisses by feelings of his delightful presence. If he did not kiss the soul, it would not be drawn nor would she run after his perfume. She desires many kisses. “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.” (Song 1:1) These little kisses prepare for the eternal kiss. They make a soul seek the solemn, eternal marriage kiss of heaven. In comparison, all the other kisses do not even deserve the name. They are only signs of the future union.

3.7 THE CHARITY OF SAINTS IN THIS LIFE CAN SURPASS SOME IN HEAVEN

After the labors of this life, souls arrive safely in heaven. They ascend to the highest love they can possibly attain. This is given “in abundance, pressed down and running over.” (Lk 6:38) God gives a reward far greater than the love we have merited.

Love in Heaven

Each soul has a greater love in heaven than they had on earth and they will use this love better than anyone on earth. They will love incessantly, without any intermission. On earth, even the greatest saints have a thousand necessities, distracting them from holy love.

In heaven, the blessed are constant in their love, which cannot decrease or be lost. Their intention is totally pure and free. Their happiness is unchangeable and incomparable. Who would suffer many trials and not prefer the delights of being in a royal palace?

Greater Charity

Souls in heaven enjoy a greater perfection of love than we on earth. Yet, some people have been so helpful on earth, that their charity is greater than some people in heaven. The charity of St. Peter, St. Paul or the other apostles was certainly greater (even while on earth), than the charity of little children who die young.

Usually, soldiers are more valiant than shepherds, yet the shepherd David was more valiant than all of Saul's soldiers. Usually, ordinary mortals do not have more charity than immortals. Yet some, although they enjoy God's love less (because on earth), surpass some in heaven in charity. So, a child in heaven has more light in his understanding, but St. Peter and St. Paul have more fire of charity.

3.8 OUR LADY'S INCOMPARABLE LOVE

Our virgin mother cannot be compared with any saint or angel. She is the daughter of dilection, the only dove and all-perfect spouse. Her charity surpassed even that of the Seraphim. "You surpassed them all." (Pr. 31:29) If the saints and angels are stars, she is the moon.

Our Lady's Charity

Her charity excels all the saints, and even in this life she used it more perfectly. She never sinned. She did not delay love. She went only from love to love. The sensual appetites could not oppose her love, so it reigned peacefully and with all pleasure. Her virginity was greater than the angels. Her spirit was anointed by the Lord and her maternal love was active and ardent.

Even her sleep was a sleep of love. Her spouse says, "I adjure you not to awake my beloved until she pleases." (Song 2:7) She gave rest to her body only so it could better serve. A Christian loves because we belong to Christ, especially after being consecrated by Baptism and Confirmation. How the Blessed Virgin must have loved her body! It was a pure body, obedient to divine love. Her body was the living source of the savior's body and belonged to him.

Her Dreams

Even her dreams came from the love which she enjoyed during her waking hours. St. John Chrysostom told his people, "Even in my sleep, my love for you excites my mind and, in my dreams, I preach to you. I think at night what I love during the day."

What dreams Mary must have had! She slept, but her heart watched. She dreamed that Jesus was still in her womb, feeding at her breasts, or asleep in her arms. Later, she slept in his pierced side, like a dove in a safe rock. Her sleep was an ecstasy of the spirit, while refreshing her body. She dreamed of her future greatness, "clothed with the sun, crowned with stars and the moon under her feet" (Gen 37 and Rev

12:1) She would be surrounded by her son's glory, and crowned with the saints. She saw the redemption which would benefit angels and men. Who can imagine the immensity of her delights?

The Use of Her Faculties

In her sleep, she retained the use of reason. The bible records Solomon, in his dream, asking God for wisdom. How much more would Mary have her heart be watchful, even while she slept. Did not John the Baptist have the use of reason in Elizabeth's womb? Surely, the mother of God had an even greater use of her faculties.

This virgin mother's heart remained perpetually inflamed with holy love, an inextinguishable fire which could only increase. These flames could never lessen or even remain the same. They enjoyed inevitable increase. She is truly the "Mother of fair love".

3.9 PREPARING FOR UNION WITH GOD

The triumphant love of saints in heaven is final, unchangeable and in eternal union with God. The senses seek enjoyment. If an object is beautiful, the eye seeks it. If the music is pleasant, the ear seeks it. According to its excellence, every object has a power over the according to the sense's capacity. The eye cannot look straight at the sun and the ear turns away from loud music.

Delights of Truth

Our understanding seeks to know truth and the more excellent truths have greater attraction. The philosophers enjoyed knowing nature's truths, and they would abandon much to enjoy these delights. Aristotle said that human happiness lies in knowing the most excellent truths. O God, what delights our spirit has when we begin to enjoy the truths of faith! The soul hears the voice of the spouse, more delightful than all human delights.

The Glory of Faith

We certainly have knowledge of God through his creatures, but this is like looking at God's feet. Faith gazes at his face. Earth is just daybreak and we do not see his face in full glory. Jacob cried out, "I have seen God face to face" (Gen 32:30), yet his view of heaven was very limited. Faith explains the beginning and purpose of all creation. By faith, we know the eternal Word by whom all things were made. We know the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. May they be blessed forever! "The learned philosophers never knew these secrets and the eloquent speakers were in ignorance of them." (St. Jerome) The disciples at Emmaus said, "Were not our hearts burning within us as he spoke on the way?" (Lk 24:32) Faith had given them flames of divine love. If divine truths are delightful in the obscure light of faith, what shall they be in full, eternal glory?

Unable to Conceive What is Believed

Hearing of Solomon's wisdom, the Queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem. After hearing his words, she was astonished by what she saw and experienced. When we arrive at the heavenly Jerusalem, we will see Jesus, the great king, with his incomprehensible brightness of the eternal secrets. Our understanding will

actually see what it believed on earth. What raptures and ecstasies will occur! We cannot even conceive the delight of what we shall see. We believe, O city of God, all the great things said about you. However, we have no idea of your delights.

3.10 OUR DESIRES FOR GOD WILL INCREASE OUR ENJOYMENT OF HIM

When finally we possess the object, desire will intensify our enjoyment. The more urgent the desire, the more agreeable the possession. If God is our only desire, what pleasure we will have in seeing God's face.

Unquenchable Thirst

Earthly pleasures cannot quench our thirst. If sought too much, they suffocate us. Yet we desire them to be extreme, even though they are excessive and hurtful. After conquering the world, Alexander the Great was told that other worlds existed. He began to weep. He had possession of the whole world and was not satisfied. Instead, he weeps for imagined worlds. Can anything quench the thirst of the human heart? Yet, this unrest is wonderful. O, my soul, be without rest until you meet the eternal waters of God, Who alone can satisfy your thirst.

Plunged Into God

The psalms speak of a deer, beset by the hounds. Out of breath, he plunges into the waters, wanting to be dissolved to enjoy their coolness. In heaven, our souls will plunge into God. Our infinite desires, never assuaged in this world, will dissolve into their powerful source.

We will be like hungry children next to our mother, burying ourselves in her breasts and sucking everything out. The soul thirsting for the true good, finds its inexhaustible source in God alone. What joy to be joined to the breasts of the All-goodness, and having them totally enter into us.

3.11 THE WOMAN IN THE VISION OF GOD

Although objects are present to us, our eyes grasp only their image. This is sense knowledge.

Images of Faith

These images begin in the exterior senses, enter into the interior senses, come to the imagination, and then enter the intellect. To become intelligible, the image must be purified of its sensible qualities.

This is also how we even understand the things of faith. Our understanding is like the mirror which contains only an image of the thing, which then enters in the person's eye. So, the word of faith only has images of spiritual realities. The word produces an image in the believer's mind. By God's grace, the soul understands this image. The will delights on it. So, on earth, the truths of faith are present in the intellect as sensible things are present in a mirror. Paul writes, "We see as in a mirror." (1 Cor 13:12)

No Images

In heaven, there are no images. God unites himself directly to our intellect and makes Himself present. We will enjoy God's inward presence, not an image. What a delight to have our intellect united directly with God. We will not have a picture of God but God himself. God will feed us his very substance by the mouth of our intellect, as if a mother, instead of milk, were able to give herself as food.

Not content with this, God will enter our souls by his substance. We will understand his essence and delight in His eternal substance. God fulfills his promises, "I will lead her into the wilderness and I will speak to her heart." (Hosea 2:14) and "Rejoice with Jerusalem that you may be filled with the breasts of her consolations." (Is 66:10-12) God promises this infinite happiness and pledges it in the Blessed Sacrament. Our bodily mouth receives his flesh and blood, His very substance, so we can be assured that his own divine essence will be the heavenly feast of glory. In Holy Communion, God does this favor secretly, under sacramental appearances. In heaven, God gives himself openly and we see him face to face.

3.12 SEE THE ETERNAL BIRTH OF THE SON FROM THE FATHER

Our understanding shall see God himself, face to face. It will have a view of his true and real presence. We will see the divine essence and the infinite beauties of God's power, goodness and wisdom.

Seeing the Word Come Forth

Our intellect will see God's infinite knowledge, a knowledge which he has of his own beauty and expresses in his Eternal Word. This Word is infinite speech, representing all of the Father's perfection. This is the one, same God without division or separation.

We shall see the eternal generation of the Word, by which He is eternally born to the Father's likeness, an image not represented by earthly qualities. God is all substance. He is interior. Nothing is exterior.

The Father's Perfect Image

The Son is a perfect image, the same God as the Father, with a distinction only of Persons. He fully represents God's life and infinite perfections, because He himself is infinitely perfect, one God with the Father, with the Father with only a distinction of persons. This distinction is necessary because the Father pronounces and the Son is pronounced. The Father speaks and the Son is the Word. The Father is Father and the Son is Son, two distinct persons but one Divinity. God is one, but He is not alone. He is one because He is God. He is not alone because He is Father and Son. O, Theotimus, in heaven we will celebrate this eternal birth by seeing it.

St. Bernard's Dream

When St. Bernard was a little boy, he fell asleep before Christmas Mass. In his dream, he saw a distinct and clear vision of how the Son of God took a human nature and became a little child in his mother's womb. Jesus, born of a virgin, was "Like a bridegroom coming forth from the bridal chamber." (Ps 19:6)

This vision filled St. Bernard's heart with such spiritual delight that he experienced it all his life, constantly receiving thousands of consolations and always speaking about his Master's birth.

Theotimus, I ask you. If a vision of Jesus' human birth so greatly delights a child's heart, what shall it be like when we see the eternal birth of the Son proceeding from the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God? We will take incomparable pleasure, and give it our unchangeable attention.

3.16 THE VISION OF THE PROCEEDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Father sees that he has perfectly expressed his infinite goodness in his Son. The Son also sees that the Father is the source of his infinite goodness. Seeing this, the Father and Son mutually love one another with an infinite love.

Love makes people equal and united (even when they are not). However, the Father and Son are equal and united from all eternity. They are the one God, one goodness, and one unity. How much they love one another!

Divine Love

This is not the love which human beings have for one another, or even their love for God. Human love has many different moments which succeed one another and makes love seem continuous. The love of the Father and Son is uncreated, and happens just once in all its fullness.

The goodness of the Father and Son is a perfect goodness which both enjoy. The two lovers (Father and Son) have only one love. They have one goodness (common to both) and one love (common to both). Therefore, only one love exists. The Father breathes this love by the same will as the Son. Their love is one Spirit, breathed by two breathers.

The Breath of the Father and Son

Both the Father and the Son have an infinite essence and will. Because their mutual breathing must be infinite, the breath itself must be God. Therefore, this breath of the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit, the only true God with the Father and the Son. This love comes mutually from the Father and the Son. This breath is not the Father or the Son, but a third Person, a Person who is God with the Father and the Son. Because this love comes from their breathings, we call the Person, the Holy Spirit.

An Infinite Friendship

The Psalm says, "How good and pleasant that brothers live in unity", (Ps 133) If human friendships are so "good and pleasant", what is the mutual love between the Father and the Son?

If we so desire human friendship how much we should desire the infinite friendship between the Father and the Son, which is the Holy Spirit himself. Someday, our hearts will be lost in the love that the eternal Father and his Son practice eternally.

3.17 THE HOLY LIGHT OF GLORY UNITES THE BLESSED WITH GOD

In heaven, our created understanding will see God's essence directly, without any images. We will receive God's light which will elevate our intellect to the highest level and to the most resplendent object.

Seeing God's Essence

An owl can see in the obscure light of night, but the noonday sun is too brilliant for its weak eyes. So, our understanding can see natural truths. We even see supernatural truths by the light of faith. However, even by grace, we cannot see God's essence in itself. Therefore, God does not show us his essence until He prepares our intellect to receive this view of his Divinity.

The sun presents itself to us through its rays. We see the sunlight, not the sun itself. What a difference between sunlight and God's light in heaven! The sun's rays cannot strengthen our eyes. They only blind our weak vision. However, when God's sacred light finds our intellect unable to see God, it strengthens and perfects our intellect by some incomprehensible power. Then, we can see God's brightness with a steady gaze. God's infinite greatness will not dazzle or turn back our sight.

Plunged Into God's Ocean

By our light of reason we know God as Creator. By the light of faith, we see God as the source of all blessings. By the light of heaven we will contemplate him as the fountain of eternal life. In heaven, we will not see this fountain from far off, but we will be plunged into it and swallowed up by it.

Deep-sea divers must use masks and light so they can see in the water. Our souls, plunged into the ocean of God, will have God's light of glory to see him in inaccessible light. "In your light, we see light itself." (Ps 36:10)

3.15 DIFFERENT DEGREES OF UNION

This light of glory, given by God, also measures and limits our seeing God. The more glory we have, the more we shall see God and enjoy greater happiness. Every soul in heaven sees all of God's essence, yet no one sees it entirely. God is indivisible and when we see him, we see him all. However, He is also infinite, so no one can ever comprehend his infinite goodness.

Everyone can see the sun's light, but no one can see it all. We can hear beautiful music, but some are trained and hear it with more delight, because their capacity is greater.

Our Limited Capacity

In the desert, everyone ate the manna but no one exhausted the manna's flavor. In heaven, we will see and taste God, but no one can see and taste God totally. God's perfections are infinitely greater than our capacity to enjoy them. What an unspeakable joy, to fulfill all our heart's desires and to enjoy God fully. Yet, God still has more infinite perfections for us to see, enjoy and possess.

Fish enjoy the vastness of the sea, but fish cannot fly to the sky. Yet, our souls will swim freely in God's ocean and fly in the Divine sky. God's ocean is so vast and his sky is so infinite, that our soul will enjoy God's infinite abyss forever. Even so, what we have not enjoyed will remain infinitely beyond their capacity.

Two Infinite Beauties

Our souls will be ravished by two beauties, the infinite beauty which they see and the infinite beauty which they are yet to see. How beautiful is what they see and also what they have not yet seen. They rejoice in the infinite beauty which satisfies them totally. They also rejoice in the infinite beauty which they cannot see. Such is the infinite beauty of God.

DECAY AND RUIN OF CHARITY

4.1 ON EARTH, WE CAN LOSE OUR LOVE OF GOD

God confirms some great elect souls, and these have no danger of losing God's love. I write now for the rest of us, to whom the Holy Spirit addresses these warnings:

1. Whoever thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall. (1 Cor 10:12)
2. Hold fast to what you have, so no one can take away your crown. (Rev.3:11)
3. Be eager to make your call and election permanent. (2 Pet. 1:10)
4. Take not your spirit away from me. (Ps 51:13)
5. Work out your salvation in fear and trembling. (Phil 2:12)
- 6.

Examples of Failure

We are not stronger than Lucifer, nor more constant than Judas, both of whom lost God's love. God gave wisdom to Solomon, but his salvation is in doubt. Adam, Eve, David and Peter, all fell from divine love (and endangered their salvation). Who has any assurance that they will navigate this mortal life safely, without moral shipwreck?

How can a soul lose God's love? Does not this love resist sin? Is it not strong as death and relentless as the netherworld." (Song 8:6) How can sin vanquish love? How can a rational person who relishes heavenly love, swallow the bitter waters of sin? How can the soul joined to God, abandon him for the creature?

"The heavens themselves are astonished." (Jer 2:12) The angels are amazed that man's heart can abandon what is worthy for what is unworthy. This happens all the time but we cannot see why. A full barrel of wine, when pierced, will not empty out. It has no space for air. A barrel with a void will empty immediately. On earth, we are all like the second barrel. None of us is so full of heavenly love that love cannot empty out.

Heaven is different from earth. In heaven, God's beauty will fill our understanding and his goodness will saturate our wills. No object can draw us out of the heavenly wine. No air can enter. No deceit is possible. God's embrace holds us securely.

A Mixed Love

Purified wine does not spoil, but a wine mixed with impurities is in continual danger of being spoiled. On earth, our souls are mixed with a thousand moods and weaknesses. Our love easily changes and is spoiled.

In heaven, our love will be purified wine, inseparably united to God. On earth, the bridegroom has not yet come and we can always become deceived. In heaven, God's light is too clear for deception, and we will be powerless to unfasten ourselves from God's love.

Our Imperfect Knowledge

At the bottom of the sea, the coral is pale green and weak. At the surface, it becomes unbending and red. Here on earth, we can be bent, to the right by heavenly love and to the left by earthly temptation. Once we arrive at heaven our trembling hopes (pale green) become infinite enjoyment (bright red) and we are rooted forever in eternal love.

If you see God, you will love him. On earth, we do not see him. We glimpse him through the clouds of faith. We see him as in a mirror. Our knowledge is not perfect and we can be deceived by false goals. These are like little foxes that demolish our flourishing vineyards. Unfortunately, Divine love is a wedding garment which we can keep by goodness or take off by sin.

4.2 GROWING COLD IN HOLY LOVE

Power of Venial Sins

Sometimes our limbs might be paralyzed, but our soul still dwells in our whole body. So, love can dwell in our soul even when the desires of love are paralyzed. Venial sins cover love's fire with ashes. They smother its flames, but do not extinguish it. Venial sins deprive love of its activity, making it a sterile and fruitless love.

Venial sins and attachments to venial sins are not contrary to love's essence. We still prefer God before all things, but we are bound too much to creatures. While not forsaking heavenly things, we occupy ourselves with earthly things. Venial sin does not destroy love (either totally or partially) but it impedes love.

Venial and Mortal Sin

To the Church of Ephesus, Jesus said, "You have lost the love you had at first." (Rev.2:4) They were not without love, but they had lost their beginning fervor. They were no longer prompt, growing or fruitful. When a bright, cheery person becomes sad, we say "He is not the same person." He is certainly the same in his substance but not in his actions.

Jesus said that “love will become cold.” (Mt 24:12). It will not be courageous or active. James writes “When desire conceives, it brings forth sin.” When sin reaches maturity it gives birth to death.” (1:15) In this text, James establishes the difference between mortal and venial sin. Venial sin does not cause the soul’s death. Only mature sin, done in malice, causes spiritual death.

However, venial sin weakens charity, and goes against love’s intention of directing all our actions to God. Venial sins direct our actions, not against God, but outside of God’s will. If a storm strips a tree bare, we say “Nothing is left of it. There are no fruit, or limbs. So, when the storm of venial sins strike love there are no more fruits or actions.

Charity Must Be Fruitful

Great sins destroyed even the pagan philosophers. Paul wrote, “Although they knew God, they did not give him honor.” (Rom. 1:21) Sinful affections made charity their slave. They hindered freedom and action. Sinful affections attach us to creatures and deprive us of any special intimacy with God. We lose love’s animating power and come to a spiritual paralysis which can bring us to death.

Charity is an active virtue. It either acts or dies. Rachel said to Jacob, “Give me children. Otherwise, I will die.” (Gen 30:1) Charity wants to be fertile. Otherwise, she will die.

Growing Accustomed to Sin

Temptations fill our mortal life. If our hearts are given to pleasures and are not ready for spiritual warfare, we cannot preserve love. By venial sins, souls become disposed to mortal sins.

We are unaware when something is slowly increased. A man who gambles a small amount, accustoms himself to larger wagers. One who allows anger, can become furious. Someone who lies, might move into calumny. A person with weak constitution “has no life” to them. So souls, addicted to pleasures “have no life” because they will soon lose it.

4.3 FORSAKING DIVINE LOVE

By not loving God ceaselessly, the soul forsakes him. We can choose to use or not to use this virtue of charity. If we keep holy love idle (or busy with other goals) it grows weak. When temptations come, they cast their allurements into our hearts and we come to enjoy the temptation. These are thorns which stifle the seeds of heavenly love.

Ensnared and Entangled

Recall Eve’s downfall. She took a certain delight in talking to the serpent, and wanted to advance in knowledge. Then, she saw the beauty of the forbidden fruit. Her delight and her desire entangled her. She gave consent and then drew Adam into her sin.

When pigeons are vain and display all their feathers, falcons can see them and seize them. A proper flight would have assured their safety. So, when souls amuse themselves with passing pleasures, they are in danger of being caught. Unfortunately, we become doves, seduced by self-love, entangled with creatures and ensnared by the falcons of sin.

God allows temptations so that we exercise our love by resisting them. By fighting, we gain victory. By victory, we gain triumph. However, our human nature can be tempted by any good.

John writes about three sources of temptation. (1 Jn. 2:16)

1. The pride of life – seeking the honors given by the world.
2. Concupiscence of the flesh – the delights of the senses.
3. Concupiscence of the eyes – a tendency to wealth.

Faith's Role

By faith, the soul can pursue the good and reject the evil. Faith must be a good sentinel, protecting charity by uncovering all evil so that love can reject it. When our faith is asleep, temptations can surprise love, and lead our senses to rebel in the soul's lower part. When the soul's upper part (reason) yields to this revolt, it commits sin and loses charity.

Absalom led a revolt against his father, King David because the ignorant Israelites accepted his proposals and consented to a rebellion. David and his friends had to abandon Jerusalem, leaving behind Zadok, the prophet, and Abiathar, the priest.

When our faith is weak, self-love seduces our senses and our inner faculties. These work upon the free will and bring about a total rebellion. Like King David, divine love abandons Jerusalem (our soul) with all its friends, (the heavenly virtues) leaving behind only faith (Zadok, the prophet) and hope (Abiathar, the priest). Because these two virtues are sorrowful that love has left, they maintain their covenant with God.

Angels can see the Holy Spirit's love depart from our sinful souls. They repeat Jeremiah's sad canticle over the destroyed Jerusalem, "How lonely she is now, the once crowded city! She is widowed who once was the mistress of nations." (Lam. 1:1)

4.4 HEAVENLY LOVE IS LOST IN A MOMENT

Love of God leads us to contempt of self, but mortal sin leads us to despise God. Love of God makes us citizens of heaven, but one mortal sin banishes holy love, and breaks the union of our will with God's will.

LEAVES AT ONCE

Man's heart cannot live divided. Divine love can never be wounded without being slain. At death, our soul doesn't leave our body little by little. It leaves instantly and the body no longer functions. When the heart is disordered by serious sins, charity abandons the soul and ceases to live there.

However, our habits remain. One intemperate act doesn't make a man intemperate. We acquire habits by a series of actions and we lose them by many contrary acts. Divine love is different. As soon as we are disposed, the Holy Spirit pours love into our hearts. Also, when we complete our consent to sin, holy love is taken away.

INCREASES BY DEGREE

Although Divine love increases by degrees, (by our good works and sacraments), it never decreases and we never lose part of it. We can only lose it all. This love is the Holy Spirit and he cannot withdraw a single piece, without himself departing.

Preferring God above all things comes from the Holy Spirit. Hagar and her son were sent into the wilderness. She put the boy under a shrub and went away a short distance saying "Let me not watch to see the boy die." When free will resolves to offend God, the Spirit leaves, not "wanting to see the child die." Ezekiel wrote, "The one who sins will die." (18:4) .

4.5 ONLY OUR WILL COOLS DIVINE LOVE

Our good works come from the Holy Spirit. Our sins come from ourselves. The Holy Spirit says, "Israel, your destruction is your own." (Hos 13:9) and "God, our Savior, wills that everyone be saved." (1Tim. 2:4)

GRACE IS SUFFICIENT

The Church teaches (Council of Trent) that God's grace is sufficient for those who do all they can. God never abandons someone He has justified, unless the person first abandons God.

A PARABLE

Our Savior is the "true light which enlightens everyone coming into this world." (Jn 1:9) Let me propose a parable: At noon some travelers lay down under a tree to get some rest. Soon, the sun's light awakened them all. Some made their way to their lodging, while others turned their backs to the sun and slept until after dark. When these awakened, it was dark and they could not find the way to their lodging.

All who arrived safely should give thanks to the sun which awakened them in time. Those who did not arrive, could not blame the sun which urged them to seek lodging at the opportune time.

NO COMPLAINTS

These latter cannot complain saying, "Why did he awake our companions and not us? The sun (like God) gave the same light and the same rays to all. These had chosen not to use its light.

Let me apply this parable. On earth, we are all pilgrims. Almost all of us have slept in mortal sin. Yet, God sends the sun rays of his inspirations. How come some follow these inspirations and others do not? Those who followed the rays cannot glorify themselves, because God awakened them. Those who slept have no reason to complain. They are the sole authors of their ruin.

GOD'S LIGHT FOR PAGANS

The Japanese complained to St. Francis Xavier that God had forsaken their forefathers. They had no knowledge of God and were lost. St. Francis responded that God gave them the natural law, engraved in everyone's heart. If they observed this law, God would give them heavenly light. If they violated this law, they deserved damnation. St. Paul wrote that pagans had no excuse. They, too, know good and can follow it. Evil multiplies if the person does not realize that evil comes from themselves.

4.6 LOVE COMES FROM GOD

All of man's love for God comes from God's love for men. All the means to our salvation come only from Our Savior's mercy. To him alone be the glory.

Paul write, "What do you possess which you have not received? If you have received it, why are you boasting?" (1Cor.4:7) We have received all from God. Why should we take glory?

TAKE NO GLORY

People say, "I should take glory for making progress in love." O soul, you were asleep in your sins. You had no strength nor life to rise. God ran to your help. He put his fingers to your lips, unlocked your teeth, and sent the breath of his inspirations. He brought you to your senses. He gave you strength until you responded. After this, he infused love and restored you to health.

What can you boast of? Certainly, you consented and followed heavenly grace. You didn't resist God's work. However, in boasting, you are mistaken. You glory in what you have received. You exalt your own consenting. Tell me, if God did not help you, would you have seen his goodness? Would you have consented to his love? No. You did not have a single thought about him.

WHY BOAST

God gave you being and life. He stirred your free will. He gave you powerful invitations. Otherwise, you could not use your freedom to respond. Even your cooperation came from God touching your free will. If he did not fill your heart, you would have no desire to cooperate.

Why try to share in the glory of your own conversion? Can murderers claim the glory of giving life when they choose not to kill someone? Do you make God's inspirations effective by not resisting? Divine inspirations come from goodness alone.

What if a patient took glory for getting better, when really the doctor should be praised? What if the patient gloried because he could have resisted the medicine? How foolish and ungrateful!

He only allowed the medicine to act. In fact, God woke him from sleep and told him to take the medicine. He even poured it into his soul and waited for his consent. What ingratitude to attribute to self what totally belongs to God!

ALL GLORY TO GOD

An obstacle can prevent a ship from sailing, but it cannot give the ship the power to sail. It can only hinder movement, not bestow it. When God sends wind for our sails, the soul can put up the sails and accept this wind. However, the wind moves the ship, not the sail.

Therefore, Theotimus, if we have Divine love, the glory belongs to God. He accomplished everything and to him is the glory. To us belongs the profit. This is how God divides. He gives us his blessings and He retains the praise. Because all comes from him, all should be for him.

4.7 AVOID ALL CURIOSITY. ACCEPT GOD'S PROVIDENCE

When the weak human spirit wants to look curiously into God's reasons, it gets entangled in a thousand difficulties. By trying to investigate divine things, the soul grows curious and vain. Instead of coming to knowledge, the soul arrives at foolishness.

OUR FALSE QUESTIONING

Divine Providence uses diverse means to draw us into holy love and divine glory. Yet, we inquire why God gives more helps to one than to another.

Theotimus, do not be caught in this mad whirlwind. God's will is totally reasonable and is the rule of all goodness. Scripture explains how God's love leads us to glory. Yet, God wants us to respect his decisions. He is sovereign judge. Only at the end of the world will He reveal his motives.

RESPECT FOR DECISIONS

If Charity demands respect for the decisions of courts and judges, then, what loving reverence we should have for the infinite justice of God! Concerning those who refused to respond to Paul's preaching, scripture says, "You judge yourselves as unworthy of eternal life." (Acts 13:46)

Paul writes, "How incomprehensible are God's judgments and how unsearchable his ways! Who has known the mind of the Lord? "(Rom 11;33-34) Because God's counsels are infinitely above our reach, we should not search out God's motives.

ST. AUGUSTINE'S TEACHINGS

St. Augustine gave many teachings on this topic:

1. Do not judge about whom God draws to himself and why he draws them. "If you are not drawn, then pray to be drawn."
2. God delivers souls from damnation, only by the mercy found in Christ.
3. God condemns souls only by the truth in Christ.
4. Why God delivers one and not another is an unsearchable judgment. God's ways are unknown. "Seek not the things that are too high for you." (Sir.3:22)

NOT EXPLAINED ON EARTH

Sometimes, twins are born. One lives and one dies. This is God's decision. Following Paul and Augustine, we realize that God makes many decisions which He will reveal only in heaven. St. Augustine writes, "In heaven all will be explained. Why was one blessed and another not? People witness the same miracles. Some believe and others don't. Some sinners God raises up, while other sinners remain in their evil." "We cannot understand these. We only know that by him we stand and without him we fall. This is hidden from man's understanding, most of all mine."

THE SAINT'S EXPLANATION

The greatest wisdom comes from St. Bonaventure. "Perhaps God sees ahead of time the good works of these souls. Yet, what works move God's will, I cannot answer. We really cannot answer. We cannot point out the real reason or motive for God's decision." Augustine says, "Certainly some reason exists but our thoughts cannot grasp it."

Really, we can speak with assurance only if God directly reveals. If knowing these reasons does not help our salvation, then our ignorance probably does help. To help our humility, God does not reveal his reasons. Paul exclaimed, "Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom of God." This is the right approach to this holy mystery.

4.8 LET US LOVINGLY SUBMIT TO THE DECISIONS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

We adore the depths of God's judgments because "who can count the sands of the sea or the drops of rain?" "So, who can know the Divine Wisdom which created all things and governs as He pleases?" (St. Gregory Nazienzen) Let us admire God's wisdom and not be overwhelmed by its obscurity.

GOD ORDERS ALL THINGS

Theotimus, our intelligence cannot penetrate the reasons for God's will. We only know that "He orders all things rightly from end to end." (Wis. 8:1) If you entered a clockmaker's shop, you might see a little clock with a hundred pieces. You would wonder how all the parts could be joined together. Although you don't even know what the little pieces are for, the clock's maker knows everything.

GOD CONCEALS HIS SKILL

So, we see human nature, which is composed of so many parts and such diverse actions. We are astonished. God has certainly created our natures, yet we cannot know how each particular movement is ordered to God's purpose, unless God himself reveals this. Usually, he conceals his skill, so we will admire it. In heaven, he will ravish us with his wisdom and we will discover how everything worked toward our eternal salvation.

ADMIRING GOD'S REASONS

When a person is dizzy, they think the room is spinning. Really, it is just their imagination. So, we experience some events and believe they have no reasons. Really, we are ignorant. God is the Maker. His

Providence cares for all and sustains all creatures. Although our life is tossed about with many accidents, God rules our affairs. We don't know why they happen, but we can admire God's sovereign reasons.

If we know things easily, we usually think little of them. What is difficult to know, excites our admiration. If our small minds could grasp God's reasons, we would love them less. "Their distance from our understanding exalts them." (St. Gregory) We cry out, "Oh, the depths of the wisdom of God" because His love is a great abyss. He has provided an abundance of means for our salvation and his infinite knowledge knows exactly how to bestow them. Why do we fear? We are children of a good and rich Father! His only will is to save us. He prepares all the means and knows how to put them into action.

DON'T GET BURNT

Butterflies are attracted by a flame which burns their wings. So don't fill your mind with a curiosity which burns your wings. God's judgments are incomprehensible. No one can search out his motives. He brings souls to perfection by his own ways. No matter how clever we are, we cannot discern. Paul wrote, "Who has known the mind of God?" Our task is not to understand but to walk in holy love. It is enough to know that whoever dies in grace shall live eternally.

4.9 WHEN GRACE IS LOST, THE HUMAN LOVE WHICH REMAINS

On a deathbed, life ebbs away and is already mingled with death. This is a painful sight. Even more painful is to see a soul withdraw from God step-by-step. Having some disloyalty and little devotion, the soul finally forsakes grace and is left in the horrible position of damnation. Love has declined, faded and is about to perish. This is called imperfect love. It is in the soul but not there totally. It will hardly stay any longer. It is about to leave.

DECEIVED BY AN IMAGE

After sin separates grace from the soul, a resemblance of charity stays behind. This image of charity can deceive us. Therefore, I will describe it. Grace produces many actions of love. By these, the soul acquires good habits. These virtues are not divine grace. They just incline our hearts to goodness.

In the beginning of devotion, we gain habits by choice. Afterwards, we perform these actions from habit, not by choice. Grace gives us a facility to love, which remains even after divine grace has been lost by sin. There remains only an apparent image of love.

ONLY AN ECHO

In Paris, we students visited a certain well which gave forth an echo. Because the well had many cavities, we heard the echo ten times. These were only images of our voices. When we spoke a long sentence, they repeated only some words. The echoes spoke with tones quite different from our own voices, because they were not words of a living person. They were a counterfeit.

When divine charity resides in a soul, it also produces a human love. If grace (charity) perishes in the soul, this human love remains. Because Divine grace leaves behind a likeness to charity, the soul might be deceived, thinking that he still possesses grace.

Grace and imperfect love are quite different. Charity keeps all God's commandments, while imperfect love knows all the commandments but keeps only some. Charity is faithful in all the circumstances, but imperfect love overlooks much, especially a right intention. Divine Grace is always steady in things of earth and heaven. Imperfect love seeks too much of earth and too little of heaven, always delaying in its turning to God.

Grace in the soul uses this imperfect love to facilitate her works, but the works belong to divine charity. But when grace is gone, these actions no longer have the value of charity. Elisha's servant had his master's staff, but could work no miracle through it. So, actions done when charity (grace) is absent are just habits of love. They have value for eternal life but this human love (without grace) cannot help the soul to love God above all things.

4.10 THIS IMPERFECT LOVE IS DANGEROUS

I have mentioned that a love in decline, a love that is fading and perishing is called imperfect love. Judas had this love for Jesus after he betrayed him. He returned the money and acknowledged that he had betrayed innocent blood. Judas had an imperfect love which remained after holy charity (grace) had left his soul. We descend by degrees, reaching our lowest point only step by step.

People who sell perfume continue to smell of perfume after leaving their store. So, a soul which has lived among heavenly ointments (grace) will keep the smell for some time. Hound dogs can smell the deer's scent soon after it has left that place. However, as time goes on, even the scent vanishes. For a while, charity (grace) leaves its marks and its scents. Yet, little by little, everything vanishes and the soul loses all knowledge that grace (charity) has been present.

Young people, educated in God's love, remove themselves from that path. Yet, even in their sinful decay, they show signs of the past, the virtues they had acquired while in the state of grace. For a time, they would resist vice, and it was difficult to tell whether they were in grace or outside of grace. Soon, it became clear that their actions came from the past. They were virtues from imperfect love, remnants from the time when charity (grace) had been within them.

A DECEIVING LIGHT

This imperfect love is good, an effect of grace (holy charity). This imperfect love served grace and is ready to serve again, if charity (grace) will return. Imperfect love is like a star compared to the sun (of grace). At the same time, imperfect love is dangerous. We can be contented with the star and not realize that the sun has left us. We think we have grace and are holy, but we deceive ourselves. In this deception, we allow our sins to grow and multiply. In the end, we discover that sin, not charity, is the master of our heart.

THE WRONG WIFE

In Genesis, Jacob wished to marry the beautiful Rachel. However, his father-in-law, Laban, deceived him and gave him his other daughter, Lia. Only in the morning light, did Jacob realize that he was duped.

So, we allow imperfect love to be substituted for holy charity (grace). Only the light shows we have been deceived!

What a pity to see a soul believing that it is holy, when it is not. It remains at peace, as if it were in the state of grace (charity), only to find out that her holiness is a fiction, and her joy is a madness.

4.11 HOW TO DISCERN IMPERFECT LOVE

How do we know if we possess the beautiful Rachel (holy charity) or her sister Lia (imperfect love)? To answer that, just examine what you seek when temptation comes. If you seek what is evil, against God's will, then you have imperfect love and not divine grace. If you had perfect love, you would destroy every desire for whatever was mortally sinful. Your heart would not dare to seek it.

PRESENT TEMPTATIONS

There is no need to imagine future, greater temptations. Just examine your desire in present temptations. Being faithful today is enough. Each part of our lives has its own temptations. Imagining yourself overcoming greater, future temptations, is an illusion. The tribe of Ephraim had great skill in preparing for war, but when actual war came, they lost courage. The psalm says, "They turned back on the day of battle." (78:9)

JUST FIDELITY

If you find within yourself a faithful feeling, then thank God and you will be faithful to him in the future. Yet we should fear our weakness, lest we lose heart. If, however, your despair becomes excessive in these imaginary temptations, make a resolution of great fidelity, hoping that God will multiply his helps and give you all needed assistance.

God does not give you strength for your imaginary temptations, but when real temptations come, He certainly gives you strength. In the middle of an attack, many lose their courage, while others lose their fears. They take heart, and act bravely in a way which they themselves could never have done.

COURAGE WHEN NEEDED

Many times God's servants lose courage while they imagine future temptations, but they act courageously when temptations come.

When Samson saw a young lion about to attack his mother and father "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson and, although he had no weapons, he tore the lion in pieces." (Judges 14:6) So, we do not need a constant feeling of courage. We need only perfect confidence that the Holy Spirit will assist us, as the need arises.

LOVES TWO ACTS – COMPLACENCY AND BENEVOLENCE

6.1 COMPLACENCY OF LOVE

When our hearts move toward the good and experience a delight. Delight is the motive for love. When delight is great, then love is great.

This is how we move toward God. Faith tells us that God is infinite in His goodness. By meditating, we grasp the immensity of that goodness, and see all of God's perfections, like his wisdom, power and goodness.

DELIGHT IN OUR WILLS

As our understanding becomes aware, delight touches our will. Using our freedom, we stir our hearts to increase the delight. We rejoice saying "How beautiful you are, my beloved. You are all-desirable." The bride said, "Such is my lover and he is my friend." (Song 5:16) The soul delights in knowing that God is so rich and so good.

Rejoicing in God's goodness, we make an act of love called desire. We rejoice in God's pleasure infinitely more than in our own. The saints enjoyed this love as they delighted that God was God. "Oh God, you are my God." "You are my Lord. You are my only good." (Ps 16) "God is my portion forever." (Ps 73) By delight, our hearts embrace God and make him our own. By this delight we enjoy the goods that are God's. God is our inheritance and we take all consolations. We spiritually eat and drink the perfections of God, drawing them into our hearts.

TAKING ON GOD'S QUALITIES

Captivated by this delight in God, the soul takes on the qualities of God, and receives all his wonders and perfections. By delighting in God's perfections, the soul makes them her own.

In heaven we will see our Beloved as an infinite sea of goodness. We will place our mouths to this cool stream and be drawn into the cool waters. This is the living spring of God, from which comes all our delight. We shall enjoy these immortal delights and be replenished by them. We will enter with Jesus, our spouse, into his nuptial bed, as he gives eternal joy to our souls.

CLOTHED BY LOVE

Love robes us. Without disrobing him, we are clothed in his robes. Without impoverishing him, we are enriched by his wealth. Air receives the light, but does not weaken the sun's brightness. The mirror accepts the image and does not diminish the person. The soul becomes as lovely as what she loves. St. Clare of Montefalco loved both our Lord's passion and the Trinity. God gave her both the marks of his passion and a representation of the Trinity. Paul loved Christ's passion and carried the wounds in his body. To enter Paul's heart, Jesus used his desires. "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Gal. 4:14) Paul so honored the Savior's passion, that he took pleasure only in this honor. He no longer lived, but Christ lived in him. (Gal. 2:20)

5.2 INFANTS AT THE BREAST

How happy the soul who takes pleasure in knowing that God is God. By this gate of delight, the heavenly spouse enters in. He eats with us and we with him. By taking pleasure in him, we satiate our heart with divine perfections. The supper is followed later by repose. Taking delight in God feeds our heart. Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me.” (Jn 4:34)

GOD’S GARDEN

The spouse says “Let my beloved come into his garden and eat the fruit of the apple tree.” (Song 5:1) The devout soul is God’s garden. “His delight is to be with the children of men.” (Pr 8:31) He plants attractions for his goodness and then delights that we are filled with pleasure. We then perceive that God is delighted with us. This reciprocal pleasure (between God and us) causes incomparable delight. Our soul has been made into God’s garden and we give God his own fruit. God is pleased that the soul is attracted to him and the soul also is pleased. We draw God’s heart into our heart. “The king brought me into his storeroom. We rejoice, remembering his breasts more than wine.” (Song 1:2) These storerooms are the king’s breasts, which abound in delights. The mother’s breasts are the treasure of the infant who has no other riches. They are gold to him. The soul which sees God’s perfections is happy. She has actually become the mistress of her heavenly spouse.

THE MOTHER’S BREASTS

A baby makes little movements to the mother’s breasts. When she reveals them, he dances with joy. The mother gladly moves toward him and presents her breasts. So, the devout soul feels the thrill of incomparable joy in seeing the perfections of the King, especially when He delights to reveal his perfections.

Who enjoys this more? God who reveals or the soul who delights. “We will rejoice in you, remembering your breasts.” (Song 1:3), I rejoice because God enjoys it. God rejoices because I enjoy it. We both enjoy it. How can anyone be good and not love your greatness?

Worldly kings keep their treasures in cabinets and their weapons in arsenals. However, God keeps his treasures of goodness in his bosom and his weapons of love in his breast. A mother’s breasts are two cabinets with rich treasures of sweet milk.

THE FOOD OF LOVE

Nature places the breasts in the bosom, which is close to the heart. Milk is the food of love, far better than wine. Wine is the milk of grapes and milk is the wine of the breasts. Milk represents mystical knowledge, the soul’s delight as it contemplates God’s goodness. Wine represents natural knowledge of God gained by reason. The milk of mystical knowledge is incomparably better than the wine gained by human reasoning. This milk flows from heaven, prepared for the child before he is born.

REJOICING IN GOD’S PERFECTIONS

When Isaac embraced his son, Jacob, he rejoiced in the smell of his garments. “The smell of a field which the Lord has blessed.” (Gen 22:27) Jacob owned the garments, but Isaac enjoyed them. When the

soul smells the perfumes of God's infinite perfections, she says, "How precious are the breasts that spread these perfumes."

Augustine enjoyed contemplating both Jesus' birth and his passion. He cried out, "I do not know where to turn my heart. Mary's breast offers me her milk. Her Son's side gives me to drink of his blood."

5.3 COMPLACENCY GIVES OUR HEART TO GOD

When our heart perceives God's goodness and we are attracted, our love begins. Our will strengthens this attraction and we are drawn to God. God becomes "My beloved to me." (Song 2:2)

POSSESSING GOD'S GOODNESS

By love of attraction, we enjoy God's goodness as if it were our own. God's perfections enter into us. Both God and we possess his goodness. Something thrown into a fire, soon becomes the fire. So, when I am attracted to God, I soon become his love. When God's perfections claim my love, then God's goodness is mine and I am totally his. His delights possess me. Our attractions make us possessors of God and also possessed by God.

HAVING YET DESIRING

Although filled with delights, our soul desires even more. It relishes God, but desires even more to relish him. Peter wrote, "Angels desired to look into the mysteries of Christ." (1Pet 1:12) How can angels, who see God, still desire to see him? Their enjoyment does not remove their desires and their desires increase their enjoyment.

In nature, enjoying something lessens our desires for it. In God, our desires are endless, not lessened by our enjoying. The perfect contentment produces desires which are perfectly content. There is an eternal contentment which is perpetually desired.

FINITE AND INFINITE

Natural good is finite. Once possessed, we no longer desire it. Infinite good is different. We can desire it and possess it at the same time. Our desire for God actually increases when we possess him.

When our will meets God, we capture him by our desires. Even though filled with desires, the human heart still rests, because it needs nothing but God. The souls in hell have no rest at all. They are in eternal movement.

On earth, we sometimes desire and we sometimes rest. The saints in heaven are different. They have desires and rest at the same time. On earth, we do not experience rest in our desires. However, in our attraction for God, we do find rest in our desires and desires in our rest. This is a foretaste of heavenly glory.

Whoever desires God while already possessing him in heaven, desires to enjoy him but has no need to seek Him. The soul wants to increase its enjoyment in what it already has. It desires to take more

enjoyment. We walk into a beautiful garden, but once there, we continue to walk so we can enjoy all the flowers of the garden. As Augustine says, “Love seeks what it has already found, so it can have it always.” (Augustine)

The soul attracted to God cries out, “To die or to live matters little since my beloved lives eternally.” Death cannot trouble such a heart, because the soul lives more in God than in its own body. And God lives in it.

5.4 LOVING CONDOLENCE – LOVE OF COMPASSION

By compassion, we share in the suffering of another. We draw their sorrows into our heart. This love has two effects. The hearts are united and the sorrows are shared. Compassion shows the power of the love of complacency.

COMPASSION’S SOURCE

Compassion takes its greatness from its source, for example, a mother’s love. Hagar grieved over her son, Ismael, dying of thirst. David was saddened by the death of his son, Absalom. St. Paul had a continual sorrow for the Jews, his spiritual children. Mary brought all of Jesus’ suffering into her own heart. By her compassion, she endured all his sufferings. The sword that pierced his side also pierced her heart. Hearing the false news of Joseph’s death, Jacob suffered greatly.

CAUSES OF COMPASSION

Compassion varies according to the sorrows. If the sufferings are extreme, the pity is great. Although not close to Jesus, the women of Jerusalem wept over him. Compassion increases when we see the suffering person. Jesus wept when he saw the tomb of Lazarus and when he saw Jerusalem. In contrast, we take more pleasure in someone dear to us. When a good friend rejoices, our joy becomes extreme. When Jacob learned that his son lived, he lived again. He rose from the dead!

DYING ANOTHER’S DEATH

We sometimes die another’s death. This happened to Jacob, who believed his son had died, even though it never happened. Learning that his son was alive, Jacob also had new life. His son’s life entered his heart by joy.

He did not need any other pleasure. “It is enough for me if my son, Joseph, is still living.” (Gen 45:128) When he finally saw his son, he said, “Now, I shall die with joy because I have seen you alive.” (Gen 46:30) His great satisfaction made even death joyful and agreeable.

Theotimus, who more highly esteems Joseph’s life, Joseph or his father who so rejoices in it? The father rejoices in Joseph’s life as much as Joseph does. Jacob and Joseph both possessed the goodness of Joseph’s life. No one can take away this love. Love’s joys surmount death. The waters of tribulation cannot quench love’s fires.

5.5 THE DELIGHT OF LOVE IN THE PASSION

When I see Jesus in agony, I realize that his love drew all the world's sorrows into his heart. Filled with love for Jesus, a devout soul draws Jesus' sorrows into his own heart. Desert tents, exposed to the weather, are always ragged and covered with dust. So, the devout soul, exposed to Jesus' sufferings, are ragged and covered with sorrow. Although filled with his sorrows, I also enjoy a contentment because my heavenly spouse loves me.

DELIGHTING AMID SORROWS

While mourning Jesus' death, I enjoy great consolation and I experience sentiments of love. Love equalizes lovers. Jesus is my fire of love in my sorrows. I do not look at his sufferings but at his love that accepted these sorrows. I see his joy in dying for me. I grieve with him but I also rejoice in him.

TWO SAINTS

St. Francis' love of compassion attracted the stigmata. St. Catherine of Sienna's love drew Jesus' burning wounds to her. Our loving complacency makes our sorrow feel infinitely strong. Also, compassion multiplies complacency. These two loves (Esau and Jacob) struggle in their mother's womb. Incredible agony is followed by ecstasy. When they were stigmatized, St. Francis and St. Catherine felt unbelievable love and incomparable pain. Love brings forth a child of both pain and joy.

5.6 LOVE OF BENEVOLENCE

The Savior desires to enter our hearts by this sorrowing delight. "Open to me, my sister, my beloved, my dove, my perfect one! My head is wet with dew and my hair with the moisture of the night." (Song 5:2) This dew and moisture are his afflictions. The Savior says, "I am filled with the pains of my passion which happened in the night of darkness."

GOD'S LOVE

God's love for us and our love for God are quite different. God's love begins with benevolence. God's love brings about our good and then it delights in us. God made David "according to his own heart" and then, he delighted in him. God gave some goodness to everything in the universe and then delighted in his creation. "God found it very good." (Gen 1:31) Then he rested.

OUR LOVE

Our love begins with delight in enjoying God's infinite goodness. Then, we experience benevolence towards God. God begins with benevolence and then delights. We begin with delight which leads to benevolence.

Our benevolent love cannot desire any good for God. He is already infinitely good. God has no future good because all good is already present to him.

DELIGHTING IN GOD'S GOODNESS

Even though God has no need of anything, I should keep desiring his good. "O God, I desire to increase your good, if you could receive such an increase. Even without this increase, I delight in your infinite

goodness. My powerlessness comes from your infinite goodness. My impossibility of desiring any good for you comes from your infinite abundance, which satiates infinite desires and makes them infinite delights.” This desire brings about extraordinary fervor. Augustine wrote, “Lord, I am Augustine and you are God. If I were God and you were Augustine, I would change my condition and become Augustine so you could be God.”

MARY, OUR MODEL

Our benevolence toward God includes increasing our delight in his goodness. Our delight imitates our Mother Mary, whose soul exalted the Lord. This resulted from her delight, “My spirit has rejoiced in God my savior.” (Lk 1:47)

5.7 EXALTING GOD SEPARATES US FROM INFERIOR PLEASURES

God’s benevolence causes us to want to increase our delight in God. To do this, the soul deprives herself of other pleasures to take more pleasure in God.

Brother Giles, a companion of St. Francis, said to others, “One to one”. He explained “Give your soul (which is one) to God (who is one).” By giving itself to many pleasures, the soul dissipates herself and cannot give herself attentively to God’s pleasure. To St. Paul, all was rubbish compared to the Savior. The spouse says “My beloved to me and I to him”.

If a detached soul meets with excellent creatures (even angels), she does not delay. She gets from them only what she needs. The bride asked, ‘Tell me, have you seen him whom my soul loves?’ (Song 3:3) When Magdalene met the angel at the tomb, she said, “They have taken away my lord and I do not know where they have put him.” (Jn 20:13) Even seeing the Savior as a gardener did not satisfy her. Filled with love, she seeks the cross, nails and thorns. She seeks the crucified one! She tells the gardener that she will care for the body. She was content only when He called her my name and she realized who he was. Not the angel nor the Savior in a different form consoled her. Only as the crucified, had he won her heart.

The three wise men were not content in Jerusalem or in the star’s brightness. They sought the child in the manger. So, souls cannot find rest until they find the object of their delight. Wanting to increase their delight for God, they cut off all other pleasure and fully yield to the divine benevolence.

To greater magnify God, the soul always seeks his face with more fervent attention. She notes all of his beauties and searches out his motives. In this way, she has greater delight in God’s goodness. In the psalms, David recited God’s wonders one by one. The sacred spouse speaks of all the beloved’s perfections to give her soul greater delight. He magnifies his excellence and subjects all other spirits to her beloved’s love.

5.8 BENEVOLENCE PRODUCES PRAISE

Often, we honor someone who is totally unaware that we are praising him. We give him titles and praise. We say a man is rich in glory and reputation. Yet, the person himself received nothing. “Poor

Aristotle, you are praised but you are not here to receive it.” (Augustine) Does Alexander the Great reap any rewards from vain words spoken in praise of him?

SURPASSES ALL PRAISE

God’s goodness surpasses all praise. He grows neither richer nor greater, because his richness and happiness are already infinite.

Wanting to honor someone of excellence, we praise him. We do this also with God who accepts our praise because the creature should bless the Creator. We love him and owe him all honor and glory.

CANNOT INCREASE

The soul cannot increase God’s goodness (which is already infinite). However, when a soul delights in God’s infinite perfections, she desires to exalt his name more and more. So, she stirs her own heart to praise. Like a bee, she goes from one divine perfection to another, gathering many delights. She composes songs to glorify her beloved’s name. Like the psalmist, she calls to mind each aspect of divine goodness. Her heart becomes an altar of praise, “I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy.” (Ps 27:6)

EXCITES DESIRES

Our benevolence excites an insatiable desire to praise God. The soul wants to give infinite praise because God’s perfections are infinite. Seeing herself fall short, she makes extreme efforts to praise God in some measure. Delight increases these efforts. By praising God, the soul relishes his sweetness even more. Delighting in his infinite goodness, the soul grows warm in praising God and increases her delights. This excites her to greater praise. Delight and praise move each other higher. Nightingales sing best when they take delight, and they take delight when they sing their best. Often, they die because their throats burst from singing. They die for love of their melody!

DESIRE AND PAIN

O Theotimus, from desiring to praise God, the soul experiences a delicious pain. After a thousand efforts to praise her beloved, she still falls short and wants to raise her voice even higher. The more she praises, the more she delights. The more she delights, the more she suffers because she cannot praise him enough.

To find some peace, the soul makes more efforts and then faints from weakness, (as happened to St. Francis). While praising God and singing his canticles, he shed an abundance of tears and then would drop from weakness. He was like a nightingale. Trying to praise God, when he could never sufficiently do so.

5.9 BENEVOLENCE – CALLING ALL CREATURES TO PRAISE

Our tongue has two functions – to enjoy food and to speak. The tongue of a soul who loves both tastes his sweetness and speaks his praises. “Praise shall always be in my mouth.” (Ps 34:1-2)

LOOKING OUTSIDE

When a soul cannot praise God as much as it desires, it looks outside and invites all creatures to help. The three young men in the furnace (Dan 3:52-90) call on heaven, earth and under the earth to praise the eternal God. The Psalmist asks angels, fishes, mountains, waters, birds, fires and snow to come together to magnify their Creator. How many psalms have the inscription "Praise God"! After inviting all creatures to praise God, the book of Psalms closes with "Let everything that has breath, give praise to the Lord." (Ps 150:6) All creatures must live to bless the Creator.

ASKING CREATURES FOR HELP

St. Francis sang the Canticle of the Sun, asking creatures to help him because he couldn't satisfy his desires to praise God. The spouse in the Canticle fainted away, unable to bless the eternal King. Her divine spouse led her into his wine cellar, where she tasted the delights of his perfections. Inebriated by her delight in his divine beauty, she was unable to praise God's exalted goodness. She said to her companions, "Have pity on me and come to my assistance."

CONCEIVING NEW PRAISE

Delighted by God's sweetness, the heart becomes overcharged and conceives all kinds of praises and asks all creatures to contribute their praises. God has an infinite sweetness which we can never praise enough. These desires to please God sends missionaries like Francis Xavier all over the world so the name of Jesus might be adored. It causes books to be written, churches to be built, and God's servants to die in the consuming flames of zeal.

5.10 ASPIRING TO HEAVEN

Realizing that she cannot fulfill her desire to praise God while on earth, the soul looks to heaven where his praises are incomparably more delightful. She says, "How great are the praises of the blessed spirits before God's throne, where perpetual alleluias resound everywhere."

HEAVENLY PRAISE

In heaven, their voices are incomparably soft, like harps, delicately touched by skillful hands. A voice tells the inhabitants of heaven, "Praise God, all you his servants and you that fear him, great and small." (Rev 19:5) All the angels and saints respond, "Praise God."

What is this loving voice coming from God's throne? It is holy delight which breeds loving desires, the source of heavenly praises. The saints learn of God's grandeur from their delight. Desires excite them to pour out their praises. Delights come from God's throne and desires return to the throne.

BEING SET FREE

This temple of praise is worthy and those who sing enjoy eternal delight. Because the soul on earth cannot sing God's praises fully, she desires to be set free of earth and go to heaven, where God is perfectly praised. These desires possess her heart and banish all other desires for earthly things. The soul becomes homesick for heaven and, if her desire for God grows strong enough, she will die from it.

In his final years, St. Francis, torn with strong desire to praise God and having God's assurance that he would enter heaven, could not contain his joy. Each day, his life wasted away because his body and soul were like incense upon the fire of his ardent desires to praise his Master incessantly.

ST. FRANCIS' DEATH

Every day these ardors increased. Finally, by one passionate desire for heaven, his soul just left his body. He died saying, "Lead me out of my prison, that I may give thanks to your name."

Francis was like a heavenly nightingale, locked up in a cage who could not sing the praises of his love. He knew he would sing better if he joined the heavenly company. Therefore, he cried out "Deliver me from the cage of my body, my little prison. My heavenly companions will make me a member of their choir and, together, we will make sweet praise." With these words, he breathed his last. What a sweet death!

5.11 PRAISES OF OUR SAVIOR AND HIS MOTHER

We ask creatures to praise God in ascending order, going from material creation to men. Then we ask the saints and angels. Finally, we come to Mary, the virgin mother. She exalts God more highly than all others put together.

SINGERS IN MILAN

When I went to Milan to commemorate St. Charles Borromeo, I heard music in different churches. However, in one monastery we heard a woman religious whose voice was incomparable. All that I had heard only showed the beauty of her unique voice. So, all the choirs of men and angels only highlight the virgin's clear voice, which gives more praise to God than all others. God invites Mary to sing, "Let your voice sound in my ears for your voice is sweet and your face is beautiful." (Song 2:15) Although her praises are excellent, they fall infinitely short of God's infinite goodness. They bear no proportion at all to it. Even her voice does not fulfill her desires.

THE PRAISE OF JESUS

The soul must invite the Savior himself to glorify his eternal Father. What a canticle the Son sings to his Father! His voice is sweet, coming from lips which received grace's fullness. The praises of angels and men come from creatures. The Son's praises come from God. Both their source and their object is God. God inspires others to praise him. The Redeemer, however, is God and produces infinite praise.

THE UNIQUE NIGHTINGALE

If someone heard many birds singing, and then heard a nightingale, the person would prefer the nightingale. If we heard the praises of creatures and the praise of our Savior, we would discover an infinite difference. His melody instantly ravishes the soul. His is the king-voice, above the Seraphim. Other voices seem like silence because the Father loves the melody of his Son's praise more than all others.

THE REDEEMER'S INVITATION

We see the Redeemer behind his human nature, for his wounds are like windows. From his pierced heart, the Savior keeps his eyes fixed upon our hearts. Although He sees us clearly, we only half see him. Otherwise, we would die. If we heard his voice, we would jump up to heaven to hear it perfectly.

The Savior invites us to “Arise. Make haste, (take flight) my beautiful one, to this place where there exists only praise. Come and see me clearly. Look at my heart through the wound in my side. Come, show me your face. In heaven, you will show it to me and you will know that I see you.” “Let your voice sound in my ears. Your voice is sweet and your face is beautiful.”

What a delight. Our voices join with the Savior's in the infinite praises which the Son gives to the Father.

5.12 GOD'S PRAISE OF HIMSELF

Jesus' human actions have infinite value because they are performed by a Divine Person. Yet, they are not infinite by their nature and essence. A room receives light according to the capacity of its window. Although of infinite merit, our Savior's human actions are not infinite by nature, because they are done according to his finite humanity.

FINITE IN NATURE

When compared to our actions, our Savior's human actions are infinite. When compared to God's essential actions, they are finite. Infinite in value (coming from a divine person) but finite in nature (coming from a human nature). The Savior's praise of God is not infinite in all respects and cannot fully correspond to God's infinite greatness.

After enjoying our Savior's glorious praise, we realize that God is yet infinitely more desiring of praise.

RISING TO THE SUN

If a man could be lifted up to the sun by his praises for the sun's brightness, he would find a greater brightness, more worthy or praise. By its praises, the soul rises toward God and sees that He is above all praise. God can be praised adequately only by himself. Only his praise equals his goodness.

AN ETERNAL PRAISE

Therefore, we say “Glory be to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy spirit”, we are talking about uncreated, eternal praise because we add, “As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. Amen.” We ask that God be glorified as He was before he created us. The Eastern Church added this prayer to each psalm and St. Jerome asked Pope Damasus to do the same for the West. All angels and men cannot worthily praise the divine goodness, which receives worthy praise only from itself.

A REPETITION OF PRAISES

The soul rejoices to see that God is adequately praised. From this enjoyment comes a new desire. The soul thanks God because he worthily praises himself. Again, the soul calls all creation to glorify God with her, wanting to produce a repetition of praise upon praise. The soul goes back and forth between enjoyment and desire, lost in an immense labyrinth, praising God because He alone can praise himself.

The soul wanted to praise God adequately, but now she does not want to have this power. She just humbly enjoys that his goodness is sufficiently praised only by himself. She says, “To you we owe our hymn of praise, O God of Zion.” (Ps 65:1)

THE SIX WINGS

Isaiah saw seraphim praising God. Two wings covered their faces, because they could not contemplate him adequately. Two wings covered their feet, because they could not serve him adequately. They used their two wings of enjoyment and desire to fly to his delightful rest.

When able to beat freely, the heart is at rest. So, the love of angels and men rests in the continual beating of enjoyment (which draws God into itself) and desires (which opens the soul to God). Although desiring to see God’s infinite wonders, the soul covers her eyes, unable to see these wonders fully. The soul covers her feet, unable to serve God adequately. Only her wings of enjoyment and desire take the soul to God.

EXERCISES OF HOLY LOVE ON PRAYER

6.1 MYSTICAL PRAYER

Love is both affective and effective. Affective love loves God and all that He loves. Effective love serves God and does what He wants. Affective love joins us to God’s goodness. Effective love moves us to do his will.

AFFECTIVE AND EFFECTIVE LOVE

Affective love fills us with enjoyment and spiritual desires, causing our spirit to mingle with God. Effective love gives us solid resolutions and obedience to do his will. We embrace all that comes from his will. Affective love makes us pleased with God. Effective love makes us please God. By one we conceive, by the second we give birth. The first places God in our heart and gathers up our desires. The second places God on our arm and uses all our virtues.

INNER MOVEMENTS OF THE HEART

Affective love takes place principally in prayer where innumerable inner acts occur, which are almost imperceptible to our understanding. Even the best trained hound dogs cannot always track the deer. So, we lose the knowledge of the infinite diversity of acts in our own heart.

God alone penetrates all these movements of our heart. If our soul reflected upon itself, it would enter a labyrinth, with no escape. We would be gazing at our own thoughts, observations, judgments, and memories. We could never free ourselves. So I warn you, anyone who does not pray will find this sixth book difficult.

DEFINING PRAYER

Prayer is more than just petitions. (St. Basil) Prayer includes all the varied acts of contemplation. (St. Bonaventure). Prayer is a conversation with God (St. Gregory). Prayer is discoursing with the Divine Majesty (St. John Chrysostom). A raising of the mind to God (Augustine). If prayer is a conversation with God, then we must speak to him and He to us. We desire him and breathe him in. He inspires us and breathes upon us.

THEOLOGY AND PRAYER

But, what do we talk about? The only object of prayer is God, the well beloved. Prayer is different from mystical theology in three ways:

1. Theology treats of God as God. Prayer treats God as a friend. Theology studies the God of goodness. Prayer studies the goodness of God.
2. Theology speaks of God's work with men. Prayer speaks of God's life within Himself.
3. Theology focuses on knowledge about God. Prayer focuses on love for God. Theology makes scholars wise. Prayer makes scholars fervent.

HEART TO HEART

Mystical means the conversation is totally secret, heart to heart, not understood by anyone else. Only lovers understand their own language. "I sleep and my heart watches. I hear the voice of my beloved knocking." (Song 5:2) How could the spouse, while asleep, talk with her beloved? Where love reigns, people do not need exterior words. Mystical prayer is a conversation in which the soul lovingly entertains herself with God. She is focused upon his goodness and she enjoys God's goodness with him.

Prayer is hidden manna (Rev 2:17) and learning cannot find it. In solitude, the soul meets God alone. "Who is she who comes up from the desert, like columns of smoke? (Song 3:6) In secrecy, she says, "Come, my beloved, let us go to the field, and spend the night in the village." (Song 7:12) The Canticle calls God a turtle. This animal delights in solitary places and sings only for her mate. In the Song of Songs, God speaks continually with his spouse, while her friends speak to her only occasionally.

CONVERSATIONS IN SOLITUDE

In her beginning prayer, St. Teresa of Avila enjoyed gospel scenes when Jesus was alone, as in the Garden or with the Samaritan woman. If he were alone, she felt more welcome into his company.

Lovers speak easily when they are alone. They want to speak only for themselves and show particular affection. The manner of love's language is special to lovers. Only they understand. Read the

language of the great saints – Ignatius, Cyprian, Augustine, Gregory and Bernard. Their language is much different from theologians. Their words have fire and sweetness.

USING ALL THE FEATURES

Love speaks with the eyes and all the features of the face. Even silence can be love's words. "I will seek your face, O Lord." (Ps 27:8) "My eyes long to see your promise." (Ps 119:82) "Give ear to my tears." (Ps 39:13) Note how love's silence speaks by the eye and by tears. Mystical prayer speaks to God and hears God in the heart's depths. This prayer has secret aspirations and we call it silent conversing. Eyes speak to eyes. Heart speaks to heart. Only the lovers understand what is being said.

6.2 MEDITATION – THE FIRST DEGREE OF PRAYER

Meditation means an attentive thought which produces affections (good or bad). The psalms speak of the man who "meditates on God's law day and night (1) and of people "who meditate on vain things." (2) Meditation can be good or evil. Usually, Scripture applies the word to stirring up love for God and for God's things. Theologians apply the word only to the holy. So we begin our mystical prayer with meditation.

TYPES OF THOUGHTS

Sometimes our thoughts are aimless, going from one flower to another, and gaining nothing. Even if our thought is attentive, it is still just thought. Sometimes thought is study. We learn causes, effects or qualities of things. Sometimes thought is meditation. Here, our spirit is a sacred bee going to God's flowers to extract divine love.

Many people have unprofitable thoughts, not knowing what they are thinking about. Others study and fill themselves with learning. However, few meditate and fill their heart with divine love. Thoughts and study can focus on any topic. Meditation refers only to devout topics. Meditation is a thought, which the person keeps in his mind so he can experience holy desires and resolutions.

DOVE AS AN IMAGE

King Hezekiah and Isaiah use the dove in speaking of meditation. "I will meditate like a dove" and "We lament, meditating like doves." Later, the Canticle says, "My dove, show me your face. Let your voice sound in my ears, for your voice is sweet and your face is beautiful." (2:14) When the devout soul comes before God to meditate, she is pleasing to him.

MOVING THE SOUL

The person meditates to move the affections. God commanded Joshua, "Meditate on the law day and night, so you will observe all that is written." (1;8). Some passages read "meditate" and others say, "think over." Both thought and meditation move the soul to desire and to act.

Paul writes, "Consider how Jesus endured such opposition, so you do not grow weary of heart." (Heb 12:3) He wants us to meditate on the passion so we will be firm and constant. David writes, "Thy law is my meditation all day long." (Ps 119:97)

SOME IMAGES

The spouse calls Sacred Scripture a wine to be relished over and again. “Your words are like an excellent wine, spreading over the lips and the teeth.” (Song 7:10) Isaac went out into the field to meditate. (Gen 24:63)

The bee flies from flower to flower to gather honey. She carries it to the hive, where she separates the honey from the wax and stores it for the coming winter. Such is the devout soul in meditation. She goes from mystery to mystery to see their beauty and to seek motives to love God. She stores them (like honey) in her heart and uses them at the proper time.

THE SPOUSES

In the Canticle, the bride looks at each part of her spouse to experience a thousand passions of love. She questions him and He fills her heart with endless light. He does this secretly with her alone. Such is the soul’s conversation with God.

6.3 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CONTEMPLATION AND MEDITATION

Contemplation is the soul’s permanent attention to divine things and is easily understood when compared to meditation.

FROM MEDITATION TO CONTEMPLATION

Bees are called nymphs until they make honey. So, when meditation produces the honey of devotion, it is called contemplation. Bees gather honey and then enjoy the pleasure of its sweetness. We meditate to gather God’s love of God and then we enjoy him by contemplation. This great sweetness of God’s love makes us attentive to his goodness. We meditate to gain God’s love. Once we have gained it, love makes us contemplate God. God becomes so agreeable that just considering him by thoughts is not enough.

The Queen of Sheba thought about Solomon’s beautiful palace. Once she experienced its magnificence, her meditation changed to contemplation. Seeing brought her a great love which enkindled her desire to enjoy Solomon’s presence. She cried, “Happy are your servants who stand before you always and listen to your wisdom.” (1Kg 10:8)

LOVING AND SEEING

We consider God’s goodness (meditation) to excite our will to love God (contemplation). When love is formed, we consider the same goodness to fulfill love’s desires.

Meditation is the mother of divine love and contemplation is the daughter. Contemplation is the attention to God begotten by love. Love excites contemplative attention, which then brings about a greater love.

By love, we experience pleasure in seeing the beloved. By seeing, we take greater pleasure. Love leads to sight and seeing leads to greater love. Love has the imperceptible power of making the beauty of the

other seem greater than it is. Love urges the eyes to look continually. Seeing forces the heart to love more ardently.

6.4 LOVE'S EXCELLENCE COMES FROM KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

What has more power? The love which forces us to look or the look which increases our love? In order to love, we need knowledge because we love only what we know. When knowledge of good increases, our love also increases.

GOING BEYOND KNOWLEDGE

Sometimes, knowledge produces a holy love which goes beyond limits of the knowledge. On earth, we can love God more than we know him. St. Thomas says that an unlearned soul can abound in heavenly love more than learned scholars. "Love penetrates where exterior knowledge cannot reach. Many bishops of old were not very learned but they penetrated the mystery of the Trinity". St. Anthony of Padua, without earthly knowledge, had such a grasp of mystical theology, that he was like John the Baptist, "a burning and shining light."

A DIALOGUE

Brother Giles said to St. Bonaventure, "You learned scholars understand many things about God. What can we idiots do?" He replied, "The grace to love God is sufficient." Brother Giles asked, "Can an ignorant man love God as much as a learned man?" He replied, "A poor, devout soul can love God as much as a theologian." Brother Giles cried out, "Devout soul, love God and you will be as great as Brother Bonaventure." He remained in this joy for three hours.

NOT A LIMIT

The will needs the intellect to perceive good. However, after the intellect perceives the good, the will does not need the intellect to practice love. Knowledge gives birth to love, but does not limit it. An injury causes anger, but soon the anger can surpass the injury. The passions are not limited by the knowledge that unleashed them. They follow their own course.

FAITH STIRRING LOVE

This happens especially with that holy love which comes from supernatural knowledge. Faith sees God's infinite goodness and urges us to love him with all our heart. People toil to find gold and silver. When they discover the sources of these metals, they search more earnestly. So, faith knowledge can powerfully stir our affections to love the goodness it perceives. Augustine says that the unlearned person gains heaven while many wise men are swallowed up by hell.

A blind man has knowledge about light but the farmer, who sees the rising sun, loves it more. The first has mere knowledge, the second enjoys it. Experiencing good is infinitely more pleasant than learning about it.

INCREASING OUR RELISH

Certainly, our love for God must begin with faith knowledge. Afterward, we must experience his goodness. This heightens our love. Just as the waves rise up when driven by the winds, so, the taste of good increases our relish. “They that eat me, shall still hunger. They that drink me, shall yet thirst.” (Sir 24:29) Who loved God more, the subtle Occam or the unlearned St. Catherine of Genoa? The subtle Occam knew God by learning. The simple St. Catherine of Genoa knew him from experience. This led to her seraphic love which He remained distant from perfection.

IMPERFECT KNOWLEDGE

“We love knowledge even when it is imperfect.” (St. Thomas) Even our very imperfect idea of God’s goodness, sets our love in motion. Then, Love increases itself by its own pleasure. Children do not want to eat sugar until they have tasted it. After that, they seek it more than we want them to.

CLEAR KNOWLEDGE

When the intellect clearly reveals God’s goodness, our will is even more strongly drawn to Divine union. Both delight and knowledge push the soul. Knowledge is very useful to devotion because love and knowledge assist one another. However, knowledge can “puff us up” and totally ruin devotion. In saints like Augustine, Basil, Gregory, Bonaventure and Thomas, knowledge increased their devotion and was perfected by Divine Love.

6.5 THE SECOND DIFFERENCE

Meditation sees divine things in detail, piece by piece. Contemplation has a complete view of the Beloved, bringing about a more lively movement toward God. Looking at a rich crown, a person can see either the particular jewels or the whole crown. The first resembles meditation, which considers God’s individual perfections. The second is like contemplation, which sees God’s variety as a single beauty. In meditating, we count the perfections. In contemplation we add up their total.

DESCRIBING HIS BEAUTY

In the Song of Songs, the bride describes her spouse’s perfect beauty. “My beloved is radiant and ruddy. His head is pure gold. His eyes are like doves. His teeth seemed bathed in milk. His lips are red blossom.” (Song 5:10-13) She concludes by seeing all the beauties together. “He is all lovely. Such is my beloved, and he is my friend.” The first experience is meditation. The second is contemplation.

Meditation is like smelling various flowers. Contemplation is smelling the perfumed water distilled from all the flowers. This one scent is sweeter than each flower smelled separately.

REDUCING ALL TO ONE

Happy the soul which has meditated on the multiple reasons to love God. She now can reduce everything to just one look. By contemplation, she gathers her thoughts into one conclusion. Augustine said, “O Beauty, ever ancient, ever new.” St. Francis would spend all night saying, “O God, you are my God and my All.”

You must imitate God himself. At creation, God looked on each of his works and “saw it was good.” He saw that the heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon, the plants and the animals were good. Then, he saw the goodness in all his works, “He saw all the things he had made and they were very good.” (Gen 1:31) When little brooks come together to form a great river, they can carry large boats that each brook, by itself, could not carry.

GATHERS INTO ONE

Meditation excites many pious affections. Contemplation gathers these affections together into a more powerful affection. This one affection contains all the others and is called contemplative affection. The higher angels have a more simple idea of God than inferior angels. In heaven, say Augustine and Thomas, we will not have changes in our thoughts. With just one thought, we will have knowledge of all things.

As water leaves its source, it divides and wastes its strength. Perfections also separate and divide as they flow from God. However, as perfections come closer to God, they unite again until they become one, sole perfection. This necessary unity, the better part, was chosen by Mary and it shall not be taken from her.

6.6 THIRD DIFFERENCE – NO LABOR

The soul contemplates in three different ways:

1. The soul sees one perfection (such as infinite goodness) and does not think of the others. When a husband focuses on his wife’s beautiful complexion, this complexion covers all her features. He is not looking at specific features. So, when the soul considers God’s goodness, this covers all his attributes.
2. Sometimes we behold, in a simple view, several of God’s infinite perfections. We do this in one glance. If the husband looked at his wife from head to toe, he would see all of her beauty, not bothering to note any particular attribute. So, in contemplation, we cast one simple glance over all of God’s perfections, without trying to note any particular one.
3. So, at times, we are only attentive to a divine action. For example, we see only God’s mercy in forgiving sins, just as a husband might notice only the gentleness of his wife’s words.

A GREATER DELIGHT

Seeing God as the source of these actions, the soul bursts forth in love, “How sweet are your words to my taste.” (Ps 119:103) Thomas cried “My Lord and my God”. Magdalene cried “Teacher.”

In all three ways, contemplation has a delight. We have found God and enjoy him. “I found him whom my soul loves. I held him and I will not let him go.” (Song 3:4)

Meditation is different. It is always done with difficulty and by reasoning. Our mind goes from one thought to another, and searches for God in many places. Jacob labored for fourteen years to gain Rachel. In contemplating her, he rejoiced and forgot his labors.

A BANQUET OF MYSTERIES

The divine lover has prepared a sumptuous banquet which represents all the mysteries of redemption. “I have come into my garden, O my sister, my spouse. I have gathered my myrrh with aromatic spices. They have eaten the honey of the honeycomb. I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends and drink and be inebriated, my beloved.” (Song 5:1)

Our Savior came into the garden of his mother’s womb. He gathered his myrrh when he suffered death on the cross. He ate his honey when he rose from the dead, reuniting his soul to his wounded body. He mixed the wine of his soul’s glory with the milk of his glorified body when He ascended into heaven.

BEING INEBRIATED

In these divine mysteries He provides a banquet to feed and to inebriate his finest friends. Some eat more than they drink and are not inebriated. Others drink more than they eat and are inebriated. To eat is to meditate, for we chew and digest the mysteries. To drink is to contemplate. To be inebriated is to contemplate frequently, so we leave ourselves and enter totally into God.

O holy inebriation, you are so different from bodily drunkenness! You separate us from our bodily senses but not from our spiritual senses. You do not dull us. You make us like angels. In a way, you make us like God. You put us out of ourselves and raise us up to the angels, so we can live in God more than in ourselves.

ACTIONS NEEDED FOR CONTEMPLATION

To gain contemplation we must hear God’s word, read, pray, sing canticles and conceive holy thoughts. Contemplation is the goal of all these activities. Those who practice these are called contemplatives and they engage in the contemplative life. Contemplation begins with a loving attention to God’s goodness, a love which makes us attentive and an attention which increases our love.

6.7 THE SOUL’S LOVING RECOLLECTION

I am not writing here about the recollection before prayer, when the person gathers their thoughts so they can speak with God. To pray well, the person must deliberately withdraw his spirit from other concerns. Love demands this.

GOD CHOOSES

I am writing of a different recollection that comes from love itself and in which we have no free choice. This recollection comes from God’s power, not ours. God recollects us by his grace. St. Teresa of Avila writes, “The prayer of recollection is like a turtle who draws within itself. The only difference is this. Turtles withdraw whenever they please. This recollection comes only when God pleases.”

This is what happens. We draw into ourselves whatever we love (good or bad). God, however draws every soul that is sensitive to the good. Our Lord imperceptibly infuses into the depths of our heart an

agreeable sweetness, which testifies to his presence. The soul's exterior senses delight in this presence and turn inward to the soul's most interior part.

INNER WORDS OF HONEY

The smell of honey brings a new swarm of bees back to the hive. So, when our Savior pours out the honey of his heavenly consolations by his inner words, our hearts perceive his welcome presence. This attracts all our faculties to focus upon God's presence within. The soul stays within itself, in the presence of the Beloved. As a magnet draws all needles, so when we experience the Savior's presence within, our faculties join themselves to him. "O God, where was I wandering to seek you! O infinite beauty! I sought you outside myself and you were in my heart." (St. Augustine).

Until Jesus called her by name, Magdalene scattered her thoughts and feelings around the Savior's tomb. (Jn 20:15) Calling her name put her into recollection. She was joined to him by his on word.

DELIGHT IN THE WOMB

When our Blessed Mother conceived the Son of God, she focused upon that child in her womb. All her faculties gathered there. Because her womb contained the divine greatness, her spirit leaped for joy (as did John within Elizabeth). Her affections did not come from herself because God was present within. Her delight came from her womb.

Devout souls can practice this same delight and imitate our Mother when they receive Holy Communion. They know by faith that the Savior (body and soul) is present within by this sacrament.

At Communion, devout souls gather all their faculties to adore the king and to receive spiritual refreshments beyond belief. They feel this divine seed of immortality within and perceive the Beloved's presence. These attractions capture our hearts. The Savior carries the soul towards himself by a powerful inclination. He draws their hearts as bodies are drawn by material ropes.

This recollection comes both from God's presence and from any means that leads us into that presence. Sometimes the soul just experiences great awe which causes it to come into his presence. For instance, we might be greatly distracted, but if the Pope should come we would quickly gather our thoughts.

A RESPECT FOR GOD

Flowers open at night but close up when the sun rises. So, when the soul perceives God's presence (or a feeling that he sees us), it closes up its powers to respect God's inner presence. This love begets a great respect for God.

Whenever a devout woman, whom I know, heard a homily that calls to mind God's presence, she enters so deeply into herself that she can hardly speak. Outwardly she seems deprived of life. Her senses are numbed until her husband helps her out of this state.

6.8 THE SOUL'S REPOSE IN RECOLLECTION OF THE WILL-BELOVED

Once inwardly recollected in God, the soul experiences an attention to God' goodness which is so gentle that it is almost imperceptible. The soul is like a river which moves so smoothly that it does not seem to move at all, without any ripple. St. Teresa of Avila calls this recollection the "prayer of quiet". It is quite similar to what she calls "the sleep of the powers".

A DEEP REPOSE

Human lovers are often quite content to be near each other without speaking, satisfied to enjoy each other's presence. Without reflecting, they experience a certain gratification. 'He shall abide between my breasts. My beloved to me and I to him.' (Song 1:7) As long as she knows where he is, she has a deep rest, filled with tranquility. The whole soul and all its powers seem to be asleep, and make no movement at all. The will alone acts and receives the delight which the Beloved's presence affords. What is even more admirable, the will does even perceive the delight she receives. She enjoys it insensibly, never mindful of herself but only of God who gives her the pleasure.

ENJOYING THE SLEEP

In this deep repose, the soul enjoys a delicate sense of God's presence but is not conscious of her own enjoyment. This happiness is precious to her and she realizes this most when someone disturbs this repose. The poor soul is a child who is awakened before getting a full sleep. Her sorrow in being awakened shows her contentment in sleeping. The bridegroom warns the bride's companions, "Do not awake the beloved before she pleases". (Song 2:7) A soul recollected in God would not give up her repose for anything in the world.

Mary, the sister of Martha, experienced this stillness as she sat at her Master's feet. She says nothing. She does not cry, sob or sigh. She does not even pray. She doesn't even notice her sister, Martha. She just pays attention, receiving every word which Jesus' lips place in her heart. Jesus is jealous of Mary's love-sleep, so He rebukes Martha, "You are troubled about many things. One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her." (Lk 10:41-42) What is Mary's part? To remain quietly near to Jesus. At the Last Supper, John was asleep on Jesus' bosom. This was not bodily sleep, but a profound mystical sleep, like a child at its mother's breasts.

Therefore, whenever you find yourself in this simple repose of confidence, stay there. Do not move. Do not form sensible acts of prayer (either by your intellect or your will). This love-sleep, which is total confidence in the Saviour's arms, contains all excellence. You do not need to leave there. To sleep on his sacred breast is better than to watch elsewhere.

6.9 HOW TO PRACTICE THIS HOLY REPOSE

How ardently hungry children cling to their mother's breast! With a soft murmur they will squeeze the breast with their mouth, sucking so eagerly that they cause pain to the mother. After the milk allays their hunger, they begin to sleep. Yet, even while asleep, they hold onto the breast and draw milk. They do this

without thinking and with much pleasure. If the breast is withdrawn, they weep. Their sorrow shows their deep contentment.

This baby is like the soul in quiet before God. She sucks insensibly the delights of his presence, using no words or actions. Only the highest part of the will opens the soul's mouth so the delight can enter. If the treasure is removed, the soul will grieve over the loss of its enjoyment. This shows the delight it had without even thinking about it. I write this because St. Teresa used this apt comparison.

NO NEED TO SEARCH

Why should the soul be disturbed at all? Should she not remain in repose? She has found the one she was looking for. "I found him whom my soul loves. I held him and I will not let him go." (Song 3:4)

She does not need to use her intellect because her spouse is present. Trying to reason about him would be profitless. Not seeing him is not important. She is content to feel his presence by her delight. Our Blessed mother did not see the child in her womb but felt his presence. How great her pleasure! When Mary visited, Elizabeth enjoyed the Savior's presence without seeing him.

The soul needs no memories because the Beloved is present. She needs no images because he is here. The will alone draws the milk of his presence. All the other faculties rest in the will. The honey recalls bees to their hive and pacifies them. When they rebel and try to destroy each other, the bee-keeper gives them honied wine. Smelling its agreeable odor, they enjoy its sweetness and are pacified.

O God! Your presence sends delights into our hearts, more pleasing than wine and honey, so that all our powers delight. Only the will moves, delightfully enjoying the incomparable good of God's presence.

6.10 VARIOUS DEGREES OF THIS REPOSE

For many reasons, souls reject this prayer of repose. Some are active and have many thoughts in prayer. Others are always examining their prayer to discover what progress they are making. Others need to experience contentment in prayer. These souls are like people who wear many garments so they never experience the cold, or like those who have many treasures of money but don't see themselves as rich.

ABANDONING REPOSE

These souls are troubled when God gives them this prayer of repose. They abandon the repose to see their own acts, or to examine their own pleasure. They are restless, trying to see if their tranquility is really tranquil. Their will should just taste the sweetness of God's presence. Instead, they use their understanding to study their feelings. They are like brides who always look at their wedding ring, instead of looking at their spouse who gave it to them. The soul should be interested in God, not in the peace which God gives.

When experiencing this loving prayer of quiet, the soul should not examine her own repose. She will preserve it by not being curious about it. She must not love it anxiously. If a child is distracted from his mother's breast, he quickly returns to it because he dearly loves it. So, when distracted by curiosity, we must move our hearts back to a peaceful attention to God's presence.

In this repose, we should not worry about light distractions. St. Teresa said some sisters worried about coughing or breathing. God does not remove this repose because of these involuntary distractions because after the will has tasted the divine presence, it continually relishes its sweetness. Sometimes, the understanding and the memory slip away into useless thoughts.

THE WILL ALONE

Certainly, the repose is greater when these two faculties work together with the will. Yet, even without them, true spiritual repose will continue to reign in the will (which governs all the faculties).

I know a woman whose soul was fixed and united to God, yet her understanding and memory were so free from all inner distractions, that she understood all that was said around her. In this state, she could not free herself from God, to whom she was fastened by her will. She was so attached to God, that she experienced great grief when withdrawn from this enjoyment. She would sigh, in the deepest contemplation, and be quiet like a child sucking milk.

This particular soul had only her will engaged. Her understanding, memory, hearing and imagination were free. That soul is like Jacob, who "burst into tears" (Gen 29:11) when he kissed Rachel, because of the tenderness which he felt.

IGNORING DISTRACTIONS

When no distraction would occupy her mind or body, her peace of soul was greater. In this way, she was totally taken up in the sweetness of God's presence. At times, her faculties were distracted, but the will continued to enjoy the divine goodness.

The will, kept in this repose by the pleasure it took in God, did not pay attention to the other faculties. This would have separated her from the beloved and destroy her repose. Soon, she would have been tired out by distractions. When the will perseveres in holy quiet, all the faculties are attracted, little by little, by this pleasure of prayer. The will gives them some perception of these divine perfumes. This draws them near, so they share in her enjoyments.

6.11 VARIOUS DEGREES OF THE PRAYER OF QUIET

The Prayer of Quiet has various degrees. In the first degree, God's quiet is only in the will (whether perceptible or imperceptible). The soul takes incomparable delight in feeling God's internal sweetness (as Elizabeth when Mary visited her). At other times, the soul has an imperceptible, but ardent, sweetness (as the two disciples going to Emmaus). When they walked with the Savior, they did not perceive their hearts burning within. They only realized what had happened after receiving Eucharist.

VARIOUS EXPERIENCES

Sometimes the experience is two-fold. The soul both perceives God's presence and hears him speak. This happens by inner illuminations and wordless intuitions. At other times, the soul perceives God and speaks to him, but in a way that does not destroy the prayer of quiet. Without awaking from the divine repose, she watches with him. In a sense, she awakes, but she speaks to God's heart with such tranquility as if she were asleep. At other times, she hears him speak but cannot speak to him. She keeps her silence because of her delight or her reverence. She is so weak of spirit that she has strength only to hear (not to speak).

Finally, sometimes she neither hears nor speaks to the beloved. She feels no sign of his presence and yet she knows that she is in his presence and pleasing to him. What if John the Apostle had actually slept on Jesus' bosom at the Last Supper? He would be in the Master's presence without feeling it.

EFFORT – WHEN NEEDED OR NOT NEEDED

Please note, more effort is required to place yourself in God's presence than to remain there. In the beginning, the soul must apply her mind and be attentive to his presence. As long as the soul uses its understanding or will to do everything in God, the soul has many means to remain with God. For example, the soul can stay in his presence by seeing him, by hearing him, by speaking to him, or by doing a work in his honor. The soul even continues in his presence by waiting to see what pleases him (whether God wants to speak or wants the soul to speak). The soul enjoys God even by doing nothing, just staying where God wants the soul to be. When we just stay before him, He often adds some little feeling to show that we are his and He is ours. O God, how precious is this privilege!

A STATUE'S JOY

What if a statue of some great prince had understanding and could speak. If asked why it is quiet, it would reply. "Because my maker placed me here. He doesn't want me to do anything. He asks only that I stay motionless. I am not here for my own interests. I just accomplish the will of my maker. This is enough for me. I do not see my maker, but I know that He sees me and takes pleasure in my being here.

SOME QUESTIONS

The person might ask, "Would you not want the power to move closer to your maker, so you can give him better service? The statue would answer, "Not at all. I desire only what my maker wishes. He wants me to be a statue standing in this niche. As long as my master is content, I am his. By him, I am what I am."

GOD'S PRESENCE

This is the best way of remaining in God's presence – to will to be forever a source of God's pleasure. Even in our deepest sleep, we are in God's presence. If we love him, we even sleep for his pleasure, by his will and according to his will. God, our Maker, places us in bed, like He places birds in their nests. On awakening, we know we have not been absent or separated from him. We have been in the presence of his pleasure. We say like Jacob, "I have been in God's presence and did not know it." (Gen 28:16)

In this Prayer of Quiet, the will seeks God's good pleasure. The soul wants only to be in God's sight and to please him. This Prayer of Quiet is excellent, having no mixture of self-interest. The soul's faculties take no selfish contentment, but seek only God's pleasure. The height of love's ecstasy is to be content in God's will, not our own.

6.12 THE OUTFLOWING (LIQUEFACTION) OF THE SOUL IN GOD

Liquids take the shape of the vessels in which they are because they have no firmness or solidity. When the liquid is poured, it conforms to the vessel's shape, whether it is round or square.

SHAPING THE HEART

By nature, the soul has her own shape and limits. She is fixed upon her own inclinations and will. We say that a soul is hard, when it is obstinate and self-willed. God promises, "I will take away the strong heart and give you a heart of flesh." (Ez 36:26) If a heart refuses to accept God's inspirations, we call it a heart of stone, or of iron, or of wood. This heart lives by its selfish inclinations which accompany depraved human nature.

A LIQUIFIED HEART

A gentle, pliable heart is called a melting or liquefied heart. Ps. 22:15 describes our Savior's heart. "My heart is like wax melting away within me." During his passion, our Lord's heart was thrown into the bitter sea of his passion and dissolved in pain. Love melts the heart more quickly than all the other passions because "Love is stronger than death."

The bride says "My heart melted when he spoke." (Song 5:6) Her heart liquefied and flowed out to the beloved. God told Moses to speak to the rock, so water would flow out.

DISSOLVED BY LOVE

Obviously, God's word can melt our hearts. Balm is neither fluid nor liquid, but is thick by nature. In time, it grows even thicker and, finally, hardens. Yet, heat can dissolve it and make it fluid. Similarly, love makes the soul fluid. The Song of Songs highlights this image. The spouse calls his beloved "oil poured out". The bride says, "My soul melted when He spoke", and "Your name is as oil poured out." (1:2) The groom and his spouse poured out their hearts into each other.

When the sun melts honeycomb, it flows out toward the sun. So, the bride's soul flows out toward the voice of the Beloved. She surpasses her own limits to follow him who spoke to her.

FLOWING INTO GOD

How does the soul flow into God? First, the soul takes great pleasure in God. This causes a spiritual powerlessness and the soul can no longer remain in herself. She no longer has firmness or solidity. She lets herself flow into what she loves. She does not spring out of herself by a sudden leap. She does not cling, by a joining or a union. She is like a liquid, gently gliding into the divinity.

When the clouds melt into rain, they lose control and fall downward. They mix with the earth and become one with the ground. By love, the soul remains what she is, yet leaves herself by a holy outflowing. She is entirely mingled and steeped in God.

ENGULFED IN GOD

The soul's outflowing into God is a true ecstasy. The soul transcends her natural limits of existence and is totally mingled, absorbed and engulfed in her God. Whoever attains to these holy excesses of divine love (ecstasy) can find nothing on earth to satisfy them after they come back to themselves. They live on in an annihilation of themselves, very much weakened in their senses.

St. Teresa's maxim was "What is not God is nothing to me." This was St. Paul's feeling, "I live, now, not I, but Christ lives in me." (Gal 2:20) and "Our life is hidden with Christ in God." (Col 3:3) If a drop of water were thrown into an ocean of a priceless liquid, it would cry out in great joy, "I love this ocean which lives in me, for my life is hidden in this abyss."

DOES NOT DIE

The soul that has flowed into God does not die. How can she die when she has been swallowed up by life? She lives, but not in herself. We do not see the stars when the sun is out, because they are hidden in the sun's light. So, the soul does not lose her life. She is mingled with God and God lives within her. These were the feelings of St. Philip Neri and Francis Xavier. Overwhelmed with consolations, they asked God to withdraw a little from them because God wanted them to still be active in this world. If they were totally absorbed in God, they could not act exteriorly.

6.13 THE WOUNDS OF LOVE

The desires of the mind and the passions of the body bear a resemblance. Therefore, words like grief, fear, hope and hatred accompany love because love, draws these feelings into the soul. For example, we hate an evil which destroys something we love. We fear future evil that might deprive us of what we love. However, we do not hate an evil which affects what we do not love. If I do not love my country, I don't hate its enemies. If I do not love God, I cannot hate sin.

Love is the origin of all the passions. Love enters the heart first, penetrates to the very depth of the will and wounds the heart. "Love is sharp and enters the spirit most deeply." (St. Denis) Love is the point of the dart which pierces, and its piercing allows all the other affections to enter. The other parts only enlarge the wound and the pain.

BITTERSWEET LOVE

A wound gives pain. The healthy juice of the pomegranate is both sweet and sour. Love, in this world, is bittersweet. It is not yet perfect and never perfectly satisfies. Yet, love has an agreeable taste, combining both sweetness and tartness.

WOUNDED BY LOVE'S DARTS

How can this be? Let's take an example. A young man, in the best of spirits, meets a girl. However, when he leaves her he feels that her love has used the darts of her glances, words and gestures. He is sad and depressed to leave. Why is he sad? He is wounded. What has wounded him? Love. His love has been a delight. How can it wound him? Love wounds his heart by its very desire and now, she is absent. Being unable to enjoy her presence, grievously torments his spirit.

THE STING OF DESIRE

You do not say to a child stung by a bee, "The bee makes enjoyable honey". The child would say "The honey is pleasant but the bee's sting is painful."

Love is a delight only if it does not leave the sting of desire. Desire causes great pain, even though the pain comes from love. The Psalmist says, "My soul has thirsted for the living God, when shall I see him face to face? Tears have been my bread day and night while it is said, 'Where is your God?'" (42:3) The bride says, "Daughter of Jerusalem, If you find my beloved tell him that I am weak with love". (Song 13:12)

THE PAINFUL WOUNDS

Love has many painful wounds:

1. The first strokes of love are called wounds because, before it experienced love, the heart was all its own. After love struck, the heart separates. It divides from itself and gives itself to the beloved. This separation and division from self is done only with pain.
2. Love's desire ceaselessly stings the heart.
3. God himself wounds the soul, which He wants to make perfect. He gives the soul an overwhelming attraction for his goodness, and invites her to love him. Then, the soul soars higher toward God. However, she has to stop herself, because she never loves as much as she desires. O God, she feels a pain that has no equal!

A POWERLESS SOUL

The soul is drawn to fly to God. Yet she cannot fly, because she is chained to the difficulties of this mortal life. She is powerless, wanting only to fly away and be at rest." (Ps 55:7) She is tormented between her violent desires and her powerlessness. Paul wrote, "Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from this mortal body?" (Rom 7:24)

Please notice. The pain in this case does not come from God being absent. He is present and has led the soul into the wine cellar. He has planted his banner of love. The soul sees that she is totally God's. He moves her. He sends a thousand darts of his love, showing her that He is more loveable than she is able to love him.

However, the soul does not experience love's force and must force herself to love. She sees her forces are weak, compared to her vehement desires. She knows that she cannot worthily love him whom no force of love can love enough. Pain tortures her. Her efforts to fly higher are both ecstasy and pain.

UNFULFILLED DESIRES

The soul, desiring to love God infinitely, sees that it cannot desire sufficiently. This unfulfilled desire is a dart in her spirit. Yet, the soul welcomes this pain because she would be afflicted if she lost her desire. Desiring to love causes pain. However, loving those desires causes sweetness.

In heaven, the saints realize that God is infinitely more loveable than they can love him. If God did not impose an enjoyable repose, they would perish in their desires. They so love God's will that they accept his will and acquiesce in being limited in their love. If this were not true, their love would be delicious (because they possess God) and painful (because of a desire for greater love).

God constantly takes arrows from his infinite beauty, wounds their hearts, and makes them see that they do not love him as He deserves to be loved. Whoever does not want to love God more, does not love him enough. Love for God is never sufficient and the soul should not remain in its sufficiency.

6.14 OTHER MEANS OF WOUNDING THE HEART

If a person has a loving heart, she is wounded if another is wounded from loving her. So, the soul sees that God is wounded, because He loves her and she receives a reciprocal wound. The heavenly spouse says, "You have wounded my heart". (Song 4:9) The soul cries out, "Tell my beloved that I languish with love". (Song 5:8) When bees wound others, they die from their own wound. The soul, seeing the Savior wounded even to his death on the cross, is also wounded, unable to love him as much as his love requires.

A SECOND TYPE OF WOUND

Another wound comes when the soul feels that she loves God and, yet, God treats her as if He did not even know her or, as if He did not trust her love. This places the soul in extreme anguish. The mere pretense of God distrusting her is too much to bear.

St. Catherine of Genoa was present at an exorcism when the devil revealed his name. He said, "I am being deprived of love". St. Catherine of Genoa was deeply disturbed from hearing the words "deprived of love". The devils hate divine love. They tremble when they see the cross or hear Jesus' name. Those filled with divine love also experience pain, when they see that love is absent.

Look at Peter. His heart was filled with love, yet the Lord pretended not to know this. He asked three times, "Peter, do you love me more than these?" By showing a lack of knowledge, the Master tested him. He wounded the heart of Peter who cried out, "Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you". (Jn 21:19)

Peter knew that Jesus recognized his love. Yet hearing the question three times gave an appearance of distrust and Peter grieved. Although these poor souls would rather die than offend God, yet they do not feel one spark of fervor. They experience an extreme coldness which weakens them and they fall into imperfections at every step.

This soul is totally wounded. Her love causes pain because it looks like God does not understand how much she loves him. He seemingly abandons her, as if she didn't belong to him. In the middle of these failing and distractions, she imagines that the Lord says, "How can you say that you love me, seeing your soul is not with me?" This dart of pain comes from love. Her fear, that this might be true, proves that she does love.

A THIRD WOUND

At other times, this wound comes from the soul remembering when she did not love God. "Oh, late have I loved you, O beauty ever ancient, ever new". (St. Augustine). The past life is a horror because it was lived without a love of God.

A FOURTH WOUND

At other times, the soul thinks about the many people who have no interest in loving God. This wounds the soul. "I am consumed with zeal because my foes forget your words." (Ps 119:139) One day, St. Francis wept so bitterly that a man heard him crying. He asked, "Why are you crying, poor man?" Francis said, "I weep to think that Our Lord suffered so much for us and no one thinks about it!" Francis again began to cry and the man wept with him.

NOBLE WOUNDS

However, this pain is delightful because these wounds are so noble. All who experience this pain would not exchange it for all the world's pleasures. Pain coming from love is well beloved. Once a Seraph thrust a golden arrow with a small flame into the heart of St. Teresa of Avila. When he took it out, it seemed to St. Teresa that her intestines had been torn out. She had strength only to moan. Yet, the pain was so precious to her that she never wanted to be delivered from it.

When St. Catherine of Genoa experienced her beginning conversion, God sent a similar arrow of love into her heart. After that, she became dead to the world and alive only to her Creator. The well beloved is a bitter bundle of myrrh which abides "between the breasts" (Song 1:12), where the best loved of all the beloveds dwell.

6.15 AFFECTIONATE LANGUISHING

Just as bodily passions and emotions can affect the soul, so the soul's affections can affect the body. When violent divine love strongly possesses the soul, the person often loses strength in the other faculties (both sensual and intellectual).

QUALITIES OF LOVE

Wanting to feed this love, the soul abandons all other cares and all other works. Love is poor, homeless, lean and broken, naked and barefoot, lies on hard ground and is a beggar. I will explain these terms.

Love is poor, (leaving everything for the beloved), homeless (leaving her own dwelling to follow the beloved), lean and broken (losing sleep and food), naked and barefoot (forsaking all other desires), lies on hard ground (manifesting its passion by sighs and praises). Love lies like a beggar at the gates (always attentive to the desires of the beloved). Love is always ardent in desire.

DIVINE LOVE

This is human love, found in the world. Yet, heavenly love has the same qualities. Paul wrote, “To this very hour, we go hungry and thirsty. We are poorly clad and roughly treated. We wander about homeless. When ridiculed, we bless. When persecuted, we endure (1Cor 4:11)

What brought the saints to such a state? Love made Francis throw himself naked before the bishop and had him die naked. Love sent Francis Xavier, (poor and needy), to Japan. Love led St. Charles Borromeo, who was born to riches, to eat a bit of bread, drink some drops of water and sleep on straw.

THE BRIDE IN THE CANTICLE

The bride says that even if she had a thousand consolations that made her beautiful, yet she is sunburned, torn, worn and ruined by many blows given by love. She says, “I am brown because my beloved has sent his sun upon me. These rays illuminate me but their heat makes me sunburn. When their glory touched me, they removed my color. Although I am like a queen beside her king, I am also a vineyard keeper. I live in a hut and look on a vineyard that is not my own.”

FIVE WOUNDS OF ST. FRANCIS

When the wounds of love are strong and frequent, they put us in a weak state of sickness. The life of St. Francis was tears, weakness, wasting away and love trances. The greatest gift was his stigmata, the five wounds of Jesus.

Francis experienced a vision of his crucified Savior. Touched with an overwhelming compassion, he became weak in the sweetness of the vision. Seeing the Savior’s wounds, he felt the sword which pierced Mary’s heart with as much interior pain as if he himself had been crucified.

St. Gregory of Nyssa wept when he saw a painting of Abraham about to kill his son, Isaac. How much greater the feelings of Francis, when he saw the Savior being crucified.

Francis’ soul was softened by this love-filled pain and he was ready to receive the marks of His Savior’s wounds. Because his memory and intellect were steeped in divine love, his will conformed itself to the Beloved’s passions and his soul was transformed into the crucified One.

INNER LOVE AND INNER WOUNDS

Francis’ soul impressed these wounds on the parts of his body where Christ had suffered them. By sharpening the imagination, love penetrates even to the body. A mother’s imagination effects the child in her womb. Imagination can disturb a person’s health. Love drove Francis’ inner torment to wound the body

with the same dart that wounded his soul. However, the inner love could not make holes in the flesh, so the angel came with the sword to make the exterior wounds, which love had already imprinted on his soul.

In the Old Testament, Isaiah knew that his lips were defiled and he would not speak. So, the angel took a burning coal from God's altar and purified his lips, fulfilling Isaiah's desire to be cleansed. (Is C6) A myrrh tree releases some gum and liquor, but an incision is needed so that all the juice flows out. This is how divine love worked in Francis' life. In all his actions, he showed sacred affection. The angel's sword made an incision, so the abundance of love flowed out. All knew that these were heavenly wounds, made by rays of heavenly light. After the piercing, the poor saint languished and was sick from love.

OTHER SAINTS

When St. Philip Neri was 80 years old, Divine love so inflamed his heart, that the heart broke the fourth and fifth ribs, so he could breathe. When St. Stanislaus Kotska was fourteen, he often fainted because of Divine love. He needed cloths soaked in cold water to assuage the burning that he felt in his heart.

A soul which has freely tasted divine consolations lives in this world with continual pain and weakness. St. Francis Xavier often prayed, "O God, take pity on me, do not fill me with such an abundance of consolations. If your infinite goodness wants me to have these delights, then take me to Paradise."

Whoever has tasted this sweetness, lives in sadness when he does not enjoy them. Sometimes, God bestows heavenly sweetnesses and then withdraws them. This privation wounds the soul, which cries, "My soul thirsts, thirsts for the living God. When can I go and see the face of God?" (Ps 42:3) Paul writes, "Unhappy man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24)

UNION WITH GOD, PERFECTED IN PRAYER

7.1 LOVE BRINGS ABOUT UNION WITH GOD IN PRAYER

PARTICULAR ACTS

I do not speak here of the general union of the heart with God, but of the particular acts which the recollected soul makes in prayer so she can be more united with divine goodness. Uniting two things and pressing them together are quite different. To unite demands only that the one touches the other, (like vines in a garden). But to press together requires a strong pressure that increases the union.

MOTHER AND CHILD

Again, see the child at its mother's breast. The child casts himself into her arms and folds his body in her bosom. The mother also clasps the child to her bosom. The baby, allured by his mother's caresses, accepts this union. He presses into his mother's breast as though he could hide in her from whom he came. In this moment, union is perfect.

This union is totally dependent on the mother. She drew the child, and pressed him to her breast. The poor little one just joins himself with all his strength to his mother's bosom. He consents to the union and also contributes to it by his feeble endeavors.

Likewise, the Savior shows his divine breast to the devout soul. He draws her to himself and folds her in his bosom. Burning with love, he clasps the soul and joins her to his delicious breasts, kissing her with the "kiss of his mouth" and making her relish "his breasts more sweet than wine." (Song 1:1)

YIELDING TO THE UNION

Allured by these delights, the soul yields herself to the union made by God. She cooperates and forces herself to join closer and closer to divine goodness, fully acknowledging that this union is totally dependent on God.

When we see people staring at exquisite beauty, listening with great attention to excellent music or listening with satisfaction to a talk, we say that the beauty rivets the eye, the music takes the ears, and the talk captures the heart. The eyes, the ears and the heart allow their powers to be joined to the objects.

PRESSING IN TO UNION

By having intense affections, the soul allows herself to be joined to God and makes progress toward divine union. When a person "presses" us, he doesn't just offer, but he earnestly persuades. The disciples going to Emmaus pressed the savior to stay with them! In prayer, this union happens by frequent advancing of the soul toward God. The child at the breast is always pressing in closer, by its little movements of sucking. So, the heart united with God by prayer makes little movements which join it more closely to God's sweetness.

For example, when a soul is happy to belong to God, she increases this union by moving forward and saying, "Lord, I am all yours, without reserve" or "O sweet Jesus, draw me deeper into your heart, so your love may devour me". At other times, the soul experiences an insensible advancing of the heart into God's goodness.

SINKING DEEPER

As a weighty mass will press itself into the earth, so our heart sinks in deeper by a progressive union that is often difficult to perceive. When the soul is totally in God, this sacred inclination unites it even more to God's goodness. "Love is a power that unites" (St. Denis). It carries us to perfect union with God's total goodness. On this earth, divine love is always a movement. Even after union has been gained, love continues to act to increase that union.

When a tree is transplanted, the roots grow and spread, lodging it deeply in the earth, an action perceived only when accomplished. So, when love transplants a man's heart out of this world and into God, the soul will root itself in God by imperceptible advances. This progress is clearly seen only when completed.

PENETRATING THE SOUL

When you drink, a union happens between you and the water. Later, this water penetrates to all parts and strengthens the entire body. Likewise, when a feeling like “How good God is” enters the heart, it immediately causes union with God’s goodness. As the soul maintains this feeling for a long time, it penetrates every part of the soul and joins with our spirit, uniting our whole being to love.

HONEY ON THE LIPS

David compares God’s words to honey. When we keep honey in our mouth for a long time, the sweetness penetrates our sense of taste. The saints constantly held sacred words in their mouths: “O Goodness”, (St. Bruno); “My Lord and my God” (St. Thomas); “Ah, my Master” (St. Magdalene); and “My God and my all” (St. Francis). Held in the heart, the prayer penetrates the spirit and fills every faculty with its taste.

This increases divine union just as perfume saturates cotton. If the soul preserves this sacred feeling of God’s presence in her tranquil heart, her union will increase and her spirit will experience infinite sweetness. This sacred sentiment differs from religious feelings because it resides in the supreme point of the spirit and performs its sanctifying acts in the soul’s summit.

7.2 THE VARIOUS DEGREES OF UNION IN PRAYER

God brings us to union without our cooperation. The soul just permits itself to be united, and offers no resistance. A child at the breast is so weak that it cannot move towards or even hold on to the breasts. The mother must press him to her bosom. Then he is happy. Sometimes, we do cooperate. Then, God draws us and “we run”. (Song 1:3)

FOLLOWING GOD’S ATTRACTIONS

At other times, we seem to unite ourselves with God before He acts. We act toward union, without yet perceiving what God is doing. Obviously, God always acts first. He lays hold of us before we can even choose to lay hold of him. In this instance, we follow his imperceptible attractions and unite ourselves to him. God continues the union, assists our weakness, and then makes himself perceptible to us. We feel him penetrate our hearts with incomparable sweetness.

A HIDDEN ACTION OF GOD

At other times, He draws us but we enjoy no sensible feelings. We experience union but do not know how it happened. Because our powers cannot bring about union, we realize that some secret power is at work. Seeing our spirit united to God with little effort on our part, we conclude that a secret influence of grace draws us. God does this so that the soul admires what God is doing and can enjoy its union with God with greater simplicity.

PERCEIVING NOTHING

At other times, God makes the union so imperceptible that the soul does not see either God working or herself cooperating. She just realizes that divine union has taken place. Her heart is caught up in God's net and her hands are tied in the bonds of union without her perceiving.

VARIETIES OF DIVINE UNIONS

Sometimes, Divine union happens only in the will. At other times, the understanding shares in union because the will draws it in, and makes the understanding take special pleasure in what it sees. In human love, the will often forces the intellect to rivet its attention on what the will is loving.

Sometimes, all the faculties are involved in the union. Although they cannot be directly united with God, these faculties gather around the will and make it convenient for the will to enjoy union. When this doesn't take place, the faculties work independently and the soul cannot surrender itself perfectly to God's union. Such is the variety of unions of the soul with God!

When Jesus lifted up the little child, he was happy to be clasped to the Savior's bosom. He did nothing and did not resist the Savior's actions.

SOME SAINTS

One day, St. Bonaventure was hearing Mass. Our Savior himself desired divine union, so he brought Holy Communion to Bonaventure. Bonaventure, touched with humility, wanted to withdraw from the Blessed Sacrament. Just imagine Bonaventure's fervor when he finally received the Sacrament.

St. Catherine of Sienna was just the opposite. She ardently desired union with the Savior in Holy Communion, always advancing her affections to him. It seems that the Savior initiated the union with Bonaventure, but Catherine began the union with the Savior.

The bride speaks in both manners, "I turn to my beloved and he turns toward me". (Song 7:10) She is united to him and He likewise to her. In another place, the bride confesses that she is first taken, "My beloved to me and I to my beloved". (Song 2:16)

BEING DRAWN AND RUNNING

No matter how it occurs, union always comes from God's grace. This both attracts the soul and animates the soul's own movements toward union! Seeing herself as totally powerless, she cries, "Draw me". Yet she knows that she has a free will and that her feeble movements must mingle with God's mighty drawings, "We will run after you in the sweetness of your ointments". (Song 1:3) If her will is drawn, then all her faculties can cooperate. God draws the will. The other faculties run. God desires only the will and unites all the faculties in the will. The divine Shepherd said, "Put me as a seal upon your heart and a seal upon your arm". (Song 8:6)

The person must press down hard upon the wax to seal it. God wants this close union to be marked with his seal. Paul wrote "The love of Christ presses us". (1 Cor 5:14) An example of excellent union!

A GREATER UNION

Originally, Adam was united by grace to God. When sin destroyed this union, God made an even closer union when the Word became flesh. In Jesus, human nature enjoyed a personal unity with God. The gift was not just for Jesus' human nature. He gave us the Eucharist, so all can have union with the Savior himself by this food. This sacramental union draws us to the spiritual union that I am describing.

7.3 THE HIGHEST DEGREE OF UNION – BY SUSPENSION AND RAVISHMENT

God is the author of all unions (perceptible or imperceptible) A soul can only be united by going to God. To do this, the soul must be drawn. Jesus said, “No one can come to me, unless the Father, who sent me, draws him”. (Jn 6:44) The bride says, “Draw me and we will run”. (Song 1:3)

A PURE UNION

This union is perfected in two ways. It must be a pure union and a strong union. I can approach a person for many reasons – to speak to him, to see him, or to get something from him. I always have some purpose. By approaching the person, I want to obtain something. However, I come close only to be with that person, then I have a pure and simple union.

Some approach the Savior to hear him (Magdalene), to be cured (the woman with the infirmity), to adore him (three kings), to serve him (Martha), to overcome disbelief (Thomas) or to embalm him (Joseph of Arimathea). The bride, however, seeks only to be one with him, “I held him and will not let him go.” (Song 3:4)

Jacob agreed to let God go only if He blessed him. However, the bride seeks pure union and will not let him go at all. She does not want the blessings of God. She wants the God of blessings. “What have I in heaven, and besides you, what do I have on earth? You are the God of my heart, my portion forever.” (Ps 73:25-26)

Ask Our Blessed Mother at the foot of the cross. “What do you seek, O Mother of life, in this place of death?” She says, “I am seeking my child, the life of my life.” “Why do you seek him?” “To be close by him who is in the sorrows of death. I do not seek joy. I seek him. My heart makes me always seek union with my child.” In this pure union, Mary seeks only to be with Jesus.

AFFIXED TO GOD

Theologians call this close union inhesion because the soul is affixed to God and cannot easily draw herself back. A man delighting in beautiful music or a game of cards, cannot be drawn away. He cannot be freed. He forgets even to eat or drink.

Any soul in love with God is locked in, united by infinite sweetness and possessed by God's total perfection. St. Paul says that not even death can separate him from the Master. Love also joined David and

Jonathan in this way. “The soul of Jonathan was one with the soul of David.” (1Sam 18:1) The ancient Fathers said “A friendship which can end was never true friendship.”

A child at the breast does not want to be placed in the cradle. If carried off, he weeps and keeps his heart where he cannot keep his body.

ALWAYS BONDED TO GOD

The Prayer of Union fastens the soul to God. Only by much force and pain is it removed. If the soul’s imagination is diverted, her intellect will keep hold. If someone loosens her intellect, her will takes hold. If some distraction affects the will, she turns back to God whenever possible. Nothing completely unties her from God. She constantly forges the bonds of union by her frequent returns.

The soul is like St. Paul, “I am caught between the two. I long to depart this life and be with Christ. Yet that I remain in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit.” (Phil 1:24) The soul wants freedom from exterior works to remain with Jesus. Yet, she accepts these works as necessary for union with him.

ST. TERESA’S TERMINOLOGY

St. Teresa teaches that when the soul is fastened in this way to the Savior, the prayer is the same as rapture (or suspension of the spirit). When it lasts a short time, it is called suspension of the spirit. When it lasts a long time it is called ecstasy (or rapture). The soul is so firmly united to God, that she cannot easily be drawn away. She is no longer in herself but in God, just as Jesus’ body did not belong to himself, but to the cross.

UNION AND THE EXPERIENCE OF UNION

To avoid any mistake, I must say that charity alone is the “bond of perfection”. (Col 3:14) Whoever has more charity is more closely united with God. Consider the great saints (Paul, Augustine, Francis, Catherine of Sienna) and imagine that they are asleep. Compare them with a devout soul who is experiencing ecstasy. Which of these is more fastened to God? Without doubt, the great saints. Even in sleep, they cannot be separated from God. You ask, “How can a soul in ecstasy be less united to God than someone who is asleep?” Ecstasy is an experience of union, not union itself. The saints are more advanced in union itself. They are already united, while the devout soul is being united.

ASPIRATIONS

The devout soul should use prayer aspirations to experience this union. “Let me be one spirit with you”. “O God, you alone are necessary.” “You are totally mine. When shall I be totally yours?” “I am made for you.” “Swallow up my spirit in your goodness.” “Draw me into your fatherly arms.”

7.4 THE FIRST SPECIES OF RAPTURE

The prayer of union is called both rapture and ecstasy. Rapture, because God raises us up to himself. Ecstasy, because we go out of ourselves to be one with God. God’s beauty and goodness have a power to

draw our attention. So, this prayer can raise us up (Rapture) and bear us away (Ecstasy). The ravished soul, by her free consent and ardent efforts, breaks out of herself, and casts herself into God.

THREE KINDS OF ECSTASIES (RAPTURES)

There are three different ecstasies, of the understanding, the emotions and the will. The ecstasy of the understanding results from admiration; that of the emotions by devotion, that of the will from action. In this chapter, I will explain the ecstasy of the understanding, which comes from admiration.

ECSTASY OF THE INTELLECT

Admiration comes from encountering a new truth, which we didn't even expect to know. When beauty and goodness accompany this truth, the experience is very pleasing. The Queen of Sheba was filled with admiration when she encountered the wisdom of Solomon. The Jews admired our Savior's knowledge.

Sometimes God gives a special light to our hearts which raises us to a sublime contemplation of heavenly mysteries. Discovering more beauty than we could imagine, we fall into admiration. Because admiration causes pleasures, it fixes the spirit upon the truth. The newness of the beauty of this experience causes the understanding to constantly want to see it.

God also gives the soul a growing light (like the daybreak). When those who have found gold, remove more earth, they find even more. So, the understanding goes even deeper into the richness of God's mystery. In this way, admiration causes contemplation and mystical experiences. When this admiration is strong, the understanding gives lively attention to heavenly things. This lifts us out of ourselves and above ourselves, and carries the soul into ecstasy.

7.5 THE SECOND KIND OF RAPTURE

God also draws the soul by his beauty and goodness, which are really one in God's Supreme Being. For example, both light and heat come from the one sun. Because the sun is beautiful, it draws all eyes. Because the sun is good, it gives heat. So, God is both beautiful and good. By his beauty, He attracts our understanding. By his goodness, He draws our will. His beauty leads our understanding to contemplation. His goodness excites our will to love. Both work together. Love leads to contemplation and contemplation to love.

DEPEND ONLY ON LOVE

Ecstasies (raptures) depend totally on love. Only love carries the understanding to contemplation and the will to union. Divine love is ecstatic. It does not allow the lovers to live for themselves. When St. Paul was possessed by the power of ecstasy, he wrote, "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me". (Gal 2:20) He was a true lover, going out from himself into God.

THE WILL

The rapture of love happens in the will, when God touches it with sweetness. When the will turns toward God, it leaves behind all earthly inclinations and enters into rapture. Although not understanding

God, the will enjoys him. Although not knowing God, it experiences him. Although not seeing God, it relishes him.

THE TWO FACULTIES

At times, the understanding is allowed to see the will taking delight in ecstasy. The will then delights that the understanding is enjoying God's beauty and goodness. The two faculties help each other to be ravished. Seeing God's beauty makes the understanding love it. Loving God's beauty makes the will admire it. As the sun both warms and gives light, so the soul, in these ecstasies, both sees and loves God. However, these two ecstasies (of will and understanding) are not essential to one another. Each can happen alone. Christians often have more love than knowledge and great knowledge is not always accompanied by great love.

THE DEMONIC

According to Paul, the ecstasy in the intellect alone does not sanctify us, "If I should know all mysteries and have all knowledge and not have charity, I am nothing." (1Cor 13:2) In fact, an evil spirit can ravish the understanding and lift the soul above its natural powers. By sensible consolations, he can even give the will some vain love. Only the Holy Spirit can give the will a true ecstasy which powerfully joins the soul to God. The Spirit is, "the love of God poured out in our hearts". (Rom 5:5)

7.6 SIGNS OF GOOD RAPTURE AND THE THIRD KIND

Many souls believed that God frequently ravished them, but these experiences came from the devil or from human nature. In Augustine's time, a priest put himself into ecstasies whenever he wanted, to satisfy the curiosity of onlookers. During the ecstasy, he did not feel fire that was applied to his skin and he did not breathe. Therefore, to beguile souls and to scandalize others, the devil changes himself into an angel of light. He causes raptures in souls not formed by solid piety. There are also natural ecstasies, caused by the person's own powers.

TWO MARKS

The saints help us to discern divine ecstasies from the human and demonic. There are two marks of a holy ecstasy.

(1) Mostly in the Will

A good ecstasy affects the will more than the understanding. It moves, warms and fills the soul with powerful affections towards God. Therefore, if the ecstasy is beautiful, bright and speculative rather than good, warm and affective, it should be suspected. Certainly, a soul can have raptures (and even prophetic visions) without charity, just as a person can have charity without ecstasies or prophesies. Yet, I affirm this. In ecstasy, a person who has more light in his intellect to admire God than heat in his will to love God, should be on guard. The ecstasy may be false, puffing up the spirit rather than building it up.

(2) God's Commandments and Inspirations

The second mark of true ecstasy is the keeping of God's commands. Human strength cannot entirely observe God's commandments. Yet, by trying to observe them, the human spirit lives with right reason.

Besides keeping God's commandments, we should follow God's inspirations. To help us, God must raise us above our own strength, and even above our natural inclinations. These inspirations exceed and surpass human reason. By God's inspirations we live a supernatural, spiritual, devout and ecstatic life which is beyond our natural powers in every way.

(3) Beyond Ourselves

Not to steal, to lie, to swear, to kill, to commit impurity, to disobey is to live according to natural reason. However, to forsake all goods, to love poverty, to seek reproach, persecution and martyrdom, to maintain an absolute chastity, and to live in the world contrary to the world's maxims is to live beyond and above ourselves. No one can do this unless "the Father draw him". Therefore, this kind of life is a perpetual rapture and a continual ecstasy (of action and deed).

A HIGHER LIFE

Paul wrote, "You are dead and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Col 3:3) "You are dead" means you no longer live in the limits of your natural condition. Your soul lives above herself and not according to herself. Silkworms change their being and become butterflies. Bees are first nymphs and only later become bees.

If we are spiritual, we do the same. We leave behind our natural life to live a higher life, which is above ourselves. Our new life is heavenly love which is hidden in God with Jesus Christ. At the Ascension, the disciples saw Jesus go up, but then he was hidden by a cloud. Jesus is our life and "our life is hidden in God with Jesus Christ". When Jesus shall appear (on Judgment Day) we also shall appear with him in glory."

7.7 LOVE – THE LIFE OF OUR SOUL

The soul is the principle of all the body's vital movements. By the soul, the person lives, feels and understands. We know life from its actions. Anything which does not act has no life.

THE TRUE, VITAL PRINCIPLE

Likewise, love is the vital principle of our devout life. By love, we live and move spiritually. Our spiritual life is the same as the movements of love. A heart with no affection has no love. A heart moved by affection is possessed by love.

By setting our affections on Jesus Christ, we place him in our soul. Our life is hidden with him and our love for him will appear when He appears in glory. "My love is crucified" said St. Ignatius of Antioch, meaning "my human life with all its passions is nailed to the cross. My natural love has died so I might rise to the supernatural life of love."

ECSTASY WITHOUT HOLINESS

Therefore, a soul which enjoys ecstasy in prayer must also lead a life that is elevated by setting aside worldly desires, by curbing her will and inclinations, by an interior simplicity, and especially by continual charity. If her life is not holy, I believe that her raptures are doubtful and dangerous. The soul enjoys God but does not love God.

What does it profit a soul to be ravished by God in prayer, when her life is ravished by earthly affections? What value to be above herself in prayer, but below herself in actions? What holiness is it, to be angelic in meditation and brutish in conversation?

THE RAPTURE OF TRUE DEVOTION

Elijah asked the people if they were going to serve God or Baal (1Kings 18:4). When the soul tries to serve both heaven and earth, it shows that these raptures (ecstasies) are deceits of the evil spirits. Blessed are those who live an ecstatic life, raised above themselves, even if they do not experience ecstatic prayer. Many saints in heaven were never in the rapture of contemplation. Many saints and martyrs enjoyed only devotion and fervor. Yet, every saint had the ecstasy of life, by overcoming self and natural inclinations.

St. Paul is really talking of this ecstasy of life, when he writes, "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me." (Gal 2:20), "Our old self was crucified with him." (Rom 6:6), "We are dead to sin and walk in newness of life." Within us are two men. One represents the old life, like an old eagle who is unable to take flight. The other represents new life, like a young eagle who has shed the old feathers and flies in newness of strength.

THE NEW LIFE

The first life lives according to the weaknesses of Adam, a life that is death itself. The second has new life, according to the favors and will of Our Savior. To attain the new life, the soul must die to the old by "crucifying his flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal. 5:24), burying it beneath the waters of Baptism and confession.

Naaman, the leper, bathed in the Jordan. His old, leprous life was left behind and his new spotless life began. He was no longer the old, infected Naaman, but the new, clean Naaman. Whoever is raised to new life lives not to himself nor for himself but in his Savior and for his Savior. "You must realize that you are dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus, our Lord." (Rom 6:11)

7.8 PAUL'S EXHORTATION

St. Paul makes the most powerful argument for this ecstasy of life and deeds. Please weigh these heavenly words of Paul who was transported to heaven. He wrote, "The love of Christ impels us." (2 Cor 5:14)

LOVED BY THE KING OF KINGS

An ordinary citizen, who is loved by the king, must love in return. Jesus Christ is the King of kings, and has loved us even to his death on the cross. Should not our hearts experience a great force to love him? Paul goes on, “Once we have come to the conviction that one died for all.” (2Cor 5:14) Paul wants us to ponder and consider this truth of faith. What does he want us to ponder? He goes on, “If one died for all, therefore, all are dead.” We are all dead in Jesus Christ. His death is ours, because He endured it for us.

Paul draws the logical conclusion, “that those who live, might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised”. (2Cor 5:15) What an important truth! By his death, Christ gave us life. We only live because He died. We no longer own our lives. By his death, He purchased them for us. So, we must live for him, and not for ourselves.

THE MAIDEN AND THE EAGLE

A story concerns a young maiden who raised a young eagle. Because she had done so much, he was totally devoted to her. One day she died, and, as was the custom, her body was placed on a funeral pyre to be burnt. When the eagle saw this happening, he flew to the young maiden, covered her with his wings and courageously died with her to protect her.

Our Savior has raised us since our youth. From the moment of our conception, He took us into his arms. At Baptism, He made us his own. At Eucharist, he fed us with his own body and blood. We must draw the same conclusion as St. Paul, “We should live no more for ourselves but for him who died for us.” We must consecrate all our moments to divine love.

DYING WITH CHRIST

See Christ on the cross, as on a funeral pyre, dying for love of us. Why do we not spiritually cast ourselves upon the cross with him? We must have the eagle’s generosity to die in the same flames. Let the same fire consume both Creator and creature. Then, Jesus is totally mine and I am totally his. Neither death nor life shall separate us. This is the ecstasy of true love. We live above human reason and natural inclinations, guided by the Lord’s inspirations and will.

7.9 THE GREATEST EFFECT OF AFFECTIVE LOVE – THE DEATH OF THE LOVERS

“Love is strong as death.” (Song 8:6) As death separates the soul from the body and from all worldly things, so divine love separates the devout soul from the body and all worldly things. What death does by its effects, love does by its affections. In fact, holy love sometimes becomes so violent that it actually causes death, the separation of body from soul (a most happy death).

The evil man dies in sin. The elect die in love and grace. Yet, this happens quite differently. A just man might die unexpectedly, but never unprovided for. The Church never prays against a “sudden death” but against a “sudden and unprovided death”. To be sudden is no problem, if it is provided for.

DEATHS OF SAINTS

If weak souls had seen fire from heaven fall upon St. Simeon Stylite and kill him, they would be scandalized. Yet, the saint had so immolated himself, that God's fire just perfected his sacrifice and consumed him. In fact, Abbot Julian saw his soul ascend into heaven. Blessed Homobonus was kneeling at mass and did not rise for the Gospel. Others saw that he was dead.

Famous saints have died in the confessional or while hearing a sermon. Others died after giving a fervent homily. These deaths were sudden, but not unprovided. Many good people die suddenly. They all die in grace and, therefore, in God's love.

How could they die in God, when they didn't have a chance to think of God? Learned men do not lose their knowledge when they are asleep. The same is true of all the virtues, which are always in the just man's heart. When a man sleeps, his virtues sleep with him and awake when he awakes. A just man who dies suddenly, dies in the habit of love, although not using it at that moment. "The just man, even though he die early, shall be at rest." (Wis 9:7)

MORE DEATHS OF THE SAINTS

Many saints have died while using Divine love. Augustine died in holy sorrow. Jerome died while exhorting his disciples to love God and neighbor. Ambrose died while in a rapture, right after Holy Communion. St. Anthony of Padua died after he had recited a hymn to Mary and was talking with Jesus. St. Thomas Aquinas raised his eyes and chanted, "Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field. Let us stay in the villages." (Song 7:11)

All the apostles and almost all the martyrs died in prayer. By revelation, St. Bede knew when he would die. He was not sick when he went to sing Vespers (Feast of the Ascension). He died while standing upright. John Gerson, a man of unsurpassable piety and learning, taught the fifty qualities of divine love in the Song of Songs. Three days later, he died reciting the words of the Song, "Your love is as strong as death".

OTHER EXAMPLES

St. Martin died while attentive to devotion. St. Louis the King, struck with the plague, never ceased to pray. After receiving Communion, he spread out his arms and said with perfect confidence, "I will come unto your house. I will worship in your temple. I will give glory to your name." (Ps 138:2)

St. Peter Celestine, steeped in cruel, indescribable afflictions, ended his life singing, "Let every spirit praise the Lord". St. Eusbia died on her knees in fervent prayer. St. Peter martyr wrote the creed in his own blood saying, "Lord, into your hands, I commend my spirit". St. Francis Xavier held and kissed the crucifix saying, "O Jesus, the God of my heart."

7.10 THOSE WHO DIED BY AND FOR DIVINE LOVE

All martyrs died for love of God. We say they died for their faith, but theirs was a living faith animated by charity. By proclaiming its faith, the will shows its love for God. After denying Christ, Peter still had faith. However, he had lost love, by refusing to acknowledge the Master.

DYING FOR CHARITY

Others died expressly for charity. John the Baptist died because he corrected King Herod. St. Paul was killed because he reclaimed women whom Nero had led into sin. St. Thomas of Canterbury died for charity, not faith. Many virgin martyrs died to preserve chastity, which they dedicated to God from charity.

CONSUMED BY LOVE

Some saints let the holy fire of divine love consume them. Their grief hindered them from eating, drinking or sleeping and their weakened bodies died from failure of strength. We say they died of grief. When the fervor of love is great, it assaults the heart, wounds it, causes it to languish, melts it habitually, and puts it into frequent ecstasies. The soul is so occupied with God that it cannot assist nature in nourishing itself properly. Little by little, the body begins to fail. Life is shortened and death occurs.

How happy is this death! How delightful this dart which wounds us with heavenly love. It makes us sick, pining with such a strong beating of the heart that we must yield to death. Works done for charity advanced the death of St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Francis, young St. Stanislaus Kostka, and so many others. After St. Francis received the stigmata, he had violent pains, convulsions and illness. He became skin and bones, more like a skeleton than a man still living.

7.11 SAINTS WHO DIED OF LOVE

All the elect die in the state of love, but some die while using love. Others die for this love and by this love. However, the greatest level is to die of love. Love does not just wound the soul and make it weak. It pierces the soul, delivers a blow right to the heart and drives the soul out of the body. This is how it happens.

Divine sweetness powerfully draws the soul as she corresponds with God's attractions. To the best of her powers, she springs towards the beloved. He attracts the soul, but the soul obviously cannot bring along her body. Rather than stay in this life, the soul just leaves the body behind and flies alone into the bosom of her spouse.

She throws herself upon the beloved, who draws and ravishes her to himself. As the groom leaves father and mother to cling to his wife, this chaste soul leaves her body to unite with the beloved. This violent effect of love requires that the affections be stripped away, so that the soul is attached neither to the world or to the body. As fire purifies the wood and brings it to flame, so divine love purifies a person from his inclinations and moves the soul out of her body to gain eternal glory.

St. Francis of Assisi could not escape death by love, because he experienced so many faintings and ecstasies from divine love. Francis died of love because God wanted to use him as a miracle of love to the whole world. Knowing that he was going to die, Francis had himself placed on the ground. Dressed in a habit, he preached to his brothers and had the passion narrative read. Then, he recited Psalm 142: “With full voice, I cry out to the Lord. Lead me out of my prison, that I may praise your name.” Then he died at age 45.

DEATH OF ST. BASIL

St. Basil had a Jewish friend, a physician whom he wanted to bring to faith in Christ. As Basil was dying, he asked the doctor to speak frankly. Having felt his pulse, the doctor said, “You will die before the sun sets”. Basil asked, “What will you say if I am still alive tomorrow?” “I will become a Christian. I promise you” said the doctor.

St. Basil prayed and gained a prolongation of his life. Then he got out of bed and went to Church to baptize the doctor. After returning to bed, he spent a long time in prayer, told his brethren to serve God, saw the angels approach and said with delight, “O God, I restore my soul to you”. Then, he died. The doctor, filled with grief, said, “Basil, if you wanted, you would not even have died today”. His death was totally from love.

After her death, St. Teresa of Avila appeared in a vision and revealed that she died of an assault of love which was so violent, that nature could not handle it and her soul departed to God.

7.12 A GENTLEMEN WHO DIED ON MOUNT OLIVET

I have found a history which is credible to those who love God. St. Paul writes, “Love believes all things”. (1 Cor 13:7) Love does not believe someone who is lying, but has no difficulty in believing if the stories seem true and magnify God’s love. The story is not known by all. Augustine says that miracles are often not known in the place where they happened and when told by those who saw them, they are scarcely believed. Yet, they are still true.

A KNIGHT IN PALESTINE

St. Bernadine told this story in his homily on the Ascension. On one occasion, a knight went to Palestine to visit the holy places. Before going, he received confession and communion. At Nazareth, he contemplated God’s goodness in becoming a man. At Bethlehem, he shed many tears in contemplating the infant in Mary’s arms. At the Jordan, he stood where Jesus was baptized and where the Holy Spirit descended. In the desert, he contemplated Our Savior, fasting and fighting the enemy. At Mount Tabor, he contemplated the Savior transfigured. In the Upper Room, he imagined Jesus washing the apostles’ feet and giving them his body and blood. At Gethsemane, he imagined the Lord sweating blood in his agony. At Calvary, he contemplated the Savior on the cross and Mary pierced with a sword of sorrow. He watched the body taken down and placed in the tomb.

HIS FINAL MOMENTS

Drawing upon all his affections, he cried out, “Jesus, I don’t know where else to seek you and follow you on earth. Grant that I can follow you into heaven.” At that moment, he shot his soul into heaven like a sacred arrow. When his companions saw this man fall dead, they went for the doctor. In judging the cause of death, the doctor said, “Obviously his heart was broken from an excess of love.”

A STORY OF HOLY COMMUNION

The “Mirror of Spiritual Persons” says a nobleman, totally dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament, suffered from a sickness that caused continual vomiting. His pastor brought Holy Communion, but the man, fearing he would vomit it, asked the priest to place it on his heart. At that moment, his side opened, he took in the host and died. This extraordinary story is similar to the story of St. Clare of Montefalco, whose cleft heart can be seen to this day. There are many extraordinary effects from divine love.

7.13 THE DEATHS OF JOSEPH AND MARY

Jesus certainly assisted at Joseph’s death. Did not Joseph offer Jesus great kindness at his birth? Certainly. Jesus would have returned this a hundred fold at Joseph’s death.

Joseph would have carried Jesus going to Egypt and on the return to Nazareth. Would not Jesus have carried Joseph into glory at the Ascension? Having already performed his duties toward Jesus, Joseph could only say “I have finished the work you gave me to do”. (Jn 12:4) Such was the death of Joseph, who performed the most loving duties to the Son of God.

OUR LADY’S DEATH

Mary had the most noble of deaths. She and her Son were one soul and one heart. She was the most loving of mothers, with a love greater than all the angels and all the saints. She was an “only mother” and he was an “only son”. Not having a human father, Jesus depended totally on his mother for his birth. She supplied all that was needed, because the power of the Holy Spirit formed the heavenly child. All the love of that conception was given to her. What angel can say to the Savior, “You are my true son and I love you as a true son”? To which creature did the Savior say “You are my mother, totally mine, and I am your son, totally yours.” A servant might say, “I have no other life than my master’s”. So Mary would say, “I have no life but the life of the son”. This is the unity of hearts between mother and son.

CONSUMED BY DIVINE FIRE

Besides living her son’s life, she also died his death. The virgin mother, by a lively and continual memory, collected all the mysteries of her son’s life and death. She had Jesus’ most ardent inspirations and also the intense activity of his perpetual contemplation. The sacred fire of divine love totally consumed her as a holocaust of sacrifice. She died, totally ravished and transported into the arms of her son.

Among the several disciples at the cross, those with the deepest love had the deepest sorrow. Jesus’ sweet mother loved more than all others and was transfixed by the sword of sorrow. Her heart was glued to her Son’s heart and the sword passed through both. Any wound on Jesus inflicted a lively torture on Mary.

Because of Jesus' love, she loved these wounds and kept her sorrow. She wanted to die with her Son, who was a perfect holocaust in the flames of charity.

7.14 THE GLORIOUS VIRGIN DIED A TRANQUIL DEATH

Our Lady revealed to St. Mechtilde that she died of a violent assault of divine love. St. Bridget and St. John Damascene said she died a peaceful death. Both statements are true. Those saints who died of love, felt many of love's qualities before experiencing death. There were assaults, ecstasies, fainting and agonies. These experiences happened because their love, (which was not yet perfect) did not have an even fervor.

A PEACEFUL, CONTINUOUS GROWTH OF LOVE

With our Virgin mother, it was quite different. A day does not dawn by intervals. The sun's rising is a continuous, almost imperceptible brightening. We see this growth in brightness, but we perceive no change because there is no interruption.

Divine love grew in Mary's heart by a peaceable and continuous growth, without any agitation or shock. The Virgin's love had no impetuosity because love shocks the spirit only when the spirit resists. When opposition does not exist, love makes progress peaceable. Mary's heart experienced no impetuosity because she placed no hindrance to divine love.

NO OBSTACLES

Because rocks and reefs prevent a river from flowing, the water leaps over them. However, on a plain field, rivers glide smoothly and without effort. In all human hearts except Mary's, divine love finds resistance. Love becomes violent to overcome bad inclinations, and becomes agitated to push the will. By these efforts, divine love finds room and gets past these obstacles.

In the sacred Virgin, everything favored heavenly love and its growth was incomparably greater and its progress more tranquil. She did not faint away with love even though she experienced the most painful attack of love. Although this attack was extreme, it was strong, gentle, mighty and tranquil.

NO CONTRADICTION

Certainly, Mary's heart had two parts with two appetites. She experienced the appetite of the spirit and the appetite of the senses (even her Son felt this burden). However, her sensual desires were so well ordered that divine love was not troubled by any contradiction with the senses. The senses' movements never went into sin. All her appetites were faithful in serving divine love.

People do not want thorns mixed with their roses. Yet, the farmer uses thorns in his fence as a rampart against cattle. So, the Virgin experienced all of life's thorns, except sin. She used these difficulties to increase her virtues. Far from hindering heavenly love, these difficulties strengthened heavenly love by her continual exercise of the contrary virtue. She is not like Martha. She has chosen her Son's love and will not be deprived.

FIVE HINDRANCES

Five things hinder God's constant allurements;

1. Sin (which distances us from God).
2. Attachment to riches.
3. Sensual pleasures.
4. Pride and vanity.
5. The multitude of inordinate passions

The Virgin is free of these five:

1. She is preserved from all sin.
2. She is always poor in spirit.
3. She is ever most pure.
4. She is always humble.
5. She is in control of her passions, totally exempt from inner rebellion.

GENTLE ECSTASIES

She is like iron drawn to God's magnet, moving more quickly as she comes closer. Nothing in her hindered divine love. Her ecstasies were gentle, without any travail. During these ecstasies, her senses continued to function without disturbing her spirit's union with God. Her death was more sweet than can be imagined, because she flowed into her Sons goodness.

UNITING OUR WILL TO GOD'S WILL (LOVE OF CONFORMITY)

8.1 LOVE OF CONFORMITY COMING FROM HOLY COMPLACENCY

When someone pleases us, we want to please them. True love always strives to please. From this desire comes loving conformity. We conform ourselves to what we love. King Solomon loved idolatrous women and soon grew idolatrous himself. Scripture calls men effeminate who love women too passionately and become like them.

TRANSFORMED BY DELIGHTS

Delight causes an imperceptible transformation because, when it enters our heart, it brings forth more delights. By delighting in God, we become like God and our will is transformed. A person drawn into a perfume shop, inevitably smells of perfume when he leaves. By taking pleasure in something, we are affected by its qualities. Delight opens our heart, just as sorrow closes it. Scripture says that delight "widens" our heart. After delight opens the heart, its object passes quickly into the spirit and it even draws other things (which might be disagreeable to us.) As the crowd entered the banquet hall, one person got in without a wedding garment. By delight, the person experiences the qualities of what he desires. Therefore, holy delight transforms us into God. The greater the delight, the more perfect the transformation. The saints who loved ardently brought the disposition of God's heart into their own and were quickly transformed.

CONFORMING OUR HEARTS

We do not imitate those whom we hate. However, we quickly conform ourselves to what we love. St. Paul said, “The law was not made for the just.” (1 Tim 1:9) because the just man does not need the law. Love draws him to the good. Love presses him to obey God’s will.

Love is a magistrate who exercises his authority without noise and with no police. Love urges by delight. We delight in God and want to please him. Love is the dictionary of all theology. It makes the saints masters of the Art of Love. By love, the spouse says “My beloved is totally mine”. By benevolence she says, “I am totally his”. My heart delights in God and God is pleased by my taking delight. When God feeds me, I give him the milk of my desires. Whoever delights in God wants to conform himself to God.

8.2 THE CONFORMITY OF SUBMISSION

Our delight in God draws God’s perfections into us (according to our capacity). A mirror reflects the sun only according to the glass’ capacity. Thus we are conformed to God. However, our desires for God’s glory (benevolence) conforms us to God in a different way. If delight draws God into our hearts, desires for God’s glory casts us into God, consecrating all our actions to him. Our desires want God to receive all possible honor and glory so his goodness is acknowledged.

WANTING GOD TOTALLY LOVED

The following is how the soul practices this desire. First, it takes great delight in seeing how good God is. Then, the soul desires that all love be used for God. It wants God to be totally loved and adored. It rejoices that God is the Lord of all creation and wants all things subject to him. It sees God’s will as perfect, just and fair and desires that he have authority over all. The soul desires that everyone serve him.

This is not obeying God because He is Father and Lord. That obedience flows from justice. I am speaking here of love. If there were no heaven to reward nor hell to punish, if we had no obligation to obey God, our desires for God’s glory would still move us to obey God by free choice.

TOTALLY SUBMITTING TO GOD

By benevolence, a woman gives herself to her husband. By benevolence, a person gives their heart to a religious order. By holy benevolence, we give our hearts to God’s, placing all our desires in his hands to be directed as He chooses. This profound obedience of love has no need for rewards or punishments, laws or commandments. Benevolent love goes beyond these, submitting to God because He deserves that all souls should unite themselves forever to his will.

8.3 CONFORMITY TO GOD’S SIGNIFIED WILL

Sometimes we see God’s will as all good and we say, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. At other times, we see God’s will in various events, circumstances and manifestations. Although God has only one will, we call it by many names, according to the circumstances. Here, I’ll examine God’s signified will.

As Catholics, we have truths to believe, blessings to hope for, commandments to keep and counsels to follow. These are called God's signified will, because He has made clear to us what we must believe, hope, and practice. We have the power to say "yes" or "no". This is due to three decisions of God.

1. He wills that we are able to resist his will.
2. He desires that we do not resist.
3. He allows us to resist if we please.

Our power to resist comes from our liberty. Our actual resisting comes from evil. Our obedience comes from divine goodness. In our disobedience, God does nothing except to leave our wills free. In our obedience, we need God's help.

THE POWER OF GOD'S DESIRES

To give permission is a passive action because it does nothing. To desire, however, is a fertile action because it invites and urges. Because God desires that we obey his signified will, He inspires and aids us. In permitting us to resist, God simply permits our wills to freely choose.

God's desire is a true desire. In the gospel parable, the King wanted an excellent banquet so he urged, and even compelled, the guests to come and eat. If he forced the food down the guests' mouths, he would be treating them like an animal (that needs to be fattened). Some favors come only by invitation, not by violence. Therefore, God acts by his desire, not by his absolute will (which would force his grace upon us).

This is true also of his signified will, even though this is what he clearly wants. All he can do is to give us the necessary means, and inspire us to use them. As a curtain can shut out sunbeams, so we can shut out God's will. Conformity to God's signified will means that we will what God intends for us. We believe his doctrines, hope in his promises, fear his warnings and live according to his commandments. At mass, we stand for the gospel, showing our readiness to obey his word. We kiss the gospel to adore his will.

At the great Church counsels, the gospel Book was enthroned. This shows the Church's great reverence for God's signified will. St. Charles Borromeo studied Scripture on his knees to show his respect. Many saints have carried the gospels next to their hearts.

8.4 CONFORMING OUR WILL TO GOD'S SAVING WILL

God wills that everyone be saved. To bring this about, God made us in his own image and then made himself in our image (at Bethlehem). He died once to save us and would die again to save us.

WORKING IN OUR NATURE

Although not everyone goes to heaven, the Father certainly wills that everyone be saved. He works in us according to his nature and our nature. His nature moves him to give us grace that will bring us to glory. However, our nature is free to accept God's abundance (for salvation) or neglect it (for damnation). "One thing I ask of the Lord and this do I seek. That I may see the delights of the Lord and visit his temple." (Ps 27:4)

ALWAYS LOVING

Our sanctification is God's will and our salvation is his good pleasure. God's will is entirely loving toward man. The marks of this love are our Savior's wounds. His heart takes great desire in doing us favors. If you turn your eyes a thousand times toward God's loving will, your will melt into his. We cry out, "How good is your will! How desirable are your favors! You created us for eternal life. Your breasts abound in the milk of mercy, pardoning the sinner and perfecting the just. Why do we not fasten ourselves to you as children join themselves to their mother's breasts?"

OUR DESIRES

We must will our salvation as God wills it. Since He wills it by desire, we must incessantly desire it. He also gives us all the necessary means and we must accept these means. It is not enough to say "I desire to use these means." We must have an absolute resolution to embrace these graces. Our will must correspond to God's and we must desire these means as God does.

OUR FEARS

However, a problem arises. We accept these means in a general way. However, in an individual way, we grow fearful. Peter was ready to undergo death for Jesus, but when the time came to act, he feared even a simple maid. We think we can drink the Savior's chalice but we run away when it comes. The Bible contains examples of people accepting the chalice. David accepted God's punishment, "O Lord, how good that you humbled me, that I may learn your justification". (Ps 119:71) After Pentecost, the apostles rejoiced in their tribulations. (Acts 5:41)

8.5 CONFORMITY TO GOD'S COMMANDMENTS

God has an intense desire that we keep his commandments. This is evident from his great rewards for the obedient and his great punishments for the disobedient. "O Lord, you have decreed that your commandments be kept most diligently." (Ps 119:4) The soul's love of complacency sees this desire of God and wants to observe it. From this observance comes a love for the commandments. "O Lord, how I have loved your law. They are more precious than gold." (Ps 119:97 and 127) To stir up our love, we must see the beauty of the commandments.

THE GIFT OF THE KING

We do not want what comes from an enemy, but we are always grateful for a friend's gift. The commands of a tyrant cause bitterness, but God's commandments come from a loving King.

Many people keep the commandments like sick people take medicine, more from fear of dying than from loving God.

SINGING ALONG THE WAY

Loving hearts love God's commandments. The harder they are, the more agreeable they find them because their obedience honors God more. When God teaches them his commandments, the soul sings

because they are refreshed by the burdens of God's commands. A pilgrim who sings along the way lightens the journey's hardship. "O Lord, your commands were the subject of my songs in my journey." (Ps 119:54)

Unfortunately, men lose courage and find no strength to carry these burdens. For the souls who love, the law of Christ refreshes their hearts. There is no labor where love is. Love with labor is bittersweet, even more pleasant to the taste than something purely sweet.

Heavenly love conforms the soul to God's will. She observes his commandments because they are God's absolute desire. Holy desires make the necessity of keeping God's law into a delight.

8.6 CONFORMITY TO GOD'S COUNSELS

A commandment shows God's absolute will. A counsel represents his desires. A commandment obliges us. A counsel invites us. If we break a commandment, we are guilty. If we do not follow a counsel, we are worthy of less praise. Those who disobey commandments deserve damnation. Those who neglect counsels deserve less glory.

THE COUNSELS RECOMMEND

By commanding, the authority obliges us. By recommending, the authority invites us. Commandments impose necessity. A counsel leads to what is useful. By following counsels, we please God. By following commandments, we avoid displeasing him. Therefore, our delighting in God urges us to follow the counsels. Our desires to serve God leads us to will even what God only recommends. A child who loves his father does not just keep his commands. He fulfills his every desire and inclination.

ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL

God gives us counsels to perfect us. "If you will be perfect, go, sell all you have, give to the poor and come follow me". (Mt 19:21) A loving heart receives counsels according to God's will and follows a counsel to give homage to God. God does not want everyone to follow all his counsels, but only what is suitable to each situation. Charity is the queen and charity gives all good works their place of order and worth.

If your parents need your assistance, then don't go to a monastery. A prince who must have children should not forsake marriage for the sake of his kingdom. A person weak and sickly should not embrace poverty. Fathers cannot sell all they have and give to the poor, because they must support their family. Kings must lay up treasures to overcome the enemy. Paul recommends that the married not abstain too long from sexual activity. (1Cor 7:5)

Obviously, all the counsels are not for every Christian. Sometimes, they are impossible, dangerous and harmful. Concerning perpetual chastity, Our Savior said, "He who can receive it, let him receive it". (Mt 19:11) In other words, "Whoever can carry away the honor of chastity let him take it." Everyone should not observe every counsel. Counsels should foster charity. Sometimes, charity draws monks out of their

monasteries to become bishops or pastors. Charity can tell some not to enter a monastery, but to stay at home and marry.

CHARITY ASSIGNS OUR TASKS

Charity draws some to poverty and others to work for wages. Charity draws some to marriage and others to continence. Charity has the fullness of Christian authority, and answers to no one. “Charity can do all things. Charity does nothing wrong”. (1Cor 13) If anyone protests, charity just says, “The Lord has need for it”. (Mt 21:3) All is made for charity and charity is made for God.

All serve her. She serves no one. She is the spouse of God, not his servant. She does not serve him. She loves him. Therefore, we take all our orders from charity. To some she assigns chastity; to some, poverty; to some, fasting, to some, almsgiving; to some, solitude; and to others, pastoral charge.

She is the sacred water which fertilizes the Church. She has no color because she gives color to all flowers. She makes martyrs and virgins. She gives mortifications to some and marriage to others. She does everything for the perfection of those souls who happily live under her authority.

8.7 LOVING THE COMMANDMENTS MOVES US TO LOVE THE COUNSELS

How full of peace is God’s will! The Hebrew word “peace” means happiness, the collection of all blessings. “Those who love our law have much peace. (Ps 119:165) God fills our hearts with love for the commandments. Because David’s heart was formed by God, he relished the commandments. He was like a lover captivated by beauty. The heavenly spouse delights in the bride’s perfume, “Your name spoken is a spreading perfume”. (Song 1:2)

BECOMING GOD’S WILL

In a real sense, the soul becomes “God’s will”. He says “My will is in her”. People have their own will but Christians forsake their will and have God’s will, which governs all souls and all wills. “God’s will in them” transforms the soul into God. The Christian’s will and Christ’s will are one single will. “The community of believers was of one heart and mind”. (Acts 4:32) The community has one, single animating force, God’s will. So, our life lies in God’s will. By doing God’s will, God reigns in us and we live in him.

Scripture describes the wicked. “You broke off the yoke of the law and said, ‘I will not serve’” (Jer 2:20). God names them “transgressors”, and “rebels from the womb” (Is 48:8) When the will revolts, it becomes its own master, absolute and independent.

WANTING TO DO GOD’S WILL

We are in this world to do the will of God who put us here. “O Savior, to do God’s will is your delight (Ps 40:9). From the first moment of your conception, you made the Father’s will reign in your heart. Give me the grace to have only the will of the Father.”

When we deeply love God's will, we want to obey the counsels (a more perfect observance of the commandments). When the soul renounces even legitimate delights, it easily avoids sinful pleasures. When he has renounced even what he owns, a person does not covet another man's goods.

David longed for a drink of water from a cistern in the Philistine camp. Three valiant men entered that camp, drew water and brought it to David. How great was the fervor of these three men to risk their lives to satisfy their master's desire.

OBSERVING THE KING'S DESIRES

While on earth, Our Savior recommended chastity, poverty, obedience, abnegation, fasting and continual prayer. By their strict observance of the King's desires, valiant Christians have arrived at perfection.

God certainly hears our prayers. However, he also hears our desires and the stirrings of our hearts. Let us be zealous for God's will, not just doing what He orders but even what He wishes. Noble souls want to know what the master wants. "My soul melted when he spoke." (Song 5:6)

8.8 THE SIN OF DESPISING THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS

We have a serious obligation to be holy because Our Savior forcefully exhorted us to perfection. He said:

1. "Be holy because I am holy." (Lev 11:44)
2. "The holy must be holy." (Rev 22:11)
3. "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt 5:48)

MATURE VIRTUE

St. Bernard wrote, "The just man never says that he has done enough. He continually hungers and thirsts for justice." People are never satisfied in earthly pursuits. In spiritual matters, whoever is satisfied really does not have enough. Spiritual graces always demand a desire for more. From the beginning, God wanted all seed-bearing plants and all the fruit trees to multiply. (Gen 1:11)

Plants reach their maturity when they bring forth seeds that produce more plants. So, virtues never come to maturity until they bring about greater desires for more virtue. God commands the earth of our heart to bring forth plants of virtue. Each virtue has new seeds (called desires and resolutions) which always multiply. Any virtue that does not desire to multiply is not yet mature.

THE LUKEWARM SOUL

St. Bernard described the lukewarm soul, "You do not want to advance in perfection. Yet, you do not want to go backward. You do not want to grow better or to grow worse. This is impossible. Nothing in this world is stable and constant. You must either go forward or backward."

The counsels do not oblige under sin. They are different from commandments. Counsels only invite us. They do not command. Yet, it is a great sin to despise Christian perfection and to hold the Savior's invitation in contempt. It is blasphemy to say to God "Depart from us. We do not desire to know your ways". (Job 21:14) How irreverent we are to God when we say, "I will not be holy or perfect. I do not want a larger portion of your kindness and I do not want to follow the counsels you give me for my perfection."

OPENLY DISDAINING

If we do not follow the counsels because of some other affection, we do not sin. For example, a man might not sell all he possesses because he lacks the courage. A person might not embrace the religious life because he cannot live a life of continency. However, to openly disdain the counsels is contempt for God.

Sometimes, we reject someone's advice because we feel they made a mistake. God, however, cannot err and to reject the advice of his counsels is blasphemy. We should say the same of the Church's counsels, for these are guided by the Holy Spirit.

8.8.1 A PERSON IS NOT BOUND TO ALL THE COUNSELS. ALL SHOULD DO WHAT THEY CAN

Every counsel should not be practiced by every person. However, everyone must love every counsel. You do not throw away a precious ring because it doesn't fit your finger. Some counsels do not fit your life, but you should value them all.

GOD'S SWEET COUNSELS

The Psalm says, "Perfumes rejoice the heart and the good counsels of a friend are sweet to the soul." (27:9) God is the friend of friends and his counsels are sweeter than honey. Even more, Jesus is our Savior and friend. His counsels are to save us. Let us rejoice to see others undertake some counsels which we cannot observe. We love all the counsels by observing those that are suitable.

Someone who believes one article of faith because God has revealed it, should logically believe all the articles of faith. Someone who keeps one commandment from pure love of God, readily observes the others. Whoever prizes one counsel because it comes from God, should love all the counsels which come from God.

KEEPING PART OF A COUNSEL

Also, we might keep part of a counsel. If someone has offended you, you can invite him to reconcile. You need not give alms to all the poor on every occasion, yet you can give willingly to some poor persons. You are not obliged to make a vow, but you can ask your director's permission.

DIFFERENT DEGREES OF COUNSELS

Counsels have different degrees. A person can lend money to the poor, but a higher degree of poverty would be to give alms. The highest degree would be to dedicate self to their service.

By hospitality, you can help strangers whom you meet. A higher degree would be to seek them out. The highest would be to live among them and serve. St. Bernard (of Menthon) gathered associates to live in the Alps and rescue travelers who would otherwise die in the storms. He built hospices on two mountains, which are named for him.

To visit the sick is praiseworthy. To serve them is better. To dedicate your life to this service is the highest degree. St. Samson, a Roman physician, served the sick in a hospital he established. St. Francis and St. Ignatius Loyola served the sick with incomparable fervor.

EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

We must practice virtues but not always in the most excellent way. Heroic virtues are only counseled, not commanded. Sometimes, however, we find ourselves in extraordinary circumstances. The doorkeeper at Sebaste saw one of the forty martyrs weaken and took his place. St. Adauctus saw St. Felix led to martyrdom and cried out, "I am also a Christian, worshipping the same Savior." He, too, was martyred.

Many accepted a martyrdom which they could have avoided without any sin. This was a heroic act chosen from love. However, when martyrdom is forced, it is not an heroic act chosen from love. It is a necessary act. St. Thomas says that the heroic acts are the perfect imitation of Christ, who practiced heroic virtue from his conception.

8.9 GOD'S WILL SIGNIFIED BY INSPIRATIONS

The rays of the sun give both light and heat. Also, God's inspirations give light so we can see the good, and heat so we have a desire to do it. The cold of winter hinders life but everything comes alive in spring's warmth.

GOD'S BREATH OF LIFE

The divine rays of God's inspirations give light to our understanding and warmth to our will, exciting us to do what is needed for eternal life. After forming man's body, God "breathed into him the breath of life and man became a living soul". (Gen 2:7) This same God breathes life into our souls by His inspirations. Paul says that we become "a life-giving spirit", able to act according to God's movements.

When Elisha breathed into the dead child, he became warm. (2 Kg 4:34) When God breathes on us, we receive the Spirit's warmth, which fills our hearts with desires and hopes.

MANY MEANS

The Spirit uses many means to inspire. The ordinary means is preaching. When this fails, he uses tribulations. "Only by trials, shall you understand what you hear." (Is 28:19) When God's warnings have no effect, then God's afflictions make the person listen.

St. Anthony was inspired by hearing the gospel at mass. St. Augustine, by reading a life of St. Anthony. St. Francis Borgea, by seeing the dead body of the empress. St. Ignatius, by reading the lives of the saints. When I studied in Paris, I heard a story of two scholars who passed the night in sin. In the morning, the Carthusians rang the bell to begin the divine office. One man said, “They perform the office of angels and we live like animals.” Hearing this remark, the other went to the Church and was consoled to see God worshipped so well, that he reclaimed his faith. God had visited him by inspiration.

INSTINCTS OF THE SOUL

God gives abundant inspirations to the devout. Happy are those who keep their hearts open. Just as God provides animals with the instincts needed to survive, so He gives the soul all that it needs to persevere in the devout life.

Abraham sent his servant to procure a suitable wife for Isaac. This servant took ten camels and traveled to Nahor, where he saw Rebecca near a well. He prayed, “O God, friend of Abraham, I will say to the woman, ‘Let down your pitcher that I may drink’. If she answers ‘Drink, and I shall give the camels to drink also,’ then this be the woman you provided.” (Gen 24:12-14) The servant asked Rebecca only for a drink. However, Rebecca followed God’s inspirations and gave water to the camels. By this act, she became Isaac’s wife and an ancestor of the Savior.

When souls go beyond both commandments and counsels, so they can comply with God’s inspiration, they become spouses of his Son. Because the servant could not discern, God revealed who was to be Isaac’s wife. When our human understanding fails, God will inspire us. If we are humbly obedient, He will not let us make a mistake. I have written much about inspirations in “[Introduction to a Devout Life](#).”

8.10 INSPIRATIONS TO THE EXTRAORDINARY PRACTICE OF VIRTUE

Certain inspirations deal with the ordinary practices, but in an extraordinary way. When St. Francis of Assisi and St. Catherine of Sienna licked the ulcers of lepers, they practiced charity in an extraordinary manner. St. Louis, the king, served the poor on his knees. He would also serve the poor at his table and then eat what was left over. St. Jerome washed the feet of those fleeing persecution. St. Francis was extreme, both in poverty and simplicity. He called creatures, his brothers and sisters. These were extraordinary practices of ordinary virtues.

THE DEVIL’S TACTICS

In these extraordinary inspirations, we should follow the rules given in “Introduction to the Devout Life” (Book 3; Chapter 37) Often, the devil makes us undertake many plans so that we accomplish nothing and leave much unfinished. He proposes a most excellent work, so we will not fulfill a less excellent work. He gives us many plans and beginnings, knowing we will complete nothing. “Among Christians, the beginning is not as important as the completion.” (St. Jerome) The devil makes us stay in the beginnings, in the springtime flowering. The Spirit wants the harvest. We rejoice in the spring growth, but we expect the summer harvest.

DECISIONS ABOUT A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

If someone is considering entering a well-regulated religious order, he does not need much deliberation, because our Savior counsels us to a religious life. The soul should make one good consultation with a prudent and capable guide. Having decided on serving God, he should be constant and immovable, not attracted by opportunities for a greater good. “The devil deludes us to forsake one good for what seems like a better good. After starting one thing, he diverts us to another and then to a third. He gives us many beginnings so we gain no end.” (St. Bernard) “We should not change religious orders except for a serious reason.” (St. Thomas Aquinas)

TRANSPLANTED TREES

“Just as a tree transplanted often can never take root and bring forth the fruit of perfection, so the soul which transplants his heart from plan to plan has no accomplishments, only beginnings.” (St. Anselm) In the book of Ezekiel, the living creatures did not turn. They went straightforward, to where God had sent them.

If we are on a good road, then let us get to the end. Do not forsake the good to seek the better or you will lose both. If you possess a small treasure, do not abandon it for a greater. Be suspicious of any inspiration which forsakes a present good to gain a future good.

WRONG DECISIONS

A man was making progress with St. Philip Neri in Rome. However, he left Philip’s new society to join an established order. Later, Philip could not be consoled because the young man did not persevere at all in the devout life.

When the devil sees devout souls advancing in love, he proposes another life, more perfect in appearance. Once the soul seeks this, the devil proposes a third road. The soul is always occupied in finding the right road, and never gains the goal of perfection.

Young hound dogs frequently seek after fresh game. However, the older, expert dog stays with the original pursuit. Having found God’s holy will, the devout soul should just practice their holy exercises.

8.11 PEACE AND TRANQUILITY – SECOND MARK OF INSPIRATION

Some inspirations lead us to ordinary virtues but to an extraordinary perfection. Other inspirations are extraordinary both in their virtue and their perfection. These inspirations are not very imitable because they go against the customs of the Church.

SOME EXAMPLES

The first hermit, St. Paul (not the apostle) buried himself in the wilderness away from mass and the sacraments. Although deprived of all spiritual direction, he did this under strong inspiration. St. Simeon Stylites lived as no mortal creature would ever think of (on top of a pillar). St. John the Silent (not the apostle) was a bishop who left his diocese and clergy to spend his years in a monastery. The bishop, St. Paulinus, sold himself to ransom a widow’s son. Did he not belong to his diocese and his people?

Sometimes, consecrated virgins were pursued to marry because of their beauty. To preserve their chastity, they would disfigure their faces. Did they do what was forbidden?

PEACE AND TRANQUILITY

One of the best signs of all inspirations (especially the extraordinary ones), is the soul's peace and tranquility. The Holy Spirit is violent, but his violence is gentle. On Pentecost he came as a "mighty wind" (Acts 2:2) and a heavenly thunder, but he did not upset the apostles. His fire "rested on them". Our Savior is a peaceful Solomon and his spouse is the daughter of peace.

The bridegroom's voice does not trouble the soul. It draws her, causes her to melt and to flow into him. "My soul melted when he spoke." (Song 5:6) Even in the midst of battles, the soul has a peaceful melody. Her armies are choirs of singers because her weapons are prayers, hymns and canticles. Those servants of God who had the highest calling (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) were filled with peace. Moses is "the meekest of men".

TURBULENT AND DISTURBING

On the contrary, the evil spirit is turbulent and disturbing. Diabolical inspirations can easily be distinguished from heavenly ones. Souls inspired by the devil become headstrong, haughty and ready to meddle in many affairs. While cloaking their actions in zeal, they turn everything upside down and find fault everywhere. They will not accept direction, and will give in to no one. While appearing to be zealous, these souls are really gratifying their own self-love.

8.12 HOLY OBEDIENCE – THIRD MARK

Humility is not a profusion of humble words or profound inclinations, but any inner sense of unworthiness and an esteem for neighbor. A productive humility makes us open to correction and prompt to obey.

ST. SIMEON

St. Simeon Stylites (439-459) lived near Syria. He joined a monastery but was dismissed because his mortifications were so severe. So, he became a hermit at the top of a mountain. Because huge crowds came to him, he built a pillar to be alone. For sixteen years, he lived on successively higher pillars because the crowds became greater. From the pillar, he converted many, and was consulted by Emperors and Church officials.

As a novice, because he did not follow his superior's advice, St. Simeon Stylites was thrown out of the monastery. When he grew more devout, he behaved quite differently. Egyptian hermits sent a government official to St. Simeon saying, "Simeon, come down from your pillar and serve God as others have done." They told the official that if Simeon takes the advice and begins to descend, he should be free to continue upon the pillar. If he refuses, the official should remove him. Hearing the desires of the monks, Simeon immediately began to descend, with the humility of a saint. The official then said, "Simeon, stay where you are. Persevere. Take courage. Your staying on this pillar is God's inspiration."

These ancient monks knew that obedience showed that the inspiration was from heaven. By God's grace, he stayed thirty years more. Simeon was admired by many. In his obedience, all was secure.

ALWAYS PROVED BY OBEDIENCE

God's first inspiration is always obedience. God told Paul to go to the city and to obey Ananias. So, anyone who refuses to obey his superiors is an imposter. All the great preachers loved the Church. They adhered to her doctrines and announced her teachings. Extraordinary inspirations (unless approved by the Church's pastors) are diabolical illusions, not heavenly inspirations. Francis, Dominic and others with extraordinary inspirations submitted humbly to the Church.

THREE CLEAR SIGNS

There are three important signs that inspirations come from God:

1. The soul overcomes inconstancy by perseverance
2. The soul overcomes a troubled spirit by peace
3. The soul overcomes obstinacy by obedience

The sunflower turns its leaves to the sun. So it is with souls. Some souls turn their heart to God by the commandments. Others, however, turn everything to God. They follow his commandments, counsels and inspirations, without reserve or exception. A well-broken horse is easily guided by the rider. So, a soul pliable to God's will does whatever God pleases.

8.13 A SHORT METHOD TO KNOW GOD'S WILL

When we do what God commands, we have freedom. However, we should go further and do what is expedient. In these matters, we need guidance because souls who want to do God's will often have a troublesome temptation. The devil puts them in doubt about what to do in many little decisions. The soul loses time in trying to find out which decision is better. The soul loses opportunities because distinguishing good from better has taken up their time.

We weigh gold and silver, but not money of little value. So, the soul should not weigh little decisions. A servant serves his master by doing what needs to get done. A person deliberates less about a trip of one day than a journey of a week.

NOT TOO MUCH INTROSPECTION

Choosing a vocation or a business career are decisions that should be pondered. However, in daily decisions, mistakes are not that important. I don't need to use much time in choosing a devotion or an act of charity. Just walk in good faith, without too much introspection. "We need to choose freely, so our spirit is not burdened nor our time wasted." (St. Basil) Let us not grow restless.

USE HUMILITY

Even when the decision is important, use great humility. Just ask the Holy Spirit. Seek God's good-pleasure. Ask advice of your director. Then, determine your choice peacefully and firmly. In carrying out this decision, many difficulties can cause you to doubt. However, just remain settled. A different choice could bring you a hundred times the problems. We never know if God wants us to be in consolation or

desolation. Peace or war. Make your resolution in holiness. Then, carrying it out will also be holy. Anything else is self-love and weakness.

LOVE OF SUBMISSIONS OUR WILL UNITED TO GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE

9.1 GOD'S WILL OF GOOD PLEASURE

Everything that happens (except for sin) is God's absolute will, (the will of good pleasure) and no one can hinder this will. We learn God's will of good pleasure through events that God has willed or permitted.

THE WONDER OF GOD'S WORKS

When we see all that God has brought about, we say "wonderful are your works. Your knowledge is beyond me, too lofty for me to reach." (Ps 139:14 and 6). We rejoice in God's infinite wisdom, power and goodness.

GOD'S MERCY AND JUSTICE

Look at the diversity of conditions, affections, passions and graces, of both men and angels. Consider the multitude of heavenly intelligences and all the human creatures to whom God shows his mercy.

We rejoice because God shows mercy in his gifts and justice in his punishments. Justice and mercy are God's goodness. His justice is sharp and full of bitterness, but he sweetens it with his mercy. In Noah's time, God sent the flood but preserved the green olive. If the soul (the dove) just ponders his ways, she will find the olive.

MINGLED WITH MERCY

Death, afflictions, labor and anguish (which fill our lives) are God's punishments for sin. But, he mingles his mercy and makes these afflictions the steps to heaven, by which we increase grace and merit greater glory. Poverty, hunger, sickness, death and persecution are punishments for our sins. Yet, these punishments, immersed in God's mercy, can become delicious (strange but true). Even the damned can find consolation in their sufferings because the pains of hell fall far short of the crimes for which they are inflicted. So, the saints say, "O God, you are good. Even in your wrath your mercies pour out like water on the flames of hell."

SUFFERING AFFLICTIONS

Look at your own life. Has not God given you graces (interior and exterior) and pains (interior and exterior). Open your arms and embrace God's will. Say, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." On earth all pleasure is mixed with some pain. Night follows day and winter precedes spring. "O God, let your will be done on earth where consolations are few and labors are many. While we carry out your commands, counsels, and inspirations, let us also suffer pains and afflictions so your will can be done in everything."

9.2 THIS UNION TAKES PLACE IN TRIBULATIONS

When painful things are seen as part of God's Providence, they are a supreme delight. Tribulations seem dreadful, but seen as God's will, they are accepted more easily. How often we accept difficult labor for those whom we love. The martyrs saw their torments as God's will. How else could they have sung in these torments and flames? A devout soul loves God in consolations and in afflictions. The soul loves the cross because love always wants to suffer for the beloved.

THREE STAGES OF ABANDONMENT

This Christian teaching has three stages:

1. The soul abandons self (which goes far beyond abstaining from pleasures.)
2. The soul follows our Lord (which demands many good works.)
3. The soul carries the cross (which is far more than just tolerating suffering.)

Love shows itself more in suffering than in abnegation or actions. Carrying the cross in suffering is greater than abstaining from pleasures or doing good works.

There are three degrees of love:

1. To love God's will in consolations is a good when we truly love God and not his consolations. However, this love requires little effort.
2. To love God's will in the commandments, counsels and inspirations. This leads us to renounce our own will and abstain from some pleasures.
3. To love sufferings and afflictions for love of God. Here, the soul desires only God's will. This love contradicts our natural tendencies, because it embraces sufferings and labors.

RECEIVING GOOD AND EVIL

In the Book of Job, the devil had seen Job's hatred of sin and firmness in his innocence. He knew that accepting afflictions was the last and greatest trial. So, Job lost all his goods, his children, his friends, his good name, and his wife. He also suffered human diseases, especially a cruel ulcer over his whole body.

Yet Job acts like Christ. He says, "If we have received good things from the Lord, why should we not also receive evil?" (Job 2:10) This sentence is filled with love! Job had received all his goods from God and he loved them because they came from God. He concludes that he should also love afflictions, because these also come from God. God must be equally loved whether He distributes consolations or afflictions. To accept afflictions from God is perfect love, because the only thing loveable about afflictions is that they come from God.

STAYING ON THE PATH

The traveler in doubt must stop often to see if he has gone astray. A traveler who is sure of his path, walks on in joy. So, the soul seeking God's will through consolations always fears taking the wrong path. The soul which walks toward God in afflictions walks in assurance. Accepting afflictions comes only by loving God who sent them.

In the springtime, when flowers fill the air, the hounds make many mistakes because they cannot smell the deer. So, in the springtime of devotion, when the soul enjoys many sensible consolations, she can hardly see God's good pleasure. The heart's attention focuses on the consolations rather than on God. When God gave St. Catherine of Siena a choice, she chose a crown of thorns over a crown of gold. "A desire for suffering is an infallible sign of love." (St. Angela of Foligno) "I glory only in the cross". (Gal 4:14)

9.3 UNION BY RESIGNATION IN SPIRITUAL AFFLICTIONS

Love of the cross makes us undertake voluntary afflictions, like fasting, vigils, hair shirts and other macerations of the flesh. It also makes us renounce pleasure, honors and riches. Even more, we accept pains and tribulations with peace, because God's will sends them. Love reaches its greatest height when we cherish and embrace afflictions for God's will of good-pleasure, which is their source.

BLESSED ANGELA

The purest effort of perfect love is to acquiesce in spiritual trials, as did Blessed Angela. (Ed. Note. Blessed Angela of Foligno, 1248-1309, was married. At thirty-seven years of age she experienced a conversion experience and joined a Franciscan lay group. She had vivid visions of Christ's passion). In her visions, she felt tortured like a person suspended upside down, between life and death, without hope of any help, unable to support herself or cry out for help. This experience is common to souls filled with interior afflictions. All the faculties are deprived of any consolation and the emotions are filled with apprehensions.

RESIGNATION TO GOD'S WILL

The soul begins to fear and is filled with a sadness until death. She asks that this chalice would pass. Only in the highest point of her spirit can she cleave to the divine will, saying "Not my will but Yours be done."

In the middle of these trials, the soul resigns herself but hardly perceives herself making this act of resignation. Her desires seem cold as if not coming from the heart. She fulfills God's good pleasure but enjoys no delight. She acts even against her own pleasure. Like Job and Jeremiah, she laments her state. With all this, a sacred peace reigns in the most delicate part of her spirit.

However, this submissive peace is not tender or sweet. Although hardly perceptible, it is sincere, strong, unchangeable and full of love. This peace resides at the very end of the spirit, like the last safe part of a besieged fort. Although captured by affliction, the soul retains her courage. Here, love is deprived of all help and cut off from the aid of the faculties. God esteems this love because it preserves the soul in the midst of afflictions.

TWO PARTS

This union with God's good pleasure has two parts, holy resignation and holy indifference. Resignation requires a certain effort in submitting oneself. For example, the soul accepts death but would rather live. Job made this act of resignation "As it pleases the Lord, let it be done." By his patience, he accepted suffering. Holy Indifference goes beyond resignation.

9.4 UNION WITH GOD BY HOLY INDIFFERENCE

While preferring God's will above all things, resignation loves many other things. Indifference goes beyond resignation. It loves nothing but what God loves. Only God's will stirs this heart. Certainly, when the soul does not know what God wills, desires can touch her. When Abraham's servant saw Rebecca, he found her beautiful beyond his expectations. Yet, he waited for a sign before acting. Only then, did he give her Abraham's gifts. Jacob acted differently. Marrying either of Laban's daughters would have fulfilled his father's will. Jacob, however, was not indifferent. Charmed by Rachel's beauty, he did not like marrying her sister, Leah.

THE DAUGHTER OF GOD'S WILL

The indifferent heart acts much differently. Tribulation is like Leah. The soul does not naturally seek her. However, since she is the daughter of God's will, the soul loves her as if she were beautiful. In fact, the soul loves Leah more because she is only beautiful in God's will. I desire pure water. Whether it is served in a golden vessel or a glass doesn't matter. What does it matter if God's will is served to me in tribulation or consolation? I seek only God's will and I can see it more clearly when it comes in the glass of tribulation.

St. Paul had an heroic indifference. "I am caught between the two and I do not know which to choose. I long to depart this life and be with Christ...but remaining in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit." (Phil 1:23-24)

St. Martin of Tours had an extreme desire to go to God yet, as bishop, he was willing to remain for the good of his flock. He said, "If I am needed for the salvation of your people, I refuse not the labor."

TWO OPTIONS

Saints see two things. They see heaven open and they also see a thousand labors on earth. They are indifferent to the choice. They set their hearts on God's will. Laboring on earth is just as pleasant as enjoying heaven, if God's will is found in both. "What have I in heaven and besides you what do I desire on earth?" (Ps 73:25) This indifferent heart is a ball of wax in God's hands. It is ready to take any form. It is a heart without choice, seeking only God's will.

Amid many possibilities, this soul chooses where God's will appears most. If God's will for the soul lies in both marriage and virginity, the soul will choose virginity, because God's will is more in virginity. If God's will lies with both the poor and the rich, the soul chooses to serve the poor because God's will is more with the poor. If God's will is in both moderation in pleasures and patience in tribulations, this soul chooses the latter.

The indifferent heart seeks only God's will, which is like the attractive smell of perfume. The divine will is like a chain dragging her everywhere. She would prize hell (if it were God's will) rather than heaven (if it were not).

9.5 HOLY INDIFFERENCE EXTENDS TO EVERYTHING

The soul is indifferent to health or sickness, beauty or deformity, strength or weakness. Even in spiritual things, the soul is indifferent to consolations or dryness, actions or sufferings, desires or aridity. Job was filled with sores in his physical life, contempt in his social life, and darkness in his spiritual life.

PAUL'S TRIALS

In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul recounts his “tribulations, necessities, beatings, prisons, riots, labors and fastings.” He is indifferent in honor and dishonor, evil report and good report. He is as dead but still alive; as punished but not killed; as sorrowful, yet rejoicing; as having nothing yet possessing everything.” (1Cor 6:4-10)

ALL THE APOSTLES

Notice the difficulties of all the apostles. What indifference they had in all of these afflictions! They are content to be poor, to live amid dangers of death and to be condemned. They saw God's will more in the sufferings than in their actions. St. Paul writes, “In all things let us show ourselves as God's ministers – in patience, tribulation, necessities and distresses.”

OUR LORD'S SUFFERINGS

Our Savior was condemned for blasphemy. He endured fears, anguish, and abandonment, as no one has ever known. Although he enjoyed the Father's glory, his love stopped this glory from spreading its influence. In this way, his whole heart was filled with distress.

When the Savior was lifted up on the cross, the Father held him only in the extremity of his spirit. All his other faculties were swallowed up in grief. “My God, why have you forsaken me?” he cried. His faculties were overwhelmed in the ocean of pains. Only the high point of his spirit was exempt from trouble and filled with glory. That same love reigns in these faithful souls who are tossed about by the waves of tribulations.

9.6 LOVING INDIFFERENCE IN THE SERVICE OF GOD

Until we know God's will of good pleasure, we must remain faithful to God's signified will. However, when God's good pleasure appears, we must follow it. If a person's mother was ill, he does not know if God wants her to live or not. (God's will of good pleasure). He does know that God wants him to use the available medicines. (God's signified will). However, if death is more powerful than the remedies, he accepts God's will of good pleasure even though he is opposed to her death.

IF GOD REVEALS

Sometimes, God tells the person ahead of time. Peter knew the manner of his death. Paul was told he would be in chains. Jeremiah knew the destruction of Jerusalem and David knew the death of his son. These men had to accept God's will.

God told Abraham to sacrifice his son. How admirable for Abraham to believe this was God's will and to undertake it immediately. How admirable was Isaac to submit himself to his father's sword, fulfilling God's will even at the cost of his life.

OUR READINESS TO ACT

Abraham had perfect union with God's will. When an angel suddenly stops him, Abraham holds his stroke, equally ready to sacrifice or not to sacrifice his son. He sought only God's will. God frequently does this. He inspires us with great plans which He does not really want accomplished. We courageously begin and pursue the work. Then, we accept whatever is the result of our enterprise.

OUR READINESS TO STOP

God inspired King St. Louis to go to the Holy land. The king accepted this inspiration but never fulfilled it. (In 1248, he went on Crusade. In 1250, he was captured and returned to France.) St. Francis (in 1219) went to Egypt to convert the infidels or to die a martyr. Neither happened. St. Anthony of Padua desired martyrdom but never received it.

St. Ignatius founded the Jesuits and saw many results of his work. Yet, if the whole order were dissolved, he would be at peace with God's will after a half hour of prayer. St. John of Avila wanted to form an order of priests to advance God's glory. However, when he saw that the Jesuits were already active, he stopped his own undertaking with great humility.

How blessed are souls who undertake great projects for God, but then give them up when God's will is evident! To leave off a good work when God wills it, is a sign of perfect indifference.

JONAH'S SELF INTEREST

When Jonah preached repentance in Nineveh, he mingled his own interests with God's will. When God showed mercy, Jonah murmured against God. Instead, he should have been content with God's plan. We certainly want to succeed in works undertaken for God, but we cannot ask God to act according to our desires.

If all of this is true, should we abandon everything to the mercy of events? Not at all. We must omit nothing, until God brings complete success to our work. There is just one condition. We embrace the result even if it is contrary to our expectation. We must do all that pertains to God's glory, but we are not responsible for the outcome. The Good Samaritan said to the innkeeper "Take care of him". He did not say "Cure him".

TOTAL ACCEPTANCE

The Apostles preached first to the Jews, but then saw that they should go to the Gentiles. We must plant and water, but only God gives the growth. When God shoots his arrows into our hearts, He becomes the soul's master. He is like a rider who controls his horse. "O Lord, burn me in any direction you want. If you give free rein, I will go full speed. If you stop me in the middle of my career, I will cease at once."

OUR FAILURES

If a work fails because of the soul's fault, how can she accept God's plan? Certainly, God's will does not cause failure, but God willed failure due to the soul's negligence. His goodness did not will your sin, but his justice willed the punishment you suffer.

We must detest our sin and accept the punishment. The sin is not God's will but the punishment is.

9.7 INDIFFERENCE CONCERNING ADVANCING IN VIRTUE

God wants us to acquire virtues and we should do everything in our power. However, after we have planted and watered, the fruits come only from his Divine Providence. If we do not advance as much as we desire, let us live in peace. While cultivating our hearts, we leave the harvest to the Lord. Not having a good harvest is often not the farmer's fault.

In the monastery of devotion, the soul is always a novice. You should be expelled from this monastery only if you think you are professed. In devotion we never complete our observance because the obligation to love God lasts until death.

A TRANQUIL REPENTANCE

"How can I not be troubled when I do not make progress due to my own fault?" That is a good question and I must repeat the advice I gave in Introduction to the Devout Life. Our repentance of faults must be constant and tranquil, not troubled and restless. How can you be sure that the problem is your own fault? If you are sure that you caused the problem, just humble yourself and confess your fault to your confessor. Then, remain in peace. Detest the fault but love your lowliness.

The souls in Purgatory detest their sins, but they lovingly endure their temporary deprivation of Paradise. They devoutly proclaim, "You are just, O Lord, and your judgment is right". (Ps 19:137) Let us make progress patiently. Do not worry about the past so you can use the future better.

THE STIRRINGS

Let's take an example. A devout soul tries to remove her anger. She would die rather than say an angry word. Yet, she suffers when she experiences the first movements of anger. The psalm says, "Be angry and sin not" (5:5) This means that our anger will surprise us but we need not allow it to carry us along.

These first stirrings are not sin. Yet, the poor soul feels sad. She must remember. Sadness should only result from sin. This sadness comes from the desire to be free of even the stirrings of anger.

SPIRITUAL VALOR

God allows these rebellions of the sensual appetite (including anger) so we can practice spiritual valor. Like the Israelites, we always will have our Philistines to fight. We will weaken these appetites but will never destroy them. They live with us and will die only when we die. They come from sin and tend to sin. However, they can never make us guilty unless we follow them. "Sin must never reign over your mortal

bodies.” (Rom 6:12) God does not demand that sin not be in us. This is impossible. He commands only that sin not reign in us. We feel this inner rebellion but, only if we consent, does it reign. A pregnant woman often wants extravagant things. She cannot help her longing. She can only avoid what would hurt the child.

ST. PAUL

St. Paul was buffeted by Satan. When he asked God to deliver him, he was told, “Paul, my grace is sufficient for you, for virtue is made perfect in weakness”. (2 Cor 12:9) Paul responded, “Gladly will I glory in my weakness, that the power of Christ might dwell in me.”

In this sensual rebellion, Paul teaches us a great lesson. This rebellion was not a punishment for Paul’s sin, but to show the great strength of God’s help. Like Paul, the soul should “glory in his weakness so God’s power can appear”. St. Paul calls these attacks against purity his “infirmities, and he glories in them because he sees God’s power not letting him consent.

Some writers taught that we must be perfectly delivered from our passions and appetites. The Church condemned this teaching because God wills that we have enemies to repulse. Let us act courageously. God wills both that we be tempted and that we conquer. We endure by patience and make progress by resistance.

9.8 GOD PERMITS SIN

Although God totally hates sin, he most wisely permits it, so that the rational creature can act freely. In this way, the good person becomes worthy of a greater reward because he is able to sin but refuses to do so. God who permits sin, hates it infinitely. So, let us also hate it and use every possible means to destroy the birth, growth and reign of sin.

Our Savior inspires us to turn away from sin and yet, allows us to be free. If we commit sin, let us use every means to blot it out. Our Savior would suffer death again to save one soul from sin. Let us also weep and pray with our Savior, who shed many tears for sinners. S. Paul had “a continual sorrow in his heart” (Rom 9:2) for the obstinacy of the Jews.

WHEN TO TURN AWAY

We must always help obstinate sinners because possibly, some day, they will do penance. Paul told the presbyters, “For three years I admonished everyone of you day and night. I am clean of the blood of all, because I have not spared to declare to you all the teachings of God.” (Acts 20:26,27-30) The sinner can always repent. So we must pray and assist him.

Having done all we could, we must do what advances God’s glory. After the Jews refused to listen, Peter turned to the Gentiles. He told the Jews, “To you we had to first preach the word but because you reject it we must turn to the Gentiles.” (Acts 13:46) Jesus said, “The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you and given to a nation which will bring forth fruit.” (Mt 21:43) We cannot waste time on people when our efforts can save others.

JUSTICE AND MERCY

We must praise God for both his justice (which punishes) and his saving mercy (which saves). Both are daughters of his goodness, which makes us good by his grace and punishes us by his justice.

God's punishing justice withdraws his mercy from us. God's justifying mercy helps us escape this justice. Whether punishing us or favoring us, we must praise God's good pleasure. The guardian angels, having done all they could to save the soul, will remain at peace even if the soul is not saved. We must kiss both God's right hand of mercy and his left hand of justice.

9.9 PRACTICING THE PURITY OF INDIFFERENCE

Suppose a pianist lost his hearing and experienced no pleasure in his playing the piano. However, he would play for a prince whom he loved. In fact, he would be overwhelmed with joy, when the prince was pleased.

LEAVING THE ROOM

To test the pianist's love, the prince would ask the musician to play but he would leave the room. The pianist continued playing as if the prince were present, even though he experienced no joy, either in hearing his own music or in pleasing the prince. "My heart is steadfast, O God. I will sing and chant praise." (Ps 57:8-9) Ordinarily, the soul can take pleasure in its song. By this, I mean that we delight in our love for God, happy to love Someone so loveable.

PLAYING FOR OURSELVES

At the beginning, souls often love God to please him. However, as time goes on, they change. They no longer take pleasure in God, but in the pleasure they find in loving him. They are content with this love which proceeds from their own spirit.

In doing so, the soul does not seek God's good pleasure but its own pleasure. The pianist plays for himself, to please his own ears. The soul loves this divine canticle, not because it exalts God but because the music is so pleasant.

9.10 HOW TO DISCOVER THIS CHANGE

We discover this change quite easily. A soul who sings to please God, sings what God wants to hear. If a soul sings to please self, she sings what she likes to hear. One song is sung for God. The other is sung for the soul's pleasure. Jacob had two wives, Rachel and Lea. He loved Lea because she was his wife. He loved Rachel because she was his wife and was beautiful. When we change, we sing God's song but for our pleasure.

LOVING OURSELVES

For example, God's will lies in both sickness and in health. Yet often, we love to serve God in our health rather than suffer for him in our sickness.

If we look into a mirror long enough, we begin to enjoy seeing ourselves. So, it is hard to love God for a long time and not enjoy this love. Our task is to love God because he is good, not because we enjoy loving him.

KEEP EYES ON GOD

If you wish to contemplate God, then contemplate him and don't turn your eyes back on yourself. If so, you are contemplating yourself, and not God. Truly devout souls do not even know if they have prayed well because they look at God, and not at their prayer. In the heat of holy love, the soul doesn't look at self but at God. The heavenly singer takes pleasure in God, not in his own voice.

THE TEST OF LOVE

If a soul really loves God, it will pray devoutly, whether it experiences delight or dryness. If the soul ceases to pray in dryness, then it loved the consolations of God and not the God of consolations.

Some children lick honey off the bread, and then throw the bread away. Similarly, this soul would take the delight in prayer and throw away the love of God. These souls are in danger. They will either turn back when prayer has no more sweetness or they will busy themselves in seeking God's sweetness. This is far removed from true love.

9.11 PERPLEXITY OF THE HEART WHICH DOES NOT KNOW IF IT PLEASES GOD

The pianist delights to see that the prince was pleased. Happy the soul who has only one desire – to see that God is pleased. There is no purer or more perfect pleasure. However, this pleasure is love's fruit and it can be separated from divine love, as a lemon from a lemon tree.

NOT SEEING GOD'S PLEASURE

The greatest pleasure is to see God's pleasure in my singing. However, what if God turns away and I cannot perceive God's pleasure in my song? What suffering for the soul! Yet, the truly devout soul will continue to love God and to sing the song. Experiencing no delight, the soul sings from pure love of God's will.

A sick child eats what his mother presents, because he loves her. He has no pleasure in the food, yet he pleases his mother and sees her contentment. Another sick child does not see his mother. He eats the food even when he cannot see his mother's joy. He eats simply because it is her will.

When the prince is present, all our efforts to serve him are easy. But, when the master gives no sign that he sees what we are doing, how difficult it is. In this case, love must be strong because it experiences no pleasure.

WHEN DEVOTIONS GIVE NO PLEASURE

Many times, our exercises of devotion give us no pleasure. In these moments, we experience a thousand fears and a thousand false alarms. The devil suggests that we are not in God's grace and that our love for him is fruitless. We do not find profit from our work or God's pleasure in what we do for him.

SURROUNDED BY THE ENEMY

In this special case, even the highest point of our spirit gives no relief. The enemy has surrounded our spirit. The soul grows troubled and is helpless to aid the spirit's lower part, because Satan is attacking the highest part of the soul. Although free from sin, the soul is not free from pain.

Since the usual consolations are removed, her stress is complete. She can only hope that the trial will not be long. Even hope cannot ease the pain because her heart cannot conceive that these problems will ever end.

NEED FOR COURAGE

Faith assures the soul that the troubles will end and that she will repose forever. However, the devil shouts in soul's inferior part, and faith can hardly be heard. The soul thinks, "I shall never taste joy again." At this point, the soul must have invincible courage, and serve the Savior with pure love. Deprived of all pleasure, the soul suffers sorrow, anxiety and attacks.

During the passion, Mary and the Beloved Disciple remained steadfast amid sorrows and cruelty. They remained firm even when Jesus showed no joy and had only looks of sorrow.

9.12 THE LOVE-FILLED DEATH OF THE WILL

The Acts of the Apostles (C.12), describes Peter's miraculous release from prison. An angel awakens him, frees him from his bonds and leads him out of prison. Then the angel leaves Peter in full liberty.

LIKE A DREAM

Although awake from the beginning, Peter did not realize that the angel had done these things. He thought he was having a vision. He was awake but didn't think he was awake. He had walked without knowing it. He had enough knowledge to do what he was doing, yet he did not realize what he had done and took no consolation in what was happening. Later, he says "Now I know that God sent his angel and delivered me from the hand of Herod." (Acts 12:11)

UNABLE TO REALIZE

This same experience happens to a soul overwhelmed with interior sorrows. She can believe, trust and love God, but she cannot realize that she believes, trusts and loves. Her anguish is so powerful, that she

cannot examine her own interior acts. As a result, she thinks she has no faith, hope or love. She sees only the shadows of her virtues, and feels that she is not doing anything.

These souls perform many virtuous actions, as if they were in a dream. They scarcely believe that things actually happen. The Psalmist says “When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we became like men who were dreaming.” (Ps 126:1) The Israelites received such a great gift, that they could not experience their own consolation.

DEPRIVED OF EVERYTHING

Such is the soul in the middle of those spiritual trials which purify and refine them. They are deprived of all pleasure and are united to God immediately, will to will and heart to heart. No satisfaction or desire intervene.

The poor soul is afflicted and abandoned. It seeks love everywhere but seemingly does not find it. Her exterior senses have no power. Her imagination is cruelly tortured. Her understanding is distracted. Finally she discovers love in the highest part of her spirit (where it resides). However, she cannot recognize this love. She does not think it is love because distress and darkness hinder her experiencing its sweetness. She sees love, but does not see it. She meets love, but does not recognize it. All is as in a dream. When Magdalene met Jesus at the tomb, she received no comfort because she thought He was a gardener.

COMMENDING HER SPIRIT

What can this soul do amid such anguish? She must let her soul die in the hands of God’s will, imitating Jesus who gave himself into the Father’s hands. She is like the hunted deer, surrendering to the hunters and uttering his last cry. “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”. This was the Savior’s final testimony to the Father.

So, when our troubles reach their height, this disposition of placing ourselves in the Savior’s hands never fails. When spiritual pains convulse us and when all solace is gone, let us bow our heads and give our wills to him.

9.13 DEAD TO ITSELF, THE SOUL LIVES ENTIRELY IN GOD’S WILL

In France, we call death an “overpassing” and the dead “overpasses”. This shows that death is a passing over. We pass from mortal life over to immortal life.

AS IF DEAD

Certainly, our will cannot die. However, it does leave ordinary life so it can live entirely in God’s will. This happens when the soul gives itself totally to God’s good pleasure. The will is lost in God’s good pleasure and is seen no more, hidden with Christ in God. The will no longer lives because God’s will lives in it.

The daytime sun absorbs the light of the stars (even though they still shine). So, when man's will is happily delivered over to God's good pleasure, it does not perish. It is lost in God's will because it has only the will of God.

THE QUEEN WITH HER KING

When King Louis sailed for the Crusade, the queen went with him. She did not need to know where they were going. She only wanted to accompany him. She made no plans, because the King designed the journey. She chose only to be in the king's presence. All the circumstances were not important.

ON GOD'S SEA

The soul has embarked on the sea of God's pleasure. The soul no longer says "Your will be done, not mine" because the soul has no will. The will is totally at God's disposition.

The will that lives totally for God has no particular will. It is self-annihilated, cemented into God's will, like a young infant who desires only its mother's bosom. The baby sees himself as one person with his mother and doesn't worry about conforming his will to hers. He leaves all his cares with his mother to do what she judges profitable for him. This is the highest perfection of our will. "O Lord, you have led me according to your will". (Ps 73:24) The soul uses God's will, not its own.

9.14 EXPLAINING THIS DEATH OF THE WILL

When Our Lady carried the baby Jesus in her arms, her delight overcame all weariness. Later, he walked while holding her hand. As he grew up, she taught him to walk on his own.

TWO WAYS

We can be with God in two ways. First, we can walk while we hold his hand, obeying all the commands of his signified will, (such as keeping holy the Lord's day).

Secondly, we can have no will of our own and be carried by his divine pleasure (like a child in his mother's arms) In this union of hearts, we only respond to God's will of good pleasure; we do not bring about the effects of this will. The effects come from Divine Providence and just happen to us. We just receive these events of heaven's good pleasure by a tranquil will that simply accepts whatever God wills.

JESUS AND MARY

If we asked Jesus where He was going, he would say. "I do not go anywhere. My mother goes for me. I will to be carried wherever she wills to go. I pay no attention to willing or not willing. My only care is to be at her bosom. Her going serves me, without my troubling myself.

I do not notice if she goes fast or slow, or whether she goes here or there. I am content. Wherever she goes, I am locked in her arms. Throughout his infancy, the Savior left all his external conduct to Mary.

LEAVING ALL TO GOD

This is how we yield to God's good pleasure. Leave all to what God wants, "throwing all our cares upon him." (1Pet 5:7) Meanwhile, let us always bless the Lord. "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21) "Lord, I will nothing. You can will anything for me and I will bless whatever you will." We must no longer care to choose. We praise God for what He chooses.

9.15 PROFITING FROM EVERYTHING (EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR) AFTER THE DEATH OF OUR WILL

It is holy to bless God in all that he decides. However, it is even greater to allow God to do in us whatever He wants. In this way, the holy soul remains detached from what happens (good or bad) and keeps its affections totally for God.

A PHYSICIAN'S DAUGHTER

The daughter of a great physician who has a high fever leaves the remedy to her father. So, the soul leaves all to the eternal Father, who always knows the best of remedies. She trusts God in all of his decisions.

If the girl's father decided on an operation, she would say "I want only your will for me". But what if the daughter asked about the remedies or tried to discover the best procedure. She would only gain useless anxiety. By trusting her father, she is saved all that. She profits most by doing nothing.

TRAPPED IN A NET

"The Lord frees my feet from the snare." (Ps 25:15) Have you been trapped by the net of adversity? Don't look upon the problem or upon the net. Look upon God. "Cast your care upon the Lord who will support you." (Ps 55:23)

Do not trouble yourself with willing or not willing because you are ignorant of what is best. God wills every good that you could possibly will for yourself. Await the effects of his will. God said to St. Catherine of Siena, "Just think of me, and I will think for you."

DESCRIBING HOLY INDIFFERENCE

It is difficult to describe this holy indifference, because it is more than just accepting or receiving. These are only passive acts which embrace whatever happens. It goes beyond permitting (which is an inactive willing). In this holy indifference, the soul wills nothing but lets God will everything. The soul is in a voluntary state of attention, always remaining prepared. It is disposed to receive whatever happens, simply paying attention to what the Master might choose. Then, as the event unfolds, her waiting becomes consent.

JESUS' EXAMPLE

Our Savior expresses his total submission to his Father's will. "I do not resist and I do not go back." Jesus simply waits and is ready. "I have given my back to those who beat me" (Is 50:5-6) After his prayer

in the Garden, He surrendered his life into the hands of his persecutors. This was perfect indifference to his Father's will.

His cry, "God, why have you forsaken me?" shows the reality of the anguish. His final words, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Show his total acceptance.

9.16 THE PERFECT STRIPPING OF THE SOUL

Jesus was stripped of his garments, and then stripped of his skin by the soldier's whips. Then, his soul left his body. After three days, his soul was vested again with his body. He was given back his skin and even the clothes of a gardener, or a pilgrim.

God's love does all of this for the soul. First, it makes the soul die to itself. It removes all human desires and strips away all attachments (even to spiritual consolations and virtues). God, who gave holy desires, seemingly takes them away. "Blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21)

GOD GIVES THEN TAKES AWAY

In the beginning, God makes us desire and practice virtue. Then, he takes away our holy desires, so we seek only God's good pleasure.

In the bible, Judith never used her costly robes. However, inspired by God, she put them on to overthrow General Holofernes. Although we possess these robes of virtues, we must put them on only for God's pleasure. Judith always wore garments of mourning. So, we must be garbed in our imperfections until God exalts us.

CLOTHED IN CHRIST

We cannot remain for long in this nakedness, devoid of all devotion. So, once we set aside Adam's sinful clothes, we must put on the new clothing of Christ. Having renounced even our affections for virtues, we put them back on, because this is agreeable to God.

Abraham had his servant carry jewelry and clothing for Isaac's new wife, Rebecca. The Savior's spouse also needs new garments. Having stripped herself of parents, home and friends, she must receive new desires because her heavenly spouse wants this.

ACCEPTING WHAT GOD COMMANDS

Putting aside our own desires for spiritual advancement and consolations, we accept heavenly favors, for Jesus' glory and Kingdom.

At the angel's command, Peter put on all his clothes and left the prison. So, the soul who is stripped of her own will, should take up nothing except what God commands. This soul feeds his body to serve the spirit, and studies only to help his neighbor.

God told Isaiah to strip himself naked. He preached this way until God told him to get clothed. (Is 20:3) So, we must examine our hearts and strip away all affections. After being naked, we can again take up those clothes which are needed for charity. We leave everything so God can clothe us in Resurrection glory.

LOVING GOD ABOVE ALL THINGS

10.1 THE SWEETNESS OF THIS COMMANDMENT

The perfection of the universe is man, and the perfection of man is his inner spirit. The perfection of that inner spirit is love and the perfection of love is charity. Therefore, the love of God is the whole purpose of the universe.

THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S COMMAND

From this you can see the greatness of the commandment to love God with all our heart. This sun of charity which gives dignity to God's laws and to Holy Scripture. All creation refers to this heavenly love. Whatever does not lead to eternal love, leads to eternal death. Fulfilling this commandment to love God is eternal life!

OVERCOMING OUR SINFULNESS

Jacob needed no commandment to love the beautiful Rachel, and we need no commandment to love the good God. Yet, God commands this, so our sinfulness will not keep us from loving God. What a privilege to love God. He doesn't just permit us to love him but commands us. "O God, should I love more your infinite beauty or your infinite goodness which commands me to love your beauty?"

REVEALED TO THE DAMNED

On Judgment Day, God will reveal himself to the damned. He will make them see clearly the beauty of his face and the treasures of his goodness.

Seeing such infinite delights, the damned will try to be united with God. All will be in vain. They will be like a woman who dies and fails to give birth. When knowledge of God penetrates these unhappy souls, divine justice will deprive them of their strength to love. Knowing God will not engender love, but infinite sadness, which will be an eternal memory of divine goodness. This memory will be filled with despair because their will cannot love God.

KNOWING BUT NOT ENJOYING

The miserable damned will live forever in this despairing rage. They will know God's perfection but will not enjoy it because they did not love God when they had a chance. They will thirst as they remember the divine waters. They will hunger as they remember the banquet. "They will gnash their teeth and waste away." (Ps 112:10), because they have seen "the Son of Man coming in glory". (Mt 24:30)

THE GIFT OF THE COMMAND

Devout souls would have suffered much if God had not commanded them to love him. In this case, they would have to seek permission. If the damned souls had even a hope of loving God, they would see themselves as blessed. What a wonderful commandment! If God gave this command to the damned, they would be delivered immediately. Blessed be God who commands us to love him when to love Him is necessary for our happiness.

10.2 THE COMMAND IS GIVEN TO THOSE ON EARTH

“The law is not made for the just man.” (1 Tim 1:9) because he does not need the pressure of the law. He does God’s will from charity, which reigns in his soul. The saints in heaven are exempt from all commandments because they experience the necessity of loving God forever.

NO LAW IN HEAVEN

In heaven, we will not be obliged by any law because we will be ravished by our joy in God. This commandment will end, and give way to our joy in God, (the fruit of our observing his commands on earth).

By giving us this commandment on earth, God destines us for heaven. The King Jesus gives this law to his children, (citizens of militant Jerusalem), so they can enjoy their citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem.

HEAVENLY LOVE AND EARTHLY LOVE

In heaven, our heart is free from passions. Our will is purified from distractions. Our spirit is freed from contradictions. Our faculties are exempted from opposition. We will continually love God, “not resting day or night”. (Rev 4) While enjoying eternal rest, our spirits will be in perpetual movement. In this life, we cannot have this perfect love, because we do not yet have the powers of the saints. Therefore, it is enough to love with all the powers that we do have. When we were little children, we loved as little children. When we reach full growth in heaven we will be freed from infancy and love God perfectly. Now, in our earthly infancy, we must fulfill what is not only in our power but is very easy – we need only love a God who is so good. That is very easy.

10.3 THE SOUL CAN LOVE GOD IN VARIOUS WAYS

A person can belong totally to God, and also belong to his family, his friends and his country because these duties do not conflict.

LOVING OTHERS

We give to the degree that we love. Loving God completely, the soul must give itself completely and love nothing which removes his heart from God. Sarah allowed Ishmael to play with Isaac, as long as he did no harm. So, God is not offended by our loving others if we do not harm to Divine love.

LOVE IN HEAVEN

In heaven, God will give himself in different ways to different souls. Although giving himself to each soul, God never gives himself totally to any one soul. In heaven, we will give ourselves to God in the measure that he gives himself to us. All will see and love God according to the measure of glory prepared for them. All will have the fullness of divine love but that fullness will not be equal.

DIFFERENT MEASURES

I gave loyalty to my king, and also to his princes. However, I give one measure to the king and a smaller measure to the princes. In heaven, we shall love God with all our hearts but our hearts will be different. Even among those on earth who love God with all their heart, there is a difference.

Even the same person loves God better at one time than another. An artist paints a picture with all his talent, yet at times, he does better than others. Do not holy people make progress in love? Do not the saints have more perfect love at the end of their life?

UNEQUAL LOVES

The Old Testament speaks of David, Hezekial and Josiah loving God with all their hearts. Yet, they did not love him equally. Each loved in a particular way. Just consider David. When he repented, God gave him a second, renewed heart. He sang his psalms much more fervently than with his first heart.

All true lovers give their whole heart, but they are not equal. They give in different ways. One gives by martyrdom, another by virginity, another by poverty, another by contemplation, and another by pastoral office.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MOTIVE

Jacob loved God and the beautiful Rachel. However, he loved God and Rachel differently. He loved God as God and Rachel as his wife. He loved God above all others and he loved Rachel above other women. The two loves are not contrary. Loving Rachel does not violate God's prerogatives.

The value of our love depends on our motive. One drop of loving God, just because he is God, is worth more than any other love. This love prefers God before all things and without reserve.

10.4 TWO DEGREES OF PERFECTION IN KEEPING THIS COMMANDMENT

King Solomon had many different maidens working for him. One he called Sulamite, meaning Spouse of Solomon. She was singularly loved and totally perfect. There were also sixty queens who held the next rank, followed by eighty others, holding an important position. Finally, there were young maidens.

NOT FULL LOVE

These represent the various perfections of souls. Some are newly freed from their sins and resolved to serve God. They love God, but other affections mix in this love. Besides loving the Savior, they also love many vain and dangerous things. Like young birds, they cannot fly in the open air because they are still

captives to the evil habits of their past life. Yet, true love animates them and they have given up sin. Their love is still young and cannot produce abundant fruit, because it does not fully possess their heart.

IMMATURE LOVE

When the prodigal son returned to his father's arms, he had abandoned sin and possessed love. However, he was half-naked and unclean. "He was dead and came back to life." (Lk 15:32) These are like Solomon's "young maidens". They love God, but as a tender youth.

Young maidens love their husbands, but they also love rings and companions. Although having sacred love, these novice-souls accept many voluntary diversions. They love God above all things, but they also love many things besides him. These little irregularities (in words, dress and pastimes) are not against God's will, yet they are not according to God's will.

ENTANGLED LOVE

Other souls do not love dangerous things but entertain dangerous desires. They love too inordinately. God wanted Adam to love Eve tenderly, but not with a tenderness that would violate his command. Adam loved Eve, but inordinately. God wants us to love our family and friends, but not to excess.

He also wants us to love our spiritual exercises. Unfortunately, we can love them as a goal, when they are only a means to divine love. These souls love what God wants, but they exceed in the manner of loving. They love the right things, but for reasons other than their love for God. These souls have wings and fly, but they must descend often to earth.

The rich young man kept all the commandments, but he wanted to hold on to his possessions. He loved what was lawful (his own possessions), but he loved them too much. So, holy souls might love divine favors. This is licit, and they can receive heavenly favors. However, they do not enjoy them as God's spouse, because they love things other than the spouse.

10.5 TWO DEGREES OF GREATER PERFECTION

Other souls are further advanced. They do not love vain things nor in a vain way. They love what God wills, as God wills. They love their friends and their enemies in God. They love all creation in God and for God. They love God above all things. Even more important, they love God in all things and all things in God. They are like eagles, who fly only in the highest air and atop mountains.

To love creatures only in God is a rare degree of perfection. Only the Blessed Virgin has perfectly arrived at this height. She is a singular dove of love, matchless in her excellence. Yet, some other souls have reached some level of pure love and they, too are perfect friends of the spouse. Like Paul, they "count all things as nothing so they might gain Christ" (Phil 3:8).

The great saints say "My God is everything to me". They are like a bird for which the earthly heavens are not high enough. They are made for God's height. They love creatures only for God and they

use any creature, only for charity. Pearl fishers seek oysters only so they can gain the inner pearl. So, these saints seek creatures only so they can find God within.

Only the Blessed Virgin loved God with a perfectly pure love because other souls enjoy a mixed love. Young maidens, while experiencing moments of pure love, are still entangled in many dangerous affections. At times, these souls fall into imperfections or venial sins. Even the Apostles fell into bitter disputes, but they remained in perfect love for God.

As good trees produce some defective fruit, so even great saints sometimes produce immature and harsh actions. We must honestly say, “This fruit is useless”. Slight angers and vain actions even in the saints are unlawful movements. Yet, this might happen often.

10.6 LOVE OF GOD IS COMMON TO ALL LOVERS

Although love for God has many degrees, there is only one commandment to love God and this obliges all equally. Just as one star differs from all the rest, so no angel or saint is perfectly equal in love. Then, to what degree are all obliged to love?

I use the word “dilection”. This is a love brought about by choice. Love of dilection prevails over all our other loves and reigns over our passions. God demands that our love for him have first place in our hearts and occupy our whole soul. It must fill our entire spirit, and claim all our strength. We choose God as our king. This is a choice of sovereign love.

Love has many species (types). There is fatherly love, brotherly love, nuptial love, a love of society, a love of independence and a hundred other varieties. All vary according to their objects. They are so diverse that we cannot link all of them together. I should not love my father like I love my brother.

I should love according to the excellence of the person loved. Because God has no equal, love for God must have no equal. We must love him with all our heart and all our strength. His goodness is infinitely above human goodness and we must love him beyond all comparison.

Whoever loves God in this way dedicates all his strength to God. He is ready to forsake the whole world to preserve his love. This is the love of excellence to which everyone is called. This love is both sufficient for and necessary for eternal salvation.

10.7 EXPLANATION

Although we can never be sure that we have that love for God that is needed for salvation, there are some signs. The most infallible sign occurs when a love for creatures opposes divine love. In this moment, the authority of God’s love within overthrows this opposition from without.

When Lucifer and the other angels rebelled, Michael encouraged the other angels to overcome them. Michael was then given his name, (meaning “Who is like to God”). When love for creatures would draw us

into their fellowship, divine love in the soul (like St. Michael) will oppose that love. No creature should draw the soul into rebellion against God.

SOME BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

When Joseph in Egypt was working for his master, Potiphar, Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. He said, "How can I do this wicked thing and sin against God?" (Gen 38:8) Note that Joseph had three loves. He loved Potiphar's wife, Potiphar himself, and God. When his love for Potiphar's wife rebelled against divine love, he fled from her. So, we must always be ready to forsake all other love for God's love.

Abraham loved both Sarah and Hagar. When Hagar began to despise Sarah, Abraham subjected her to Sarah and Sarah drove Hagar out. Divine love certainly allows us to have other loves. Yet, when any love challenges our love of God, the devout soul chooses God and sets the other love aside.

DIVERSE LOVES

There is a difference between greatness and goodness. A valuable pearl is small and a tree is large, yet the small pearl is worth much more than the large tree. A prince receives much glory by his achievements in war, but governing his people wisely is of greater value. A mother with a new-born infant seems to have only one love, giving herself fully to its needs. Yet, she values her husband more. Her love for her child is tender, but her love for her husband is stronger.

A soul with pure love for God will prefer God to all other loves. However, this pure divine love does not touch the heart as often as lower acts of divine love. Yet this single act is more important than a million acts of lesser loves.

Rabbits are more fertile than elephants, but one baby elephant is of greater price than many rabbits. Our love for creatures produces many actions and our love for God produces just a few, but these few are so excellent that they surpass all others.

10.8 A HISTORY OF THE POWER OF HOLY LOVE

The power of holy love should surpass all desires, vanquish all difficulties and honor God above all things. Sometimes, souls will courageously leave all their goods (and even their life) but will not abandon lesser things.

A STORY

A story is told of a priest (Sapricius) and a layman (Nicephorus) living in Antioch. They were close friends, but this friendship was broken and followed by hatred. The layman acknowledged his fault and tried to reconcile with the priest. He rejected these attempts.

A persecution broke out and the priest suffered a thousand torments without losing his steadfastness. After being condemned to death, he was walking toward his glorious martyrdom. The layman said to him

“Oh martyr for Jesus, pardon me. I have offended you.” The priest rejected this. The layman tried again. “Please, pardon my offense.” The priest said not a word.

GOD WITHDRAWS HIS GRACE

The executioners could not understand the man’s need of pardon. A final time he tried, but the priest obstinately denied mercy to him. God withdrew the grace of martyrdom and the priest asked to be freed.

The layman urged him not to deny Jesus Christ, so as not to lose the crown of martyrdom. Unfortunately, the priest had forgotten to reconcile “before offering his gift.” (Mt 5:23-24) So God let him fall into idolatry.

The layman was touched by a holy inspiration and said to the executioner, “I am a Christian and I believe in Jesus Christ. Please, cut off my head.” So, on February 9, 260, the layman died as a martyr.

LOVING GOD IN ALL EVENTS

Notice how the priest was bold in defending the faith and ready to receive the death blow, preferring God’s honor to his own life. Yet, he preferred his pride in hating the layman and he fell headlong into apostasy.

To love God more than our own life is not enough. We must love him in all events and without reserve. You can ask, “Did not Our Lord say ‘Greater love than this no one has, that a man lay down his life for his friends’? (Jn 15:13) Certainly, and among the various testimonies to divine love, to accept death for God’s glory is the greatest testimony. Yet, accepting death is just one act and charity requires many diverse acts. These are the ordinary acts between lovers which preserve their love. The priest accepted God’s will concerning martyrdom, but he rejected God’s will concerning forgiveness.

NO EXCLUSION

To die for God is the greatest act but it is not the only act which charity requires. To will this one act and exclude others is vanity, not charity.

If a person is willing to die for a friend, he should accept everything else for that friend. However, the human spirit is unwilling to suffer lesser pains, even when charity demands them.

10.9 CONFIRMING BY A COMPARISON

Look at Jacob’s love for Rachel. From the moment he met her, he loved her and sought to marry her. To gain this he worked seven years (which he considered nothing). When Rachel’s father tricked him, he worked another seven years. Then, he gave her all his affections, scarcely thinking about his first wife, Leah.

RACHEL’S WEAK LOVE

After all of this, Rachel was weak in her love for Jacob. One day, Leah had some mandrakes which Rachel desired. So, she gave Leah the right to have intercourse with Jacob for the fruit. (Gen C30) Seeing

Rachel's weak love, Jacob's heart sank because she sacrificed his love for the mandrakes. Was this not fickle love on Rachel's part? She preferred a mandrake to her husband's love.

We make choices that are infinitely more shameful. Mandrakes have a pleasant smell but are without flavor. This is a perfect example of worldly delights which are attractive on the outside but tasteless on the inside. Because of these foolish pleasures, we cast off God's love, preferring empty pleasures instead of his favors.

SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLES

Look at King David. Although he overcame hatred and pardoned injuries, he stole the wife of Uriah and caused his death. Look at St. Peter. He wielded a sword against the soldier but was a coward before a maidservant. Rachel sold the chastity of Jacob for mandrakes, imitating Adam and Eve who sold grace for their fruit.

ALL THE TRUTHS OF CHARITY

Heretics choose the truths of faith which they want to believe. Catholics embrace all the truths, without exception. Charity also has its truths and the heresy in sacred love is to choose which commandments to observe and which to violate. He who said, "You shall not kill", also said "You shall not commit adultery". True love keeps all the commandments.

If a person told me he would not cut off my arm but decided to run his sword through my body, would he love me? True charity is a universal love which extends to all the commandments. If we fail in one commandment, then love is not universal and the heart cannot be called truly loving or truly good.

10.10 NEED TO LOVE GOD SOVEREIGNLY, ABOVE OURSELVES

Aristotle thought that our love for others comes from our love for ourselves. He said this because he did not know God. Really, love of God precedes our love for ourselves comes from God's love for us.

CONSECRATED TO GOODNESS

God has consecrated our will to goodness and the will is forced to love an infinite goodness. The saints in heaven see God's face and are carried away with love for God. Their happiness is a torrent and the waters flood them. In heaven, when we see God face to face, we will love him heart to heart, according to our capacity. We will be ravished by such a powerful rapture that we will have no desire to resist.

PARTIAL VISION

On earth, because we do not see God so clearly, we are not carried away by God's love. Here, we have only a partial vision. Even so, we are inclined to love God more than ourselves, but we lack the strength to do so. Only seeing God supernaturally will infallibly produce this necessity to love him.

Natural knowledge of God does produce a tendency to love God more than ourselves. Even with a little knowledge, the soul can totally love this infinite good.

LOVING GOD EVEN WITH LIMITED KNOWLEDGE

Our will loves what is nearest and what is its own. Yet, with the infinite God, it is different. Even with limited knowledge, our soul prefers his friendship before all other loves.

This inclination is strong because we actually live more in God than in ourselves. We are from him, by him, for him and belong to him. Realizing this relationship, we exclaim, “I am yours, O Lord. I must belong only to you. My soul must live for you. My will must tend to you. I love you because I have my existence from you. I must love you because I am totally in you and of you.” If we could be independent from God (which is impossible) God could still draw us by His infinite power.

If there were some infinite goodness with which we could have no union, we could not love it because love tends toward union. We could not have charity, because charity always seeks reciprocal friendship.

MADE IN GOD’S IMAGE

Loving our neighbor is to love God in others. We love God for his own sake and our neighbor for love of God. When Raguel met Tobias he said immediately, “This young man looks like our cousin.” Later, Raguel realized that Tobias was his nephew and said, “Blessings upon you, because you are the son of a virtuous man”. (Tob 7:2-8) Raguel then embraced him because he loved Tobias’ father, who was “a good and virtuous man”. When we see our neighbor, we should think “This creature resembles his Creator”. We should bless him a thousand times because of God who made him in his own image.

THE PERFECTION OF DIVINE LOVE

Our neighbor is from God, belongs to God, lives because of God and exists for God, whom he resembles in some way. Our love of God pours out love for neighbor into our hearts, because of our neighbor’s resemblance to God. Man is made in God’s image and man’s loving man is a true image of man’s loving God. This topic deserves a whole book (which I hope someone will write) because the highest love of God consists in perfect brotherly love.

10.11 LOVE FOR NEIGHBOR

God created man in his own image and likeness. Then, he asked man to love according to that image. We must love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves. Why do we love ourselves? Because we are an image of God. Why do we love our neighbor? Because all men and women also are an image of God.

We belong so much to God, that He calls himself our Father and He calls us his children. Because we are his children, we can be united to his divine essence, receive his grace, be associated with the Holy Spirit and participate in his divine nature (as Pope St. Leo wrote).

A TWO-WAY LADDER

Jacob saw one ladder with angels ascending and descending. Charity is that one ladder, lifting us to union with God and sending us back down to love our neighbor. We love our neighbor because he is an image of God, created to have union and to enjoy God's glory.

10.11 ZEAL, JEALOUSY AND ENVY

Love tends toward the good of the beloved in two ways. It takes delight in the good already possessed and it desires to give whatever the beloved lacks. Love also produces a hatred which flees evil in two ways. Love tries to remove any evil that is present in the beloved and love prevents any future evil from coming. If the evil can be neither removed or prevented, love hates and detests it.

ZEAL, GOOD AND BAD

Fervent love is called zeal when it removes everything contrary to the beloved. Zeal takes its quality from love. If love is good, zeal is good. If love is evil, the zeal is evil. Jealousy is a type of zeal but different. Zeal wants the beloved for her own good. Jealousy wants the beloved for a selfish good.

ENVY AND JEALOUSY

When the soul loves worldly things, beauty or honors, then zeal becomes envy, because these finite things can be possessed by only one person. For example, if we want someone to love us exclusively, then zeal becomes jealousy, not wanting others to share this human friendship. The soul wants no rivals and experiences the passion of jealousy when one does appear.

THE DIFFERENCES

Jealousy and envy differ in five ways:

1. Envy is always unjust. Jealousy can be just, if moderate. A spouse rightfully wants his intimate relationship with his wife for himself.
2. Envy causes sorrow when we see our neighbor have a greater good than we have. Jealousy does not have this sorrow. A jealous man does not grieve about a man with many women, as long as his wife is not one of them.
3. An envious person sees no imperfection in the other person. Rather, he envies the other's good. A jealous person sees the other as imperfect.
4. Jealousy comes from love. Envy from a defect of love.
5. Jealousy happens only with personal love. Envy extends to all kinds of goods, such as riches and honor.

10.12 HOW GOD IS JEALOUS FOR US

"I am the Lord your God, a jealous God." (Deut 5:9) How is God jealous? At first, he seems like a jealous husband wanting us totally for himself alone. "No man can served two masters." (Mt 6:24) God demands all our heart, soul and strength. He calls souls "his spouse" and when she separates, he calls it "adultery".

EXAMINING GOD'S SELFLESS JEALOUSY

God has full reason to be jealous. Our heart is small and cannot supply any love worthy of his goodness. Should we not, at least, give all we can? Should not supreme goodness be loved totally?

However, God's jealousy does not come from any selfish desires because our love is useless to Him. His jealousy comes from supreme friendship and totally for our good. God enjoys our love, because it benefits us. He wants to bestow his goodness with no profit for himself. His jealous words see what sinners have lost, not what he could gain.

SEEKING OUR GOOD

"They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters and have built broken cisterns for themselves." (Jer 2:13) God's jealousy is generous. He complains because people do not receive his living water. The spring suffers no harm, but the people are deprived and God grieves over their loss. In fact, if they had another fountain of living water, God would have been pleased. He seeks only their good. God says "To forsake me is to perish. To flee is to fall headlong. This is what astonishes me." He wants us to love him because otherwise, we lose all love.

NO MINGLING OF LOVES

"Put me as a seal upon your heart and as a seal upon your arm." (Song 8:6) God's jealousy wants no love to escape from our heart and he wants nothing else to mingle with his love. He also seals our arms so that all our actions serve only him.

Here is the reason for this divine demand. As death separates souls from the body, so God's jealousy separates the soul from all her other affections, purifying it from any mixture. "Love is strong as death." (Song 8:6) God's love is pitiless in punishing any rivals. Satan allows no mingling of love with hatred. God tolerates no mingling of hatred with love.

EXAMPLES OF JEALOUSY

The dove is gentle, but extremely jealous toward his mate. When he sees her with other companions, he manifests his jealousy. He circles about her and beats her with his wings, even though he knows she is faithful and innocent.

One day St. Catherine of Siena was in rapture when her brother made a noise that disturbed her attention to God. This was a sudden distraction, with no shadow of disloyalty. Yet, when the Blessed Virgin spoke to her about this, she melted into tears.

THE LAMP OF ZEAL

St. Catherine of Genoa gives the best description of God's jealous love. "Perfect love becomes zeal and zeal permits no intermingling of any other affection. Zeal permits a divine love which can only have a greater love for God. The lamps of zeal have no oil, wick or smoke. They are all fire, a flame which the

world cannot extinguish. Those carrying these burning lamps are like chaste spouses, not adulterous women. They think only of their husband.”

THE CHASTE SPOUSE

“The chaste spouse fears the absence of her spouse. The adulterous spouse fears his presence. The chaste wife fears his departure. The adulterous wife fears his staying. The chaste spouse is jealous of other women because she loves her spouse. The adulterous spouse is not jealous because she doesn’t love him.” (St. Augustine)

The soul with the burning lamp does not worry about being loved. She suffers because she cannot love enough. Her jealousy has no self-interest. It comes totally from noble friendship. She even loves her neighbor for God’s sake, and would die so that her neighbor would not lose heaven.

Zeal is an inflamed love and must be practiced prudently. Otherwise, the soul would be harmed by lack of moderation. Zeal can easily become anger (an unjust passion). Here is not the place to discuss that problem. The soul should bring these questions to their spiritual guide.

10.13 OUR ZEAL AND JEALOUSY FOR GOD

A man asked an artist to paint a picture of a horse running. The painter presented him a picture of a horse on its back. The man was angry until the painter turned the picture upside down to show that the horse was running. If we examine human jealousy and turn it upside down, we will have a correct picture of God’s jealousy.

UNLIMITED SUN

Because everyone can enjoy the sun’s brightness, no one is jealous. All possess the sun. No one is deprived. A lamp is quite different. Not all can enjoy the lamp’s limited light. If all desire the lamp, it becomes an object of envy. Human goods are limited. If one has them, others are deprived. Human friendship also is limited. When given to one, others are deprived. That is why we are jealous of rivals.

God is like the sun, so abundant that all can possess his divine love and no one is deprived. His infinite love can totally fill all hearts and still not be diminished. The sun shines on a million flowers, as if it shines on only one. So is God’s love. Its rays are not lessened by the number of its recipients.

OPPOSES ENEMIES

What makes up our zeal and jealousy for God? Its first duty is to hate, flee, detest, reject, fight and overthrow all that is opposed to God. “I have hated iniquity.” (Ps 119:163) “Have I not hated, O Lord, those that hated you?” (Ps 119:21) The soul uses her passions of envy and jealousy in God’s service! She persecutes, overthrows and exterminates evil. Jesus’ zeal led him to drive out the moneychangers from the temple.

SEEKS PURE LOVE

Zeal's only duty seeks purity of soul. St. Paul wrote, "I am jealous of you with the jealousy of God for I have espoused you to one husband to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." (2 Cor 11:2) If Abraham's servant had seen Rebecca (destined to be Isaac's wife) in danger of being dishonored, he would say, "I am jealous with the jealousy of my master, for I want to present you as a chaste virgin to Isaac." St. Paul would say "God sent me to arrange an eternal marriage between God's son and you. I promised I would present you as a chaste virgin. I am jealous with the jealousy of God."

A mother hen always keeps her eyes on her little ones. She will fight any enemy to defend them. Jesus said about Jerusalem, "I would gather you as a mother hen gathers her young." (Mt 23:37) This is the zeal of parents for their children, of pastors for their flock and of brothers for each other. This is the zeal of Paul for the Jews and the Gentiles. This is the zeal of Moses who was willing to have his name removed from the book of life to save the Israelites.

THIRD DUTY – TOTAL GIVING

Human jealousy fears that others will possess our goods. Divine jealousy fears that God will not possess us. Human jealousy fears that we might not be loved. Divine jealousy fears that we do not love enough. "Show me where you feed your flocks, lest I wander after the flocks of your companions." (Song 1:6) The bride fears offending her beloved by being attracted to his rivals. Zeal tolerates no attraction to others. She is totally dedicated totally to the Savior.

10.15 DIRECTOR OF HOLY ZEAL

Zeal needs guidance or it will exceed moderation. Certainly God's love in our will cannot be excessive. However, zeal must use boldness and anger to surmount difficulties and the will must use the intellect to discover the right means. Sometimes, our intellect follows a too violent course, and our anger can go beyond the limits of reason. An indiscrete zeal is truly blameworthy.

EXAMPLES OF ANGER

David gave strict orders to his general, Joab, not to injure his rebellious son, Absalom. Joab, in hot pursuit of victory, deliberately killed the son. Zeal's anger should destroy evil but not destroy the sinner. Zeal can become a run-away horse, not caring about its rider.

In the parable, the owner knew that his servant's zeal could ruin his crop. "Do not gather up the weeds, lest you also take the wheat with it." (Mt 13:29) Anger is a strong and courageous servant, able to accomplish great undertakings. However, it can be so impetuous that it does much evil while trying to do good.

A DANGEROUS HELPER

Anger helps us to execute our zeal. However, its help is dangerous. When it gains strength, anger replaces reason as the master of zeal. Zeal can accomplish much, without any anger. The zealous person must fear anger, because it can possess the heart, and make it a slave. Zeal is a fire which can envelop the whole building. Zeal can be like foreigners within a country taking command.

Sometimes self-love uses zeal to justify its passions and cover up its own disorder. Anger often reveals a false zeal. True zeal seeks only good and abuses no one.

TWO EXAMPLES

When a certain monk saw a notorious sinner coming close to the altar, he violently attacked the man. He then wrote to St. Denis (the Areopagite) rejoicing in what he had done. St. Denis responded in the spirit of St. Paul, showing the monk that his zeal was imprudent and impudent. Zeal is praiseworthy only when practiced with discretion. The monk violence at the altar, a place where love should prevail.

St. Denis provides another example of zeal ruined by anger. A person, recently converted to Christianity, was led back to idolatry by a pagan. The bishop, led away by anger, concluded that the man should no longer live. He rose at midnight and asked God to kill both of these men. God made the heavens open and the bishop saw the two men standing on the edge of a precipice, paralyzed by fear and about to fall. Some were even trying to push them over the cliff. Then, the bishop saw the Savior's compassion for these two men. The Savior extended his helping hand and had angels keep them from falling. The Savior said to the bishop "In the future, turn your anger upon me. Also, think about yourself. Would you like to fall into the gulf or to live with the angels."

CHARITY BECOMES CRUELTY

The bishop's anger had transgressed all limits and had changed charity into cruelty. Some people feel zealous only if they are angry. Really, true zeal rarely makes us angry. It restricts anger to extreme necessities.

10.16 SAINTS WHO USED ANGER IN THEIR ZEAL

Moses, Elijah and others certainly used anger in their zeal but they regulated their passions. We, however, are common people and do not have such restraint. Our horse gallops well but does not stop when we want. Great saints have mortified their emotions. They can use their anger, and then quickly recall it. We, however, are young and let our anger loose at great peril, not always able to restrain it.

St. Denis wrote to the angry monk. "Whoever would correct others must be sure that anger does not send reason into exile. Otherwise, anger will stir up a revolt. We cannot approve your actions because the Savior corrected his disciples when they were angry with others."

THE ANGRY APOSTLES

When Samaria would not allow Jesus to pass through, John and James asked, "Will we command fire to come down and consume them?" Our Lord rebuked them, "You do not even know what spirit you are. The Son of Man came not to destroy but to save them." By these words, Our Savior revealed his gentle soul. He used anger only when no other way existed.

SAINTS WITHOUT ANGER

When St. Thomas Aquinas was dying, some told him to imitate St. Bernard's dying words. Thomas answered "I do not have St. Bernard's spirit". So, if someone tells us to use the anger of saints, we should answer, "I do not have their spirit of perfection". Not everyone knows how to be angry in God's zeal.

These great saints were inspired by God and the Spirit held their anger within bounds. The Spirit's anger is different from man's. "The anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God." (Jas 1:20) These great saints used their anger only for great sins. Their fiery words never exceeded the sinful actions.

CRITICISM AND ARROGANCE

Do we feel free to grow angry with sinners or to criticize bishops just because St. Paul called the Galatians "senseless" and confronted Peter? Paul knew how to do things correctly. In contrast, presumptuous souls follow their own arrogance and cover over their maliciousness with zeal. They are not using God's fire but their own passions.

The ambitious man wants to be a bishop. The restless monk claims it is his zeal that drives him. The arrogant man claims that he speaks against the Church from zeal. However, a true observer will see that their actions come from anger and restlessness.

THREE PRACTICES OF ZEAL

We can practice zeal in three ways. First, we can act against evil. This duty belongs to those in authority, but we, with no authority, take this to ourselves. Second, we can practice zeal by giving good example, by suggesting remedies for evil, or by bringing about the good. All should do this, but few actually do. Third, we can suffer to hinder evil (the most excellent use of zeal). Hardly anyone will do this. Instead, people spend their energy on a false zeal, which seeks their own glory and pride.

Our Savior's zeal appeared most in his death. St. Gregory Nazianzen describes St. Paul's zeal, "He fights for all, prays for all, is passionately jealous for all. He is inflamed for all. Oh, incredible fervor. He imitates Jesus Christ, "who was made a curse for our infirmities." (Gal 3:13) Our Savior received all his punishments because of his zeal for all sinners.

NOT SEPARATED FROM GOD

When the Savior was forsaken by the Father, he was still the well-beloved Son. The apostle Paul also desired to be a curse, but he never wanted to be deprived of charity. Nothing could separate him from God's love. He wanted to be treated as cast off by God, but he did not want to actually be deprived of God's grace. "Love is as strong as death" and zeal is stronger than the netherworld. Yet love and zeal do not separate us from God's grace. Love is grace itself and could never make anyone desire to be separated from grace.

"Happy is he who knows how to discipline zeal." (St. Ambrose) "Let zeal be inflamed by charity, filled with knowledge and established in constancy." (St. Bernard)

Zeal is charity's child, and it is "patient, kind, not easily provoked to anger." (1 Cor C13) Zeal is diligent in pursuit, but without any anger. True zeal is constant and solid. False zeal is turbulent and troubled.

10.17 HOW OUR LORD PRACTICED LOVE'S MOST EXCELLENT ACTS

In these preceding chapters, I have mentioned many actions flowing from divine love. Now I want to show examples of each in Christ's life.

THE FOURTEEN ACTIONS OF DIVINE LOVE

1. His delight is to be with the children of men. (Pr 8:31) – Love of Delight
2. He bestowed his divinity upon men – Love of Desire
3. He united himself to our humanity – Love of Union
4. His greatness melted down to our littleness.
5. For our sake, He went out of himself – (ecstasy)
6. He was annihilated – emptied of himself to fill us
7. He was ravished and became mortal in his mother's womb. He who was God from all eternity will now be man for all eternity.
8. Love led him to admiration of the Centurion's faith.
9. He contemplated the young man who had kept all the commandments.
10. He was in loving quiet with suspension of his faculties in his mother's womb and in infancy.
11. He experienced tenderness towards children, Mary, Martha and Lazarus.
12. His incomparable zeal turned into jealousy. He turned away from all evil and drove away his rival, the devil.
13. He had a thousand langours of love. He said "How anxious I am to accomplish my Baptism." (Lk 12:50) He sweat blood in the Garden, not just from the exceeding sorrow (in his spirit's inferior part) but also by his singular love (in his soul's superior part).
14. Finally, this lover died among the flames of love. He died in love, by love, for love and of love. He had the keys of life and death. He used the key of death to ravage his body. He died by his choice not by the torments. "I have the power to lay my life down and the power to take it up again." (Jn 10:18)

ALLOWING DEATH TO COME

The gospel says that "He gave up his spirit". (Jn 19:30). The Savior said "yes to death and allowed it to come." (St Athanasius) He decided to die so he could revive those who had no chance of true life.

SELF IMMOLATION

Our Savior's death was a sacrifice offered by himself to the Father. Jesus died because he wanted to. The divine flame of love caused his death. He immolated himself by love, and for love.

His death did not happen through rapture. Rather, His soul departed through ecstasy, caused by the abundance of his love. Seeing the Savior's actions must inflame us to the practice of holy love. "This charity of Christ impels us."

THE SOVEREIGN AUTHORITY OF SACRED LOVE

11.1 ALL VIRTUES ARE PLEASING TO GOD

God loves virtues wherever he find them. Even pagans practiced human and moral virtues, but they were of little worth due to their lowly intention.

ACCOMPLISHED WHEN EASY

They practiced virtue only for honor or a social good, or from some weak inclination to do good. When they met no resistance they would help friends, live honestly or pay wages that were due. God accepted these small virtues and rewarded them generously.

NATURAL VIRTUE REWARDED

The midwives of Egypt were obviously pagans. When Pharaoh told them to kill Hebrew children, they feared God and refused to do it. God was pleased and the Israelites were fruitful in children.

Because the King of Babylon waged a war against Tyre that was just, God gave Egypt into his hands also. God told the prophet Ezekiel that he did this “because the King has labored for me”. (Ez 29:20) St. Jerome says that when pagans do good things, God rewards them. Daniel told the king to “redeem your sins by alms”. (4:24) So, God rewards virtues. He rewarded the midwives in Egypt and the King of Babylon. Even though the King had sins, Daniel saw that God would reward the king for almsgiving. St. Paul says “those who do not have the law will keep the law by nature”. (Rom 2:14) When they do, God will take account.

OBEYING HUMAN REASON

Pagans saw that marriage was good and necessary. They trained their children to love their country, to get an education and to live a civil life. This pleases God because they were following their reason.

God has planted in everyone this natural tree called reason and its fruits are always good. These works of reason, compared with works of faith, are of some value before God. Augustine says that God rewarded the moral virtues of the Romans and gave them much territory. (St. Augustine)

THE WOUNDED SOUL

Even when the soul is sick due to sin, she can do little deeds. A sick person can still see, talk and hear. Likewise, the sinful soul can do natural good acts with natural rewards. The sinner is like the man on his way to Jericho. The gospel says he was left “half-dead”. He was also half alive, doing half-living actions. These are weak actions and he would have died without the Good Samaritan.

Natural reason is half dead from sin and unable to keep all the commandments. Its eyes can see the path, but its legs cannot walk.

GOD'S SPECIAL PROTECTION

The sinner keeps some commandments and can even keep all the commandments for a short time, when no great virtue is demanded and no violent temptation is present. However, when a sinner remains in his sins, he needs God's special protection not to commit new ones. When the person does not cultivate virtue, the soul's enemies are many and they excite a thousand temptations to forbidden things. Human nature without God's grace cannot save itself from the precipice. Jesus said, "Watch and pray that you do not enter into temptation". (Mt 26:41) "To watch" is what the sinful soul can do but "To pray" requires God's special help.

11.2 DIVINE LOVE MAKES VIRTUES IMMEASURABLY MORE PLEASING TO GOD

Because strawberries lie on the ground, insects creep over them. Yet, they are not poisonous because they have no affinity for poison. Such are the human virtues. Although they reside in sinful pagan hearts, they are themselves so loyal that they are not corrupted by their society.

"Virtue is a habit which no one can use for evil." (Aristotle) However, these virtues in non-believers or in sinful believers (not in the state of grace) do not merit eternal life because eternal life is a heavenly inheritance. God's Son bestows these riches on his adopted brothers and sisters and God promises heaven to those who die in his covenant-grace. Natural virtues cannot bestow rewards that are "supernatural", and human nature can neither give nor merit supernatural virtues.

HOLY BECAUSE OF FRIENDSHIP

The virtues of God's friends are holy because they are friends of God. By grace, God makes us his friend and pours out his life upon all our actions. The difficult experiences with our friends are sweet and the sweet experiences with our enemies are bitter. A friend of God gives everything.

If I give a tree, I give all its branches and fruits. "The just man is like a tree planted near running water, bringing forth fruit in due season. All that he does shall prosper." (Ps 1:3) This tree has all the leaves of virtues, which gain a special efficacy because they come from a heart rooted in charity. If your heart is rooted in holy penance and love for God, then all your works will share in these, even without your further attention.

GOD'S FRIENDS

Because God respected Abel, he accepted the offerings coming from Abel's goodness. God favors his friends and makes their smallest actions holy. In this way, he honors his Son, making holy the friends of Jesus.

God told Ezekiel that King Nebuchadnezzar had labored for him. (Ez 19:20) So, the good works of an unjust man belong to God even though the unjust man himself does not. However, when a Christian, filled with holy love, has these virtues, they are precious in his eyes. "Add charity to a man and everything profits. Take charity from a man, and what remains is profitless." (St. Augustine)

11.3 DIVINE LOVE RAISES SOME VIRTUES HIGHER THAN OTHERS

Some virtues are more allied with charity than others. These include faith and hope, which are like charity because they refer immediately to God. Also, the virtues of religion, penitence and devotion exist primarily for God's honor, which have a great affinity for one another.

ENHANCED BY CHARITY

When surrounded by divine love, all virtues receive a greater dignity. However, faith, hope, fear of God and devotion serve love and tend directly to God's glory. So, love enhances them with a greater value.

MORE PROFITABLE

These virtues have a saving power, are more fruitful and become more excellent when the soul is filled with charity. St. Paul wrote, "If I had faith to move mountains but did not have charity, it profits me nothing." (1 Cor 13:2) In contrast, faith with charity is highly profitable.

Although charity sanctifies all the virtues and gives them greater value in God's sight, its power is greater, with those virtues which foster piety (faith, hope, religion and devotion).

OUR TASK

Therefore, we must cultivate reverence toward holy things, holy fear of God, speaking of heavenly things, looking forward to heaven, visiting churches, reading spiritual books and observing Catholic ceremonies. These practices feed sacred love, which spreads its mantle over them.

11.4 VIRTUES PRACTICED AT THE COMMAND OF DIVINE LOVE

Rachel had children by her husband Jacob in two ways. First, she counted as her own those children which Jacob had by her handmaid. She herself also had two boys, Joseph and Benjamin. Like the beautiful Rachel, divine love calls other virtues her own, because they are produced at her command. However, charity also has two of her own children.

The first is effective love, which subjects all the soul's faculties, passions and affections to God's will so that his will is served above all things. Effective love makes us love God with all our heart, mind, strength and soul. The second is affectionate love which is very delicate, pleasing and loveable.

THREE TYPES OF VIRTUES

So, there are three types of virtuous actions, given in order of their importance:

1. Those which come directly from charity;
2. Those which come from effective love or affective love;
3. Those which their presence enlivens and enhances love.

CHARITY – THE GENERAL

In gaining a great victory, a general will do some actions directly and some actions through others. He is considered to have done everything, either by himself or by his commands. Besides honoring the general, we also give credit to each part of his army and we even praise individuals who distinguished themselves in battle.

Divine love is the general of the virtues. It alone can gain heaven and overcome hell. It personally conquers the enemy and, at the same time, commands the other virtues to act all over the battlefield. Many virtues act even without the explicit orders of charity. These, also, charity claims as its own.

ENLIVENING ALL VIRTUES

St. Paul writes, “Charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”. (1 Cor 13:7) Although Charity does all these, we distribute the praise to many virtues. Scripture says that we are saved by faith, or by almsgiving or by prayer, or by humility, or by hope or by chastity. Certainly, these virtues save us, but only as they are united with charity. Charity alone gives every virtue its holiness. “Charity is kind, is patient, believes all things, hopes all things and bears all things.” (1 Cor 13:7) St. Paul writes this because charity enlivens each virtue to perform its unique actions.

According to Paul, love is the life of all virtues. Patience would not be patient enough, hope would not trust enough, and faith would not be faithful, enough unless charity animated them. Only charity makes the virtues profitable and of service to God’s will.

11.5 LOVE PERFECTS THE EXCELLENCE OF EACH VIRTUE

Charity is a tree which has every virtue grafted on. This grafting does not dry up the tree or cause it to wither. These grafted virtues invigorate charity and charity is insatiable in bringing forth these fruits. Rachel said to her husband Jacob “Give me children. Otherwise I shall die.” (Gen 30:1) Charity says the same words to every soul.

OWN QUALITIES

Each graft follows its own nature. An apple graft produces apples. A peach graft produces peaches. Each virtue has its own name but all draw their life from charity, the root of holiness in every person. Each fruit preserves its own excellence, but receives a unique taste from charity. She heightens their flavor, while preserving their own natural goodness.

DIFFERENT QUALITIES

At night, flowers have no color. In the morning, the sun shines on them but does not make their beauty equal. The sun cannot make the violet equal to the rose, or make the daisy as lovely as the lily. However, if the sun shone fully upon the violet and only partly upon the rose, the violet would seem to be more fair. So, if two souls had an equal charity and one died by martyrdom and the other accepted a holy fast, their value would not be equal, because martyrdom is worth more than fasting. Marital chastity is not equal to virginity and a good use of riches does not equal the practice of poverty.

Charity allows every virtue to enjoy its own qualities. Charity is like sugar which can sweeten many fruits, yet leave them all with their own taste. It doesn't make peaches into oranges.

LITTLE VIRTUES WITH GREAT CHARITY

When love is ardent in the soul's heart, it will better perfect her virtues. St. Paul says that a person can suffer death for God without charity. (1 Cor 13:3) They can also suffer death with little charity. The martyrdom of some soul with less charity might be of less value than the simple death of someone with more charity. The little virtues of the Blessed Virgin (or of the great saints) were of more value to God than those of lesser saints. The Seraphim's slightest actions are more inflamed than the greatest movements of lesser angels. The nightingale's first songs are more melodious than songs of other birds.

The great painter, Pireicus, painted only trivial subjects in his later years. Yet, these works sold for more than the great works of other painters. The little virtues which the great saints hide in their humility are more important to God than the illustrious works which others performed with little charity.

In the Song of Songs, the bridegroom praises his beloved's eyes (the most noble part of the face). Then, he praises her hair (which is frail and worthless). This shows that a soul immersed in divine love pleases God, even in her trifling aspects.

11.6 DIVINE LOVE BESTOWS VALUE ON HER OWN VIRTUES AND ON OTHER VIRTUES

You ask, "What value does holy love give to our actions?" St. Paul answers this question, "For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory". (2 Cor 4:17) Let us ponder these words:

LIGHT YET HEAVY

1. Our afflictions now are light and soon will be over.
2. They produce an eternal weight of glory.

Look at the contrasts. Tribulation produces glory. Light afflictions give weighty glory. Momentary becomes eternal. What gives such power to fleeting moments and light afflictions?

Purple is a royal cloth, not because of the cloth's wool but because of its color. So, Christian actions merit heaven, not because of the wool (our hearts) but because of the color (Jesus' blood).

OUR SAVIOR'S NAME

Charity unites us to our Redeemer, from whom we draw merit for everlasting life. Because Levi's staff had Aaron's name, it brought forth blossoms. (Gen 17:23) When charity writes the Savior's name on our hearts, we bring forth heavenly fruit. By themselves, our souls cannot bring forth one good thought. However, filled with the Holy Spirit, we can produce sacred actions that lead to immortal glory.

OUR DEBTS AND HIS WAGES

By charity, our works become rods of gold which can measure the heavenly Jerusalem. (Rev 21:15) God gives glory to both men and angels, according to their charity in action. “God will render to every man according to his works.” (Rev 22:12) Scripture assures us of joys in heaven for our works on earth. This is a magnificent reward, worthy of the good Master whom we serve. God could have demanded our service without any salary because we owe him a thousand debts. Yet, God, because of his Son, decided otherwise.

For our works, he will give us eternal wages. Our service is not profitable to him because we are “unprofitable servants”, utterly useless to the Master. However, he converts all to our good by his superabundant riches. We serve God with little profit to him and much profit for ourselves.

HIS PROMISE

He is bound to pay us only because he promised to do so. In this promise, He observes equity, equally combining liberality and right order. Our works are small (incomparable to his glory) but their quality comes from the Holy Spirit, who dwells in our hearts by charity. By God’s actions, all our works are both ours and the Spirit’s. He does these works in us so we can do them for him. He operates and we cooperate.

THE OIL OF CHRIST

By living in us, the Holy Spirit makes us remain in Jesus Christ. “Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit.” (Jn 15:5) Christ is the anointed Messiah and his holy oil spreads over all his members who are joined to him by holy love. “Like the ointment on the head which ran down the beard of Aaron and onto his garments.” (Ps 133:1-2)

Our works are like the mustard seed which cannot compare with the tree of God’s rewards. Yet, our actions can produce that glory because they come from the Holy Spirit. He infuses grace and makes our works into his. Yet they remain our works. He acts and we cooperate. He gives us the merit and we profit. He begins, assists and finishes all our works. Then, He distributes the rewards. We give him praise and He gives us glory. By light labors, we gain an eternal weight of glory.

11.9 PERFECT VIRTUES ACCOMPANY EACH OTHER

In the beginning stages of conception, the heart is feeble, frail and imperfect. As life strengthens, the heart becomes more vigorous and gives life to all the other organs. Virtues are acquired, one by one. Like the heart, invigorating the bodily organs, the soul takes possession of one passion at a time.

LOVE’S POWER WITHIN

The soul’s life begins with love, which is at the very center of our desires. Then it spreads over all our desires, bringing them to life. Love’s final goal is to touch the understanding by contemplation. Spiritual death (sin) reverses this process. It begins in the intellect by lack of reflection. “Death enters by the windows.” (J 9:21) It then spreads to other desires and finally destroys holy love in our heart. When love perishes, our spiritual life is dead. We still possess some virtues but these are imperfect and weak,

because love does not possess all our faculties and passions. When reason is wounded by sin, all our faculties grow weak.

VIRTUES OBEYING REASON

All virtues possess the truth of reason and resemble the beauty of reason. A soul which possesses charity will obey reason and practice all the virtues at all times.

LOVING ALL VIRTUES

Jacob loved Rachel because of her beauty. He did not love Leah, because she lacked beauty. If a soul loves according to reason, he will love all the virtues, finding them all to be beautiful. Whoever loves to give alms but does not love chastity, does not love according to reason. His almsgiving is an apparent virtue, not done from true love.

A child conceived in infidelity will have the name and titles of the family but he will not have both parents' blood. So, some actions are called virtues but do not possess their full qualities.

In another case, a man has some virtues and lacks others. These other virtues are either just springing up or are perishing (like dying flowers). Virtues only have their true integrity and sufficiency when all are practiced together.

FALSE VIRTUES

How can an intemperate, unjust and cowardly man have the virtue of almsgiving? How can someone practice justice, without being prudent and temperate? Is not justice a fair and constant giving to everyone? Do we not need to live temperately to be just to ourselves? True virtue is a constant force in the soul. In his intemperance, a prudent man acts imprudently. Fortitude without prudence is folly. Justice is ineffective in a weak man. Someone carried away by passion cannot be just. The imprudent man cannot even discern what is just. Justice must be prudent. Prudence must be temperate. Temperance must include fortitude. In conclusion, only virtue accompanied by other virtues is true.

HAVING ALL AND PRACTICING SOME

No one has to exercise all the virtues all the time. A hermit has no need to show mildness. Devout souls do not always use all the virtues. However, they are always ready to practice them as the need arises.

ONLY SEEM LIKE VIRTUES

Some virtues are just natural dispositions. Many people are just naturally mild, chaste and abstemious. To be quiet by nature is not a virtue, but to deliberately restrain the tongue is. Someone from a loving home should not boast that he never became a runaway. Someone who has never been sick cannot claim to be patient. Therefore, some think they have virtues, when they only have natural inclinations.

St. Augustine says that individual virtues without other virtues are very imperfect. In contrast, we can have some vices without having them all. In fact, each virtue has two opposing vices. St. Augustine

says that Cataline appeared to possess constancy. Yet, he chose the bad and showed no temperance. His constancy was really obstinacy.

11.8 CHARITY COMPREHENDS ALL THE VIRTUES

“A river in Eden divides and becomes four branches.” (Gen 2:10) God has placed within man the river of reason which enlightens the four parts of every soul with the four moral virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance).

THE FOUR NATURAL VIRTUES

1. Prudence enlightens the practical understanding to lead our mind to judge wisely. It leads us to set aside evil and to pursue the good.
2. Justice strengthens the will so it constantly gives to all what is their due.
3. Temperance moderates the passions of our desires.
4. Fortitude controls the irascible appetite of anger.

These four virtues divide into many others form all human actions into a natural goodness.

THE FOUR SUPERNATURAL VIRTUES

Besides these natural virtues, God places charity, which purifies the soul of all sins and spreads the same four virtues (in a supernatural degree) over all the faculties, giving prudence to the practical understanding, justice to the will, temperance to the concupiscible appetite and fortitude to the irascible appetite. By this outpouring, the heart tends toward the supernatural happiness of union with God. These four supernatural virtues mingle with each natural virtue. If charity finds no natural virtues, it brings them about.

CHARITY'S FULLNESS

In some saints who had natural virtues, divine love made them more brilliant. Others, like Magdalene and the Good Thief, did not have natural virtues. So, charity itself made these saints gentle, humble and generous.

We plant seeds and the sun's heat makes them rise. So, God has sown seeds of virtues in our heart. However, they are covered over by our imperfections and only appear when the heat of divine love resuscitates them.

ONE MAN ARMY

As the manna in the desert contained every good taste, so heavenly love includes all the virtues. Joshua defeated God's enemies by leading the armies. Samson was more glorious. By his own hand, he killed thousands. He produced by himself all that Joshua did with many soldiers. Holy love is like both Joshua and Samson. Sometimes, it finds virtues in the soul (at least faith, hope and penitence) and uses these for God's glory. At time, virtues are missing. So, charity does all their work.

ORDERING LOWER VIRTUES

Charity orders the lower virtues. Charity commands and the virtues accomplish. The bishop distributes church offices to priests, deacons and lectors, but he himself can do all these in an eminent way. “Charity accomplishes the work of all the virtues.” (St. Thomas Aquinas) “All the virtues are members of charity.” (St. Ambrose) “There are four principal virtues which come from love. Temperance is a love which gives itself totally to God. Fortitude is a love which willingly accepts all for God’s sake. Justice is a love which serves only God and therefore treats all men fairly. Prudence is a love that chooses things that are united to God and rejects what is contrary.” (St. Augustine)

A COAT OF MANY COLORS

A soul with charity is like Joseph who had a coat of many colors. This is a symbol of that charity which contains all perfections. Charity is not envious but kind; not frivolous but prudent; not ambitious but affable; not exacting but thoughtful; not irritable but peaceful; not rejoicing in evil but in the truth. She hopes for the salvation of her neighbor and endures all things, hoping to obtain all for herself also. Charity is pure, fire-tried gold. “I advise you to buy from me gold refined by fire so you may be rich.” (to the Church of Laodicia) This charity contains all the virtues.

11.9 VIRTUES RECEIVE THEIR PERFECTION FROM DIVINE LOVE

Without charity the soul cannot have all the virtues, or even the perfection of one virtue. Without cement, the stones of a building collapse. Without nerves and muscles, the body comes apart. Without charity, the virtues cannot sustain one another.

LOVE AND THE COMMANDMENTS

Our Savior always joins love and the commandments. “Whoever loves me will keep my word.” (Jn 14:23) “Whoever does not love me, does not keep my word.” (14:24) John repeated these words “The love of God is this, that we keep his commandments”. (1Jn 5:3)

NEEDING ALL THE VIRTUES

We need all the virtues to keep all the commandments. We need religion to keep the first three commandments; by piety we keep the fourth; by gentleness we keep the fifth; by chastity we keep the sixth; by honesty we keep the seventh; by truth we keep the eighth; by purity and frugality we keep the ninth and tenth. Only with charity can we have all the virtues and keep all the commandments.

Someone (without charity) can have some virtues and can live a short time without offending God. As an uprooted tree can produce imperfect leaves, so a heart uprooted from charity can bring forth some virtues (but not for long).

PERFECT VIRTUES

All virtues separated from charity are imperfect. They cannot attain their goal of making us happy. At birth, a bee is just a little grub with no wings. Later, they become little flies. Finally, they become perfect bees, having all they need to fly and make honey. So, virtues have their beginning, progress and perfection.

Without charity, virtues can be born and possibly even grow. However, they cannot have the strength to fly to God and to collect the honey of sanctification.

Charity is like the sun, giving to all virtues their beauty. Other virtues, like faith, hope and repentance enter the soul first and prepare for charity's coming. When she arrives they obey and she animates them.

HELPING EACH OTHER

Virtues help each other. Chastity requires sobriety, humility needs obedience. Although chastity performed from obedience has a double value, yet, chastity mixed with obedience, still lacks love's perfection. A man with all the virtues except charity would be like Adam's body before God breathed life into it. Virtues lack motion and life until God gives charity, "the breath of life" (Gen 12:7) Without this love, virtues gain no profit.

LOVE AND OBEDIENCE

Divine love enhances all virtues and receives no perfection from them, even from obedience. Obedience perfects all other virtues, except love. Certainly, God commands us to love and we exercise obedience by loving God. However, love draws its goodness from the good it loves, not from obedience.

Obedience is loveable only because love is its goal. By obeying, we love. God is both the beginning and the goal of goodness. So, love begins all virtues and is their goal.

11.10 DIGRESSION – IMPERFECTION OF PAGAN VIRTUES

Although ancient philosophers spoke highly of the moral virtues, what virtues can men have who deliberately overthrow religion? Many times, these philosophers killed themselves rather than endure the calamities of life. Yet, they would claim that the wise man was always happy. "If you are so happy, why don't you stay alive?" (St. Augustine)

SOME EXAMPLES

One wise man who committed suicide was even praised in his decision. Augustine says, "The man had no courage and wished to avoid personal shame. His was a weak soul that could not stand adversity."

Lucretius killed herself because she claimed she was misjudged concerning her chastity. Many even praised her chastity, but if she were innocent, why did she kill herself? Aristotle taught that children should be abandoned and, if a man had too many children, he should procure an abortion. Seneca, praised as a wise man, taught that deformed children should be abandoned.

ROMAN PRACTICES

Tertullian reproached the Romans for this practice of exposing their children to the cold, famine and dogs. This was even the practice of the rich who could afford children. What kind of virtuous men were

these? Their wisdom was cruel and brutal. As St. Paul says, ‘Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools and their foolish hearts were darkened.’ (Rom 1:22 and 21)

WRONG GOALS

Pagans who practices virtues did so for worldly glory. “Pagan virtues are not true because they were done for passing goals.” (St. Ambrose) “On the Day of Judgment the virtues of the pagans will not save them, but it will lessen their condemnation.” (St. Augustine)

ONE VICE FOR ANOTHER

The pagans repressed many vices because of another vice called vainglory. They despised vanity because of their vanity. Diogenes trampled upon Plato’s pride. Plato said, “You trample my pride because of your pride.”

Seneca, at the moment of his death, told his friends to be faithful to the gift he had left them, “the picture of his life”. This man was vain even on his deathbed. These wise men wanted the honor that goes with virtues. Their virtues were not true virtues because they usually performed their duties with much outward show. The true servant works quietly and generously.

APPARENT VIRTUES

The Church Fathers called pagan virtues, “virtues and non-virtues” meaning they appeared to be virtues but lacked the heat of God’s love. Pagans were incapable of divine love because love is based on faith. Originally, Augustine believed that philosophers practiced true virtue. Later, he realized that he praised their virtues too much. Their virtues were like fireflies. These shine in the night but have no light in the day. Pagan virtues are virtues when compared with vices, but when compared with true Christian virtues, they are unworthy of the name “virtues”.

Their virtues are like a worm-infested apple. They have the substance of an apple but the worm of vanity destroys their inner core.

CHRISTIAN MARTYRS

For example, Cato had a firmness of heart, yet he killed himself. True firmness would not only suffer for glory, but would suffer for truth. Christian martyrs were constant in tribulation, not like Cato, Seneca or Lucretia, (who killed themselves). St. Lawrence, St. Vincent, St. Agnes, St. Agatha, Perpetua and Felicity (and thousands of others) all suffered martyrdom. How can anyone admire the imperfect pagan virtues and not admire the perfect Christian virtues which are a hundred times more worthy.

11.11 HUMAN ACTIONS WITHOUT DIVINE LOVE ARE WORTHLESS

Abraham had Isaac by Sarah. He had other children by other wives, but Sarah would not acknowledge these other children. As a result, they could not inherit. Even Ishmael, the son of Hagar, (Sarah’s mistress), was not acknowledged by Sarah even though she had asked Abraham to have a child by her.

Similarly, only the children of holy love (the actions inspired by charity) can merit the inheritance of the Kingdom. Only divine love makes us “Heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ”. (Rom 8:17)

ACTIONS WITHOUT CHARITY

When moral or supernatural virtues (faith and hope) produce actions without charity, they are of no value for heaven. Paul writes “If I give away everything I own and even if I hand over my body to be burned, but do not have charity, it profits me nothing”. (1 Cor 13:3)

If the soul produces moral virtues which come from pride or self-interest (and not from charity), they are banished from Abraham’s house like Ismael, his son by the slave girl. They do not have charity’s privileges and are left without merit. These actions are infected by bad intentions and are more vicious than virtuous. In these actions, virtue is on the outside and vice is on the inside.

WHEN LOVE DIES

The Israelites lived peaceably during the life of Joseph and Levi. When they died, the Israelites were reduced to slavery. So, the merits of Christian virtues remain in the soul while charity reigns. However, if love dies, all the merits die at once. These virtues were born under charity, but lost their life because the will rebelled. Ezekiel teaches, “If a just man turns away from justice and does the works of an evil man, will he live? No. all his justice will not be remembered and he shall die in his sin.” (Ez 18:24)

Mortal sin ruins all the merits of virtue. Virtues performed while the soul lived in grace gain merit, but this is lost when love dies. If virtue is practiced while the soul is in the state of sin, these virtues are born dead, useless for eternal happiness. The Dead Sea has so much salt that it kills fish coming from the Jordan. So, mortal sin kills all the merits of virtuous actions. To survive, the fish must turn upstream, away from the salt. So, the soul must turn away from sin to live.

THE DEAD SEA

The Dead Sea represents clearly this evil of sin, because mortal sin kills everything that comes near to it. Sin is infectious, like a pestilence. While the soul is in sin, even the most excellent virtues produce no life. The acts of a sinner only resemble the acts of a just man. In truth, they are empty fruits. Certainly, God sees them and rewards them with temporal blessings (which are given to servants) but these empty fruits do not please divine justice nor are they rewarded with the fruits of eternal life.

These fruits perish on the tree and God cannot harvest them. John wrote to the Church of Sardis, “I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead”. (Rev 3:1) The Church’s virtues were dead and pleased only the eye. St. Paul writes clearly, “Without charity, I am nothing and nothing profits me”. Virtues of a soul in mortal sin do not profit for eternal life. “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?” (Mt 16:26)

11.12 WHEN HOLY LOVE RETURNS TO THE SOUL

The virtues of a sinner who is deprived of grace do not gain eternal life. They are dead works. The virtues of the just man living in grace are living works. If later, the soul loses divine grace by mortal sin, these virtues are called extinguished works. They are not dead works. Because Jesus was about to raise Jairus' daughter to life, he said, "She is not dead, only asleep" (Mk 5:41) Her death, because of a short duration, was just like sleep.

NOT "DEAD WORKS"

So, when a just man has committed mortal sin, his works die. They are not "dead works", but "deadlike". When divine love returns through repentance, they will return to life again.

Sin deprives the soul of life and of all its merits. The return of grace restores both life and merits. Sin is the coldest of winters, killing all holy works. During the winter, plants are in a state of death. If the winter of sin continues, nothing can recover.

RESTORATION OF LIFE

With spring, the old plants, withered by the past winter, become green and regain their life. When sin is blotted out, divine love returns. The works dried up by the winter resume their life. Such is the power of God's love. Ezekiel writes, "When the wicked man turns away from his wickedness, he shall save his soul". (Ez 8:27) The wickedness is repaired.

The Father reestablished his Prodigal son in all the privileges which he had lost. Job (a symbol of the repentant sinner) received "twice as much as before". (42:10) The Council of Trent taught priests to say to sinners, "God is not unjust. He will not forget your works and the love shown in his name."

THE RETURN TO GOD

God does not forget the works of the sinner who recovers divine love by penance. God forgets their works when they sin. However, he remembers them again when they repent. The Council of Trent teaches clearly that for a soul to gain eternal life it is not necessary that the soul never fall into sin. They need only die in God's grace and charity.

God promises that if the sinner returns to God by penance, God will no longer remember his sin but will remember his good works. Sin is totally removed from the divine memory and the sinner's good works are remembered forever. "Return unto me the joy of your salvation." (Ps 51:14) This is the joy of the heavenly wine which "cheers the hearts of men". (Ps 104:15)

SIN AND GOOD WORKS

Sin does not destroy the just man's works. They are only forgotten. By penance, the sin is forgotten, blotted out and abolished. If a just man sins again, his former sins do not come back to life. Once forgiven, sin is annihilated. Former good works, however, return to life again.

What happens to the good works done while the soul is in sin? As long as sin makes the soul incapable of eternal life, these works remain unprofitable. However, when charity returns by God's forgiveness, the soul becomes capable of immortal glory. Then, God recalls these works and they become profitable.

Sin does not have the same power over charity, as charity has over sin. Sin abounds to ruin us, but grace super-abounds to restore us. (Rom 5:20) God's mercy triumphs over God's judgment, which caused him to forget our good works. (James 2:13)

BURSTING INTO FLAMES

When Our Savior healed, he restored health and added new blessings. The cure far excelled the disease! Good works which have been drowned in sin, regain life when the soul, through penance, regains grace and charity. When Jerusalem was destroyed, the sacred fire in the temple turned into mud. When the mud was exposed to the sun, it burst into flame. (2 Mac. 1:19) So, the sinner's good works turn into mud. However, freed from sin, his good works become clear flames, placed again in the dignity of God's altar.

11.13 REDUCING ALL OUR ACTIONS TO HOLY LOVE

Brute beasts do not know the goals of their actions. As a result, animals do not aim at a goal. They simply follow their instincts.

PURPOSE IN OUR ACTIONS

Man is different. He does his actions for some purpose. Sometimes, his purpose changes the action. An oath is meant to insure truth, but a man can swear in order to deceive. He can also add another goal to his action. Almsgiving's goal is to relieve poverty. However, the giver can also intend to show kindness.

VARIOUS GOALS

We can add a less perfect goal, an equal goal or a higher goal. For example, in giving the alms, the person might desire:

1. To gain a friendship (a lesser goal)
2. To give good example to his neighbor (an equal goal)
3. To please God (a higher goal)

Our motives different perfections to our actions.

When doing something, we often have many motives. If a man enters public service, he might want honor for himself or the good of the state. In both instances, he might even be ambitious, placing his interests over the common good. He also wants a salary for his family, an intention which is both honest and well ordered. "Trade until I come" said the owner in the parable. So, let us trade our lower motives for higher ones. That will bring more profit.

DIFFERENT MOTIVES

Someone might receive Communion at Easter to obey the Church's law. He does well. But if he receives Communion primarily to avoid a bad name, he places the opinions of others at the same level as God's opinion.

During Lent, I can fast to please God, to obey the Church, to be diligent, to be religious, or to tame the flesh. Some motives are better than others. To fast in order to save money is good. To fast to obey the Church is better. To fast to please God is the best. If a person invites his friends to dinner and places those of lower rank in higher seats, he offends everyone. The lower rank feel like fools, sitting in the high places. So, if a person does an action for many motives, he should have them in correct order.

To desire to please God and Our Lady is excellent. However, to want to please Our Lady more than God would be wrong. Each goal has its proper place and the supreme rank belongs to God.

THE HIGHEST MOTIVE

Love makes all actions pure and heavenly love should be the highest motive of all our actions. The saints and angels love all things to please God. They love one another and us, but only to please God. They even love their heavenly happiness because it pleases God. They even love their love for God only because it pleases God.

11.14 PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE

For divine love to spread over all our actions, we must purify all our intentions, always rejecting vicious motives like pride, vainglory and self-interest. To steep our virtues in charity, we must examine our good motives and do our deeds from love.

A HERO FOR VARIOUS MOTIVES

I can be a hero in war for various motives:

1. To show my bravery
2. To obey the prince
3. To love others
4. To be great-hearted

To raise these motives to divine love, the soul says, "O God, because these virtues please you, I put them into action. I follow these feelings of valor only because you want me to."

In this way, divine love fills all our other motives. We do these actions because God wills them. Whoever steals to get drunk is more of a drunkard than a thief. Whoever is brave to please God is more a divine lover than an heroic soldier. Love for God absorbs his whole will.

PRACTICING VIRTUES FROM LOVE

We might go to Paris by way of Lyons. Therefore, we are going to Paris, not to Lyons. We can sing to serve God. Then, we are not so much singing as serving God.

We can love a virtue for a unique motive. We might love chastity because it is pure. If so, we should add divine love. “O God, in practicing chastity, I seek only your good pleasure and your delight.” “Father, it has seemed good in your sight.” (Mt 11:26) We must place all our actions in God’s good pleasure, loving virtue because God loves it.

EXCESSIVE LOVE

Some men love a virtue excessively, and they leave charity aside. Tertullian so loved chastity, that he violated charity. He left the Catholic Church so he could practice a chastity according to his own ideas. The “Poor Men of Lyons” loved poverty so much, that they became heretics. Many Enthusiasts exalt prayer and leave charity behind! Some heretics exalt love for the poor and set aside love for God, saying that man is saved only by almsgiving. This violates St. Paul’s teaching. “If I give all my goods to the poor and have no charity, it profits me nothing.” (1Cor 13:3)

STANDARD OF LOVE

“God has set his standard of love over me.” (Song 2:4) Love is the standard in God’s army, the only flag under which we fight for our Savior. Let all virtues obey charity. Let us love each virtue only because it pleases God. In this way, divine love will give life to all virtues.

11.15 CHARITY CONTAINS THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

To follow the dictates of reason and to gain natural happiness, the human heart must have:

1. Temperance – to repress sensual rebellion
2. Justice – to give God, neighbor and self what is due
3. Fortitude – to overcome the difficulties in doing good and avoiding evil
4. Counsel – to discern the proper means to do the good
5. Knowledge – to know what is truly good and what is truly evil
6. Understanding – to see the basic principles of the good and the beautiful
7. Wisdom – to contemplate God as the source of all good

These qualities make our spirits gentle and obedient to our natural reason.

SUPERNATURAL HAPPINESS

Besides natural happiness, there is supernatural happiness, when the Holy Spirit himself makes us gentle and obedient to his heavenly inspirations. His love bestows seven perfections which scripture calls the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

THE SEVEN GIFTS

These seven gifts are charity’s principal actions.

1. Wisdom is a love that relishes and experiences the goodness of God.
2. Understanding is love which penetrates the truths of God in his inner life and God in his creatures.
3. Knowledge is love which knows ourselves and all creation so we can serve God correctly.
4. Counsel is love which makes us wise in choosing the means to serve God.

5. Fortitude is love which strengthens us to act according to counsel.
6. Piety is love which sweetens our labor so we do the works pleasing to the Father.
7. Fear is love which causes us to avoid whatever displeases his Divine Majesty.
- 8.

THE SEVEN STEP LADDER

These gifts are the seven sacred steps by which souls ascend (to unite with God's heart), and by which they descend (to help their neighbor and lead him to heaven).

On the first step, fear makes us forsake evil. Then, piety excites us to do good. Third, knowledge discerns the good we are to do and the evil to avoid. Fourth, fortitude gives us courage in all our efforts. Fifth, counsel helps us to choose the suitable means. Sixth, understanding shows us the features of God's infinite beauty. Seventh, wisdom joins our wills to God to experience his incomprehensible goodness. God waits for us at the top of this ladder. When we arrive, He gives us his kiss of love and makes us taste his sacred breasts, which are better than wine.

DESCENDING THE LADDER

We descend the ladder to return to earth to help our neighbor. On the top step, we experience zeal for God. On the second step, understanding gives us an incomparable light to teach others God's beauty and goodness. On the third step, counsel provides the means we can use to have others relish God's goodness. On the fourth step, fortitude gives us strength to overcome obstacles that would ruin God's plan. On the fifth step, knowledge prepares us to preach and exhort others to practice virtue and avoid vice. On the sixth step, piety helps us to place a devotion in them, so they acknowledge God and obey him. On the last step, fear helps us to urge them to fear God's judgments. If they fear eternal damnation and also fear God as his child, they can easily forsake earth and begin their own climb to heaven.

Charity is like a lily which has six white flowers and, in the middle, a golden wisdom which beats into our hearts a loving relish of the Father's goodness, of the Son's mercy and of the Spirit's sweetness.

11.16 THE LOVING FEAR OF SPOUSES

David said about Jonathan, "More precious is my love for you than love for women". (2 Sam 1:26) He desired to have more love than a husband has for his wife. So, I will describe the unique love of the perfect soul for God.

A WIFE'S PERFECT LOVE

Imagine a wife with a loving heart and perfect nuptial love. Her love is incomparable. It is chaste but modest, strong but gracious, bold but obedient. Although fearful, she is assured by the goodness of her spouse that she will not lose him. Yet, she greatly fears that she will not enjoy enough of his divine presence and also that, sometimes, he might be absent. Although having no fear that she will offend him, she is sensitive that she might not be sufficiently united with him.

NEXT LEVEL

At the next level of perfection, she realizes that she will always be united to God. However, she fears that this eternal union may not have a pure simplicity. She does not love spiritual pleasures, virtues or consolations that might distract her. She wants him, not his gifts, “Show me, O you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock lest I begin to wander.” (Song 1:6)

This fear touched the great souls of St. Francis and St. Catherine of Genoa. They did not want unmixed love. They did not want consolations (or virtues) to stand between their heart and God. They would say, “What is not God is nothing to me.”

THREE STAGES

There are three stages of love. Beginning love is true, but young and feeble. A constant, solid love produces filial fear. However, only a perfect love produces this fear of spouses.

Although servile fear does not come from love, it is often a profitable servant. To make her fine linen clothing, a woman uses a needle to insert the gold thread. So, God uses the needle of servile fear to prick our hearts. He then inserts the gold thread of solid virtues. As John wrote, “Perfect love casts out fear”. (1 Jn 4:18) Fear of damnation (and loss of heaven) does not remain when the full sweetness of sacred love enters.

11.17 HOW SERVILE FEAR REMAINS WITH SACRED LOVE

If the woman with the needle is interrupted, she will leave the needle stuck in the material until she returns. When God places virtues and divine love in our souls, He also leaves in the needle of servile fear, until charity comes to perfection. Then he removes it. On earth, while we experience the joy of love, we must also tremble with apprehension. “Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice in him with trembling”. (PS 2:11)

LEAVING FEAR FOR LOVE

Abraham’s servant brought the beautiful Rebecca to Isaac. When she saw Isaac, she left the servant and became his wife forever. God uses servile fear to arrange the marriage between the soul and divine love. The soul must not marry fear. She must leave him behind when she meets divine love.

Just as this servant remained in the service of Isaac and Rebecca, so fear continues to serve love, (as the occasion demands). Even a just soul will experience temptations and even courageous love must repulse attacks. Man is changeable and always subject to the mutiny of the passions.

USING FEAR AS A GOOD SERVANT

In these cases, love uses fear to repulse the enemy. When Jonathan attacked the Philistines, he took his armor bearer, who killed those that Jonathan did not kill. (1 Sam 14:1) To overcome its enemies, divine love uses fear. The fear of damnation kills those temptations which love does not kill. When temptations to pride, greed or sensuality are strong, love must call fear to its aid, saying to itself, “If you succumb, you will lose your eternal inheritance and merit eternal punishment.” In these extreme necessities, the soul must use

every means. Jonathan used even rocks and his speed of foot, to avoid death from the Philistines. Sailors always bring rope and anchors for moments of storms. So, a soul always takes along a fear of God for the storms of temptation.

THE APPLE SKIN

Just as the apple's skin preserves the apple, so servile fear preserves love. Whoever gives an apple, also gives the skin. The Holy Spirit gives many gifts, and he gives fear of God to preserve them.

Servile fear is needed on earth but not in heaven, where there is certitude. Servile fears are like Moses and Aaron. They did not enter the Promised land, but their children did. In heaven, the soul will experience both filial fear and spousal fear, so she can admire the majesty of God. "The fear of the Lord is holy, enduring forever." (Ps 19:10)

11.18 HOW LOVE USES SERVILE FEAR

Many unforeseen accidents can cause persons with no devotion to fear God and nature. Many problems like earthquakes, floods and famine cause people with no devotion to lift their hands and eyes to God. People believe that God blesses those who serve him. When the pagan sailors were in danger (Book of Jonah), they turned to their gods. Also, the natives of Malta felt that God was punishing St. Paul when they saw the viper attack him.

GOOD EFFECTS

The psalmist calls thunder and storms the "Voice of the Lord", saying "They fulfill his word". (Ps 148:8) Samuel's mother said that God's enemies would fear if God would thunder from heaven. (1 Sam 2:10) These fears do not come from our free will. Yet, they cause good effects. They show that we depend on God and should ask his aid. Christians (amid these natural disasters) invoke the names of Jesus and Mary and make acts of faith, hope and love. Even St. Thomas Aquinas feared thunder and would always say "the Word became flesh".

FAITH AND FEAR

Faith gives us a different fear. It teaches us that there are eternal punishments prepared for those who offend God and die without being reconciled with him. By faith, the soul knows that it will be judged at the hour of death (and at the end of the world). These Christian truths place a deep fear in devout hearts. How could a soul ponder these eternal horrors and not tremble? When these fears drive out all affection for sin, they are wholesome. (Council of Trent) "We have conceived your fear, O Lord and have brought forth the spirit of salvation." (Is 26:18)

Although Our Savior established a law of love, he also instilled fear. He said, "Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Mt 10:28)

VARIOUS FEARS

Every good fear removes affections for sin. Any fear which retains an affection for sin is evil. Devils fear the power of exorcism, but they continue to desire evil. A galley-slave fears his owner but still hates him. A person who loves sin but avoid it out of fear, still commits the sin in his desires.

Besides this malicious fear, I add another one. It is less evil but equally useless. In the Bible, King Felix listened to Paul and feared God. However, he still wanted a bribe from St. Paul. (Acts 24:25) In the Book of Daniel, King Belshazzar saw his condemnation written on the wall. “His face blanched and his thoughts terrified him”. (5:6) However, he did no penance. Fear without repentance is useless.

HIGHER FEARS

Not offending God because of a fear of hell is very good. However, there is a higher fear. Some Christians act to receive a heavenly reward. If only eye could see, ear could hear and mind could conceive what God has in store for those who serve him! Certainly, this fear of losing a reward should include a love for God.

The highest fear is not based upon gaining heaven or avoiding hell, but upon the respect we owe God as Father. A good child does not obey his father because he will lose his inheritance. Even if the father is old, poor and powerless, the child still serves him with great affection.

JOSEPH’S FILIAL FEAR

Joseph honored his father, Jacob, and showed constant tenderness. After their father’s death, Joseph’s brothers used their father’s name to seek Joseph’s pardon for selling him into slavery. “Before he died, our father said, ‘I ask you to forget the wickedness of your brothers’.” (Gen 50:17) When Joseph heard this he wept, because his heart loved his father.

When this filial fear is mingled with servile fear or mercenary fear, it is called “beginning fear”, used by those who are just learners in devotion. Young boys who are learning to ride, cling to the horse when the path begins to curve. An experienced rider just presses closer to the saddle. So, when beginners are besieged by the devil’s assaults, they use all three types of fear to hold themselves steady, while an experienced person needs only filial fear to be faithful.

11.19 SACRED LOVE CONTAINS THE SPIRIT’S TWELVE FRUITS AND THE EIGHT BEATITUDES

Paul mentions twelve fruits of the Spirit – charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, long-suffering, mildness, faith, modesty, continence and chastity. (Gal 5:22) He considers all these as one, calling them “the fruit of the Spirit” because “the love of God is poured forth into our hearts by the Holy Spirit”. (Rom 5:5)

CONTAINS ALL THE FRUITS

Love is the one fruit of the Spirit and contains all the fruits in itself. The fruit of the vine is grapes, from which come must, wine, brandy, etc. So, the one fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, which has twelve qualities.

COVERED IN CHARITY

Charity is the true fruit of paradise. The soul gathers it from the tree of life, (the Holy Spirit who dwells within us). Besides rejoicing in love's delicious sweetness, we should cover all our treasures with charity. In this way, we are assured eternal life and are content in this life. This contentment is so strong that all the waters of tribulation cannot extinguish it.

Even amid poverty and losses, love grows stronger. It rejoices in its tears and gains strength when subjected to injustice. When surrounded by others who suffer, love grows in compassion. It renounces all sensual and earthly delights to gain purity. Love tries to stop wars and mediate dissensions. It spurns earthly honors, grows strong by suffering and sees life's goal as dying for the beloved.

VIRTUE, GIFT, FRUIT AND BEATITUDE

Holy love is a virtue, because it obeys God's commandments. In fact, love is the virtue of virtues. Holy love is a gift, because it makes us sensitive to the Spirit's seven gifts. It is the gift of the gifts. Holy love is a fruit of the Spirit. Because it gives us a great desire to practice devotion. It is the fruit of fruits. Holy love is a beatitude. Because it makes us see the world's insults as honors. We reject any glory except that of Jesus crucified, and desire only the throne of his cross (which is more glorious than Solomon's temple).

11.20 DIVINE LOVE LEADS ALL PASSIONS AND AFFECTIONS INTO OBEDIENCE

Love gives to our hearts all of its desires. Love leads. Desires follow. These desires tell us what to hope, to fear, to hate, or to avoid. Desires dictate what objects we want and what triumphs we seek. If a man loves women for physical passion, he desires only physical pleasure. He undertakes anything to gain it and grows angry when he loses it. Whoever loves riches or loves honors become slaves to riches or honors.

DRAWS ALL DESIRES

When divine love rules the heart, it attracts all desires (which always follow love). Divine love then tames sensual love and brings the sensual passions into obedience. Divine love is the Savior's water, and "Whoever drinks of this water shall never thirst". (Jn 4:13) With abundant divine love, the soul desires only God and acts only from divine love.

TWINS AT WAR

Divine love and self-love reside in our hearts like the twins, Esau and Jacob, who both lived in Rebecca's womb. They hated each other, opposed each other and continually struggled. St. Paul wrote, "Who will deliver me from the body of death, so only God's love can rule?"

We must take courage. When Our Savior told us to fight, he also promised victory. God said to Rebecca “Two nations are in your womb. One people will overcome the other. The elder shall serve the younger”. (Gen 25:23) The two boys were the fathers of two nations, which constantly warred against each other.

The soul, also, has two loves. Each love has many troops (their desires and passions). As with Jacob and Esau, these diverse desires cause convulsions and pain. Just as Esau the elder would serve Jacob, so sensual love must serve the spiritual, and self-love must serve divine love. The elder nation served the younger, only after David conquered them. So, sensual love serves divine love only when the Spirit subjects the passions. In heaven, beatified love will possess our whole soul.

USING JACOB’S TACTICS

At birth, Jacob held Esau’s foot to hold him down. Divine love must use the same means as Jacob. When holy love sees some passion rising up, it must take that desire by the foot and make it an obedient servant to God. Divine love must turn our passions into virtues.

How do we make the passions serve love? Two things make the stars disappear – the clouds at night and the sun by day. Two powers diminish our passions, the opposite passion and a more powerful passion.

TWO MEANS

For example, I can directly oppose vain, earthly hopes by thinking of the short time that I have on earth and that I will leave my earthly goods to others. Also, I can think of stronger hopes, my desires for eternal rewards and life in heaven. I can overcome my desires for earthly riches and pleasures by despising them or by seeking the greater riches and pleasures of immortal life. In this way, heavenly love destroys sensual love.

JESUS’ TEACHING

Our Savior used both of these methods. To cure his disciples of worldly fear, he instilled a greater fear. “Fear him who can destroy both the body and the soul in hell.” (Mt 10:28) To cure his disciples of a vain joy, he offers a greater one, “Do not rejoice that the demons are subject to you. Rejoice, instead, that your names are written in the book of live.” (Lk 10:20) Divine love turns our desires away from the goals of self-love and orders them to spiritual goals.

Before eating, we should say, “Lord, I do not eat to satisfy my appetite but to sustain the body you gave me.” When experiencing a slight fear, we should say, “O Lord, you let me fear so I avoid this trouble.” When experiencing an excessive fear, we should say, “I will do everything needed but, if it be your will, I will accept whatever happens”. In this way, all our passions and desires are turned into the pure gold of heavenly love.

11.21 SADNESS IS ALWAYS USELESS, AN ENEMY OF DIVINE LOVE

Just as you cannot graft an oak onto a pear tree, so you cannot graft despair onto charity. True despair, (not just a distrust of self or a rejection of worldly pleasures), can never serve divine love.

NO HELP TO CHARITY

If Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, how can sadness help charity? St. Paul writes, “Godly sorrow produces a worthwhile penance without regret, but worldly sorrow produces death.” (2 Cor 7:10) God’s sorrow helps sinners to repent and it leads perfect souls to grieve for the sins of others. David, Peter and Magdalene wept for their sins. Jeremiah wept over Jerusalem. Our Savior wept over the Jews. Paul wept over those “who were enemies of the cross of Christ”. (Phil 3:18) This was divine sadness, not worldly sadness.

THREE SOURCES OF SADNESS

The world’s sadness comes from three sources:

1. From Satan

By many disturbing suggestions, Satan clouds the intellect, weakens the will and troubles the soul. Just as fog darkens sight, so Satan’s thoughts darken our minds. In this darkness, the soul grows discouraged and falls into despair. Then, when it is sad, the devil ambushes the soul. He attacks her desires with worries about past sins and leads her imagination to reject all of God’s consolations.

2. From Natural Dispositions

When depression dominates a personality, sadness comes from the person’s natural disposition. The devil uses this disposition to prepare a thousand temptations. Cheerful souls do not have these problems but depressed personalities suffer from self-distrust, sloth and spiritual numbness.

3. From Life’s Events

Tobias was sad because he was blind. David was sad at his son’s death. This sadness comes to everyone (good or bad). The soul moderates this sadness by resignation to God’s will. Tobias thanked God for his adversities. Daniel sang for joy in the lion’s den. Unfortunately, the worldly soul enters into despair. Worldly people are elated at prosperity but despair when the abundance is removed.

THE SADNESS OF REPENTANCE

Repentance is different. It has a sadness that enlivens the spirit, stirs up hope and causes devotion. This sadness of repentance leads to great consolation. “Let the penitent always sorrow, but also rejoice in the sorrow.” (Augustine) “This sadness of penitence is a child of charity and spreads itself over all its pain. It hopes to do better and retains the gentleness of the Spirit’s fruits. In good souls, this sadness is not really sad. It rejects the evil of sin, for the past and the future.

HARMFUL TYPES OF REPENTANCE

Other repentances are not good. They are troubled, impatient and bitter. These prove fruitless and bring no true amendment. These come from self-love and not from the virtue of penance. “The sorrow of

the world produces death” (1Cor 7:10). So, we must avoid it and banish it. If it comes from nature, we must use the remedies prescribed. If it comes from the devil, speak to your confessor and obey his direction. If it comes from circumstances, we must resign ourselves to God’s holy will. Let hope of eternal life show you that all events are passing and not worth thinking about.

RULES FOR CONTROLLING SADNESS

In all types of sadness, we must use the superior part of our will to act from divine love. Some actions depend on our physical strength and we cannot always fulfill them. If we are depressed, we cannot always look happy. However, we can say kind words and perform charitable works. We cannot always be cheerful but we can always be gracious.

COUNSELS FOR PROGRESS IN HOLY LOVE

12.1 PROGRESS DOES NOT DEPEND ON NATURAL TEMPERMENT

Writers sometimes think that affectionate temperaments are conducive to divine love. However, God does not distribute charity according to natural conditions. This contradicts Scripture.

SUBJECT OF THIS BOOK

In this book, I do not write about affectionate natures but about a divine love which God pours into our hearts. This resides in the supreme point of our soul. This divine charity is above all our faculties and independent of our natural disposition. Natures which are inclined to love might be more ready to love God, but they are also more ready to set their desires upon creatures. This propensity places them in great danger of being turned away. They can mingle their divine love with natural love. Their loving nature contains the danger of loving wrongly.

Certainly, these loving souls, when purified from creature love, work wonders in holy love. Their love spreads easily through all their faculties, and they enjoy a sweetness not present in harsh or melancholy souls.

TWO SOULS AND EQUAL CHARITY

If a loving soul and a harsh soul have an equal amount of charity, they will love God equally, but differently. The one will love more easily and more amiably. The other will love more solidly and more perfectly. The love that spring up among the thorns of a harsh personality will be more noble. The love in a more loving personality will be more delightful.

When supernatural love is exercised supernaturally, the soul’s natural inclinations are of no importance. So, I say, “You who love naturally, why not give yourselves to divine love? You who are lacking in natural love, why not seek a supernatural love? God calls all to holy love and will give it to all.”

12.2 NEED FOR A CONTINUAL DESIRE TO LOVE

Jesus said, “Lay up treasures in heaven.” (Mt 6:20) For God, one treasure is not enough. He desires us to have many treasures, and we must have an insatiable desire. If my soul is created for infinite good, should I not add love upon love.

DESIRING TO LOVE GOD

Unless God reveals it, we cannot know if we love God above all else. Yet, we can easily know if we desire to love him above all else. Knowing our desire, we can see that this love is beginning within us. Both our desire to love and love itself reside in our will when once we desire to love, we have already begun to love.

CRYING OUT FOR DIVINE LOVE

The “poor in spirit” are those who desire to love God. Jesus said that the poor in spirit will inherit the Kingdom. Listen to the saints. “To love is to die to self and to get to God.” (Augustine) “Let me die of your love, You who died for my love.” (St. Francis) St. Teresa of Avila, thirsting for love, cried out “O Lord, give me this water”. (Jn 4:15)

SPIRITUAL COVETOUSNESS

Earthly covetousness seeks temporal goods and is the root of all evil. Spiritual covetousness seeks the pure gold of God’s love and is the root of all good. Whoever truly desires love, truly seeks it. Whoever truly seeks it, will find it. Cry out day and night, “Come Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with the fire of your divine love. Oh, when will you fill my soul?”

12.3 TO HAVE THIS DESIRE FOR SACRED LOVE, WE MUST REMOVE ALL OTHER DESIRES

Hunting dogs lose their scent in springtime. When flowers give off a variety of smells, they cannot follow the true scent. The same is true for many souls. They have so many desires for projects, that they do not desire divine love as they should.

Lilies have no season. When placed three inches into the ground, they blossom immediately. When placed deeper into the ground, they blossom later. A soul, buried in the world only superficially, will bloom quickly and strongly. A soul deeply buried in the world will bud later and with difficulty.

SAINTS IN THE DESERT

This is why the saints took themselves to the desert. Freed of worldly cares, they gave themselves totally to heavenly love. The spouse in the canticle closed one eye (4:9) so she could keep the other eye fixed firmly. She took aim to wound the very center of his heart. Also, she tied up her hair, allowing just one strand to bind her spouse’s heart and make him a slave to her love.

ONLY ONE DESIRE

Whoever desires to totally love God must shut their minds to worldly events and meditate in heavenly things. They must gather up all their desires so they can serve God alone. Whoever desires something else, desires God less.

Blessed Giles would say “one to one”, one soul loving God only. Having many desires in the heart is like having many children at the breast. They cannot all suck at once and each struggles for its turn. Eventually, the breast dries up. Whoever aspires to heavenly love must reserve everything for God.

12.4 LAWFUL OCCUPATIONS ARE NO HINDRANCE

Curiosity and ambition cause a thousand obstacles to divine love. These silly and superfluous undertakings are embarrassments. They turn us from divine love and are not really part of our vocation. King David wrote, “What have I in heaven, and besides you, what do I desire on earth?” (Ps 73:25)

UNTOUCHED BY CIRCUMSTANCES

St. Bernard ministered in the courts of Kings and among the princes of armies. Yet, he lost no progress in divine love. He lived in different places, but his heart always lived in God. These changes came from the needs of others. He was concerned only with the work God had for him. He was white in purity and red with charity.

ISRAELITES IN BABYLON

While in captivity, the Israelites refused to sing their religious songs in Babylon. They said, “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” (Ps 135:4) They were unwilling slaves because their love was with God, who preserved them.

During the Milan plague, St. Charles visited the sick and touched infected persons. He placed himself in danger only from necessity. Otherwise, he would be tempting God. Because He trusted in Divine Providence, God preserved him. So, God protects those who must act because of a duty. A man must go where he is needed and must not go when there is no necessity.

12.5 A GOOD EXAMPLE

God is innocent to the innocent, good to the good, and tender to the tender. He favors those souls who make themselves childlike.

St. Francis of Rome tried to say Our Lady’s Office, but was interrupted on a number of occasions. When she returned to her prayers, she saw the next verse written in golden letters. Her companion saw the saint’s guardian angel writing them.

The necessary tasks of a person's vocation do not diminish divine love. The truly devout soul loves as much when performing exterior duties as when she performs interior prayer. Both her silence and speech, her actions and contemplation, sing her hymn of divine love.

12.6 USE ALL OCCASIONS FOR DIVINE LOVE

Some souls intend to do great works for Our Savior. Often, there is never an opportunity for these works. They deceive themselves. By having desires for future crosses they avoid the present crosses, (which are much less). They are valiant in their imagination, but do nothing in their actions.

May God preserve us from imaginary fervor which breeds a secret self-esteem! Great works are not available to us. However, we can do little ones with great love. When a saint gives water to a traveler he does a small exterior act. However, his abundant love turns the water into the spring of eternal life.

THE UNIMPORTANT FLOWERS

The bees gather honey from the great flowers (the lily and the rose) and from the less important ones (the thyme and the rosemary). These less important flowers give more and better honey. So, by devotion's little works, the soul practices charity more frequently, more humbly and more excellently.

Putting up with the troublesome actions of others, overcoming our passions, renouncing our lesser inclinations, acknowledging our imperfections, keeping our souls in peace, loving abjection and accepting criticism are more profitable to our souls than we can imagine, (if done from heavenly love).

12.7 DOING OUR ACTIONS PERFECTLY

Our Savior wants us to reject any crown that is not made of gold, that is, if it does not come from charity or from a devout intention.

DOING WORKS OF GOLD

I might fast to lose weight. I might do actions to please others. In these cases, I do not have the right intention. In contrast, if I fast so I can enjoy God's grace, the work is of gold and increases charity. Doing little actions, with the pure intention of pleasing God, greatly sanctifies us.

Some eat much, but are never healthy because of poor digestive powers. Others eat little and are always healthy because their stomach is good. So, some souls do many good works but grow little in charity because they do them by natural inclination, rather than by divine love. Others seemingly accomplish little, but they advance greatly in charity because they act from a holy will. They use their little talent faithfully for the Lord who rewards them greatly.

12.8 HOW TO APPLY WORKS TO GOD'S SERVICE

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of Jesus Christ.” (1Cor 10:31) “Whether you eat or drink, do all for the glory of God.” (Col 3:17) We do all for God's glory when we have the habit of holy love. Our intention is implicitly contained in our communion with God. This dedicates all we do to God's goodness. A child, living with his parents, does everything for them. He belongs to them and depends on them. We only need to be God's children to direct all to his glory.

PRACTICING VIRTUES BY AND FOR CHARITY

When charity is near, it communicates its perfections to the other virtues. When a branch is grafted to a tree, the branch shares in the tree's sap. Having charity and practicing virtues should not be your goal. You must practice your virtues by and for charity.

When a painter guides the pupil's hand, the stroke belongs primarily to the painter. The pupil applied the brush, but the master made the movements. The result has the master's touch in every part. The pupil receives praise because he shared in the master's skill. This is an example of virtues guided by charity. This happens in different ways.

THOSE SPECIFICALLY DEDICATED

Divine love gives a special perfection to the actions of souls specially dedicated to God's service. Bishops, priests and deacons, by sacramental ordination and the indelible character, are branded as slaves to God's perpetual service. Religious, by their vows, are immolated as living sacrifices to God. Lay people become members of pious congregations. Others, by set purpose, have strong resolutions to follow God's will and make retreats to stir their souls to reformation of life. (Thankfully, St. Ignatius of Loyola brought retreats back into use.)

We do not need to apply the motive of love to each particular action. A resolve to give a sum of money even without a direct attention to love, is still made through love, (the soul's intention at the beginning).

SHARES IN ORIGINAL INTENTION

What is the difference between giving money and going good actions? None. They are the same. If distributing money shares in the original intention of love, certainly performing good actions also shares in that intention. A soul who has consecrated herself to God, has also consecrated all her acts to divine love.

Therefore, souls should make retreats to cleanse themselves from sin and to resolve firmly to serve God (see first part of Introduction to a Devout Life). Later, they must review each year the resolutions of their retreat.

A man, in the habit of doing good, receives much merit even without any explicit intention. His soul is ennobled by love, the original source of these good habits.

12.9 CERTAIN MEANS TO APPLY MORE DIRECTLY TO LOVE

When our intentions are rooted in love, our actions take their value from love (which is their origin). Actions which flow from priesthood have their source in the young man's original intention to be a priest.

DAILY RENEWAL

However, the soul must move along. Offering our life to God once a year is not enough. We must do it every morning. This daily renewing invigorates our intention and freshly unites our hearts to divine glory. This sanctifies us even more.

Hundreds of times each day we must use ejaculatory prayers to lift our hearts continually to God. A soul who incessantly breathes words of love, and keeps her heart lodged in God's bosom, certainly does all her works in and for God. Whoever says, "Lord, I am yours", "My God and my all", "Oh Jesus, you are my life", "Whatever is not of you is nothing to me", is a soul dedicated to her heavenly spouse.

RESIGNED TO GOD'S WILL

How blessed is the soul which has stripped herself and totally resigned herself into God's hands! She needs only one look at God to renew her surrender. She wishes nothing but God and loves nothing in the world except God.

In heroic works and matters of great importance, we need to ponder our holy and glorious eternity. We must realize that God cherished us from all eternity, and prepared everything for our salvation, especially the heroic good that we now must do. We, then, consent and embrace what must be done, because God has eternally willed it and we choose to obey him.

ST. CHARLES, BISHOP OF MILAN

When the plague hit Milan, St. Charles saw that this scourge had been prepared for his flock. He knew that the same Divine Providence that allowed the plague would also take care to assist the afflicted. Seeing the sacrifices which would be asked of him, he immolated himself to God's will and kissed the cross saying, "I salute you, precious cross, which came from the Father of Mercy and who willed this for me and my people from all eternity. I will you because the Father willed you and I embrace you with affection."

This is how we must undertake great works and meet serious afflictions. If they continue for a length of time we must use Jesus' words, "Father, you graciously willed it so", (Mt 11:26) What great treasures are present in this practice!

12.10 THE SACRIFICE OF OUR WILL TO GOD

Abraham sacrificed his strongest natural inclinations. God said, "Go forth from your country and your relatives and out of your father's house. Come into the land I shall show you." (Gen 12:1) Abraham went immediately, "not knowing where he went". (Heb 11:8) He sacrificed his country, his family and his

father's house. He departed boldly and with fervor, going wherever God led him. What abnegation! No one can love God perfectly without abandoning affection for everything created.

THE GREATER SACRIFICE

This is nothing compared with what happened later. God said, "Take you son, Isaac. You shall offer him as a holocaust upon one of the mountains I will show you." (Gen 22:1) He set out immediately for a three day journey. When he ascends the mountain with Isaac, his son asks, "Father, where is the victim for the holocaust?" Abraham said, "God will provide". At the mountaintop, Abraham constructs an altar, lays wood, binds Isaac and is about to immolate him, when an angel says, "Lay not your hand upon the boy. Now, I know that you fear God and have not spared your only son for my sake." Jesus said, "Whoever looks with lust at a woman, has already committed adultery in his heart." (Mt 5:28) and so Abraham, when he bound his son to immolate him, had already sacrificed him in his heart.

This holocaust that he offered for God's love cannot be estimated. Yet, which of the two loves was greater? Abraham's love which was willing to sacrifice Isaac, or Isaac's love which was ready to be sacrificed? The father's love was generous. The son's love was magnanimous. Abraham was old and experienced in loving, strengthened by his vision of God. He had often tasted God's care and sweetness. Isaac was in life's springtime, a novice in loving God. Yet, at his Father's word, he gladly gave himself as a holocaust in obedience to the Divine will. This surpasses all understanding.

ABRAHAM'S INNER SACRIFICE

Abraham had to deal with these bitter thoughts for three days. Did he not feel compassion as his son asks, "Father where is the victim?" The child's sweetness made the father's heart melt, a heart admired by the angels and God himself. "O Jesus, after giving you all that we have, when will we also give you all that we are?" When shall we offer you our free will, the only child of our spirit? When shall we tie our free will to the cross, so this little lamb will die by the sword of holy love?" "O my free will, how good for you to be bound on the cross. How desirable to burn forever as a holocaust to the Lord."

SLAVE TO GOD'S WILL

Our free will is totally free when it is a slave to God's will, and it is totally a slave as when it serves itself. It has life when it dies to itself, and death when it lives for itself. We are free to do good or evil. Choosing evil, however, abuses our freedom. So, let us renounce this terrible liberty and subject our free will to heavenly love. Let us be slaves of love. This will make us happier than kings.

If our free will wants to use its liberty to violate our resolutions, then let us sacrifice our free will. Make it die to self so it can live for God. Whoever holds on to free will in this life, will lose it in the next. Whoever gives free will liberty in this world, will be its slave in the next world. Whoever makes free will to serve the cross, will love the Creator forever.

12.11 MOTIVES FOR HOLY LOVE

Because many saints have written the motives of holy love, I will only sum up my teaching.

There are 5 major motives for loving God.

1. God will ravish our soul and crown our happiness.
2. God has a special care for each of us.
3. God redeems us and prepares heaven for us.
4. God gives everyone enough graces to be saved.
5. God wants to give us eternal glory.

12.12 A MOST USEFUL METHOD

To grow in divine love, use these five motives in the following three ways:

1. Apply to Specific Aspect

Apply each motive to a particular aspect of your life. For example, a general thought of God's goodness in redemption should become "He has loved me and given himself for me". (Gal 2:20)

2. Consider the Eternal Source

Consider the source of these blessings. From all eternity, our Creator determined to create, redeem, save and glorify me. I am only a poor soul, yet God in his eternal thoughts designed the day of my birth, my Baptism, all his inspirations in my soul and all the benefits he would give me. What other sweetness is like this?

3. See all in Jesus' heart

We must see the benefits in their source. The High Priest wore a garment inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes. Jesus, from his conception and birth, knew all our names. On Good Friday, he lovingly said our name, "O God, I take so and so's sins and I undergo torments so he can live and not perish. Let me be crucified so he can be glorified".

Jesus saw clearly all the benefits he would gain for us, for each person and each blessing. Thinking of all these benefits will inflame our hearts, as we see God's will (which destines them for us) and Jesus' heart (which merited them for us).

12.13 MOUNT CALVARY – THE ACADEMY OF LOVE

The greatest motive to touch our hearts is the suffering and death of Jesus. In his wounds, our mystical love finds its sweetest honey. O Jesus, your death is the effect of love and worthy of my love.

TWO SOURCES OF HAPPINESS

In heaven, our souls will be ravished by God's goodness and by Our Savior's death. At the transfiguration, we received a glimpse of heaven. There, Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about his death which "he would accomplish in Jerusalem". (Lk 9:31) This death sent life from the lover into us, the loved.

In heaven we will chant, "Live, Jesus because Your death proved the supreme might of heavenly love." Mount Calvary is the mountain of lovers. Any love is frivolous and dangerous which does not come from Christ's passion. Without this love our death will be unhappy. Without this death our love will also be unhappy. Because love and death mingle in the Passion, we must have both.

MAKE THE CORRECT CHOICE!

During life we choose either eternal love or eternal death. There is no middle ground. I have written this book so you can choose correctly. “Oh, eternal love, I choose you. I want to die to all else so I can live in Jesus’ love and not die eternally. I love Jesus.”

May these words on charity take root in your heart. “May they bring forth the fruit of good works, not just the leaves of praise.” (St. Augustine)

AMEN - ALLELUIA