



APPLIED CHRISTIANITY

BY JOHN J. HUGO



**O TEMPLE
IN WHICH
GOD WAS
MADE A
PRIEST**

NIHIL OBSTAT
Arthur J. Scanlan, S. T. D.
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IMPRIMATUR
✠ Francis J. Spellman,
Archbishop of New York,
New York, May 8, 1944.

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“Behold, this child is destined for the fall and
for the rise of many in Israel and for a sign that
shall be contradicted.” — Luke 2, 34

— 5 —

APPLIED CHRISTIANITY

by

Father John J. Hugo

“Christianity, even when watered down, is still hot
enough to boil the modern world to rags.”

-G. K. Chesterton.

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**TO OUR LADY
THE QUEEN
OF THE
MOST HOLY ROSARY**

**WHOSE FIFTEEN MYSTERIES SO
MARVELOUSLY EXEMPLIFY AND
EPITOMIZE THAT DIVINE PATTERN
OF LIVING GIVEN TO US BY HIM
WHO SAID:**

**I AM THE WAY
AND THE TRUTH
AND THE LIFE**

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“If any man will do the will of Him, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”

-John 7, 17

FOREWORD

When anyone publishes a book, it is to be presumed that he has perfected his work so far as he is able. Not so in the present case. I am handing to the printer a manuscript filled with imperfections; and no one could possibly be more fully aware of these imperfections than I am myself. That I am having the manuscript printed nevertheless is due to the fact that I have not at present the leisure to revise it; and yet many persons have urged its publication – persons who say that it has been of help to them even in its present imperfect form, and who, therefore, wish it made available to others.

Accordingly, I beg all who read these pages to give freely of their charity. From the start the reader should understand that the book is intended to be no more than an outline, a set of classroom notes, such as is prepared for students to supplement their texts and aid them in surveying and summarizing a given subject matter. Originally these notes were written for a group to whom it was my duty to give religious instruction. I prepared them myself because I know how inadequate, and inaccurate, are the notes taken by students. However crudely written, they quickly spread far beyond the small group for whom they were at first intended; and ever since there has been a constant demand for them. The present edition is put out to satisfy that demand. I hope in the future to have the opportunity, not merely to revise, but to rewrite completely, what is here set down so sketchily. Meanwhile, I trust that even in the present form this outline of the spiritual life will continue to help such as desire to serve God more perfectly.

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

John J. Hugo.

Feast of the Apparition of St. Michael.

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PART I:
NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL

Chapter I
The Two Principles of Activity

In coming to a complete and scientific knowledge of any subject, the first step is analysis, the second synthesis. That is to say, the matter must first be broken down into its component parts, and each one of these studied in its own proper qualities; then the components are considered together, in their mutual bearings on one another. In this way a detailed, accurate, and complete view of a subject is made possible.

An example may be found in chemistry. Compounds are there broken down and studied in their simpler elements in order that we may get a fuller knowledge of the compound. Or take another example. The mechanic in mastering a machine studies the separate parts; he takes the machine apart in order that he may the better understand it. Then, enabled thereby to study the functions of the several parts, he reassembles them and now intelligently observes all the parts working together as a unit.

In studying the Christian life, it is most useful to follow the same procedure. The Christian is a composite; and, if we are to understand him properly, we must separate the various elements that are found together in him. We may then study the characters and properties of each of these elements; and, finally, considering them once more together, we may the better understand their interrelations and the manner in which they affect one another.

In the Christian there is, first of all, human nature. Yet this nature does not exist in simple or pure form. It bears the marks of the Fall; and this is the second fact that we must mark in the Christian. Finally, this nature has been elevated by grace to the supernatural plane. These three things, then, must be distinguished in the Christian: nature; concupiscence; grace. We must know exactly the implications of each of these in order to understand fully the Christian life. We must know what they are and their bearings on one another.

Obviously these three factors exist together in each and every

Christian; yet, to assist study, meditation, and spiritual effort, it is necessary first to consider them apart in order the better to grasp their interrelationships in the actual living of a Christian life.

These remarks are made here both as an explanation of the procedure that will be followed and as a precaution. It may seem impractical, even unreal, to study nature in itself, apart from grace; yet it is necessary to know the inclinations and the end of nature if we are to grasp how grace modifies them. It may well seem unreal when the mechanic studies part of his machine in isolation from the rest; but he does so in order that he may understand what each part contributes to the whole. . . . In the first four chapters, especially the first and third, we isolate nature and grace in order to study their respective roles in the Christian life; in the fourth chapter (to some extent, even in the third) we begin the work of synthesis. . . .

1. In every man there is a twofold principle of activity. The one is his human nature; the other is supernatural. The supernatural principle does not belong to man at all, but is given to him by God, out of God's infinite mercy. It comes as divine grace.

Since both nature and grace are principles of activity, man then is capable of human and supernatural activity. Corresponding with these activities are two ways of life: the one human and natural; the other supernatural and divine.

Man's supernatural destiny consists in the enjoyment of God, in entering the intimacy of the Trinity, to live for all eternity in the companionship of the three divine persons. The full fruition of the supernatural life belongs to the next world. Still, grace and the life of grace on earth are a beginning of the life of glory in heaven. Already in this life God invites us to enter into the friendship of the Trinity; and, indeed, only those may enjoy this friendship in eternity who have availed themselves of the invitation here.

2. *Definition of the natural and supernatural*; first of the words, then of the concepts.

One lives a natural life when he lives in accordance with truths and laws discovered and known by *natural reason*, and when his actions proceed from purely natural powers, i.e., senses, bodily powers, will, imagination, reason.

One lives a supernatural life when he lives in accordance with laws and truths given to him by *divine revelation*, and when he is enabled to do this by supernatural means (charity, faith, grace) that exceed all natural powers.

In a word, a natural life is proportioned to man's natural abilities; a supernatural life is simply beyond all human ability and would be completely impossible without God, who gives us both the knowledge of this higher way and the necessary means to pursue it.

It is possible to define the natural and supernatural destinies in three ways: by their *make-up*, or composition; by their respective *guides*, by their *destinations*.

(a) In regard to its make-up, man's natural life is composed of all his natural actions, i.e., all actions that proceed from his senses, his body, his understanding, memory, and will.

Man's supernatural life is made up of all actions that proceed from a supernatural principle, i.e., from grace and charity. All such actions are supernatural and therefore meritorious; i.e., they give us a real claim to supernatural happiness. But no action, no matter how grand or good, which does not proceed from charity can be considered either as supernatural or as meritorious; therefore, it is useless for my supernatural destiny. Hence, the makeup of the supernatural order, i.e., its essential constituent, is *charity* or *love*. "God is charity, and he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him." (I John 4, 16)

(b) Natural and supernatural life may be defined in reference to their respective guides.

Man is guided through his natural life by *reason*. Reason is in fact man's typical human faculty – it is what distinguishes him from the beast. If I live according to reason, I will be living a virtuous natural life I will be a good pagan; but I will not be supernatural, not a Christian.¹

Faith is the guide of the supernatural life: "The just man liveth by faith." Only when my action is directed by faith, instead of by reason, is my life supernatural. Faith, then, is the headlight of the supernatural, as charity is its engine.² "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision: *but faith that worketh by charity*." (Gal. 5, 6)

(c) The natural and supernatural orders may be defined by means of

1. It should be noticed, too, that in practice reason has been darkened by original sin; this causes it to lead us even further from the supernatural way. Of course, if nature is here understood in the sense of pure nature, a natural life is only a theoretical possibility. Since the Fall, those who attempt to lead a natural life are turned aside from the ideal of reason and natural virtue by concupiscence. Hence, in practice, those who live a natural life are more or less ruled by sensuality and egotism. See Part I, chap. VI.

their respective destinations.

The destination of the supernatural life is heaven. If I live in accordance with its requirements, I will enter upon an eternity of happiness with God.

But the destination of the merely natural life is merely natural happiness. Natural actions, even when they are good, are not supernatural, and they do not, as a consequence, deserve heaven. They deserve only natural happiness.

Natural happiness consists in the satisfaction of the natural powers and desires, i.e., the satisfaction of the senses, of intellect and will. According to the philosophers, natural happiness consists essentially, and in its highest form, in the knowledge and love of the Supreme Good, which is God.

It is customary to speak of the place of natural happiness in the next world as limbo. No natural action, then, of itself deserves heaven or can assist us in getting to heaven. Such actions, performed in accordance with reason or natural appetites, belong to natural religion, as do all merely natural virtues; hence, of themselves they merit only a natural reward. It is necessary to insist on this, so that it may be seen how insufficient is natural religion, however good in its own order, to merit the supernatural happiness of heaven.

Examples: If I indulge in snobbery towards the poor, towards Negroes, etc., I act in a human manner, as darkened reason dictates. But *faith* tells me that all men are images of God and are redeemed by Christ. If I act in this way, and treat even the poor as other Christs, then I act in accordance with faith. If I obey my superior because my superior is reasonable, the action is a good one, but is only natural. If I obey my superior, whether or not he is reasonable, in all things except sin, because my superior is the mouthpiece of God, as faith teaches, then my action is supernatural. *An action is supernatural when grace is its principle; and grace becomes operative in faith and charity.* Nature, even at its best, cannot merit supernatural happiness apart from grace.

We do not speak here of purgatory, because, in order to get to purgatory, we must also live a supernatural life. Purgatory is a kind of anteroom to heaven; to obtain it, the same conditions are necessary as for

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2. To live by faith does not mean, however, that we abandon reason. It means that we follow reason illuminated by faith; i.e., no longer does our reason depend on purely natural principles, arrived at by study, but on principles and truths revealed by God.

obtaining heaven. Purgatory does not increase our merits or our love of God; it simply destroys the last vestiges of sin that was forgiven on earth.

3. Texts. That man has a supernatural destiny may be shown from the following texts:

“But as many as receive Him [Christ] He gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His name, who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1, 12)

“Amen, Amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3, 5)

“Amen, Amen, I say unto thee, that he who heareth My word, and believeth him that sent Me, hath life everlasting, and cometh not to judgment, but is passed from death to life.” – This text is typical of a whole group which speak of the supernatural as life, the natural as death. Observe, Jesus does not say that those who sin are in death, but those who do not believe, i.e., who are guided *not by faith*, but by *their natural faculties*. In practice, it is necessary to remember that these natural faculties are biased by the effects of original sin, i.e., by concupiscence, which, were its course not interrupted by the opposite pull of grace, makes us “*by nature* children of wrath,” betrays us into actual sin, and would cause us to go to hell despite the good in our nature. Those who live under the dominion of concupiscence are therefore “dead.”

“I am come a light into the world; that whosoever may believe in Me may not remain in darkness.” (John 12, 46) This text is likewise selected because it is typical of a larger group: those who live by faith are in “light,” while those who live in accordance with fallen nature are in “darkness.”

(See St. Paul, Romans 8, 14-18. Also Ephesians 1, 11-14.)

4. *The natural and the supernatural orders are really distinct.* This is shown:

- a. By the words themselves. That which is supernatural is above (*super*) the natural. To be supernatural, we must be, not merely human, but superhuman. By grace we are deified, divinized; and, once baptized, God expects us to act as divinized beings and no longer as mere men.
- b. By the concepts. These have already been explained. Natural is that which is made up of natural activity; supernatural is that which is made up of actions that are infinitely beyond all human power.

Merely as human beings, we are no more capable of supernatural actions than a dog is capable of thinking, writing, talking.

- c. From the Sacred Scriptures note particularly the following texts:

“Wherefore henceforth we know not man according to the flesh. And if we have known Christ according to the flesh; but now we know Him so no longer. If then any be in Christ a new creature, *the old things are passed away, behold all things are made new.*” (II Cor. 5, 17)

“Therefore, if you be risen with Christ, *seek the things that are above*, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, *not the things that are upon the earth*. For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ *in God.*” (Col. 3, 1)

“And be not conformed to this world, but be reformed in the newness of your mind.” (Rom. 12, 2)

“To put off according to former conversation, the old man, who is corrupted according to the desire of error. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind. And put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth.” (Eph. 4, 22)

(See also Rom. 8, 5-13; Gal. 6, 8; Col. 3, 9-10; Titus 2, 11; I Cor. 15, 48; Rom. 6, 4.)

5. Below the level of the natural is sin. Man sins when he disregards both his faith and his reason and follows his brute appetites. And sin, of course, at least when mortal, leads to hell. There are, then, in each of us three possible levels of life:

	I MAKE-UP	II GUIDE	III DESTINATION
Supernatural	Charity	Faith →	Heaven
Natural	Natural Activity	Reason → ^a	(Natural happiness) (Limbo)
Sin	Disobedience to God	Appetite →	Hell

- a. NOTE. — The parenthesis and broken arrow above indicate that this is a merely theoretical possibility.

In order to see God we must get up on the supernatural level and live there. If we wished to interview an executive whose offices are in a skyscraper, we should have to go up to where he is; otherwise, no amount of patience would get us the interview. Nor can we see God except through living supernaturally. No matter how good we are, if our goodness is merely natural, it merits only limbo and not the supernatural vision of God.¹ Or, again, to reach Philadelphia from the West we must travel by the Lincoln Highway; no matter how persistently we follow the William Penn Highway, which is parallel to the Lincoln, we will never get to Philadelphia, for that particular road doesn't go there. Likewise, to reach heaven we must travel the supernatural way; no other road goes there.

In each of us, therefore, there are three possibilities of action: one may act as an angel, a pagan (a natural human being), or a devil.² We can act in any of these three ways. To go to heaven, we must act as angels. But, even though baptized, we are still capable of acting like pagans; when we do so, *our actions do not deserve heaven*, although there may be no sin in them.

6. The idea of natural happiness (limbo) is introduced to assist in defining the natural order and to distinguish it clearly from the supernatural order; or, in other words, to distinguish natural religion from Christianity. It was the error of the Pelagians to believe that men, of their own unaided powers, could live holy lives and merit eternal salvation. In our day, according to Pope Pius XI (*Miserentissimus Redemptor*), there has been a resurgence of Pelagianism: men have become again so confident of their human powers, so little appreciative of the incomparable dignity conferred on them by divine grace, that they think to obtain eternal happiness by their own human efforts and their own native goodness. The idea of limbo helps to correct this tendency by showing that natural actions, of themselves, merit at best only perfect natural happiness, and not the supernatural bliss promised to followers of Christ.

There is no intention here of suggesting a possibility that Christians may go to limbo; limbo is finally closed to the baptized. Hence the notion of limbo is used as a pedagogical device, for purposes of definition, and has no doctrinal significance; so used, it has the sanction of traditional

-
1. We speak here of nature by itself, apart from grace.
 2. Of course, there is in each of us only one soul, one life, one person. But this person is free to conduct himself in any of these three ways. The reason is that grace, nature, and concupiscence – though on different levels and in differing ways – are all distinct principles of activity.

teaching.¹

According to the common Catholic teaching, unbaptized infants do go to limbo at death; and their case well illustrates the point that is being made here, namely, that nature of itself cannot merit supernatural beatitude. Although innocent of personal sin, they cannot enter into heaven, because they have not been “born again of water and the Holy Spirit.” Because of this innocence in regard to actual sin, they do not, on the other hand, merit the punishment of hell; and although they are under the ban of original sin, *their human nature and its powers remain substantially intact*. Hence they go to limbo, “a state of perfect natural happiness, just the same as it would have been if God had not established the present supernatural order.” The limbo of infants is thus a “state of positive happiness, in which the soul is united to God by a knowledge and love of Him proportioned to nature’s capacity.” They are given such happiness as the normal and proper end of their nature and natural powers.

In the case of adult pagans or infidels, although concupiscence prevents them from realizing perfectly or for long the ideal of natural goodness, nevertheless they are able to perform some good actions, i.e., paying their debts, carrying out their duties.² Such actions, however, being on the natural plane, merit only a natural reward. In Christians, also, only those actions are truly supernatural and merit heaven which proceed from grace, rather than from nature, as their principle. And, of course, to say that an action proceeds from grace means, not merely that the grace is given by God, but also that men on their part accept the grace and correspond with it by performing supernatural actions and living a supernatural life: only in this case do they earn the beatitude of heaven.

The point to be grasped is this – that although Christ closed limbo to Christians, *He did not destroy their natural activity*. After baptism a man retains all his natural activity and desires; if he liked roast beef before baptism, he will still like it afterwards. Therefore, although baptism restores us to our supernatural destiny, *it does not change our nature*. And

1. See, for example, Father Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ways of the Spiritual Life*, N. Y., Benziger Bros., 1938, p. 4 et seq., especially p. 12. See also Abbot Columba Marmion, *Christ, the Life of the Soul*, London, Sands & Co., 1935, p. 15. For a general treatment of the subject see article *Limbo* in the Catholic Encyclopedia, from which the quotations in the following Paragraph are taken.

2. See Pohle-Preuss, *Grace, Actual and Habitual*, St. Louis, B. Herder Book Co., 1941, pp. 55-63.

if we live in accordance with the sensual and egocentric inclinations of fallen nature, rather than under the impulse of grace, then we do not merit heaven. Since we are “*by nature* children of wrath” (Eph. 2, 3), it is only by grace, and by a life which is lived in accordance with the spiritual and supernatural inclinations implanted in the soul by grace, that we merit heaven.

If a girl who likes pretty clothes decides to enter a convent, she takes upon herself a new vocation, a new destiny, but she does not thereby change her natural tastes; these remain to be gotten rid of. So also, although we Christians are given a new destiny, our natural tastes remain; so that we must begin, by laborious effort in correspondence with divine grace, to cultivate new tastes, supernatural tastes.

It may be objected that, since there is no limbo, it is useless to talk about it. Actually, however, the idea of limbo is very helpful. When a person enters a religious community, he gives up marriage and family life, and takes upon himself a new set of obligations. Marriage as an end in life is closed to him; and yet it is certainly not useless for him to know something of marriage – without such knowledge he will have a very inadequate idea of human nature. Likewise here, although we cannot go to limbo, we have a very inadequate idea of the natural order unless we study about it. In seminaries, students for the priesthood make a detailed study of natural happiness (in the science of ethics), despite the fact that the possibility of natural happiness in the next world has been removed from Christians.

Here are some good reasons for taking natural happiness, (limbo) into consideration, that is, for keeping in mind that perfect natural happiness is the proper term of natural activity:

- a. It helps us to define the natural. The best way to differentiate between two Greyhound buses, or two Pennsylvania trains, is to tell their destinations, i.e., that one is bound for New York, the other for Chicago. To show the destination of natural and supernatural activity is likewise the best way to define these two distinct levels of action.
- b. It shows us that natural activity, even when it avoids mortal sin, does not lead to heaven and supernatural beatitude. A Christian must not only rise above sin; he must rise above nature, that is, above natural standards of conduct.
- c. It gives us a true idea of supernatural happiness. Many people seem to think that supernatural happiness is a good deal like the happiness they long for in this world. Supernatural happiness is

the possession of God; heaven is the place of purely spiritual delights. If we forget about limbo, it is likely that we will think of heaven as just beyond hell and therefore confuse it with limbo, i.e., with perfect natural happiness. To put limbo into our thinking gives us a true picture of the immense height of heaven.

- d. If we pass over the theoretical possibility of limbo, we are likely to forget about the rest of the natural level – natural activity, etc. This is in fact what happens to many Christians. In consequence, they see only two levels of life instead of the three that we have pointed out. They are prone to think that merely by avoiding sin they are living on the supernatural level whereas the avoidance of sin may leave one still on the natural level, i.e., like the “good pagan” described by philosophers; or like the gross pagans so much more common in our day.
- e. Limbo shows us what grace *does not do*. Grace raises us to the supernatural level of life, but it *does not* supernaturalize our natural activity; that is, while it gives us the power to supernaturalize our natural activity, it does not make up for our failure to correspond with grace. This is a task that remains for us to accomplish with the help of grace, and it must be done if we are to merit heaven. In other words, in order to obtain our eternal reward, we must correspond with God’s grace by raising our merely natural actions to the supernatural level.

Chapter II The Two Principles of Activity

Practical Implications

From the doctrine outlined in the previous section, important consequences follow:

1. *By the mere avoidance of sin we do not live a supernatural life.*

If I seek only to avoid sin and aim at nothing higher, ignoring the requirements of charity and the impulse of grace, then I live as a pagan rather than as a Christian – a good pagan, no doubt, such as described by Aristotle, but a pagan, nevertheless, having a natural and rational standard of conduct. Moreover, I can practice all the natural virtues

(prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance) and still remain a pagan. The supernatural virtues alone make me a Christian – faith, hope and charity.

It is therefore insufficient to take as a guide for conduct the rule, “Avoid mortal sin.” If we make this rule our maximum of conduct, we will not get beyond a merely natural standard of behavior, observed also by good pagans; we will be led also to believe that, provided we avoid serious sin, it is lawful to abandon ourselves to worldly pleasure. Avoidance of mortal sin is an absolute minimum; our vocation is higher, i.e., to conform to Christ and conduct ourselves as sons of God.

It follows, then, that mere obedience to the commandments of the natural law does not make us Christians. The natural law comprises the commandments which men know by reason, by studying the bent of their own nature. Men know these laws without Christ or revelation. Hence it is a great mistake to confuse this natural law with Christianity. The chief precepts of the natural law are given in the Mosaic code. In its precepts God reaffirms the natural law. Subsequently, He made this law the point of departure for the supernatural religion that He established. But by the mere observance of the commandments of the natural law we cannot be saved. These commandments, when kept, bring out the possibilities of our nature; but they can never raise us to the level of supernatural life, and by their observance we merit at best a merely natural happiness. The Christian life consists in following the instincts, not of nature, but of grace. No doubt, as we shall see, in living a supernatural life we keep our human nature and natural activity intact; but we must learn to rule them in accord with the exigencies of grace and charity.

Certainly, one who is in the state of grace and has faithfully observed the natural law will be saved. But it is the grace that saves him, not the natural law. Our point is precisely that only supernatural activity – i.e., actions which proceed from a supernatural principle, can merit salvation. Let it also be noted that, at best, observance of the natural law is the absolute minimum acceptable in a Christian. Later we will show that one who takes the natural law as his maximum standard will not be able in practice to fulfill even its requirements.¹

Christianity, therefore, is not to be put down as a mere system of natural morality; it is not to be confused with natural ethics. Yet these mistakes are frequently made. Christianity takes natural morality as a starting point and then goes far beyond; it is essentially a supernatural religion.

1. Part One, Chapter VI.

We did not need Christ to teach us the natural law. Buddha and Confucius did this. So did Aristotle, who also wrote magnificently on the natural virtues. We Christians are under a heavy debt to Aristotle; but we must never confuse our supernatural religion with his masterly analysis of natural law and natural virtues.¹

2. *Accordingly, hatred of the world, as well as avoidance of sin, belongs to the very essence of Christianity.*

It is only by raising ourselves above the whole natural order that we become Christians. To do this, we must love God with our whole heart, whole soul, whole mind, whole strength. This means that we must withdraw our love from the things of the world, giving it all to God. By contempt of the world, then, is meant indifference to the world, spiritual detachment. (See Col. 3, 1-3) Because of our fallen nature, we have a tendency to become absorbed in creatures; this must be mortified by deliberate effort. If a man says that he loves his wife more than he loves some offensive creature like a toad or a lizard or a reptile, or more than he loves filth, she is not likely to be overcome by such flattery. What he must say is that he loves her more than all other women – he may not except even very attractive women; the very fact that other women are attractive is the reason why his wife demands his exclusive love.

Now sin is spiritual filth. Do we flatter God when we say that we love Him more than filth? We must rather show God that we love Him *more than all creatures*, even the most attractive; and, as in the example, the fact that other creatures *are* attractive is the reason why God demands that we choose Him in preference to them. Hence, the maxim, “Enjoy the world – as long as you don’t commit mortal sin,” belongs to paganism, not to Christianity, although it is all too frequently followed by Christians. St. Thomas defines sin as *an aversion from God and a conversion to creatures*: “Just as sin consists in this that a man, despising God, turns to perishable things, so the merit of a virtuous action consists in an opposite tendency, namely, that, despising created goods, one holds fast to God as to his end.”² All sin thus comes from worldliness, and mortal sin is simply worldliness carried to the degree of excluding God from our lives. That is why the love of the world cannot long continue in the soul without sin; for this love grows and is strengthened by every indulgence

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1. It is true that all men cannot know the natural law by reason, and that even the greatest minds have not known it perfectly. Christianity brought light here, too. Nevertheless, all that is called natural law is within the domain of reason. Revelation is primarily concerned with truths of a higher order.
 2. Summa Theologica, II II, 104, 3, c.

until it finally leads to the malicious love of the world that constitutes grievous sin. It is not that the world is evil; on the contrary, the world is good. The evil is in us – in our hearts, which so easily give their love to creatures rather than the Creator.¹

In condemning love for creatures, we condemn only that love which is sensual, egotistic, “natural,” in the sense that it proceeds from concupiscence. There is also a *supernatural love* of creatures, of which we shall speak more explicitly in another chapter. (Part Three, Chapter II) This supernatural love of creatures – like that of St. Francis Assisi – far from retarding virtue, is itself a manifestation of divine charity. But it is found only in purified souls and is vastly different from the love of creatures that is met with in sensual, imperfect, and worldly men. Indeed, it is only by renouncing the natural love for creatures that we come to love them as they ought to be loved, i.e., in reference to God. “They alone are able truly to enjoy this world, who begin with the world unseen. They alone enjoy it, who have first abstained from it. They alone can truly feast, who have first fasted; they alone are able to use the world, who have learned not to abuse it; they alone inherit it, who take it as a shadow of the world to come, and who for that world to come relinquish it.”²

3. *Charity is an absolutely indispensable means of salvation.*

There is no salvation without charity. That is why we say that baptism, at least of desire, is necessary for salvation. Some theologians think that pagans who have never heard of Christ can be saved, i.e., receive supernatural happiness. This may be so; but it is certain that they can only be saved if God gives them the grace to make an act of charity, demonstrating their love of God above every creature. What is called baptism of desire is not merely the desire for baptism, but *love of God above every creature*.

All the commandments are useless in the supernatural order if we

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1. Some people take scandal at the phrase “contempt for creatures.” Yet it is as old as Christian spirituality. How many mornings the Church has us pray, in the Collects of the Mass, for the grace to despise earthly goods and love those of heaven (*despicere terrena et amare caelestia*)! contempt for creatures does NOT imply: (a) that creatures are evil; (b) that the love of creatures is sinful. It implies that, since we must love God wholly, we ought to rid ourselves of all *sensual, selfish* and merely natural love for creatures apart from God. According to St. Thomas, contempt for creatures is a sign that our souls are in the state of grace. See I II, 112.5.
 2. Cardinal Newman, “The Cross of Christ, the Measure of the World,” *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. VI.

fail to obey the commandment of charity. And all virtues are powerless to place us on the supernatural plane if we have not charity. “If I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have prophecy, and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.” (I Cor. 13)

Of course, charity is an infused virtue; but it is given to us to be exercised. A man does not pay his secretary simply because she has cultivated the habit of typing, but rather for exercising that habit. So God rewards men for exercising the supernatural powers He has given them. The insistent repetition of the word “whole” in the commandment of charity (whole heart, etc.) shows that we must give our whole affection to God, none of it to creatures. The precept demands a total gift of self. We should strive to love creatures only in God and because of God, i.e., supernaturally.

4. *An action and its reward are proportionate to each other.*

If I desire to enjoy the pleasure that is obtainable from eating an apple, I must eat the apple; and I cannot reasonably expect to get that particular pleasure by, say, drinking a cup of coffee. There is a proportion between actions and the pleasure associated with them, or the reward belonging to them. Accordingly, natural actions can obtain for me only a natural reward; if I desire a supernatural reward, I must perform supernatural actions.¹

A man who works for Jones cannot expect to be paid by Brown. If he goes to Brown, the latter will send him back to Jones for his money. Similarly, if a man works for the world, he must be satisfied with the pay that he gets from the world; he cannot expect to be paid by God. If we wish to be paid by God, we must work for Him. This is the significance of Christ’s words: “Amen, I say to you, they have had their reward already.” (Matt. 6, 2) He is referring to those who have worked for the praises of men.

St. Paul states the same principle in this way: “For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption. But he that soweth in the spirit, of the

1. We do not discuss at this point *how* these actions are to be made supernatural, but simply assert that it ought to be done.

spirit shall reap life everlasting.” (Gal. 6, 9)

And Jesus Himself says: “When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen, nor thy neighbors who are rich: *lest perhaps they also invite thee again, and a recompense be made to thee.* But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind. And thou shall be blessed, *because they have not wherewith to make thee recompense: for recompense shall be made thee at the resurrection of the just.*” (Luke 14, 12)

5. *Death changes nothing; death simply immortalizes what is in us.*

If we wish to enter heaven, we must live the supernatural life on earth. For we carry into eternity with us the amount of love that we have when we leave the earth. If I have five degrees of charity when I die, I shall have five degrees through all eternity; if I die with no love of God, then through all eternity I shall have no love for Him.

Examples: If a man walks across a room holding five dollars, and while he is walking some one turns the lights out, he will still have five dollars when he gets to the other side – turning out the lights has no effect on the sum of money. So, if one leaves the earth with five degrees of love, turning out the lights (death) will not change the sum... If an Englishman gets on a ship in England he is still an Englishman when he gets off – the trip makes no difference in his nationality. Now there are only saints in heaven, and to enter heaven we must be saints; if we wish to arrive in eternity as saints *we must leave the earth as saints* – the mere passage will not transform us. Sanctity must be achieved in our lifetime on earth. We are, in fact, placed on earth for no other purpose than to prepare for eternity.

Many people seem to have a false idea of purgatory. There is no meriting in purgatory – there is no meriting after death at all. If my eternal happiness depended on the performance of one small meritorious act, to tip the balance in my favor I could not perform that act after death. It is a doctrine of the faith that one’s status for eternity is fixed in the particular judgment at death; after which there can be no change.

Purgatory, then, will not increase our charity – since charity is only increased through meritorious acts. Hence, if a man does not love God when he dies, but loves the world, no magical change will come over him after death. “If the tree fall to the south, or to the north, in what place soever it shall fall, there it shall be.” (Eccles. 11, 3. “The night cometh when no man can work.” (John 9, 4).

If we anticipate the supernatural pleasures of heaven, we must cultivate a taste for them here. Those Christians who take such obvious

delight in the things of the world – if they are serious in their wish for eternal happiness with God, why do they not fill themselves with the things of God now? What makes them think that their tastes will suddenly change at death? If they find the things of God so dull and unsatisfactory now, would they not have a very dull time in heaven?

6. *Heaven is not primarily a place, but a state, a condition of soul.*

Eternal happiness consists in the intuitive knowledge and love of God, i.e., union with God. Therefore, our happiness depends on the degree of union with God, and this, in turn, depends on our love of God when we die. “In the evening of life,” said St. John of the Cross, “we shall be judged on love.”

Hell, then, is likewise a condition of the soul in which the soul is deprived of God; although there is also a punishment of sense, according to Catholic teaching. Souls in limbo are also deprived of the beatific vision; but they do not expect this vision, or miss it, but are content with merely natural satisfactions. It should be noted that those pagans who disobey the natural law will not even go to limbo, but to hell.

Suppose that a group of people, scattered all over a hillside, are watching a sunset. Those on top of the hill get the best view; those down a little farther can see also, but their vision is poorer the farther they are from the top. Those towards the bottom of the hill cannot see the sun at all, although they still have light; those deep in the valley below are in total darkness.

God is the Sun of Justice. The saints are those who stand on top of the hill and enjoy the fullest measure of the beatific vision. The souls of the just are those who, a little farther down, yet possess the vision of God. The souls in limbo are those who still have happiness, but are excluded from the vision of God. Those in darkness are the souls in hell. The place that anyone occupies is that which he has merited (through Jesus Christ) while on earth.

After the resurrection the bodies will occupy a place. In this sense, which is secondary and accidental, heaven may be a place, but primarily and essentially, it is a state of the soul. It is love; it is friendship with God. And in eternity we shall have the degree of love, therefore of happiness, that we merited on earth.

Chapter III

The Harmony Between the Natural and the Supernatural

By the very fact that we have a supernatural destiny we are called by God to leave the plane of natural living; we are to give up the merely human way of life and act henceforth in accordance with our now divinized humanity. We are, in a word, to mortify ourselves – to mortify the natural man. And “mortify” means to kill, to make dead.

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

So also in mortifying the natural man, we do not simply destroy our human nature – if this were so, then the simplest and quickest way of attaining our supernatural end would be to commit suicide. Only certain elements in the natural order – those, namely, which are in conflict with our supernatural destiny – need to be removed. Whatever does not conflict with the supernatural calling need not be mortified. Accordingly, there are two elements in our nature: one that is good, and in harmony with our supernatural destiny, and this need not be mortified or destroyed; the other element conflicts with our supernatural destiny, and this it is, therefore, that must be mortified.

In this chapter we speak of what is good in the natural order. It is a matter of great importance, and in discussing it here at the beginning we are like the surgeon as he makes certain preliminary examinations, preparatory to an operation. For example, he examines the heart and the lungs – without, however, any intention of removing them, but to get an accurate idea of the whole system; afterwards he concentrates on the infected part. In the same way we examine first what is in harmony with our supernatural destiny, which need not be mortified; afterwards, in the next chapter, we will also give our attention to the infected area.

1. Where the Harmony Is Found

There is harmony between the natural and supernatural orders:

a. *In regard to human nature itself.* Human nature is essentially good, created by God; hence it need not – and should not – be destroyed or injured in order that we may live a holy life. Does this mean that we are to leave it as it is? Not at all: this nature has been divinized by grace, and it is

our business to see that it is wholly *transformed* by grace and charity. Of itself, our human nature, although good, cannot merit supernatural happiness; for this it must be penetrated by a higher principle. Still, it always will remain essentially the same human nature, no matter how far this process of divinization goes on.

An example will readily illustrate this: A blacksmith plunges steel into a fire and applies the bellows. Under the action of the heat, the metal first reddens, then comes to a white heat, finally turns liquid. It is still essentially the same; it is just as much steel now as before. Yet it has been transformed, and, in this new condition, it can be readily worked on and made to take all kinds of shapes. . . . So must our human nature be transformed by grace; it likewise will remain essentially the same; but when it is penetrated through and through with the divine action, it will be soft and pliant, readily following the impulses of grace.

And so, far from remaining merely human, our natures and our whole lives must be transformed by the divine principle of grace that is within us.

Note: Although our nature is essentially good, nevertheless it has been infected by original sin. True, the guilt and the eternal punishment of original sin are removed by baptism; *but the effects remain*. And if these do not injure the substance or the powers of human nature, nevertheless the damage that they do is real and serious, wounding all its activities. Thus, St. Paul can say of fallen human nature – apart from grace – “I know that there dwelleth not in me, that is to say, in my flesh, that which is good.” (Rom. 7, 18) This means that all the activity in our unregenerate human nature, until it is mortified and purified by grace, is infected more or less with concupiscence.

Now while it is true to say that human nature is essentially good, it must not be forgotten for a moment what the *actual* condition of this nature is. . . . Accordingly, we may distinguish two senses in which the word “nature” may be used. First, it may be used of human nature considered in itself (*in se*), that is, in its essential stuff and properties, which are wholly good. To use the word in this way, however, is to use it in an abstract sense; for human nature does not actually exist in this pure state. Secondly, we may speak of nature as it exists in the concrete (*in re*, in reality), and here it always is hindered by the effects of original sin.

Philosophers usually consider human nature in the formal or abstract sense (*in se*); this is useful in speculative discussions for clarifying certain matters. But in these pages, since we are dealing with practice, we will generally use human nature in the concrete sense, as it

actually exists, in order to set up certain rules to govern the actual practice of the Christian life. There is, of course, no contradiction between the two meanings; both are necessary and useful in certain contexts. However, a too purely speculative mode of thought would cause us to commit serious errors in this matter if we were to treat human nature *as if* it actually existed in a state of complete purity. In the concrete, human nature must be considered with the concupiscence that infects it. St. Paul had this sense in mind when he said that we are “*by nature children of wrath.*”¹ (Eph. 2, 3)

b. *In regard to natural activity.* Our physical activity – the activity of senses, body, intellect, and heart – is not in conflict with our supernatural destiny. We can, therefore, engage in this activity without giving up a supernatural way of life. There is, then, no need to mortify (i.e., to destroy or injure) natural activity in the interests of a mortified Christian life. We need not look at the sun, which would destroy our sight, in order to mortify our eyes; we need not eat sand in order to mortify the appetite; we need not cut off our ears in order to mortify our hearing. Indeed, we *must* not injure ourselves by such “mortifications,” because the fifth commandment forbids such conduct. Natural activity is good because it proceeds from human nature.

However, we are not to leave this natural activity on the merely natural level; it must be elevated to the supernatural, where it can merit eternal happiness for us. Of course, in the first instance, the grace of God raises us to the supernatural level, *but God leaves us free*; so that we can refuse to remain there by failing to correspond with divine grace.

Our natural activity presents us with a problem similar to that of a farmer who wants some peaches, but owns only apple trees. We want supernatural happiness, but we have only natural activity to work with; and natural activity, of itself, is no more capable of bringing us supernatural happiness than an apple tree is of producing peaches. The farmer solves his problem by grafting the branch of a peach tree on one of his apple trees. In the same way must we graft our natural activity on to the supernatural life; so that the latter, animating our natural activity, will enable us to produce supernatural works.

Once again it should be noted that this natural activity, while essentially good, *is likewise infected by original sin*. Because of concupiscence,

1. Therefore, let it be clearly understood from the beginning that when we speak of mortifying *natural* activity, eliminating *natural* motives, fighting against *natural* inclinations, we use the words “nature” and “natural” in the concrete sense, i.e., in the sense of fallen nature. See Appendix I.

man's affections turn from the Creator to the creature and he becomes absorbed in creatures, worldly occupations, and carnal joys to the exclusion or neglect of the Creator. This is the reason why we can say that *in practice* the mark of the natural man, or pagan, is the selfish and merely natural love of creatures; whereas the mark of the supernatural man is love of God. A supernatural life is one that is *ruled* by the love of God; a natural life is one that is ruled, at least in the practical order, by the love of earthly things. "For they that are according to the flesh, mind the things that are of the flesh; but they that are according to the spirit, mind the things that are of the spirit." (Rom. 8, 5)

C. *In regard to truth.* There is no discord between the natural truths of reason and the mysteries of faith. The truths of faith and those of reason belong to different orders, but they do not contradict each other; both come from God, who is the very Truth, one and eternal. Theologians say that the truths of faith are above reason, but not contradictory to it; just as the intellectual knowledge of man is superior to the sensible knowledge of a dog, although the latter is true enough as far as it goes. . . . Hence the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, which tells us that there are three persons in one God, is not opposed to the truth (of mathematics) that three times one is equal to three; the doctrine of the Incarnation, which teaches that there are two natures in the one person of Jesus, does not contradict the fact that in arithmetic two times one is equal to two; the truths of biology concerning man's bodily origin are not contradictory to the truth of religion that man's soul was directly created by God.

Nevertheless, although there is no contradiction between the truths of faith and those of reason, the former truths are much higher than the latter; and when we live by faith we break away, as it were, from our human moorings and follow a line of conduct that we cannot understand; as, for example, when instead of defending ourselves against injury, we practice the Scriptural injunction to "turn the other cheek." This does not mean that we are to cultivate eccentricities, in the delusion that we thereby live by faith. To live by faith is not to mortify one's self by denying that two and two are four or that Columbus discovered America, or by making one's self ridiculous in other ways.

Since we are humanly prone to cling to our reason, it is difficult to live by the truths of faith even when we accept them in a speculative way. The truths of faith are so far beyond our reason that at times they *seem* to contradict it; as when Abraham, a childless old man, was asked by God to believe that he would be the father of many nations. Moreover, we must notice also in this connection that *even our reason has been affected* by

original sin: it has been darkened, so that it easily follows the inclinations of concupiscence. . . . If we consider this darkened reason, then, there may be *an actual contradiction* between faith and reason; as when faith teaches us to seek our joy only in God, and our darkened reason persuades us to look for consolation in the goods of the world. . . .¹

Hence, as we use the word “nature” in two senses, so also do we use the word “reason.” First of all, there is reason in se – pure reason or right reason; and this is an abstraction which does not actually exist. It is pure reason that we have in mind when we say that there is no contradiction between faith and reason. Then there is reason as it actually is, reason in the concrete, the reason that is darkened as a consequence of original sin.

In the following pages when we say that we must mortify and attack and destroy the “natural,” we mean nature in the concrete. When we say that we must go against reason, or that faith conflicts with reason, we mean reason in the concrete. . . . A clear understanding of these terms will make impossible certain misunderstandings of doctrine that are common among even educated Catholics, and will help to give greater insight into the spiritual life. In ascetical theology, that is, when we deal with actual practice in the Christian life, it is customary to employ these terms in the concrete sense.

2. How to Raise Natural Activity to the Supernatural Level

The practical task of the Christian life is to take the natural activity of which we are capable and raise it to the supernatural level. God does not do this for us, although He makes us *capable* of doing it: “As many as received Him, He gave them *power* to be made the sons of God.” (John 1, 12) We must do it by voluntarily corresponding with God’s grace.

How is this to be done? The answer follows immediately from the principles that we have already set down. The supernatural world is God’s world, just as the natural world is man’s. . . . When we pass from the natural to the supernatural order we pass from man’s world to God’s. Now God is love, and that which characterizes His world is love, charity. Our action becomes supernatural, our lives are made divine, when they are impregnated with divine love; a supernatural life is one that is *ruled* by the love of God.

1. “It is not enough for the Member of Christ to apply reason to his affairs. Habitually narrowing to this scope one’s efforts after good, would bring about, essentially, a weakening of the supernatural element in conduct.” Edward J. Leen, C.S.Sp., *True Vine and Its Branches*, N. Y., Sheed and Ward, 1938, p. 137.

A natural life is one that, at any rate in practical conduct, is ruled by the love of creatures; thus a man who lives a natural (selfish) life and falls into many imperfections and venial sins allows his conduct to be ruled *in practice* by the love of creatures, even though he does not yet turn wholly away from God by mortal sin.¹

When can we be sure that our lives are actually *dominated* by the love of God? When our actions are *motivated* by this love. The motive of an action fixes its end and thereby reveals, as it also determines, the animating principle of the action... Hence we can say that an action is made supernatural by a supernatural motive, being performed for the love of God. By means of such a motive *we clear imperfection from our heart* and our intention, thereby allowing the divine grace to provide the impulse for our actions. If, on the other hand, our motive is merely natural and selfish, grace no longer impels the action, but is kept locked up in the soul; the practical impulsion and motive for the action comes from selfishness, from concupiscence, from the love of creatures. In such a case, although grace is not destroyed, it is kept more or less inactive (depending on the degree of imperfection), and the soul, while committing no sin, fails to correspond with grace. Such a soul remains on the human or natural level, refusing to live, as it is called to live, on the divine or supernatural plane.²

To sanctify our lives then means to make love the ruling force of our lives. This is the way that we bring religion into all the actions of the day; it is the way that we sanctify ourselves by small and ordinary duties... This, indeed, is the ultimate secret of sanctity, accessible to all who will hear it, and it makes holiness a possibility to the least of us. Nothing extraordinary is required, but to do all things with an ardent love, devoting all our lives to God.

It is not maintained here that supernatural motives are necessary under pain of sin. The purpose is to show the way to the *fullness and*

1. To see how this is possible, it is necessary to study the doctrine of imperfect actions and venial sin. We will speak of imperfect actions later. Concerning venial sin. See Rev. A. J. McNicholl, O.P., "The Ultimate End of Venial Sin," *The Thomist*, July, 1940, p. 373.

2. When Thomists say that natural actions are meritorious, they are speaking of natural actions in themselves (*in se*), apart from the concupiscence that sends natural actions awry in practice. Actions can be supernatural only when grace is their principle; concupiscence thwarts the impulses of grace and must be mortified. This is best done by supernaturalizing intentions. See Appendix II.

perfection of the Christian life.

3. Harmony Between the Three Lives

As already noted, although there is in us only one soul and one person, nevertheless we can live as animals, as pagans, or as Christians. We have seen that God has created a harmony between these three elements; it is our duty in our moral conduct to keep this harmony, for by concupiscence and by sin – and also by a merely natural life – we can destroy the harmony intended by God. If we live by our appetites, we are on the animal level only. If we live by reason, imposing the rule of reason on appetites, then we live on the human plane as good pagans; if we place reason under the guidance of faith, we are living on the Christian level. A child without training eats like an animal; then, trained in the amenities, he eats as a gentleman, as a human being; finally, through a supernatural motive, he eats as a Christian.¹

There is no difficulty in seeing the discord when a human being behaves like an animal; yet it is an even greater discord, although not visible, when a Christian behaves like a pagan. In all our actions we must have, besides the animal and human elements, the third, the Christian element. *The rule then for supernaturalizing natural activity is to get in the third element, the supernatural motive.* Because *God is love*, we make our actions divine when we see to it that they are ruled by love.

In our relations with others we can behave as animals (by quarreling, etc.), as human beings (by observing good manners), and as Christians (by treating our neighbors as “other Christs”). Friendship and the love of married couples can exist on the same three levels; and in these cases also it is necessary to get in “the third element.” Love may be mere lust, or human love, or Christian love; for from the Christian point of view, marriage is a means of sanctification, a sacrament. The angel Raphael

1. We are not here requiring an actual supernatural intention for each action. What is important is not the *frequency* of supernatural intentions, but their *purity*; and a Christian seeks to make his intentions *habitually* supernatural. If among theologians there is some controversy as to the *kind* of motive required for supernaturalizing actions (a controversy which we need not enter), there is no controversy but *rather complete unanimity* among spiritual writers concerning the need for purity of intention. (see for example, St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The True Spouse of Christ*, chap. XIX; Alphonsus Rodriguez, S.J., *Practice of Perfection and the Christian Virtues*, Chicago, Loyola Press, 1929, Vol. 1, third treatise; Abbot Marmion, *Christ in His Mysteries*, London, Sands & Co., 1939, pp. 294-295.) Hence, the dogmatic controversy is irrelevant to the present discussion, which is confined to the practical order.

told Tobias that he must put God first even in marrying Sara; otherwise he would fall under the power of Satan. (Tobias 6)

It is true that those who leave God out of their arrangements fall under the power of the devil. Friendships that leave God out are destroyed by God. Marriages that leave God out are likewise destroyed by Him; they end in the divorce courts and in suffering, instead of happiness. “Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it.” (Ps. 126, 1)

Even in our relations with our relatives and family, we must “get in the third element,” and we must not allow these to take us away from the love of God. That is why Jesus could say: “If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life, he cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14) This means that we must put God before the most sacred relationships, even before our own life, and allow nothing to come between us and God; that we must love God above *every creature*.

Chapter IV

The Conflict Between the Natural and the Supernatural

To those accustomed to the doctrine that grace completes nature and presupposes it, there may be something surprising in the idea that there is a conflict between nature and grace. Yet it is so. The *Imitation* says: “My son, pay diligent heed to the motions of nature and of grace, because *they move in a very contrary* and subtle manner, and are hardly distinguished save by a spiritual and inwardly enlightened man. All men seek good, and make pretense of something good in all they say and do; and thus under the appearance of good many are deceived.” (*Imitation*, III, 54) The author then goes on in detail to show how the opposite pull of nature and grace manifests itself in the soul.¹

1. Where the Conflict Lies

When actions are directed to God by a supernatural motive, there is harmony between the natural and supernatural. But when the motive is

1. For a fuller discussion of this point consult Appendix I.

merely natural¹ – when we do something because our darkened reason suggests it, or because of pleasure desired – then there is conflict between the two orders. For God has raised us to the supernatural order by grace and now He expects us to act *in accordance with grace*. Since we have been elevated to the order of grace, we can act *either* according to nature or according to grace. Grace does not destroy our freedom; and God expects us to act according to grace. We may know that we are on the road to God by the following test: “He who says he abides in Him *ought to conduct himself just as He conducted Himself*.” (1 John 2, 6)

Grace raises us to the supernatural level *and leaves us free*. Just as a boy, lifted to a shelf by his father, may or may not take an orange that is there, so the soul, raised to the supernatural order by grace, may or may not utilize this grace. God leaves us our freedom to decide that ourselves.

Hence, grace does not supernaturalize our intentions; these remain natural, unless, under the action of grace, we supernaturalize them ourselves. If I am in the state of grace today, that fact does not supernaturalize actions that I perform tomorrow. I must myself, by correspondence with grace, *supernaturalize them when I come to them, by means of the motive*; what grace does is to give me the power to accomplish this.

Thus we might (to take an imaginary example) breathe a rational soul into a dog, and the dog could refuse to use it; we might attach wings to a fish, and the fish could refuse to use them. By grace God has given wings to our nature; and we can still refuse to use these wings. Raised to the supernatural, we can still live on the natural plane, as pagans.

Further, an intention can be good and still be natural, as when a man takes a walk to promote his health. Now the more purely supernatural is our motive, the more meritorious will be our action. By purifying our motives we intensify our charity, increase our merit, perfect our conduct, draw closer to God. The Little Flower achieved heroic sanctity by performing with great intensity of love duties such as those performed by all other religious. The difference between her actions and those of less perfect religious was in the motive.²

We have not finished our spiritual efforts when we have brought our souls, or those of others, into the state of grace. Parents, when they have brought a child into the world, cannot consider their task finished; they must go on to raise and care for the child. *Nor can supernatural life be abandoned when it has been “brought into the world.”* Once we have intro-

1. Natural in the sense that they follow the inclinations of *fallen* nature and are therefore selfish, egotistic, sensual.

duced this new principle of life, grace, into our souls, our spiritual task *has just begun*. We must take care of this new life; and we do so by doing all things for the love of God.

God is not pleased when I say to Him: “Although I am living like a pagan, nevertheless I am in the state of grace.” It is *precisely because I am in the state of grace that He expects me to live as a Christian*. We do not console a mother when we tell her that her feeble-minded child has reason potentially, although unable to use it; she is sad for the very reason that her child has reason and should, therefore, be able to live as a reasonable being. So with God: His displeasure with me is occasioned because He knows that I should be living in accordance with my divinized nature.

The end of the Christian life is union with God, which is to be effected by means of grace. However, God graduates His graces, accommodating them to the needs and capacities of each soul. To the perfect He gives graces that effect a very intimate union with Himself. On the other hand, the graces that He gives to beginners, while initiating union with Himself (since all sanctifying grace is a “created participation in the divine nature”), are rather meant to prepare the soul for higher graces and lead it to perfection. Now a soul that has received the grace to begin should not thereupon end all spiritual effort.

Motives comprise the central area of our freedom. Our actions for the most part are not otherwise free. Nature determines that I must eat; the cook determines *what* I must eat; the only thing that I am free to decide is the motive – I can eat for God or for mere sense enjoyment.

The motive is what should occupy our efforts. All progress in perfection is a progress in the purification of our motives. God the Holy Ghost, of course, sanctifies us, but He does not do so without our cooperation; and there is no other way that we can cooperate except by the supernatural motive. Of the two principles of sanctification – God and our own wills – God is far and away the more important; but our part is indispensable. The supernatural motive is like the contact of wires effected by an electrician – it does not create the current, but it is indis-

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2. Once more, be it observed, it is not necessary to have an *actual* supernatural intention for each action. The concern here is not for the *frequency* of forming an intention, but for its purity. “The idea [of doing things in Christ] should be so interwoven with all our *thoughts*, that it spontaneously stamps itself on the whole pattern of our lives. It becomes the more effective the more it has become a habit and the less need there is of directing actual attention to it in the several details of conduct.” Leen, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

pensable for the passage of the current.

The following texts show the necessity of the supernatural motive: “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or *whatsoever* else you do, do *all* to the glory of God. (I Cor. 10, 31) “*All whatsoever* you do in word or in work, *do all* in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Col. 3, 17) “*Whatsoever* you do, do it from the heart as to the Lord, and not to men.” (Col. 3, 23)

“For she that liveth in pleasures is dead while she is living.” (I Tim. 5, 6)

What we do, therefore (aside from sin), is unimportant; *why* we do it is the concern of God, and should be our concern. If when I eat I give God the motive, that is all He takes; the dinner still remains to me. But if I fail to give Him the motive of my actions, then I give Him no part of them. It is the direction of our actions, not their physical make-up or their importance, which God is concerned with. Therefore, He is interested in the motive; by means of the motive we worship Him, as Jesus commands, “in spirit and in truth.” i.e., interiorly. *It is the motive that counts.*

2. The Reason for the Conflict

a. Sin comes from natural motives. Everyone that commits sin does so to get pleasure, i.e., because he likes some creature. Therefore, sin comes from a natural motive as from a root. *We do not say that natural motives are sinful or that all natural motives result in sin, but merely that sin results from natural motives; so that some at least lead directly to sin.* Since God hates sin, He must also hate the principle of sin.

b. God has raised us to the supernatural plane; and now He wants us to live there and to leave the natural plane of life. It is not that the natural life is evil – it is good and created by God. But it is *not supernatural*, and God wants us to be supernatural. Accordingly, when we live natural lives, even though they may be naturally good, we are in conflict with our supernatural destiny. Natural motives *at best* – i.e., even if they are purified of the sensuality and egotism which spoil them in all except perfect souls – are infinitely lower than the supernatural order. The perfection of the Christian life, for which all should strive, requires that divine love be the animating force of all our actions. “But those who are progressing, or are eager to make progress, ought to devote their attention to securing not only that their actions should be morally correct, but that they should be as fully as possible, animated by divine charity.”¹

Examples: A musician, if he insists on playing a piece in the key of C, when the rest of the orchestra is playing it in D, will soon be discharged. So we have been transposed to the supernatural order and must now live there... A student must conform to the traditions of his present college, and not to those of a school that he attended formerly. If a king brings a boy into his court to be a prince, he expects the boy to lay aside his peasant ways and adopt the manners of the court. So with us: having been introduced into the celestial court of God, we must give up our natural ways and adopt the supernatural manners of His court.

There are, then, two reasons for making our motives supernatural: (a) because in imperfect men, natural motives habitually bear the taint of concupiscence; (b) because natural motives at best are so far below our supernatural destiny as Christians.

We get our motives from the object of our love. Jacob worked fourteen years for Laban in order to marry Rachel. Jacob could have had four possible motives for doing this: he could have done it for love of Laban; he could have done it because he loved the sheep that he tended; he could have done it because he loved work. Actually, he did it because he loved Rachel. *He got his motive from the object of his love.*

Therefore, if we love God, we must get our motive from God. We are required to love God; therefore, we are required to act from supernatural motives. *Our motives reveal the object of our love.* This is the obverse of the above principle. If our motives are supernatural, we love God; if they are habitually natural,¹ we love the world, which is God's rival.

Two friends, Mary and Martha, are both attracted to James, and he to them. Now the two friends become rivals, because of their affection for James. God created the world, and the world is good; God and the world are, as it were, friends. But when I give my love to the world, God is jealous; or if I give it to God, the world is jealous: God and the world now become rivals, not because of evil in the world, but *because of my affection*. We must hate the world and love God; not that we must regard the world as evil, but *out of the urgency of love*. When James marries Martha, he must relinquish his affection for Mary.

Again, if James marries Martha and then announces that he is going to visit Mary, the question that will spontaneously be asked by Martha is: "WHY? What is your *motive*?" If James says: "On business" – or "For

1. Edward J. Leen, C.S.Sp., *op. cit.*, p. 125.

1. *Natural*, again, is used in the sense of conforming to the instincts of fallen nature; for they then reveal a selfish attachment to the pleasures of the world.

utility” – or “To collect some money to get you a coat” – then Martha will not object. But if James wishes to see Mary *because he still loves her*, then Martha will object, even though she and Mary are good friends. . . . Now my relationship to God is one of love. When, therefore, I use the things of the world, He asks me, as Martha did, “WHY? What is your motive?” If I say that it is one of *utility*, then God does not object; but if I say that my motive is one of *love*, that I wish to use the things of the world *because I love them*, then God does object; because my love belongs to Him. Thus our motives are a matter of love. And we must supernaturalize them because we must love God with our whole heart, whole soul, whole mind.

3. Why God Hates Natural Motives

a. Natural motives, by weakening our resistance, lead to sin. As we have seen, sin in itself springs from a natural motive: also, even seemingly innocent natural motives, by diminishing our strength and nourishing concupiscence, predispose to sin. If a man fasts for one hundred days and falls over dead on the hundredth day, his death is no more attributable to the last day’s fast than to the first day’s. So, too, with mortal sin, the final collapse of the soul; it is no more due to the last natural motive, which directly causes the sin, than to other acts of indulgence, which, days and months before, were undermining the soul’s virtue and charity.

It is impossible, then, to live on the natural level, indulging constantly in natural motives, and to avoid mortal sin. A man may want to jump from a building for the thrill, without wishing to get hurt on the sidewalk by the fall; but if he jumps, what is to break the fall? We may likewise wish to enjoy the world “for the thrill,” without desiring to fall into sin –, but when we act on the principle of doing things because we like to do them, what is to stop us in the end from committing sin because of something we like?

b. Natural motives are an insult to God. If James gives Martha a bouquet of weeds, she is insulted, not flattered. Or if he gives her a bouquet in honor of the birthday of her rival Mary, it would not be acceptable. Neither are actions that have natural motives acceptable to God. They are weeds. For these actions are performed in honor of God’s rival, the world. When we are consecrated to God, and bound to love Him with all our strength, as is the case with every Christian, we may not indulge in natural motives; for, according to the principle, our motives come from the object of our love. Such motives show that we love the world; how then can we offer them to God? Therefore, in consecrating our lives and actions to God, we must set about purifying our motives.

Otherwise, our actions, revealing a love for the world, give the lie to our verbal consecration to God.

c. God has promised that He will burn out our natural motives and affections by trials and afflictions: “Wherein you shall greatly rejoice, if now you must be for a little time made sorrowful in divers temptations: that the trial of your faith (much more precious than gold which is tried by the fire) may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” (I Peter 1, 7)

Chapter V The Pagan Mentality

Paganism, in the sense in which we have been speaking of it, is more than an occasional act of self-indulgence; it is a habitual cast of mind that gives a certain tone and coloring to all one’s thoughts and actions. What creates this pagan mentality is an habitual natural intention. While thoughts flit before the mind in an endless parade, transiently occupying the attention, the *intention*, which is formed in the will, tends to persist, and therefore dominates subsequent actions. Thus, if a man forms the intention of going to New York, this intention, formed once, will cause him to pack, buy his ticket, etc., and finally get him to New York. In like manner, the natural intention persists, seeing to it that all actions performed under its guidance are on the merely natural plane.

What we need, then, is to have *an habitual supernatural intention*; and for this it is necessary to rid our minds and hearts of creatures and fill them with God and the things of God.

As noted in the last section, although, of the two principles of sanctification, the action of the Holy Ghost is the more important, the intention of our own wills is the one that we should chiefly observe and regulate. We may take the action of the Holy Ghost for granted; we know that there are superabundant graces at our disposal at all times; we can be as confident that these graces are present to assist us as we are that there is an abundance of air about us to breathe. Let us take them for granted, and concentrate on *our part* of the spiritual life. Many people excuse their own mediocrity by doubting whether the Holy Ghost is there to help them, instead of blaming the deficiencies of their own wills. Others, who are sincere in their quest for knowledge concerning the spiritual life,

nevertheless occupy their attention too much with the work of grace and not enough with the work that they have to do. “Nothing is wanting to you in any grace, waiting for the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (I Cor. 1, 7)

In his Encyclical on the Mystical Body (*Mystici Corporis*), Pope Pius XII condemns a certain tendency of Christians in our day to be so exclusively preoccupied with the efficacy of divine grace that they forget and almost deny, at least in practice, the need to correspond with grace: “Just as false and dangerous is the error of those who try to deduce from the mysterious union of all with Christ a certain unhealthy *quietism*. They would attribute the whole spiritual life of Christians and their progress in virtue exclusively to the action of the divine Spirit, setting aside and neglecting the corresponding work and collaboration which we must contribute to this action. No one of course can deny that the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ is the one source of whatever supernatural power enters into the Church and its members. For ‘the Lord will give grace and glory,’ as the Psalmist says. But that men should continue consistently in their good works, that they advance generously in grace and virtue, that they strive earnestly to reach the heights of Christian perfection and at the same time do their best to stimulate others to gain the same goal – all this the Spirit from above does not wish to bring about, unless men contribute their daily share of zealous activity. ‘For not on those who sleep but on the diligent,’ says St. Ambrose, ‘divine favours are conferred.’”

A doctor, when sent for, does not merely discourse on the merits of life; the patient takes these for granted and expects the doctor to give him a regimen that will help him preserve life. In spiritual reading, meditation, we are prone to occupy our attention with the advantages of the supernatural life of grace and not sufficiently *with what we ourselves must do to preserve and increase that life*. Of course, we should know the meaning of grace and the sacraments, but it is also important to know *how to use them*: “Now these things you ought to have done, and not to leave the others undone.” (Luke 2) It is possible to neglect grace; and the spiritual mediocrity (or worse) of Christians is caused precisely because of failure to accept and correspond with grace – not by any dearth of graces on the part of God.

Now since, according to Catholic theology, the principle of *merit is charity* (i.e., it is through love that we increase in grace), then by means of an habitually supernatural intention, we habitually correspond with grace. In this we obey St. Paul’s exhortation “Stir up the grace of God which is in thee.” (II Tim. 1, 6) On the contrary, when our motives are

habitually wanting in charity, then, although we may not sin, we fail to correspond with grace and increase it in our souls.

The following are some worldly maxims that cause Christians to relax their efforts and to fail to correspond with grace.

1. “Natural behavior is attractive in children.” On the pretense that it is good for children to act natural, because they are “cute” and “innocent,” parents and teachers justify their failure to teach children the supernatural life. But such children are not so attractive to God, *who expects every baptized soul to live on the supernatural plane*. Those who are merely natural, even children and young people, are like careless or malicious children, who throw away opportunities that are given to them by parents. Charity, and hence kindness, according to theologians, should be well-ordered, i.e., it should put the spiritual welfare of the recipient above his physical welfare. It is wrong to confuse the merely natural kindness that indulges the sensible appetites of children with the supernatural kindness that seeks to return them to God, to whom they belong, as saints. Child saints show the kind of children that God loves. St. Teresa of the Child Jesus said: “From the time I was three years old, I have done everything for the love of God.”

2. It is alleged that all actions performed in the state of grace are meritorious; and the authority for this opinion (so it is claimed by the objectors) is St. Thomas Aquinas. (See Appendix II)

3. The pagan mentality considers acts singly and says: “God could not condemn me for one piece of chocolate, one drink of beer, etc.” This is, of course, true; since only mortal sin can condemn us to hell. The trouble is that such acts of self-indulgence do not come singly, but in large numbers; and then they are harmful. Habitual indulgence in sensuality nourishes concupiscence and lessens the influence of grace. “For the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other.” (Gal. 6, 17)

I may say, “One little germ in my lungs will not kill me.” No, but millions of them will – and they usually come in millions. So, also, millions of natural motives will kill me, i.e., will weaken me and dispose me to sin, although one of them may be harmless. But to speak of them as though they came singly is to discuss a case that does not exist; it is an artificial and misleading manner of speech.

4. It may also be objected: “Not all natural motives lead to sin. It would be possible to teach children, for example, to obey rules out of love for good order. Here is a natural motive from which no harm can come.”

This is true; yet *in practice* it is impossible to distinguish between

natural motives that are harmful and those that are not. Many of those that seem to be harmless may afterwards be harmful: to get children to study, we can arouse their sense of competition, which may lead to great selfishness.

Hence, it is impossible to distinguish good from selfish natural motives *in practice*; and it is, therefore, best to get rid of them all.¹ Suppose we should say to someone: “I am going to put you in this room, which was just vacated by a man suffering from tuberculosis. There are good and bad germs in the room; we do not want to disinfect it for fear of killing the good germs.” This would not be more difficult than it is to distinguish in practice the good from the selfish natural motives. Notice, too, that pure natural motives are a practical impossibility in imperfect souls.

Besides, the only natural motives that are very effective are those that appeal to selfish interests. Will boys obey rules ordinarily out of an abstract love for good order? But supernatural motives are very powerful to move even the rude and callous, for they carry with them supernatural sanctions, i.e., heaven and hell.

Finally, even supposing that such good natural motives are possible, it is not *certain* that they are meritorious. To use them one’s self is to lose merit; to teach them to others is to prevent others from obtaining increased merit that they might have with a little effort.

5. The pagan mentality speaks of actions *in themselves* (*in se*) and permits all actions which *in themselves* are indifferent, i.e., neither good nor bad. Since there is no sin in such actions, the pagan mentality thinks that they may be indulged in freely.

Now it is perfectly legitimate for philosophers to speak of actions *in se* (like dancing, walking, etc.). They use this phrase to distinguish actions which are intrinsically evil (murder, theft, adultery, etc.) from other actions which have nothing in themselves to make them either good or bad. But philosophers do not teach that these actions, *in themselves* indifferent, are also indifferent *in the concrete*.

As a matter of fact, *no action in the concrete is indifferent*; in the concrete, that is, in actual reality, every action is either good or bad,

1. “To destroy these roots in us (i.e., of sin), to keep ourselves from all infidelity, from loving any creature for itself, to remove from our actions not only every culpable motive, *but even every motive that is merely natural*... such is the first element of our holiness.” Abbot Marmion, *Christ in His Mysteries*, 4th ed., London, Sands & Co., 1939, XV, No. 3.

natural or supernatural. If the morality of an action is not determined by its *object*, like theft or murder, then its morality is determined by its end (motive) and circumstances.

Object, end and circumstances are the three extrinsic elements that determine the morality of indifferent actions. If the morality of an action is not determined *intrinsically* by an object, then it is determined extrinsically by the end and circumstances. Actions are spoken of as indifferent *in themselves* because their morality is not determined intrinsically, but by the extrinsic factors (i.e., extrinsic to the act itself) of end and circumstance.

Thus, walking is *in itself* indifferent. But if a man's end in walking is to steal, then the action is bad; if he is going to steal in church, then this added circumstance makes the act, not merely unjust, but sacrilegious as well. And though the theft may not be carried out, his action (i.e., walking) is evil because of his *intention*.

It is, therefore, false and artificial to speak of actions *in themselves*. This is accurate for philosophers, who deal with things *in the abstract*; but it is dangerous for us who must decide the merits of our actions *in the concrete*. For in the concrete every action takes us either closer to God, or further away from Him.

Suppose a mother asks someone where her child is playing: "Is there poison in that bottle?" The person will not satisfy the mother by saying: "*In the bottle*, that poison will not hurt your child." The mother knows this: what she wants to know is whether the poison will hurt the child when he gets it out of the bottle, i.e., in the concrete.

Therefore, in the concrete, every action is either good or bad; and in the case of indifferent actions, this goodness or badness is determined decisively by the intention (circumstances are less important in determining the morality of actions). Moreover, a mere good intention is not sufficient – with this, the act – may remain natural; a supernatural intention is needed – at least it is the only *safe* procedure for placing these acts on the supernatural level and making them meritorious. And it is the only procedure for those who, desiring the fullness of Christian life, strive for the goal of perfection.

This whole doctrine may be summed up in the words of Archbishop Ireland:

"There is not much practical Christianity in the world. The danger of today is that of living a purely natural life as the good old pagans did. Naturalism, materialism, worldliness possess the world. Everything is

done for fame or money or the honor that is in it, else you are a fool and have no purpose in life. We should lead a supernatural life. *Our works are dead and have no merit* unless we are in the state of sanctifying grace *and do them from a supernatural motive*. On the supernatural plane elevated above the natural the just man lives by faith. *We should have a supernatural motive in all that we do*. The true happiness of the Christian soul lies in the heavenly regions on a supernatural plane above the merely natural life.” (Quoted by Rev. John F. Duggan, in the *Ecclesiastical Review* for Dec., 1939. Italics ours.)

Chapter VI The Law of the Flesh

1. The Doctrine of Imperfect Actions

a. Can we take seriously the idea that God is rivaled in the affections of the soul by the things of this world, and that this rivalry is manifested in the natural motive?

A wife, it will be pointed out by an objector, would be unreasonable if she were to be jealous of the affection that her husband lavishes on cigarettes or beer. This is true. But let it be supposed that the husband becomes so fond of smoking, drinking, golf, good fellowship, that he decides to live at his club, although making an occasional short visit to his wife; then she may justly be jealous. Similarly, God could not condemn us for one or the other natural motive or indulgence. It was observed before, however, that these natural motives do not come singly; and if a man's love of the world is so great that he spends all his time in its joys and consolations, only stopping occasionally to make a formal visit to God, then God is justly displeased. It is the habitually natural intention, the fixed natural mentality, that should cause us alarm.

Moreover, even single acts of self-indulgence, or single natural motives, which are imperfections, are not to be considered unimportant. St. Francis de Sales illustrates this fact by an example from the Old Testament.¹

1. St. Francis de Sales, *Love of God*, Westminster, Md., Newman Bookshop, 1943, Bk X, chap. 9.

Jacob so loved Rachel that he worked for Laban fourteen years to obtain her hand in marriage. One day, Rachel wanted some mandrakes that had been gathered by Lia, the sister of Rachel, also married to Jacob, but not loved by him. Lia refused, complaining that Rachel had stolen the affection of her husband; whereupon Rachel, little valuing Jacob's love, promised Lia the favors of Jacob in return for the mandrakes.

St. Augustine, writes St. Francis de Sales, once observed some mandrakes to see why Rachel coveted them. He found that they are pleasing to the sight, have a delightful smell, which surgeons, for mercy, used to intoxicate those on whom they wished to make an incision; but they are altogether insipid and without flavor. For this reason, says St. Francis, they well represent worldly pleasures. These pleasures "have an attractive outside, but he who bites this apple, that is, he who sounds their nature, finds neither taste nor contentment in them, nevertheless, they enchant us and put us to sleep by the vanity of their smell... And it is for such mandrakes, chimeras and phantoms of content, that we cast off the love of the heavenly beloved; and how then can we say that we love Him above all things, since we prefer such empty vanities before His grace?"

Jesus has purchased our love by His own life; every time that we indulge in worldly things, we are, like Rachel, casting aside this priceless love and its divine consolations for the worthless consolation of a few paltry mandrakes. When we look at the matter in this light, can we doubt that God is displeased with us?

Moreover, because of the law of the flesh, which leads us into sin, the saints warn us even against single acts of immortification. For they will certainly lead to others, then to sin. Hence the Scripture says: "He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little." (Ecclus. 19, 1) And again: "He that is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in a very little thing is unjust also in much." (*Ibid.*, 16, 10) Whoever contemptuously refuses to give attention to natural motives because they are small makes a dangerous mistake.

b. What is the spiritual effect of imperfect actions?

Motives are determined by love – my motives come from the object of my love. If then my love of God is one hundred per cent, my motives will be one hundred per cent supernatural. If my love of God is fifty per cent, then my motives will be fifty per cent supernatural. If my love of God is zero, then my motives will be wholly natural.

Now the second kind of motives, i.e., those in which there is some love of God, but also considerable love of the world, makes our actions

imperfect. The question is, what is the value of these actions? Can we be saved by them? (We may call these actions natural actions or imperfections.)

To answer this question, let us consider some examples. A boy brings the teacher an apple, and the teacher, upon trying to eat it, discovers that the apple is filled with worms. She asks the boy if he knew this, and he replies: “Yes, but I thought that you could eat around the wormholes.” When we present imperfect actions to God, we do as this boy does, expecting God to extract what good He can from actions that are largely displeasing.

Again: A man decides to eat one biscuit a day. Soon he will die, even though, when told so, he protests that he is eating regularly; for he is not getting enough nourishment. So with imperfect actions: although they nourish our souls with some charity, there is not enough, and we gradually become weakened spiritually and probably fall into sin.

Again: If we pour small quantities of water that is ten degrees in temperature into a large quantity of water that is one hundred degrees, the whole quantity will quickly be reduced to ten degrees. Similarly with charity: although it may be very great, say, after the reception of the sacraments, imperfect acts gradually cool our fervor, and if we continue long enough, it is fairly certain that we will lose fervor altogether. According to Father Garrigou-Lagrange, an imperfect act is one containing less charity than is proportionate to the grace of the one who performs the action; so that imperfection is a matter of the presence or absence of love. He writes as follows:

“Three points are to be noted in regard to these acts:

(1) These acts are still meritorious, *but*, according to St. Thomas and the best theologians, they do not immediately obtain an increase of charity. They will obtain it only when we make a more fervent act, equal or superior to the degree of our virtue; just as in the natural order a generous friendship grows only through more generous acts.

(2) Acts of charity relatively too feeble for our degree of virtue *show even a deficit*, in this sense that the soul ought always to progress instead of remaining stationary; just as a child ought always to grow in order not to be stunted.

(3) Lastly, these acts *dispose us to positive retrogression*, for by reason of their weakness they permit the rebirth of disordered inclinations, *which lead to venial sin*, and may end by overcoming us or leading us to *spiritual death*. Does the virtue of charity thus directly diminish? Not directly in itself; but its radiation, its influence, becomes weakened as a

result of the obstacles that gradually accumulate about it, as the light of a lantern which, while keeping its intensity, sheds less and less light in proportion as its chimney becomes dimmed and soiled with the splashing mud of the road.

“In the same way a retarded soul falls back like an intelligent man who ceases to apply his mind to study. If possessing five talents, he acts as though he had only two or even four, he does not sufficiently increase the treasure entrusted to him. He is thereby guilty of negligence and spiritual laziness that may hinder him from perfectly observing the precept of love, and the fundamental law of Christian life. From all this we see that a meritorious act which is too weak *is an imperfection disposing to venial sin, as the latter disposes to mortal sin.*”¹

Let us summarize the moral and spiritual effects of imperfections:

1. On the part of God. They displease and insult Him, even though they are not sinful. As a teacher is displeased with a pupil who, although obtaining passing grades, refuses to use his talents to the full, so God is displeased with those who fail to use the grace and charity that He bestows upon them, even when they avoid the worst excesses.

2. On the part of man (the examples already given illustrate these points):

- a. They cause spiritual undernourishment.
- b. They weaken the soul.
- c. While not utterly destroying grace, they weaken the ardor of charity.
- d. They lessen the radiation of charity and keep grace bound up so that it cannot exercise its divine influence in our lives.
- e. They predispose to sin. Hence the old axiom of ascetical theology: “Imperfections predispose to venial sin, venial sins predispose to mortal sins”: Just as cancer grows until it finally destroys the health of a man’s body, so also does the love of creatures grow until it causes men to commit serious sin... This is a most significant, even a sinister fact. The next section is devoted to showing why it is so.

1. *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, St. Louis, Mo., B. Herder Book Co., 1937, pp. 189-190. (Italics ours.)

2. The Law of the Flesh

Can worldly men be saved? Certainly not by cultivating worldliness, which would lead them sooner or later into sin, but by responding to the movements of grace, which oppose worldliness by attracting the soul to God.

It must be kept in mind that the supernatural life is truly a vital process: there is, therefore, no standing still – one either progresses or retrogresses. This is an axiom of the Fathers, common among theologians and spiritual writers. If one's love of the world is slight, and gradually diminishes under the growth of charity, then one can be saved. But if the love of the world is great, continuous, and unmortified, it will, in the course of time, lead to sin, repeated sins, and hell. This is shown by the following arguments:

1. St. James describes the whole process: earthly desires lead us to sin, sin causes death: "But every man is tempted by his own *concupiscence, being drawn away and allured*. Then when concupiscence hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin. But sin, when it is completed, begetteth death." (James 1, 14-15) The word "concupiscence" here, it should be noted, means simply the desire or appetite of the flesh, i.e., the desires of fallen nature, of nature in the concrete. The text describes the whole process by which men are led from carnal desire, to sin, to hell.

2. "Adulterers, know you not that the friendship of this world is the enemy of God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God." (James 4, 4) The word "adulterers" is here used metaphorically, in a spiritual sense: since we owe our love to God, we are adulterers if we give it to the world.

3. "For many walk, of whom I have told you often (and now tell you weeping), that they are enemies of the cross of Christ; whose *end is destruction*: whose God is their belly; and whose glory is in their shame: who mind earthly things." (Phil. 3, 18-19)

4. "For they that are according to the flesh mind the things that are of the flesh; but they that are according to the spirit, mind the things that are of the spirit. For the wisdom of the flesh is *death*: but the wisdom of the spirit is life and peace. Because the wisdom of the flesh is *an enemy to God*: for it is *not subject to the law of God*, neither can it be. And they that are in the flesh *cannot please God*... For if you live according to the flesh *you shall die*. But if by the spirit, you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live." (Rom. 8, 5-14)

According to Rev. Ferdinand Prat, S.J., the word flesh as used by St. Paul in this place means human nature as it is *in the concrete* i.e., vitiated

by original sin.¹ The meaning then is: anyone who lives according to the desires of fallen nature will die spiritually.

“Finally, the flesh is human nature, as it is in the present order, vitiated by sin and infected with concupiscence. The bad sense, instead of being simply physical, as in the preceding paragraph, here becomes moral. The flesh is no longer the weak, failing, material, terrestrial, human part: it has a relation – either of origin, or tendency, or affinity – with sin. This meaning is frequent in chapters 7 and 8 of the epistle to the Romans.

5. Jesus Himself teaches the same thing in the parable of the sower: “And that [seed] which fell among thorns, are they who have heard, and going their way, *are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and yield no fruit.*” (Luke 8, 14)

He likewise teaches it, even more clearly, in the parable of the house built on sand (Matt. 7, 24-27), which will be explained in chapter 7.

6. The explanation of this deterioration and collapse is not difficult to find. There is an opposition between “the flesh” and “the spirit” – “the spirit” at the expense of “the flesh.” “I say then walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the spirit; and the spirit against the flesh. For these are contrary one to another...” (Gal. 5, 16-17)

Natural motives starve the supernatural life. In the example given above, the first day’s fast is as much responsible for the man’s death as the hundredth day’s. And natural motives which undermine one’s charity are in the end just as responsible for the final collapse and sin as is the last natural motive that directly issues in sin.

Again, natural motives are like termites that get into a house and undermine it. The collapse of the house may be *occasioned* by, say, a storm; but the cause is in the fact that it has been undermined. So also sin may be sudden and violent, but it is nevertheless the result of a long process of undermining; and this has happened through pampering the appetites of fallen nature in little things.

Once more: each indulgence weakens the taste for spiritual things, strengthens it for the things of the world. Now we already have a natural taste for creatures, but we have, in our imperfect state, no taste for God; this taste must be cultivated. This is done by pursuing the things that are above, never by indulging in the things that are below.

1. *The Theology of St. Paul*, London, Burns Oates & Washbourne, Ltd., 1933 Vol. II, p. 403.

So, an intelligent child's literary tastes are not developed if he reads only literature of a low or childish type; he must be weaned away from this, and his tastes gradually raised till he has a sincere affection for worthwhile literature.

7. The *theological* explanation for this opposition between the *flesh* and the *spirit* is found in the doctrine of original sin. We do not possess our faculties intact; by original sin our minds were darkened, so that we do not clearly see our greatest good, which is God; our will is weakened, so that we can possess ourselves of that good only with difficulty; our nature was given a proneness to evil, which causes us to be deceived easily about what is good for us.

“For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do. Now if I do that which I will not, *it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.*” (Rom. 7, 19-20) Hence, St. Paul also says: “But I chastise my body and bring it into subjection: lest perhaps when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway.” (I Cor. 9, 27)

It is true that human nature, *in itself*, i.e., in the abstract, can proceed along the natural level, acting by means of its natural powers, possessing natural virtues, living without sin, and enjoying a natural happiness. The trouble is that human nature does not exist *in itself*, but is corrupted and set askew by original sin; so that if a man tries to act *in the concrete as if* he possessed an intact human nature, he will quickly find himself surprised by sin. To act *as if* we had a pure human nature is to invite difficulty. It is as though a fighter who is off balance would try to strike his opponent. Or, again, it is as if a car with larger wheels on one side than on the other would attempt to follow a straight course.

What the fighter must do is first to regain his balance, then strike his opponent. That is what human nature must do, i.e., remove that element which damages its nature and causes it to conflict with the supernatural, then go on with the practice of the Christian life. We remove the objectionable element from our acts by getting rid of the natural motive and a merely selfish attachment to creatures.

8. St. Paul explains the whole process of moral deterioration and sin when he shows how the “law of the members” delivers us into the “law of sin.” Thus, there is in our members a law, i.e., a force, as Father Maturin says, that works “with all the persistency and precision of ‘Law’ – by which the passions of sin... work in our members, to bring forth fruit unto death.” (Rom. 7, 5)

Thus, St. Paul writes: “But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in

my members.” (Rom. 7, 23)

Father Maturin explains this law: “According to St. Paul, there is a law working in us *resulting in acts and desires which are not in themselves sinful, but which prepare the way for sin*. We know well enough what is definitely right and what is wrong, but there is something else, in itself neither right nor wrong, belonging to the debatable land, the borderland between right and wrong. The region neither of light nor darkness, but of twilight. The soul that dwells under the law of this land will certainly end in passing over into the kingdom of darkness and sin. The heat of the battle does not, in fact, lie in the direct conflict with evil, but with things in themselves neither right nor wrong. The man who determines that he will not do what is positively wrong, but will do everything else that he wishes, will find that in the long run he cannot stop short of actual sin.

“There are in Nature a multitude of phenomena apparently having no relation to one another which a careful study shows to be all the product of the same law – the falling of an apple to the ground, the motion of the stars in their course through the heavens, the weight of the atmosphere. And there are in the life of a man a number of acts and words, of desires and inclinations, which, however independent they may seem, can all be brought under one category, the working of one steady and changeless law whose object is to bring him under the dominion of sin. This St. Paul calls the ‘law of the members.’ Let man yield himself unresistingly to the control of this law, and he will ere long find himself under the captivity of the ‘law of sin.’”¹

Chapter VII

Jesus Speaks of the Supernatural Life

Jesus gives a complete description of the Supernatural Life in the Sermon on the Mount. (Matt. 5, 6, 7) Here He condemns the pursuit of merely human, or natural ends; He teaches that men should cease to act as mere men, and, instead, act in conformity with a human nature that is now divinized by grace; He clearly sets a divine standard of sanctity for *all* men to follow.

1. B. W. Maturin, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Discipline*, N. J., St. Anthony's Guild Press, 1939, p. 95.

To show this systematically, it is first necessary to make two distinctions:

When men pursue any end, it is always with the idea that it is good; for the object of the will is a good apprehended by the intellect. Now three different species of good may be distinguished; and these three include all the goods that are the object of human effort. There are *external* goods, or goods of fortune, such as money, reputation, power; there are *internal*, or bodily goods, such as health, comfort, convenience; there are *spiritual* goods, or goods of the mind, such as knowledge, natural happiness, natural joy.

The second distinction to be noted is that of the various phases to be found in any action. In each action we may distinguish: (a) an end, which regulates the motive; (b) some means adapted to obtain the end desired; (c) the result of the action. For example, the end of an artist is to create a work of beauty, the means that he employs is his brush, the result is a painting, say, of Our Lady.

With these two distinctions in mind, we go on to show that Christ condemned all three phases of merely natural actions: He condemned their end, which comprises the three kinds of goods that we have mentioned, their means, and their result. We will then show that Jesus replaced these with a Christian end to be pursued by all, Christian (or supernatural) means to pursue it, and a purely supernatural result.

1. Jesus Condemns the Pagan Mentality

- a. He condemns the ends, or goods, pursued by pagans.
 - i He condemns the pursuit of external goods: “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5, 3); and in Luke 6, “But woe to you that are rich; for you have your consolation.”
 - ii *He condemns the pursuit of bodily goods* (Matt. 5,4): “Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land.” Those who receive Jesus’ blessing here are those who receive afflictions and sufferings meekly, i.e., those who *lack* the goods of the body. And in Luke 6: “Woe to you that are filled: for you shall hunger and thirst.”
 - iii *He condemns the pursuit of the goods of the mind* (Matt. 5, 5): “Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.” Jesus here blessed, not those who are satisfied and content in mind, but precisely those who lack human consolations. Luke 6: “Woe to you that now laugh: for you shall mourn and weep.”

Woe to you when men shall bless you . . .

- b. *Jesus condemns the means used by pagans to obtain their ends.* The chief means for obtaining any end is the intention. Suppose my end is to get to New York, and the means available is a railroad. Although there should be a train passing my door every moment, New York will stay where it is, and I will stay where I am, unless I first form an intention to make the trip. The use of the other means, trains, etc., follows in virtue of that first intention. When, therefore, Jesus condemns the natural motive, He condemns the means that is of first importance in pursuing natural ends. “Therefore, when thou dost an alms-deed, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that *they may be honored by men.* Amen, I say to you, *they have received their reward.* . . . And when you fast, be not as the hypocrites, sad. For they disfigure their faces, *that they may appear unto men to fast.* Amen, I say to you, *they have received their reward.*” (Matt. 6)

Here Jesus emphasized and twice re-emphasized the principle that we should not work for the world, i.e., for a natural motive. He affirms the same principle in Luke 14, 12-14.

- c. *Jesus condemns the result of merely natural activity* (Matt. 5, 20): “For I tell you that unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” The Scribes and Pharisees were not evil men, but good men, naturally good, since they observed scrupulously all the commandments of the natural law. But their goodness did not warrant their entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

2. Jesus Defines the Christian Mentality

- a. In the place of natural goods, Jesus substitutes a supernatural end to be pursued by all men (Matt. 5, 6): “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after *justice*: for they shall have their fill.” Justice means holiness or sanctity, as also in “Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

This is why Jesus also says: “Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth: where the rust and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven: where neither the rust nor the moth doth consume and where thieves do not break through, nor steal.” (Matt. 6, 19)

The rest of the eight beatitudes are simply commentaries on this fourth one: they enumerate certain *divine* attributes (mercy, purity

of heart, peacemaking) which are to be incorporated in the actions of Christ's disciples, showing that they are henceforth to act in virtue of their *divinized human nature*.

- b. Jesus requires that we work from supernatural motives: “But when thou dost an alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth; that thy alms may be in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee. . . . But when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee. . . . But thou, when thou fastest anoint thy head, and wash thy face; that thou appear to men not to fast, but to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee.” (Matt. 6)
- c. Jesus requires a supernatural result: “Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Jesus here tells us to be as holy, not merely as the saints or as the angels, but as God Himself: He sets up an absolute and divine standard of sanctity. . . . This is addressed to all men.

The rest of the Sermon on the Mount develops more fully these various points. And at the end of the Sermon, Jesus compares those who live the supernatural life, i.e., those who follow the doctrine He has taught, to wise men that build upon a rock. But those who build on the natural and fail to get rid of natural motives, He compares to a foolish man that builds upon sand: “. . . and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall thereof.” (Matt. 7)

The reason that the foolish man's house fell is not because it was subject to wind, rains and flood – a house must be planned to withstand these – but because it was built on sand. In this way Jesus teaches that the soul falls into sin, not because it is subject to trial and temptation – the soul must expect this – but because it is built on the sand of natural motives, i.e., love of the world, having refused to accept the doctrine given in this Sermon.

Chapter VIII

The Christian Mentality

“For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 2, 5)

A Christian mentality is one that is dominated by the idea of God and refers all actions to Him. This mentality must also penetrate the will; therefore, all natural motives should be eliminated and supernatural motives made to dominate all our actions. Thus one’s mind, one’s will, one’s whole life must be permeated with the idea of God. That we may thus bring God into our lives, to fill every part of them, it is useful to study the various ways that God presents Himself to us; in order that we may take advantage to the full of every overture on His part.

1. To our wills, God presents Himself in three ways:

a. As our final end. God is the final end or goal of our lives. This means that for the present we should refer all our actions to Him, and in the future, that we be united with Him: union of our will with His should begin now, but will be consummated in heaven. Moreover, since death changes nothing, I *must* begin to live this life of union now if I am to possess it hereafter. Thus we must follow the Apostle’s advice: “Let your conversation be in heaven.” (Phil, 3)

b. As the state of grace. Grace is a participation in divinity. By it we are made in some sense sharers in the very deity of God. Yet grace is not itself an end, but a means – a means to effect union with God and practice the supernatural virtues, that we may “walk as children of light.” (Eph. 5, 8)

c. In the first commandment. In giving us this commandment, God has given us the means of being united to Him in this world. “God is charity; and he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him.” (I John 4, 16)

St. Gregory tells us – together with other saints – that he who loves God with his whole mind (*integra mente*) already possesses Him.

Thus, “Charity never falleth away” (Cor. 1, 13) but is the one possession that we have now which we shall take with us into heaven. Jesus says: “Mary hath chosen the better part, *which shall not be taken from her.*” (Luke 10, 42)

And St. Paul: “I live – yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” (Gal. 2, 20)

2. To our minds, God presents Himself as the science of the supernatural: since the mind grasps things as knowledge. Now this science of the supernatural may be likened to the science of architecture. For we are

temples of the Holy Ghost: “Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (I Cor. 3, 16)

To build this temple I must work “according to the grace of God that is given to me, as a wise architect.” (*Ibid.*, 3, 10) As architects, we should proceed as follows:

a. The architect first decides to build; and that is what we must do. We are going to build a temple of perfection; hence we must *first* decide to be perfect.

We may not say: “First I will get rid of mortal sin, then of venial sin; and, finally, if I am successful so far, I will work to remove imperfections.” *We must desire perfection from the start.* Jesus said: “Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt. 5,48)

There is an excellent reason for this. “What is last in the order of execution is first in the order of intention.” If a sculptor is working on stone, the last thing that appears is the finished product (the order of execution). But this finished product was the first thing in his mind (the order of intention). Throughout the time of his carving, while the stone was a crude and shapeless mass, there was in the mind of the artist a picture of the complete statue, and he was shaping the stone in reference to this idea.

Or again: The last thing on a house is the roof; but it is the thing first in the architect’s mind. It is the same in the spiritual life; although perfection is the last thing that we shall achieve *in the order of execution*, it is the first *in the order of intention*; for it is the directing idea that must shape all subsequent work.

b. Having decided to build, we must then lay our plans. We are doing that in these instructions. And we may supplement these plans by spiritual reading and meditation, getting practical “tips” from every source that we can; just as the architect studies in order to create his designs... This is why meditation and spiritual reading are so necessary: without them we are like a builder without plans.

c. We must dig out the sand in order to set the foundation on a rock. As we have seen, this means digging out the sand of the natural motive in order that we may erect our edifice on the rock of the supernatural.

d. Having fixed the supernatural foundation, we begin with the superstructure. We must be very careful, if we wish our building to last, to use only first-rate materials. If an architect, running short of steel beams, substitute a plank for them here and there, his building will be very unsteady and will sooner or later collapse. Accordingly, all materials of our building, which are the actions of our lives, must be of even

quality, and that the very best. In a word, *every* action is to be supernatural. To put in natural actions and imperfections is to use planks and straw, and the building cannot stand. What makes our actions durable is charity; so that they should all be wholly motivated by charity in order that the temple may be secure.¹

(Three things, according to St. Thomas, determine the merit of an action: the amount of charity that is in it; our promptitude in performing it; and the difficulty of the action.)

e. We must keep everything “plumb” in our temple, just as the builder does by setting every piece of material against a plumb line or a level.

The plumb line in the supernatural is the ideal of perfection. We must try to make each action perfect. This means, not that we should engage in great works, but that every action should proceed singly from charity; for every action that does so proceed is a perfect work.

In a building, we expect to ‘see every door, every window, every stone in its precise place; we take it for granted that the builder should exercise great care in every minute detail. No less should we be attentive to every detail of our supernatural structure, not complaining of the trouble, but taking this trouble gladly. The children of light, working for a much greater reward than any earthly architect, should be wiser in their generation than the children of this world are in theirs.

3. Rules given by St. John of the Cross to one seeking to acquire a Christian mentality:

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

“Secondly, in order that he may be able to do this well, every pleasure that presents itself to the senses, if it is not *purely* for the honor and glory of God, must be renounced and completely rejected for the love of Jesus

1. Although, as already observed, it is the purity of our motives, and not the frequency with which they are renewed, that counts to perfect them, nevertheless frequent and habitual repetition of supernatural intentions is a great aid in purifying them. How frequent? St. Alphonsus suggests that we renew our intention before every important action (*True Spouse of Christ*, Chap. XIX). Dom Chautard desires habitual vigilance over our motives by means of “custody of the heart” (*Soul of the Apostolate*, trans. by J. A. Morali, S.M., Ky., Mission Press, 1941, Part 5, Sect. 4)

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

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

Chapter IX Christian Perfection ²

1. The Call to Sanctity

The purpose of Christ’s mission on earth, as well as the purpose of the Church He founded, was the sanctification of souls. That is to say, Christ desired to make men saints. Moreover, He intended that they should be saints, not only after their death, but while they live on earth; indeed, since death changes nothing, it is necessary that men be saints here first if they are to be saints hereafter. Accordingly, Jesus called all men to sanctity and not just a select few. “Be ye perfect as your heavenly

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1. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, trans. and ed. by E. Allison Peers, London, Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1033, Bk. I, chap. 15.
 2. I have treated this subject more fully in a pamphlet entitled, “*This Is the Will of God*,” (Our Sunday Visitor Press, Huntington, Ind., 1943).

Father is perfect.” (Matt. 5) These words were not addressed to Carthusians, but to an ordinary, motley group of illiterate country people. Before them Jesus set an absolute standard of sanctity. He told them to be holy, not only as the saints or angels, but as God Himself. The Scriptures enforce this obligation in other places:

“This is the will of God, your sanctification.” (I Thess. 4)

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice. . . (Matt. 5)

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His justice.... (Matt. 6)

“Follow peace with all men, and holiness: without which no man can see God.” (Heb. 12, 14)

“Only let your conversation [i.e., your conduct] be worthy of the gospel of Christ.” (Phil. 1, 27)

Jesus’ words, “Follow Me,” mean the same thing: they do not mean that we should follow Him physically, but that we should follow Him in virtue, especially in charity, according to the explanation of the Fathers.

There is, therefore, just *one kind of Christianity* for all men, for laymen as well as religious. Religious orders and congregations are human institutions – the obligation to perfection does not come from them, but from Christ. There is then nothing inferior or second-rate about the Christianity of the laity: to them, as to all, were addressed the words: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people; that you may declare His virtues who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (I Peter 2, 9) The vocation of a Christian is before all other vocations: religious life is intended only to enable those who embrace it to realize the Christian vocation more fully.

The difference between lay and religious is as follows: If I owe a man ten dollars and after some delay in paying, I take an oath to pay him on a certain day, I take upon myself, through the oath, a second obligation. Nevertheless, even though I should not take the oath, I am still bound in justice to pay my debt. My fundamental obligation is one of justice, although I afterwards add a more religious obligation. So also, every Christian is bound *by the mere fact that he is a Christian* to pursue perfection; when a religious binds himself by vow, he does not create the obligation to pursue perfection, then, but he simply reinforces and emphasizes his primary obligation. He binds himself to follow one or other of the counsels, which are not obligatory upon all.

2. Christian Perfection

a. *Its nature.* Christian perfection consists essentially in the virtue of

charity: a Christian is perfected by charity. St. Thomas says: “A thing is said to be perfect in so far as it attains its proper end, which is the ultimate perfection thereof. Now it is charity that unites us to God, who is the last end of the human mind, since ‘he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him.’ (I John 4, 16) Therefore the perfection of Christian life consists essentially in charity.” (II II, 184, 1) And further: “Primarily and essentially the perfection of Christian life consists in charity, principally in the love of God and secondarily in the love of neighbor, concerning which the chief precepts of the divine law are given.” (*Ibid.*, art. 3)

In a secondary sense, perfection also includes the counsels, which help us to attain perfection; and in this secondary sense, it also includes all the other virtues. Thus the virtues and counsels belong to the *plentitude* of perfection, or to its integrity. Similarly, we say in the physical order, that the soul belongs to the essence of human nature, so that a man cannot exist at all without a soul; whereas the fact that he has five fingers on each hand belongs to his integrity; that is, the five fingers belong to the complete human body, but they do not affect the essence. So it is with charity and the other virtues, the former being the essence of perfection, the latter belonging to its integrity.

b. *Is perfection possible?* To answer this we must distinguish different kinds of perfection, according to the teaching of St. Thomas. (II II, 184, 2) The first kind of perfection is absolute. Now, since perfection is love of God, absolute perfection would consist in a love that is proportionate to God’s infinite deserts, that is, an infinite love; and this is possible only to God Himself.

A second kind of perfection is that of the angels and the blessed in heaven, who love God, not according to His infinite deserts (since even angels are only finite), but according to the totality of their powers, so that all their affection is concentrated in God.

A third kind of perfection is that of the souls on earth. These neither love God according to His infinite deserts nor does their love exhaust their powers, for the distractions and exigencies of human life prevent all our energies from being absorbed in charity. This kind of perfection consists in the *exclusion of all elements that oppose the movement of our affection towards God*. It excludes, then, in the first place mortal sin, and it must do this much under pain of damnation; but it excludes also, not only what is utterly opposed to charity (sin), but everything that impedes the movement of charity, i.e., natural affections for things of the world.

This third kind of perfection is possible; for although we cannot in

this life be wholly free from imperfection and venial sin, we can certainly be free from *affection* for these.

In considering the possibility of perfection it should likewise be kept in mind that the Holy Ghost sanctifies us; so that our sanctification does not depend on our own powers. What we must do is to remove the obstacles to the Holy Ghost's activity, i.e., affection for creatures; so that here there is no need for discouragement, no matter how weak and imperfect we may be.

c. *The obligation of perfection.* Charity is a precept that binds under pain of sin and under pain of damnation: it is an absolutely necessary means of salvation. In addition to the texts given above, the capital text that shows the necessity of charity is, "Love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, thy whole soul, thy whole mind, thy whole strength."

Now, since perfection consists essentially in charity, perfection is also obligatory upon all men, and is even necessary for salvation. That is why Pope Pius XI wrote: "Christ has constituted the Church holy and the source of sanctity, and all those who take her for guide and teacher must, by the divine will, tend to holiness of life – 'This is the will of God, your sanctification,' says St. Paul. What kind of sanctity? The Lord Himself declared it when He said – 'Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.' Let no one think that this is addressed to a select few and that others are permitted to remain in an inferior degree of virtue. The law obliges, as is clear, absolutely everyone in the world without exception." (*Encyclical on the Third Centenary of St. Francis de Sales*)

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

3. Precepts and Counsels

A precept is a commandment given us by God or the Church and binds under pain of sin. A counsel is a recommendation merely, not binding under pain of sin, made in order to indicate the best way to live

the Christian life. A precept may bind us seriously without fixing an indispensable means of salvation, i.e., the precept to attend Mass, which may be set aside when there is sufficient reason, or the precept to receive Confirmation, which is not absolutely necessary for salvation. A precept may also fix a condition that is absolutely necessary for salvation. The precept of charity is an example of this. For this precept not only commands that certain actions be performed under pain of sin, but also designates an absolutely indispensable condition for salvation.

Since charity is a precept in this stricter sense, so also perfection can be no mere counsel, but is a precept, and that in the stricter sense likewise.

The difference between the precept of perfection and the counsels is this: The precept determines an *end* that is common to all Christians; whereas the counsels indicate the best *means* to attain this end, without, however, implying any obligation to use the best means: “And since what falls under the precept may be accomplished in different ways, it is not necessary to fulfill it in the best way in order not to sin against it; to avoid its transgression it is sufficient that it be accomplished in one way or another.” (II II, 184, 3)

“The evangelical counsels are concerned with the means, but with nothing but the means, of attaining this goal [i.e., of perfection].”¹ Suppose that three men must go to the same destination; and, according to the degree of their hurry, one goes by air, one goes by train, one by boat; the destination is the same for all, the means of travel differs. So also in the Christian life; the destination is sanctity, or perfection, for all, but there are different means: the contemplative orders, the active orders, lay life. Contemplatives are like those who go by plane – they wish to go to God quickly, and put aside entirely the things of the world; religious in active orders travel more slowly, being retarded a little by worldly occupations, but they must go to God none the less directly; lay persons are even more occupied by worldly matters, but they are likewise heading for the same end. In the case of lay life or that of the active religious there must be no affection for the things of the world – all should go directly to God. The difference is simply one of means, one being better than the other, although all are capable of achieving the desired end.

The phrase “counsels of perfection” does not mean then that perfection is a counsel; it simply means that the counsels (poverty,

1. Jacques Maritain, *Prayer and Intelligence*, trans. by Algar Thorold, N. Y., P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1928.

chastity, obedience) are the best means of attaining perfection. Hence, St. Thomas teaches that, although perfection consists *primarily and essentially* in the precepts of charity, nevertheless – “Secondarily and instrumentally perfection consists in the counsels: all of which, as the commandments likewise, are subordinated to charity, although in different ways. For the commandments other than charity are intended to remove whatever is opposed to charity and incompatible with it; the counsels, however, are intended to remove certain things that impede the act of charity without being repugnant to it, such as matrimony and secular business.” (II II, 184, 3) For this reason we said above that the virtues belong to the plenitude of perfection, although not to its essence.

4. The Degrees of Perfection

Perfection is essentially present in all those who are in the state of grace; for grace is inseparable from charity, and perfection consists in charity.

In the case of an infant, charity is infused into the soul with grace, and no dispositions are required on the part of the infant, although later, when it reaches the age of reason, it must also exercise itself in supernatural acts. In all other cases, the sacraments presuppose actual charity, and no sacrament dispenses from this requirement. “The lowest degree of divine love is to love nothing more than God, nothing contrary to God, nothing as much as God. He who does not reach this degree of Christian perfection in no way accomplishes the precept.” (*Ibid.*) Without having this much charity it is not possible to be in the state of grace.

An excuse for spiritual mediocrity is sometimes derived from the fact that perfection is essentially present in those who have grace; for, it is argued, this is enough to be saved.

Now, while it is true that perfection is essentially present in all those who have charity, this perfection is embryonic only. The essential characteristics of life are present in the embryo or the fetus; yet these do not constitute a complete, mature human being. Moreover, the fetus is under the law of growth: it grows inevitably, and when growth ceases, death has set in. Similarly, the supernatural life is under a law of growth; although it begins with the “state of grace,” he who has only this has not certainly the plenitude of the Christian life. And when spiritual growth ceases, this likewise means that death has set in in the soul. “In the way of salvation, he who does not advance goes back.” We have seen this in dealing with the imperfect acts and the law of the members.

Therefore, although perfection is essentially present in those who

have grace, no one may limit himself to this much perfection. All must seek to be perfect, as Jesus commanded: “Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father.” Not only in this text but also in the precept of charity is it evident that we may not measure our love for God: the insistent repetition of the word “whole” every time this precept is given shows that we must not limit our love, but give God total love.

“Now the love of God and of neighbor does not fall under the precept in a certain, *definite measure* or up to a certain extent only, so that any excess of the virtue would belong to the counsel: this is evident from the very form of the precept which implies perfection and totality: ‘Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart...’ The end admits of no measure, which is concerned with the means only. The physician does not measure the degree up to which he will cure the patient, but he does measure the remedies and the diet he prescribes in order to accomplish the cure.” (*Ibid.*) So in the spiritual life, we must not measure the end, which is perfection, but we may measure the means; that is, we must adapt our actions to achieve this end; that is why all do not have to follow the counsels – they are not compatible with some conditions of life.

To understand this, we must distinguish between the order of intention and the order of execution, or reality. A student may desire to make one hundred per cent in the order of intention; in reality he may make sixty per cent. An athlete may desire to jump six feet – in the order of intention; in reality, when he jumps he may reach only five feet. But observe: even to reach these low marks, both the student and the athlete have to aim high; if they had aimed lower in their intention, then their achievements would have been even lower than they were.

In the spiritual life, it is necessary for all to seek the highest perfection in the order of intention; for the precept of charity is *universal, absolute, and equal*.¹

How holy we actually become, in the order of execution, or reality, depends on two things: (a) what means we use to reach perfection, i.e., whether or not we follow the counsels; (b) the action of the Holy Ghost (and, of course, it is the Holy Ghost who in the first place calls certain souls to follow the counsels in a religious vocation). Therefore, the degrees of charity exist in the order of execution, *and are no concern of ours*. In the order of intention, which is our concern, there are no degrees of perfection – all are bound to seek the highest degree of that perfection which is proper to the souls of the just. Mark: it is not said that all are bound to *achieve* the highest perfection (since our achievement depends on grace and is, there-

1. St. Francis de Sales, *op. cit.*, X, 6.

fore, God's affair), but that all must seek it.

“For any Christian to be unwilling to strive toward the total gift of himself to God is a grave sin against the supreme commandment. As St. Augustine puts it, ‘If you say, it is enough, you have already perished.’”¹

To reach the lowest degree of perfection, we must aim for the highest; otherwise we are likely to fail to reach even the lowest.

Note: Concerning the rich young man whom Jesus asked to follow Him (See Matt. 19), the following points should be observed:

a. The words, “If thou wilt be perfect,…” do not mean that perfection is optional, a mere counsel. “If” here does not denote a condition; it is a consecutive “if,” as in the statement, “If you wish to live, you must eat correctly.” In this statement it is not hinted that people will generally refuse to live – that fact is merely taken for granted. That the “if” in the present text is no condition is evident from the fact that (a) we have already shown that perfection is a precept, and the present text cannot be understood in a sense that would contradict the other teaching of Christ and the Church; (b) from the parallel place in St. Luke where the conditional form is not used at all in reporting Christ's words. (Luke 18, 20-23)

b. “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments,” does not mean that we can enter into heaven by keeping only the commandments of the natural law. Christ certainly includes here the precept of charity, which is the first and greatest of the commandments. And this is shown when Jesus demands that, in addition to the commandments of the natural law, which the young man had kept, he should also follow Jesus. St. Thomas also notes that “commandments” here includes the commandment of love, therefore of perfection. (I II, 100, 10 ad 1)

c. Although Jesus looked on the young man and loved him, this was before He had given His invitation and before it had been refused; it is no argument that the young man was saved despite his rejection of the divine invitation. Jesus' words immediately following the young man's turning away seem to indicate that he was not saved: “It is difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven…”

d. There is both a precept and a counsel in Jesus' invitation. The precept is “Follow Me.” The counsel is “Sell what thou hast.” The young man could have refused the counsel without incurring damnation, but he could not refuse the precept. Whether or not he is in fact damned depends on whether he rejected the precept...What this man received from Jesus, in addition to the call to perfection which is common to all Christians, was what we would today call a religious vocation. (II II, 184, 3 ad 1)

1. Rev. Joseph Buckley, *Ecclesiastical Review*, Feb., 1940, p. 132.

PART TWO: THE SUPERNATURAL WORLD

Chapter I The Glory of God

Doctrine

God's purpose in creating the world was to manifest His external glory. We here examine this proposition in detail:

1. God's Own Motive in Creating the World

It is an axiom in philosophy that every agent acts because of some end or purpose; intelligent agents act in virtue of some end that they themselves determine. This is true of God also; He had some end in view in creating the world, and this end or purpose would determine His own motive.

Now God must act for some infinite end. The reason for this is that faculties and actions are determined by their end; hence, there is a proportion between the powers of any agent, or person, and the ends which he works for. If we knew an artist only by some paper dolls that he had cut out, we should conclude that his talent was not of a very high order; if we knew him by great works, we should conclude that we were in the presence of genius. Genius is betrayed by its products and by its purpose. Therefore, if God had envisioned, as His primary purpose in creating the world, some finite end, such as the happiness of mankind, we should have to conclude that God is finite – which is nonsense. The fact that God is infinite shows that He envisioned an *infinite end* in creation.

Now there is no infinite being except God Himself; therefore, God acted on account of Himself.

When an agent acts, he does so through his will; and the will acts on account of some good, real or fancied; in other words, the object of the will is good. When God acted in creating, He acted through the divine will, and on account of good, His own infinite goodness. Thus, it was His own infinite being, considered under the aspect of its Infinite Goodness, that prompted God to create.

When finite agents act, they *do* so in order to *procure* some good; as when one goes to school to get an education. Now God is infinitely good, and that means that He contains all goodness within Himself. He does not then create in order to procure goodness.

Sometimes human agents are prompted by a desire, not to obtain good, but to communicate it; this is true when such an agent possesses a good superabundantly; as when a man abounding in knowledge desires to teach, or when one who is filled with news wishes to pass it along. Now God, being filled with a superabundance of all good, creates in order to communicate or diffuse His goodness.

This, then, answers the question proposed: God's motive in creating the world was to diffuse His own infinite goodness.

2. The Purpose of Creation Itself

This problem is different from that just discussed. The end of the artist may be different from the end of the artifact that he makes. His purpose may be to get money; the purpose of his work, if it is a sacred picture, would be to arouse devotion. Of course, the end of the artist and the end of the artifact may coincide; this would be true, for example, if in the case given the end of the artist is to arouse devotion. However, whether these two ends differ or coincide, they are distinct. Thus, although we have seen what is God's *purpose* in creating, this does not necessarily tell us the *purpose of creation* itself.

In this case, however, the two ends coincide; in fixing His own purpose, God has also fixed the purpose of the universe. If God has created to communicate His goodness, then the end of creation can be nothing else than to receive, possess, and manifest his goodness.

Now to manifest God's goodness is to glorify Him; thus we say that the end of creation is to glorify God.

Creatures may glorify God in two ways. They may do so *objectively*, merely by showing in their own nature the goodness of God and His perfections, without being conscious of God and His perfections and the glory they give to Him. This is the way all irrational creatures glorify God – flowers, animals, celestial bodies, etc.

Rational creatures may glorify God *formally*, that is, they can recognize God's goodness with their minds and praise Him for it; in so doing they glorify God.

Since God's purpose in creating and the purpose of creation coincide in the manner shown, it follows that in securing His own end, God is also securing the end and the good of His creatures. It follows also that

creatures themselves, in working for God’s purpose, secure their own happiness. Man’s happiness, then, is obtainable only if he manifests the glory of God. This purpose is fixed in the very structure of his being by the Creator Himself. If man works for any other end, he acts, not only contrary to the law of God, but contrary also to the deepest laws of his own being. Thus he can secure his own perfection only by accepting the purpose that God has assigned to him; and he can find happiness only by procuring the perfection of his nature.

Creatures do not create God’s glory, nor do they add anything to it; they merely manifest it. Therefore, to state things accurately, we should say that the purpose of creation, and of men, is to manifest the (external) glory of God. This is shown also from the Scriptures:

“The Lord hath made all things for Himself.” (Proverbs, 16)

“The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of His hands.” (Psalm 18)

3. The Glory of God

There are two kinds of divine glory, *internal and external*. God’s internal glory is the same as His own personal, infinite goodness; it is the composite of all His divine perfections, and is the final basis for the praise that is given Him.

God’s internal glory is in itself twofold. His internal, *objective* glory comprises the divine perfections themselves, the basis of praise. His internal, formal glory consists in His own recognition of these perfections and His own praise of Himself.

The *external* glory of God is the communicated glory or goodness of God that is found in creatures. External glory is likewise objective and formal. External, *objective* glory consists in the divine perfections as they are found in creatures, having been communicated to creatures in creation. External *formal* glory consists in the praise that is given to God by rational creatures for the goodness that they see, not in God Himself, but in His creatures; for their reason tells them that this goodness is communicated to creatures by God. Thus:

Internal (God’s perfections)	Objective:	God’s perfections themselves.
	Formal:	God’s praise of His own perfections.

Divine Glory	External (Communicated perfections)	Objective:	Creatures manifesting God's goodness.
		Formal:	Rational praise of God by men on account of communi- cated goodness of creatures.

When we say that the universe is created to manifest God's glory, we mean His *external, formal* glory. The universe exists that it may be gathered up by man in a hymn of praise to Almighty God. For lower nature glorifies God itself only objectively, i.e., unconsciously, necessarily, and without merit; man does it consciously, freely and meritoriously; and since he uses all creation, he may be said to take up all creation within himself to glorify God formally.

St. Augustine defines external glory as "luminous knowledge joined to praise," *clara cum laude notitia*. External glory, although outside of God, is itself a participation in the internal glory. Thus external objective glory is a participation in internal objective glory; in other words, the goodness (or glory) of creatures is a participation in the goodness and perfection of God. Again, external formal glory is a participation in God's internal formal glory; or, in other words, by praising God on account of the goodness found in creatures, man shares in God's infinite praise of Himself.

In creating the universe to manifest His glory, God does not show ambition, pride, or vainglory.

a. Ambition becomes sinful only when it desires honor that is not due the one who desires it. But God is infinite and deserves infinite honor; He cannot be ambitious in demanding man's merely finite honor.

b. It is not vainglorious to exact respect that is due to one. A mother is not vainglorious in exacting respect from her children; she is bound to exact it. We should think a woman deceived who would allow her children to offer her disrespect, on the grounds that she does not wish to be vainglorious. In the same way, right order demands that we glorify God; for God is an infinite and sovereign Being, and we are merely His creatures.

c. God is truth, and He expects us to love truth. Now mere truthfulness demands that, when we look upon creatures, we acknowledge

that they are good and praise their goodness. And since God loves truth, He can do nothing else but expect us to make such a truthful acknowledgment. If He would have us do otherwise, He would be condoning falsehood.

Chapter II The Glory of God

Application

To act according to our divinized nature, it is necessary to know the mind of God (so far as divine revelation makes this possible) that we may know how to guide our actions. Especially is it necessary, since we live in the creature world, to know God's plan concerning creatures. For we have seen that, to live a supernatural life, we must give up creatures and even despise them. Yet these creatures are good and made by God; they surround us on every side; how are we to use them?

We are to use them according to the intention of God their Creator: and to know this we must know the plan of God. We have found, in studying the plan of God, that God created creatures to manifest His external glory. We now study the application of this plan to our own conduct.

1. What the Divine Glory Is for God Himself

a. The divine glory is God's principal intention in creating the world. We have already developed this point in the preceding section. Concretely, this glory consists in the praise offered to God by intelligent creatures. The glory given to God by creatures is external, however, and adds nothing to Him; any more than praise of a rich man adds to his riches. Thus God does not need the glory offered Him by creatures.

b. It is the directing idea of His creation. If a man makes a saw, he must cut teeth in it so that it will be fitted for the purpose intended. When a thing is made for a purpose, it must be designed to fulfill that purpose. God, whose purpose is His own glory, so designed creatures, therefore, that they are capable of glorifying Him. His glory was the directing idea in every creature, great and small; and every creature is capable of returning glory to God. We habitually acknowledge this in regard to lower creatures, but it obtains also for men: we ourselves and our

neighbors are fitted to manifest God's glory.

c. It is His continual preoccupation. Once the world was created God did not cease to desire His glory to be manifested by creation. As long as He sustains creation, He is concerned to obtain His own glory. This is illustrated in a remarkable way in the Book of Judges (Chap. 6). It is here told how God desired to have the Israelites overcome their enemies; but, knowing the infidelities of His chosen people, He so arranged matters that in accomplishing this, the Israelites, with Gideon their leader, could claim absolutely no credit for themselves, and were compelled to attribute everything to God. St. Paul (I Cor. 1) also teaches how God chooses the weak and foolish things of the world, in preference to the wise and strong. "That no flesh should glory in His sight." It is not that God would not use talented men in His plans; but when such men would take God's glory from Him, then He will not use them.

2. What This Glory Means for Man

a. This glory is man's happiness. In fulfilling God's purpose, as we have seen, man likewise fulfills the deepest purpose of his own nature; he thus perfects his nature and achieves happiness. Now man can achieve happiness only by moving in the groove marked out for him by his Creator. When he leaves this groove, he acts contrary to his nature and can never be happy. Thus it is quite simply and literally true that happiness is impossible apart from God.

We have seen that the end of creatures coincides with God's purpose in creation. Therefore, in willing His own glory, God has also willed man's perfection and his happiness, so that we may say that the secondary end of creation is the happiness of man. This is, indeed, the foundation and starting point of the divine mercy; namely, that God has not imposed His will upon us arbitrarily from without, but that, in realizing His will, He likewise fulfills the desires of His creature, man. God's glory, then, is not an arbitrary law imposed on us from above; its pursuit and attainment fulfill the deepest needs of human nature.

This can be shown simply by an example: As an employer gives wages only to those who work for him, so God gives happiness, as a wage and a reward, to those who serve Him.

b. This glory is man's double means:

i. Of explaining the actions of God. Not all of God's actions can be explained by His mercy, but all of them can be explained by His glory. For example, it is not possible to explain the defection of Judas by the divine mercy; if we keep only this attribute in view, it may be asked why

God did not give Judas more grace, so that he would be prevented from sinning. The answer is that God's glory demanded that Judas save himself with the sufficient grace that was given him... Wars and other great tragedies of the world cannot be explained by God's mercy, but they can be explained by His glory; for they manifest the glory of His justice against those who defy His will.

ii. Of obtaining grace. The only way we have of paying God for His favors is to praise Him; so that praise is the coin by which we obtain grace.

c. It should be man's continual preoccupation. Since the divine glory is the purpose that is behind every creature in the world, men must be careful to use creatures for *this sole end*; otherwise they are abusing creatures. Moreover, their own actions and lives must be directed to the divine glory; if men seek their own glory, they are robbing God, and, as we have seen, God will not permit this.

We should not work for our own glory or credit, but for God's. Thus we should not complain when others take the credit for our work; we should, indeed, thank such people, for they give us an opportunity to show God our sincerity when we say that we work for Him.

Especially if we desire to work for God and help to carry out His plan, we must seek His glory. As high-resistance materials do not permit the passage of an electric current, so pride prevents supernatural energies from passing through us to energize the world. Hence, the Psalmist said: "Out of the mouths of infants and of sucklings Thou has perfected praise" (Ps. 8, 1); that is, only those offer perfect praise to God, who, like children, are simple and guileless and do not seek their own interests.

3. Importance of This Doctrine

By glorifying God, we enter into the divine plan and participate in the divine creative intention. Moreover, we reproduce in ourselves the activity of God the Son. For God the Son is called in the Scriptures (Heb. 1, 3) the Glory of the Father. Thus the divine plan of glory becomes personified, as it were, in the Son; and by glorifying God we share in the activity of the Son.

Chapter III

The Doctrine of The Samples

God is an infinitely simple Being; that is to say, there is within Him no division of parts, all His attributes being joined in an incomprehensible and perfect unity. Thus God's mercy is not really distinct from His justice; both are identical with the divine essence. Nevertheless, we may legitimately distinguish these qualities and attributes, not because of any division in God, but because of the limitations of our minds, which can grasp but one point of view at a time.

Thus, from our standpoint, we may distinguish between the divine essence and the divine action, although in reality God's action is identical with His essence.

Considering these aspects of the divinity, we may say that, since we must glorify God, we should glorify Him both in His essence (in what He *is*) and in His activity (in what He *does*). We can glorify God in His essence by means of the *Samples*; and we glorify His activity by means of the Supreme Dominion.

We shall now discuss separately these two modes of glorifying God:

1. We live in a world of creatures and have a natural taste for creatures. Yet our supernatural destiny demands that we abandon creatures and rise to the supernatural plane with the Creator. Unfortunately, we have no natural taste for God or the things of God; only charity gives us an affinity with the supernatural.¹

Therefore, in order to become supernaturalized, we must use creatures as stepping-stones to approach God; if we use them for themselves and love them for themselves, we will remain on the merely natural level of life.

God desires that we use the things of the world to rise to Him. How may this be done? By observing the perfections of creatures we more and more come to some dim appreciation of the infinite perfections of God. For all creatures are made by God, all proceed from the divine mind, and, therefore, all represent in some degree the perfections of this mind. As we can tell from the work of an artist that he has humor, pathos, power, etc., so we can tell from God's variegated creation something of

1. Of course, our nature, considered in itself (*in se*), has an appetite and need for God; but in practice, because of concupiscence, man is prone to be attracted to creatures to the forgetfulness of the Creator.

His attributes.

Here is the way in which we are to use creatures: we are not merely to enjoy them, as pagans do, but to rise to the knowledge of God through them. This is why St. Thomas says that we rise from the knowledge of creatures to the knowledge of God; it is why men like St. Thomas and St. Augustine troubled themselves about knowledge – because knowledge of creatures is a highway to God. This same truth is also taught in the Scriptures:

“He that planted the ear, shall He not hear; or He that formed the eye, doth He not consider?” (Psalm 93) Thus the eye and the ear are reflections of divine attributes.

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

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all impiety and iniquity of men who impede the truth by their unrighteous conduct; because what is knowable about God is clear within them, since God made it clear to them. For from the creation of the world His invisible attributes are plainly observable, being perceived through created things – His eternal power, namely, and divinity.” (Rom. 1, 18-20)

All these texts show that God expects us to rise from the knowledge of creatures to the knowledge of Himself, and that He will punish those who do not so use creatures.

Thus the creatures of the world are samples of God, “And from thence (i.e., from amazement at God’s marvelous works) we pass on to most holy complacency, rejoicing that God is so infinite in wisdom, power, and goodness, which are the three divine attributes, of which the world is but a small evidence or, as it were, a *sample*.”¹

2. The universe is a catalogue of samples, placed before us by God to give us some idea of the good things in heaven, where “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.” (I Cor. 2, 9) As a salesman shows us the samples in order to excite our desire to buy his wares, so our intellects are salesmen that appraise the sample of divine perfections and try to excite our desires to possess these perfections in heaven.

1. St. Francis de Sales, *op. cit.*, Bk. IX, chap. 1.

The salesman does not try to sell his customer the sample; and the customer would not dream of trying to wear the sample coat or hat. The sample is used merely to show what is obtainable at the factory or the store. So with the samples of heaven: they are not put here to be enjoyed, but to give us some idea of what is waiting for us in heaven. When we use the divine samples for any other purpose, we are just as foolish as the customer who tries to wear the little sample of cloth.

In order to use the samples of this world to ascend to God, we shall compare them to God and the happiness of the supernatural. This we may do in three ways:

a. In duration. The pleasures of this world last but a moment, i.e., the eating of an orange, or a piece of chocolate. There is in heaven waiting for us a pleasure corresponding to these, but it will last for all eternity. Thus the momentary pleasures of this earth gives us a dim idea of the eternal happiness that awaits us in heaven.

b. In quality. The pleasures of heaven are of a much superior kind, far beyond anything in this world. In fact, the pleasures in heaven are spiritual; and as the text quoted above shows (Cor. 2, 9), sense pleasures give us no adequate idea of the happiness of heaven. Here we purify our comparison, by showing the difference in excellence between the joys of earth and those of heaven.

c. In intensity. The pleasures of heaven are much more intense than those of earth. If one ray of God's goodness in an orange or chocolate causes me so much pleasure, what will be my happiness when I possess the plenitude of divine goodness in heaven?

Contrary to the pagan idea, spiritual joys are much more absorbing, much more intense, than those of earth. A scholar of cultivated tastes gets more satisfaction from his reading than does a sensual, semi-literate man from reading cheap stories; yet the sensual man thinks the other a fool. Now the pleasures of the spirit are more delightful, in the same way, than the highest natural satisfactions; yet it is not to be wondered at if the sensualist does not think so: "But the natural man does not grasp the secrets of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him; and he is unable to comprehend them, because they have to be judged spiritually. But the spiritual man judges of all things, while he himself is subject to no one's judgment." (I Cor. 2, 14-15)

There are two important differences between earthly and heavenly pleasures: in the first place, earthly joys are chiefly pleasant in anticipation, while their fruition is disappointing; heavenly joys, on the contrary, are not pleasant as we look forward to them, but their actual

fruition is wholly delightful. Secondly, the more we get of earthly joys, the less we want of them – in the end they bring disgust and revulsion; but with the joys of the Spirit, the opposite is true; i.e., the more we get of them the more eagerly do we seek them.¹

3. Lest these simple comparisons be disdained, it should be noted that Christ frequently made use of them.

In the gospel of St. John, chapter 4, Jesus makes use of the water at the well of Jacob to raise a sinful Samaritan woman's mind to the things of God. The well water is a sample of the "living water," which, if any shall drink of it, he shall not thirst again; for this living water will be "a fountain springing up into life everlasting." The cool, refreshing qualities of well water are here taken as a sample of happiness with God. According to St. Teresa, the living water is union with God through prayer, which is enjoyed on this earth and is also a fountain of life eternal... Jesus used the same example when He said: "If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink." (John 7, 37)

In St. John (4, 34) He likewise said to the Apostles, when they offered Him food: "My food is to do the will of Him that sent Me." What meat does for the body, God's will does for the soul: the food of the body is a sample of what God provides for the soul.

In the gospel of St. John (chapter 6) Jesus takes bread and uses it as a sample of the celestial bread that He was promising to give us in the Eucharist. He also made bread the symbol (and sample) of faith when He said, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall not hunger, and he that believeth in Me shall never thirst." Finally, in the same chapter, He says: "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto life everlasting, which the Son of Man shall give you."

Again, He makes rest the sample of happiness with God: "Come to Me, all you that labor, and are burdened, and I will refresh you." (Matt. 2, 28)

In St. Luke 12, 37, Jesus likens spiritual happiness to a banquet at which God Himself will serve the blessed; in St. Luke 22. 15, He likens eternal happiness to a paschal banquet. And in St. Matthew 6, He says: "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth, where the rust and the moth doth consume, and where thieves break through and steal..."

4. Thus we are to use creatures not for our enjoyment, but as samples to teach us about God. We are given these samples; yet we should as far as

1. From St. Gregory the Great in the *Roman Breviary*: "Sunday within the Octave of Corpus Christi."

possible give them up. Nor is it of any account to say: “These creatures come from God, they are good – we should enjoy them.” It is only because they are good that they can be samples of God; if they were evil, they would teach us nothing of Him; so that the doctrine of samples does not deny the goodness of creatures. But it is precisely because they are good that they must be given up. If I tell God that I do not like apples and will, therefore, give them up for Him, there is no merit in this: to get merit I must give up something I like. Just as a man must tell his wife that he loves her more than all other women, even the most attractive, so must we prefer God to the most attractive creatures.

Father Garrigou-Lagrange says: “It can aptly be said: ‘The best thing that one can do with the best of things is to sacrifice it,’ on condition, however, that we safeguard the hierarchy of the gifts of God and of the virtues, and that we do not sacrifice something superior to what is inferior.”¹ It is not that God gives us creatures only to see us renounce them; but we must renounce them, at least interiorly, if we are to use them as He would have us use them.

5. Other examples to illustrate the place of creatures... Creatures are photographs of the Creator, each having some likeness to Him. Now we do not love a photograph for itself, because of the paper it is printed on, but simply in reference to the person whom it represents. Similarly, creatures are not to be loved in themselves, but only in God.

St. John of the Cross speaks of creatures as crumbs that fall from the table of God. (*Ascent*, 1, 6) He has reference to the text in St. Matthew (chapter 15) where Jesus replies to the woman of Canaan who had asked Him to cure her daughter: “It is not good to take the bread of the children, and to cast it to the dogs.” But she said: “Yea, Lord, for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters.” St. John of the Cross, interpreting this text in a spiritual sense, says that the crumbs are creatures and they who eat the crumbs are dogs. Moreover, the dogs cannot possess the bread of the children; i.e., those who love creatures cannot enjoy the love of God, which is possessed only by the “children of God.” This illustrates the two main points of the doctrine of Samples: (a) that creatures bear some likeness to the Creator, since the crumbs, which represent creatures, fall from the table of the children; i.e., they are mere broken fragments of supernatural happiness; (b) these crumbs are not to be eaten by those who love God, for those who eat them are dogs, not the children of God.

1. *Op. cit.*, p. 132, footnote.

Chapter IV The Doctrine of Samples

Application

In practice, the doctrine of the Samples has the following effects:

1. It cuts criticism to the root. – The reason why we criticize others is because we compare them among themselves, or to ourselves; and, as a consequence, we find them “too kind,” or “too harsh,” or “too soft,” or “too severe,” etc. We should never compare samples (human beings are also samples!) among themselves, horizontally. To act as God intended, we should compare them only to God, vertically. Thus we will say, “This man’s kindness – seemingly excessive – is but a sample of the divine kindness.” Or, “This man’s severity – which to me appears extreme – is but a sample of the divine justice, a justice which I must some day face!” Thus, we are led to cease criticizing and at the same time raise our thoughts to God.

2. It teaches us the right use of creatures. Creatures are to be used to glorify God; and we do this when we use them as a means to know and praise God. If we use creatures for any other end, if our motive is other than the glory of God, then we abuse them. Disorder then enters the universe as soon as our motives are anything other than the glory of God. Such disorder may consist in the use of our own powers for personal aggrandizement or pleasure; or it may consist in the use of creatures for pleasure. In any case it is the motive of pleasure that acts as a criterion of abuse: not that pleasure is evil in itself; the malice is in the disorder, and the motive of pleasure simply indicates its presence. Thus we may say that disorder comes with the *appropriation* of God’s glory by man; and there are three stages of it.

Appropriation (Disorder)	Division:	We use creatures for pleasure, without sin: this shows that our love is divided.
	Dominance:	Pleasure becomes our dominating motive, shown in deliberate venial sins.
	Exclusion:	We use creatures for our own pleasure entirely, excluding God’s glory altogether.

Note: An imperfection may be defined as: (a) a natural motive, which

betrays a love of creatures and an imperfection in our love of God; (b) an indeliberate venial sin, in which we choose the pleasure of creatures, in preference to the glory of God, by a kind of habitual and automatic response; such an automatic response, while not sinful, shows where our heart is, for if we loved God we would choose *His* glory out of a formed habit.¹

3. It teaches us the right use of pleasure. Pleasure is an instrument, a means, never an end; to make it an end is to subvert the divine order. As an instrument it is absolutely subordinate to its end. Thus the act of eating is subordinate to the end of eating, i.e., physical health and, ultimately, the service of God. The pleasure of eating is subordinate not only to the end (health), but even to the means (the act of eating). Pleasure then is in an absolutely subordinate position; to put it higher, as we have seen, causes disorder. "... it [pleasure] is only an instrumental satisfaction which I must make use of; and not a final satisfaction in which I may find my repose. It is a means and not an end. When I say that I am made for happiness and that happiness is the secondary end of my existence, there is no question of the happiness which is in created things. For me there is no trace of any end in these; my end is in God, my final happiness is in Him; they only contain means."²

St. John of the Cross distinguished between voluntary and involuntary pleasure; it is voluntary pleasure that we must mortify, never allowing pleasure to be our motive, while we need not trouble ourselves about getting rid of involuntary pleasure; this would be impossible: when pleasure functions involuntarily, it functions as God intended it to do. (*Ascent*, 1, 12) Still, we should be interiorly detached also from involuntary pleasure.

4. By means of the samples we can dry up the exterior life of the senses and gradually "put off" the natural man. For the samples teach us to rise immediately to God, not tarrying a moment in the enjoyment of creatures. Thus may we gradually destroy our taste for creatures and cultivate a taste for supernatural goods. When a man gets a taste for Shakespeare, he loses his fondness for cowboy stories.

"Almighty God, when He is now known through desire and intellect, dries up in us every fleshly pleasure; and whereas aforesaid we seemed to be both seeking God and cleaving to the world, after the perception of the sweetness of God, the love of the world grows feeble in us, and the

1. Very Rev. Joseph Tissot, *The Interior Life*, trans. by W. H. Mitchell, London. Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1927. See chap. VI, IX.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

love of God alone waxes strong; and while there increases in us the strength of inmost love, without doubt the strength of the flesh is weakened.

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

Note: Two rules of St. John of the Cross for using creatures:

a. It may be asked if certain pleasures, because of their elevated natures – sounds, sights, etc., may not be indulged in in order to raise the mind to God. St. John answers that they may be so indulged in if they raise the mind *immediately* to God, without delay and without causing the mind to take delight in the creatures themselves. (*Ascent*, 1, 12) St. John warns against attachment even to religious articles.

b. There are two means of union with God: the remote means, and the proximate and proportionate means. Remote means may include any creature, and especially religious objects; the only proximate and proportionate means is faith. In the life of a Christian, as he advances spiritually, there should be a tendency to give up progressively the remote means of union and embrace ever more exclusively the one proximate and proportionate means, until he lives on the supernatural plane sustained by faith only.

An adult who would persist in dressing as a child, or in retaining the pastimes of a child, would be ridiculous. Not less ridiculous are those in the spiritual order who should be approaching spiritual maturity yet persist in occupying themselves with the trinkets of the spiritually immature. “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought as a child, I understood as a child. But when I became a man, I put away the things of a child.” (I Cor. 13) As we approach spiritual maturity, we should live by the theological virtues alone; the remote means belong to children. St. Paul includes among “the things of a child” even the charismata, which are special graces from God; what the mature Christian should live by, he teaches, is charity. (*Ascent*, 11, 9)

5. This doctrine develops the interior life of contemplation. If I regard every creature as a sample that teaches me of God, then all creatures, all pleasures, all natural affections, become ways to approach God. We should not then be troubled by distractions, which come from

1. St. Gregory the Great, quoted by Abbot Butler, *Western Mysticism*, 1st ed., N. Y., Dutton, 1924, p. 94.

natural affections, but make them an exercise in the love of God: “If this sample is so attractive, what must God be like.” Thus, gradually, all the senses, instead of being sources of distraction and of loving worldly things, become so many transmitters of the divine perfections.

We speak here of voluntary distractions. It is impossible to get rid entirely of involuntary distractions, on account of the limitations of the human mind. Yet even involuntary distractions can be considerably thinned out if we rid ourselves of affections for worldly things; for these affections are the cause of distractions. Obviously, then, progress in meditation and prayer depends on progress in the mortification of natural affections.

6. This doctrine explains the failure of spiritual effort in the world. So much time, money and effort are expended on religious education; and the results are not at all proportionate. Why? Because religious training is too often based on a false assumption. We think that we have done enough when we teach children to avoid mortal sin; and we do not correct their love of the world, but even condone it. The consequence is that their minds are filled with worldly things, and not with God. If we wish to fill the minds of people with God, we must teach them not to love the things of the world, but to use them only as a means of approaching God.

Now the will, by which I guide my activity and direct my love, is a blind faculty. Of itself it cannot see, but depends wholly on the guidance of the intellect; hence, philosophers tell us that the object of the will is the good *that is known*. Knowledge must precede the action of the will, and the will is at the mercy of the kind of knowledge that the mind offers it.

If the mind is filled with the things of the world, then the will can do nothing else but rest in these things. Especially if one is taught that these are to be enjoyed, the will, which seizes upon the good known, chooses, strives for, and reposes in the goods of the world. Since the mind is not filled with God, the will cannot choose Him, strive to possess Him, repose in Him.

Thus the love of creatures itself prevents anything like deep religious fervor; and as this love increases, and it does inevitably in virtue of the law of the flesh, it leads eventually to sin; for sin is an aversion from God and a conversion to creatures.

That people may be religious *in practice*, that their wills may be religious, it is necessary that they be taught to use creatures as God intended, without loving them in a way that is merely natural and sensual.

Thus, to blame sin and crime on weakness of will is nonsense. A criminal has no weak will; in getting the things he wants, he manifests a very strong will. The trouble is that he has been allowed to love the wrong things – money, for example – and he uses his will in the interests of mammon and not of God.

What is needed to keep resolutions is not what is called will-power, but one hundred per cent sincerity; we must really *will*, and not merely wish. If, in making a resolution, I am only ninety-nine per cent sincere, allowing for possible exceptions, etc., that resolution will never be kept for the simple reason that it has never been made. To make our wills desire and strive for anything, we must fill our minds with the desired object, allowing no alternative to the will. If we do this, resolutions will keep themselves almost automatically.

7. As a consequence of the preceding point, the doctrine of samples shows why so many Catholic Action organizations, especially youth organizations, fail to bring forth any spiritual fruit. For these organizations are founded on the *natural* and human assumption that youth should be appealed to through the things that interest it, i.e., sports, dancing, recreation. They assume that youth is interested in everything except religion (although, in point of fact, religion is one of the most discussed topics of college students): and their “Catholic Action” often consists in “sandwiching in” a little religion as part of a recreational program.

But any religious project that seeks to support itself by appealing to a love of worldly things is nullifying at the very start any hope that it may have of *supernaturalizing* its participants. No young person needs to be taught how to play; but young people do need to be taught how to *sanctify* play, how to get in “the third element,” even in their recreation. Nor can this be done by study clubs that idly discuss abstract doctrine and tid-bits of information about the accidentals of the Catholic religion. What is needed, as the foundation of any organization that calls itself Catholic, is the purpose of having its members pursue Christian perfection, together with a provision of means to secure this end.¹

8. The doctrine of samples teaches us how to handle temptation. The love of God is essentially an act of preference by which we choose Him over creatures. Now, when we are tempted, a creature is placed before us;

1. In a booklet entitled “*In the Vineyard*,” I have applied these principles more fully to Catholic Action. (Catholic Worker Press, 115 Mott Street, New York City, 1942.)

and God, as it were, says to us: “Which do you prefer – Me or this sample?” The temptation is then an opportunity of showing God our love and our preference for Him. Lovers are fond of declaring their love; if we love God, we will likewise be fond of declaring our love for Him; and we will be especially delighted with every opportunity that presents itself, not merely to declare our love in words, but to prove it effectively by a difficult choice.

Thus, when we are tempted against faith, God says: “Which do you prefer – your own puny reason or My infinite Wisdom, of which your reason is but a sample?”

Temptations against purity, being specially attractive, provide a good opportunity to show one’s love for God. Marriage is a sacrament and the supreme sample of the soul’s union with God. Temptations against purity, therefore, are not to be considered shameful, but the occasion of grace and merit. If one is severely and frequently tempted against this virtue, one should thank God that he has been given emotional depth and power, and then set about concentrating this power upon loving God.

Chapter V

The Supreme Dominion of God

Doctrine

In this chapter we treat of Divine Providence, which may be defined as: “The action by which God, in His Wisdom, ordains and disposes creatures towards their intended end.” (See *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Art., “Providence.”) Since the end of the creature is the manifestation of the divine glory, providence then is the act by which all things are ordered to God’s glory. We wish to show here how God governs all events, even the smallest, to obtain His glory.

1. *God is the cause of all good in the world.* It was defined by the Council of Orange that: “God effects in man several blessings without man’s cooperation, but man can do no good without the help of God, Who Himself enables man to accomplish all his good works. *No one has anything of himself except his deceitfulness and sin.* Whatever truth and justice we have in us, we have received from that source whence we should all drink in this life, if we do not wish to faint on the way.”

Hence, God causes all good, both in the natural and the supernatural orders.

Concerning the natural order: God does not merely give us existence and then leave us to ourselves. He concurs in absolutely every act; so that without this concurrence, which both prepares for the action and assists it, it would not even be possible to twiddle one's fingers.

Concerning the supernatural order: Not the slightest act in the supernatural order – not the first vague movement of the heart towards conversion, not the first sigh of repentance from a soul in sin – is possible without grace. Sanctifying grace gives us the power to perform supernatural actions: and in addition to this, each supernatural act needs actual graces for its performance.

In regard to the natural order this is shown in Acts, 17, 18: “For in Him we live and move and have our being. In regard to the supernatural order it is demonstrated in such texts as these: “No man can come to Me, except the Father, who hath sent Me, draw him...” (John 6, 44) And again: “Without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15, 5) Some texts include both orders: “For it is God who worketh in you both to will and accomplish, according to His good will.” (Phil. 2, 14) Other texts: “Or what hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?” (I Cor. 4, 7) “Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.” (II Cor. 3, 5)

To understand this, we should notice the different kinds of causes. God is a *principal* cause that moves creatures as mere instrumental causes; He is also a *primary* cause that moves rational creatures as *secondary* causes.

“A *primary cause* is one that does not receive its power of acting from any other cause, and only God is such; a *secondary cause* is one that borrows its power of acting from the primary cause, and all created causes are of this kind. A *principal cause* is one that produces an effect in virtue of its own proper power, e.g., as the sun produces light... An *instrumental cause* is one that produces an effect because it is subordinated to the power of a principal cause; e.g., heat in the works of nature, a pencil in the works of art.” (Translated from Signoriello, *Lexicon Peripateticum*.)

Not every principal cause is a primary cause: there is only one primary cause, God, whereas created, secondary causes may be principal causes, i.e., an artist. In fact, when we have in mind human agents, it may be said they are usually principal causes, (although human beings may be

used as instruments, too).

From the point of view of God, even secondary causes, in the non-rational order, are mere instruments (e.g., gravity). So are human secondary causes, with this difference, that human beings are free and responsible agents; so that God must govern their actions *without destroying their liberty*, as a prince governs the actions of an ambassador without removing the latter's responsibility.

Every instrument must be used according to its nature; a saw is used for cutting wood, not for hammering nails. Therefore, in directing human beings, God must do so according to their nature. Now their nature is free and rational; hence God moves them *gently (suaviter)*, i.e., without doing violence to their freedom; but He also moves them *efficaciously (fortiter)*.

Both in the order of nature and of grace, then, God moves man *suaviter et fortiter*, governing all human activity without destroying human responsibility. Moreover, it should be noted in regard to primary and secondary causes that "One cause does not subtract anything from the other, so that an effect is to be attributed wholly to its secondary created cause and wholly to the infinite uncreated will." (*Ibid.*)

2. While God is the cause of all that is good, He does not cause evil. To explain the problem of evil, it is necessary to distinguish two kinds: physical and moral.

Physical evil consists in the limitations inseparable from a finite creation. God does not directly will such limitations, but simply permits them; if He did not, then there could be no creation. Any being that does not possess all perfections is, in the measure that it does not, imperfect and evil. Only God, however, possesses all perfections; so that *every* creature is evil to the extent that it is imperfect.

This is why evil is defined as a privation of good (*privatio boni*); it is essentially, not something positive, not a *thing*, but a deficiency, a lack, a *non-thing*: "Evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound."

So a mechanic making a machine does not directly will the defects that are inseparable from the machine; what he wills is the perfection of the machine, yet he knows that it has defects and will eventually wear out. But he would not, on this account, refuse to make the machine.

So it is with physical evil, i.e., disease, decay, ugliness in nature. God does not will these directly or positively, but He permits them as the unavoidable accompaniments of a creation that is merely finite.

Moral evil, sin, is likewise a deficiency. It is not a positive thing at all,

but a mere failure on man's part to conform with the laws laid down for him by God. Sin, then, proceeds from the defectibility of man's will; it is likewise an absence of good; and it cannot be attributed to God, who wills only good. Defectibility of will is the price that man must pay for freedom of choice, and it is likewise the result of his finite nature; i.e., man can commit evil only because he is not wholly good. This defectibility is removed from the souls of the just by a special help of God, so that they are confirmed in goodness.

God's attitude, then, towards evil is *permissive* only: He permits moral evil for the following reasons:

a. Because He wills a finite creation; and defectibility, we have seen, results from the fact that man's will is finite.

b. Because, by giving man freedom, He can receive from man a free, meritorious, and responsible love.

c. Because He can obtain a greater good out of evil, as when He leads a sinner to sanctity.

d. God likewise permits evil to the individual, the better to secure the *common* good of the universe; i.e., through suffering He raises men to the supernatural plane of divinized humanity.

3. In any case, if God does not cause evil, it does not escape His control: His Providence includes even evil and utilizes it. "God writes straight with crooked lines. Even sin." (*Claudel*)

Thus the souls of the damned glorify God, by manifesting His justice, as surely as do the souls of the just by manifesting His mercy. God employs sin to lead men to repentance and sanctity. He uses malice and folly to purge His children of their natural attachments and so lead them to sanctity. He uses afflictions and sufferings in the same way. He uses injustice to punish ungodliness, as when He allowed the faithless Jews to be overcome by their enemies. Even the devil works for God, helping Him to sort the cockle from the wheat. The book of Job shows how God uses the devil to try and perfect His saints, and how the devil must work within the guiding Providence of God.

"Voltaire, setting out to crush the Beast, was in Christendom and in the history of Christendom what he was in the created universe and in the order of Providence. *He served them in spite of himself.* His campaign for tolerance, though a fight for one error... led him at the same time to fight against another error not less evil in its effect: I mean the modern error, which has found expression in the formula *cuius regio eius religio*, that the force of the state and social pressure have of their own nature a right to control conscience. In this respect, Voltaire was striving without

knowing it for Article 1351 of the Code of Canon Law: ‘No one shall be compelled to embrace the Catholic Faith against his will’.¹

Thus, there is no such thing as *chance* as far as God is concerned. If heredity, social status, education, are largely matters of chance as far as I am concerned, all is nevertheless within the Providence of God – every detail of it. Divine Providence is *universal, efficacious, immediate, gentle*.

Chapter VI The Supreme Dominion of God

Application

1. The Importance of the Doctrine

As the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Love, proceeds from the Father and the Son, so supernatural love, the charity within the heart of the faithful soul, must proceed from faith and hope.

If a soul gives itself to God, asking Him to increase its sanctity, that is, its charity, God will respond by giving the soul opportunities to practice and increase its faith and hope, that thereby its charity also may be increased. How does this come about? By seeing God in the actions of others we increase our faith; by accepting the sufferings which these actions cause us, we come more and more to hope only in God. Moreover, when the soul makes the act of surrender, it will become increasingly difficult for it to practice in this manner the Supreme Dominion of God; for God, answering the prayer for sanctity, will *afflict* the soul through others that it may grow spiritually. Hence, we must see the hand of God in all the actions of others.

That we are to receive our afflictions in faith is shown in Hebrews (10, 32-38): “Do not, therefore, lose your confidence, which hath a great reward. For patience is necessary for you... for yet a little and a very while, and he that is to come, will come, and will not delay. But my just man *liveth by faith*.”

That hope is increased by afflictions and issues in charity is shown in

1. Maritain, *Freedom in the Modern World*, trans. by Richard O’Sullivan, K.C., London, Sheed and Ward, 1935, p. 87.

Romans (5, 4): “And not only so; but we glory also in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, trial; and trial, hope. And hope confoundeth not because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost who is given unto us.”

2. What the Doctrine Means

a. *God gives existence to every being.* Therefore, I should respect the qualities found both in others and in myself, because they come from God.

If we criticize a table, we insult, not the table, but the carpenter who made it. And if we criticize our neighbor, it is not merely our neighbor that we injure, but God Who gave existence to our neighbor.

If we are dissatisfied with the qualities that God has given us, we are like a child, who, when given one kind of candy, instead of thanking his benefactor, cries out for another kind. So we show ourselves ungrateful to God when we wish that we had other talents, conditions of life, etc.

b. *God gives action and movement to every being.* Accordingly, we should see God in the actions of others.

- i. We should see God in the actions of our neighbors, even when these actions hurt us. It is God, in answer to our prayers, removing the paganism from us. God is like a surgeon and He uses the actions of our neighbors as His scalpel.

When one is operated on by a surgeon, he does not “blame” the scalpel, but the surgeon; and his “blame” of the surgeon consists in thanking him and paying him. So, when God operates on us, we should not blame the scalpel, but we should hold God responsible, and we should sincerely thank Him for cutting out our paganism, thus paying Him for the operation.

- ii. We should see God’s action in the actions of our superiors and then accept them from God without worrying whether the superior is pleasant or unpleasant. God operates through superiors, too. Nor should we expect superiors to understand us. No one except God can look into the human heart; He alone can understand us and will take care of us through His Supreme Dominion.

“And we know that to *them that love God*, all things work together unto good, *to such as according to His purpose we are called to be saints.*” (Rom. 8, 28)

- iii. Even in our own actions, including our mistakes, we must see the supreme dominion of God and not be disturbed about them. When we have made mistakes or committed imperfections, we

should remember that they were foreseen and permitted by God and that He can use them in the work of manifesting His glory. We should not allow such things to disturb our tranquillity and spirit of prayer, but make them occasions for acts of humility, confidence and faith in God.

c. *God gives direction to every being.* Every person has a twofold purpose, both given to him by God. The first is the general purpose, common to all, of manifesting His glory. The second is a particular purpose, unique for each person. Now we do not always know the purpose that God has in mind for others; usually, perhaps always, we do not know what His purpose is for us in this life. Yet God guides each one to the accomplishment of the end that He has in mind.

This being so, how foolish it is to criticize others. For we lack the elementary data needed for such criticism, i.e., knowledge of the purpose of God in the actions of those whom we criticize. It is absurd to criticize a washing machine because it cannot sew – it was not intended for that. Yet when we criticize our neighbors we do precisely this; we judge them in reference to standards that we arbitrarily set up, being wholly ignorant of God's standards. Thus, St. John of the Cross says that we should not even love one person more than another: "For he whom God loves best is worthy to be loved best, and thou knowest not who it is that God best loveth." (*Cautions*)

NOTE:

a. Even from a natural point of view, and in regard to the natural virtues, conflict and the give-and-take of social life are necessary. If one lived among friends only, and were always pampered, his virtue could not be tried and tempered. Our enemies, after all, are our best friends.

b. By seeing the Supreme Dominion of God in others and in ourselves, we shall be enabled to live a tranquil, undisturbed life, which is absolutely necessary if we are to obey the injunction of Jesus to "pray always."

c. Seeing God in the actions of others should not prevent us from seeking to remove their imperfections, especially if this is our duty (e.g., parents, teachers, superiors). We can see God in our neighbors even while we try to improve them. God has left His creation deliberately imperfect for us to improve. Thus, children must be taught, our talents must be laboriously cultivated, etc. God is in this respect like an artist who deliberately leaves his work unfinished that his disciples may learn how to design in the manner of the master.

Chapter VII The Folly of the Cross

Doctrine

1. What Is the Folly of the Cross?

There are two points in the doctrine of the folly of the cross:

a. In order to possess ourselves of supernatural happiness, we must give up all natural affections; or, in other words, the supernatural rises out of the destruction and death of the natural man, just as the phoenix of old was said to arise out of its own ashes.¹

b. This death of the natural takes place independently of sin, whether original or personal sin. The necessity of dying to nature derives from the very fact that we have a supernatural destiny. Our supernatural destiny requires that we abandon the merely natural plane of living.

The Scriptures teach this doctrine:

“He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life *in this world*, keepeth it unto life eternal. (John 12)

“If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” (Luke 9) Both of these texts are also given in the same or similar form by the other Evangelists.

The second text, as both Edward Leen and Pourrat remark, contains the essential and distinctive teaching of Jesus. This teaching involves two distinct but *inseparable* phases. The one phase is *negative*, “Deny thyself and take up thy cross daily,” and consists in the repudiation of one’s self, asserted without any limitation whatsoever, and an endless mortification; so that mortification is not to be considered an occasional indulgence for the Christian, but is coextensive with Christian life. The other phase is *positive*, and consists in union with God through love: “Follow Me.”

Now the essence of Christianity is to be found, not in the renunciation of self, but in the love of God. Nevertheless, the renunciation of self

1. When we speak here of the death and destruction of the natural man, the word “natural” must be understood in reference to our explanation in Part 1, chapter 3. – The *substance* of our nature always remains. This destruction of the natural in us is *moral*, i.e., a destruction of our merely human dreams, desires, aspirations, ambitions, attachments. These things being attractive to us, giving them up is a kind of death.

and of the world is inseparable from the love of God, or, in other words, it is not possible to possess the positive element of Christianity without submitting to the negative requirement. Those who abhor the thought of mortification, asserting that this is a “negativistic” view of Christianity, must remember that sanctification and love are possible only through purgation. Renunciation of creatures and of self pertains to the very essence of Christianity.

This folly of the cross is not so startling as may at first appear. Men expect worldly lovers to sacrifice everything for their beloved: those who shrink from sacrifice when it is required are looked upon as cads and cowards. Men are likewise expected, as a matter of course, to sacrifice their lives for their country in time of need. If so much is required for mere earthly love, why should not at least this much be expected in the divine romance of the soul with God?

Despite the fact, however, that the world wants heroic sacrifice for its own ends, it regards as folly the renunciation of worldly goods for God. This is why this doctrine is called the Folly of the Cross. God, on the other hand, has repudiated the wisdom of men in His plan of redemption: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the prudence of the prudent I will reject... But the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise.” (I Cor. 1) “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles *foolishness.*” (*Ibid.*)

“Let no man deceive himself: if any man among you seem to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise, for the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.” (Cor. 3, 13)

Therefore, in order to be wise we must become fools; that is, if we would have wisdom, we must renounce the things that earthly wisdom prizes. We must cease to act as mere men and act in virtue of the divine principle within us. “For my ways are not your ways,” says the prophet Isaias.

2. The Reasons Why We Must Practice the Folly of the Cross

a. This is a universal law that is engraved in the very structure of things. This law may be stated as follows: The corruption of one thing is the generation of something else, *corruptio unius est generatio alterius*. For example, the corruption of water is the generation of hydrogen and oxygen; the corruption or death of a human being is the generation of the various chemicals that make up the corpse. Thus, *one and same process is at the same time a process of decay and one of renewal.*

And this is a universal law. For all finite things are subject to the law of change, and in every change there is at one and the same time, both a corruption and a generation, the loss of an old form, and the gaining of a new form.

Applied to the spiritual life, this law means that supernatural life arises out of the death of the natural man and cannot come into being except in this way. St. John of the Cross notes its application here: “Wherefore, as in natural generation no form can be introduced unless the preceding, contrary form is first expelled from the subject, which form, while present, is an impediment to the other by reasons of the contrariety which the two have between each other; even so, for as long as the soul is subjected to the sensual spirit, the spirit which is pure and spiritual cannot enter it.” (*Ascent*, 1, 6)

b. Moreover, God’s sanctity requires it. It is our destiny to penetrate into the all-holy Trinity and be intimately united with the three divine persons. But holiness is required in those who thus associate with the Trinity. As earthly rulers expect those who enter their presence to observe certain external formalities, out of respect, so also does God demand certain formalities. God, however, looks not at the exterior, but at the interior; so that what He expects in us is interior cleanness, i.e., sanctity.

Thus, St. Paul writes: “*Follow peace with all men, and holiness: without which no man shall see God.*” (Heb. 12, 14)

And again: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot see God: neither shall corruption possess incorruption.” (I Cor. 15, 50) The corruption that we must be rid of is that element in our nature which we have seen is in conflict with the supernatural; it includes not only sin, but love of creatures, the use of them for our own pleasure, and the egotistic pursuit of personal ends in preference to the glory of God; for in all these ways abuse and disorder enter into souls.

Therefore, in order to see and love God immediately, we must leave behind our merely natural taste for creatures and seek for God. It is this necessity to rise to the supernatural level that prompted God to give us His grace, by which we are made capable of divinized. life and action. It is for this reason also that St. John says: “We know that when He shall appear, *we shall be like to Him* because we shall see Him as He is.” (John, 3, 2)

In order to enjoy supernatural happiness, we must cease to be merely human, must die to the old man and become divinized. This can be shown in another way:

Sanctity is an attribute of God: it consists in the conformity of the

divine will to the divine goodness and the other divine perfections: it is the quality in God that prompts Him to choose and love His own infinite perfections. If, then, human beings possess sanctity, it is only a participated sanctity: their sanctity is a sample of the divine sanctity.

Now our sanctity, since it derives from the divine, possesses the same formal element: It must consist essentially in the conformity of our wills to the divine goodness and the divine perfections. Thus to be holy, we must love and choose God's goodness and all His other infinite attributes, which must accordingly penetrate into our lives. But if we will and love the Creator, we do not will or love creatures as our end; if we choose God, we cannot choose His rival in our affection, which is the world; if we desire the divine perfections, we cannot be satisfied with the mere samples of these divine perfections, found on earth. The consequence is that sanctity, absolutely necessary to enter God's presence, is obtained only at the price of all our cravings for creatures and love of self.

c. God's glory demands it. As we have seen, God's glory is the very purpose of all creation; and this glory demands that nothing penetrate His essence unless He remake it: that is why He "remakes" us with grace and glory in order that we may enjoy the Beatific Vision.

This follows from an axiom of common sense: "When one thing is received into another, the thing received must conform to the mode of the thing receiving it, *quidquid recipitur, secundum modum recipientis recipitur*." Examples: If a student wishes to enter a certain school, he must, no matter what his knowledge, etc., conform to the requirements of the school that accepts him. . . . Again, when we know an object, that object, in a certain sense, is inside our heads; it is not, however, in them physically (i.e., according to the manner in which the object exists); but it enters our heads *spiritually*, that is, according to the spiritual mode of existence of the mind that receives the object. . . . So also if our senses receive objects within themselves, it is only such objects as conform to the structure and function of the respective senses. Thus, the ears receive only sound vibrations, never colors; and the eyes receive, of an object, only its color, never its sound vibrations or taste or smell. Only that enters the receptor (sense organ) that conforms to the mode of that receptor. Similarly, when I take an idea into my mind from another, I make it my own idea – I make it over; for I make it part of my own resources, I unite it with my other ideas, etc., in such wise that I can truly say it is my idea.

Applied to spiritual things, this principle shows that we can enter the Trinity, as our destiny entitles us to do, only by being conformed to the manner of the Trinity, i.e., by being supernaturalized or remade by God. So God gives us grace; and in order that this grace may bring us into

heaven, our whole lives must be transformed by it; which means that we must cease to live on the merely natural level. And since death changes nothing, we must cease to live on the natural level *now*.

3. Christ's Relation to the Folly of the Cross

We have said that it is necessary to practice the Folly of the Cross independently of sin. Where does sin come in then? And where do Christ and His cross come into the picture?

The Folly of the Cross is made necessary by the fact that God destined us to the supernatural life; and when God planned this destiny for us, He did so independently of sin. If a group of people are going to a picnic, it is not likely that they will be animated by a desire to have an accident. So God, in planning His world, did not plan on the accident of sin: that occurred apart from His plans – it came from man.

But people on a picnic, if they suffer a slight accident, will, if possible, repair the damage and go on their way. So God, foreseeing sin, but not willing it, determined from all eternity to repair the damage in order that men might still possess supernatural happiness. Yet, aside from sin, God had planned to elevate man to the divine level. For this privilege, man would have to renounce a merely human happiness. This is why the practice of the Folly of the Cross is necessary apart from sin.

An offense is measured by the dignity of the one offended. And since God is infinite, sin is an infinite offense. Thus, no mere man could repair the damage of sin; for this the Father sent His only begotten Son on earth to live and die for us. By such means God circumvented sin.

Yet Jesus did something more for us than overcome sin. Even if there were no sin in us, we could not, by our natural powers, merit supernatural life. For supernatural life exceeds our greatest natural powers by an infinite distance. Before our actions could be meritorious on the supernatural plane, it was necessary for God Himself to elevate them to that plane. Now God chose to do this through His Son Jesus Christ; so that our actions can be supernatural only if they are bathed in the blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, if it had not been for the merits of Jesus, even if we lived the Folly of the Cross in the fullest measure, denying ourselves in all things, we could never merit supernatural happiness. Now we see the place of Jesus in the Folly of the Cross: He did two things for us: (a) He overcame the infinite malice of our sins; (b) He raised us to the supernatural level by His merits.

Thus, a father may plan for his son to go to school. Then, finding himself unable to pay the expenses of college, he calls on the boy's

brother to help. In this way did God the Father plan our supernatural destiny, but Christ, our Brother, the Son of God, paid the bill.

It is obvious, now, that there is a triple foundation and reason for mortification in the Christian life:

a. The Folly of the Cross, by which we must give up the natural to obtain the supernatural.

b. Sin, both original and actual, requires mortification. We must mortify ourselves to get rid of the effects of original sin and to prevent the actual sins that might proceed from these effects. We must also offer satisfaction for actual sins, whether our own or those of others.

c. The example of Jesus, who lived a poor and mortified life.

4. Examples of the Folly of the Cross

a. The angels. When the angels were created, they were raised to the supernatural order *substantially, but not morally*; i.e., they were raised to the supernatural and left free. Before admitting them to supernatural beatitude, God subjected them to a test; and the test was the Folly of the Cross. He demanded that *against their own angelic judgment* they should do something *that they did not wish to do*; in other words, He required that, trusting wholly in Him, they should renounce their own angelic intellects and wills, which were their highest perfections.

We do not know the nature of the test that the angels went through. Many of the Fathers thought they were given a vision of the Incarnation and were asked by God to bend their knees in adoration of Jesus. Some did so, and were confirmed in goodness; others, led by Lucifer, refused – for it was *folly* for angelic natures to adore one with a nature lower than their own: they would not repudiate their own nature as God wished them to do; and God plunged them into hell.

b. Adam and Eve. Our first parents were likewise raised to the supernatural substantially, but not morally, i.e., placed there and left free. Before being admitted to the Beatific Vision, they had likewise to pass a test; and their test was also to submit to the Folly of the Cross. They were told not to eat of the fruit of a certain tree of the Garden of Paradise – a foolish command to our human reason, like telling a visitor to sit on any chair except the third one from the right. In this way God required that they should give up their human judgment and their human will; giving up mere sense pleasures is nothing compared to giving up one's highest powers. And these latter were precisely the things that our first parents were asked to sacrifice. They failed, and we know the consequences.

c. The supreme example of the Folly of the Cross is Jesus. Although

being Himself divine, and possessing a spotless humanity, He submitted to the Folly of the Cross in order to satisfy for our sins vicariously and also to put us back on the supernatural plane. Jesus alone would not have had to submit to this law; but He did so voluntarily. His own human will revolted against the sufferings of Calvary, but He submitted it to the Divine will: “Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done.”

Fortunately for us, the prayer of the *human* Christ was not heard. The renunciation of Jesus which we are to imitate was not a renunciation of sin: there was no sin in Him. It was a renunciation of His pure humanity, and all its sinless tendencies.

As Jesus submitted to the law of the Folly of the Cross, so also did Mary, His Immaculate Mother, the Mother of Sorrows.

d. Mankind in general. God has raised us also to the supernatural plane and left us free. Before entering into happiness, we are likewise tested. This test lasts a lifetime and it consists, as with the angels and our first parents, in practicing the Folly of the Cross. We are called upon to renounce the human – sensible tastes and desires, human judgment and will – and practice the Folly of the Cross. “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.”

Chapter VIII The Folly of the Cross

Application

Besides the examples given in the last chapter, the following examples and applications of the Folly of the Cross are given in the Scriptures:

1. The old and the new man: we are to strip ourselves of the old man and his deeds and put on the new man. This is a favorite expression of St. Paul: “To put off, according to former conversation, the old man, who is corrupted according to the desire of error; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind: And put on the new man, who, according to God, is created in holiness and justice of truth.” (Eph. 4, 22; see also Col. 3, 9)

2. St. Paul also speaks many times of the “death” of Christians to themselves: “Know ye not that all we, who are baptized in Christ, are

baptized in His death. For we are buried together with Him by baptism into death; that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we may serve sin no longer. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall live also together with Christ.” (Rom. 6, 4-9) By “sin” St. Paul refers here not to personal sins, but to unredeemed human nature as it existed before Christ’s coming, i.e., infected with original sin and prone to actual sin. St. Paul even goes so far as to speak of the Old Law and the law of nature as the “law of sin,” i.e., a law that was powerless to prevent sin and which when once known made those who broke it responsible for sin before God.

3. “I am the True Vine; and My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me, that beareth not fruit, he will take away; and every one that beareth fruit he will purge [prune] it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” (John 15, 1)

Jesus here points to an ordinary example of the Folly of the Cross as it exists in the natural order, in order to teach us how to apply it in the supernatural order. A farmer, besides cutting off dead branches from his fruit trees, also cuts down, or prunes, the living branches. He does this, not to destroy the living branches, but rather to make them more fruitful. Life arises from death and fruitfulness comes of destruction: a beautiful example of the law of the cross.

If the farmer does not prune his trees, they will bear less fruit and this will be of inferior quality. And yet his action, to one unfamiliar with this law of nature, would seem foolishness; to such a one he would have to say: “I am cutting this tree down in order to make it grow higher.” Or, “I am cutting the blossoms and fruit from this tree in order to make it bear more blossoms and fruit.” And he is actually doing this.

Jesus applies this principle to the spiritual order. He is the Vine, we the branches: we get our life, our supernatural life, from Him. If we do not bear fruit, we will be cut away by the husbandman, who in this case is God the Father. But if we bear fruit, what then? God will prune us that we may bring forth more fruit. How prune us? By mortifications, afflictions, etc.

4. “Amen, Amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” (John 12, 24)

In the seed, Jesus finds another example of the Folly of the Cross. Suppose the farmer has a grain of wheat. He can do one of two things with it: he can, on the one hand, eat it himself or put it away and keep it; on the other hand, he can plant it. If he eats it, he gets the satisfaction; if he plants it, he gets a crop. Yet it seems foolish to plant it; for what he does in this case is to place the seed in the ground and allow it to decay, putting water around it to help the process. He also deprives himself of an immediate enjoyment.

Human reason apart from experience would never learn this, i.e., that life arises out of death. Men learned it simply by trial and error. If you explained to a man wholly unfamiliar with agriculture – say a man from Mars – that the farmer is throwing away his seed in order to get more seed, he might have some difficulty understanding. For reason tells us to keep what we have and enjoy it – But the world of nature teaches the farmer that, in order to get rich, it is better for him to put the seed into the ground and let it die.

Moreover, the farmer sows as much seed as possible; for his own immediate use he keeps no more than is necessary. He knows that “He who sows sparingly shall reap sparingly.” (Cor. 9, 6)

Finally, although the farmer would be much more comfortable at home, listening to the radio and munching the cakes that his wife could be baking from his grains of wheat, he is nevertheless very cheerfully throwing the seeds into the ground to die. He realizes that present discomfort means future riches.

Applying this, we see what is to be done with our natural life. If we take and enjoy the things of this world, we are like the farmer who eats his seeds. Better for us to forego the momentary enjoyment and plant a crop for eternity. Thus, all the pleasures of earth are “seeds” that may be either enjoyed or planted. If we take them now, we “have our reward” already, but if we “sow” them, we shall “reap a hundred fold in this world and in the next.” Sow creatures, and we reap the Creator, sow the pleasures of this world and we reap the happiness of heaven.

Moreover, as with the farmer, “He that soweth sparingly, shall also reap sparingly.” To get a good crop in heaven, we must sow as much as possible of this world’s goods.

Finally, we should be cheerful about it, remembering that the sacrifice of the moment will grow into a great harvest for us. So that we should not be at all sad about giving up the natural affections and desires that we must give up to reap supernatural goods.

This is the Folly of the Cross: to act contrary to the dictates of mere

human wisdom, which bids us “eat, drink and be merry,” and to sow all the enjoyments of this life in order to enjoy life eternal.

What to Sow

1. Sow Money: By sowing money, we reap the treasures of heaven; and by this means we make unto ourselves “friends of the mammon of iniquity” that we may afterwards be received “into everlasting dwellings.” This is the reason why people should give money to the Church, to charity, etc. And we should sow as much of our money as possible – to get a good crop. When we support the Church only by eating cake at a bazaar, we are like the impatient farmer who eats his grain of wheat; we should give up immediate returns.

Not that we have to wait for eternity for returns on our sowing: God promises us a hundred fold even on earth. Accordingly, when people are in need of money or this world’s goods, the way to get them is to sow them. Suppose an institution needs money for charitable purposes and desires God’s help in its efforts; it should “sow” some money; i.e., it should give help to the poor. This is foolishness according to natural reason; but it is according to the wisdom of God and the law of the supernatural life, as Jesus Himself has taught.

Sowing money means, also, sowing the creature – pleasures that money can buy. For, as we have already noted, it is not money itself that God hates, but man’s affection for money; and man loves money because of the power and pleasure that it can obtain for him. Therefore, we must sow the pleasures of sense, or as many as it is possible to sow. Instead of enjoying the “samples,” we should sow them.

2. Sow Time: To reap time in this world, and eternity in the next, we should sow time; i.e., we should “waste” it on the things of God. No matter how busy we are, we should attend Holy Mass, be faithful in spiritual reading, meditation. When we are busy, it seems foolish, by the standards of common sense, to stop to pray; but this is what is to be done, according to the Folly of the Cross. And what we must learn to do is thus to see things in terms of the supernatural.

In addition to these exercises, it is a wonderful practice, and necessary for a really fruitful Christian life, to spend one hour before the Blessed Sacrament each day. This hour should be given in addition to other usual exercises, and during it we should occupy ourselves, not in saying Office, or the Rosary, or in any other devotions, but in simply giving our attention to God. We may find it difficult to do this, and in this case our principle is: “The harder we find it to make, the more we need to make it.”

In order that our work may be spiritually fruitful, our activity should proceed from the love of God. If we depend on natural powers or talents, our work *cannot* be fruitful. In apostolic work we are like wires; and we will remain “dead” wires unless we are in constant contact with the source of supernatural energy. The kind of life that the run of Christians should live, and especially those who are engaged in any sort of religious or apostolic work, is the kind that Christ lived, a life of *both* activity and prayer. The Fathers and theologians call this life the “mixed” life, and St. Thomas taught that it is more perfect than either the active or the contemplative life.

By itself the active life is not perfect at all; for activity that does not proceed from love and is not energized supernaturally only exhausts us and cannot produce spiritual fruit. The kind of activity that should be engaged in by those in the active life is the kind that proceeds from love and prayer, which superabounds and runs over into activity. If our activity *subtracts* from our spiritual energies, it is imperfect, of little effect, and will sooner or later run out. Our activity should proceed from prayer, *not by way of subtraction*, but by way of addition; i.e., there should be a spiritual increase in it for us. This is the kind of activity that we find in the lives of St. Paul and St. Francis Xavier and St. Vincent de Paul. No other kind is of much value. In other words, the value of all activity is in proportion to the amount of love that animates it.

In order to be able to sow time, we must have a Christian mentality; that is, we must realize that our human efforts, no matter how much natural excellence they possess, are supernaturally powerless; that to be supernaturally valuable they must be penetrated throughout with charity; that, therefore, in whatever is to be done, we must rely chiefly on God, being well satisfied if He will deign to use us as instruments; this in place of reliance on our own powers, with the addition of a few prayers (if we have time) in the unlikely case that our efforts prove insufficient!

3. Sow Judgment: The heart of the pagan, his last and strongest citadel, is his natural judgment and will. He must give up his will to charity, his judgment to faith if he is to be supernaturalized. There is no conflict between natural and supernatural truth *in the abstract*. But in the concrete there is a contradiction between faith and the practical judgments of men. Men naturally employ their reason in the service of creatures; in this their judgments are under the influence of emotion; between such judgments and faith there is contradiction.

We must learn to give up our natural judgment. We wish to reap the divine wisdom; the way to do it is to sow the natural judgment. To this end, we must bear with contradictions, with foolishness about us. We

must not seek to impose our judgment on others. In such cases we should simply “die” like the seed.

4. Sow Will: The natural will, the last stronghold of the pagan, is loath to give over its love of creatures, of pleasure, of self. Yet this self-love must be destroyed. We can sow our will:

a. In obedience to superiors, though their commands seem to us to be *senseless* and are in any case contrary to our own will.

b. In bearing contradictions, being crossed by others, etc.

c. When our rights are infringed upon, we can sow these rights. It would not be a sin, even an imperfection, to assert one’s rights; such as assertion would be ethically and naturally good. But we thereby lose in the supernatural world, where we gain more by sowing natural desires.

d. In accepting our present duty at each moment, regardless of feelings, we practice a constant immolation of the will.

In general, we must want very much to do the things that we don’t want to do. “*Agere contra*” – act contrary to our natural inclinations.

And, like the farmer who sows, we should whistle as we work.

“Now this I say: He who soweth sparingly, shall also reap sparingly; and he who soweth in blessings, shall also reap of blessings. Everyone as he hath determined in his heart, not with sadness or of necessity: For God loveth a cheerful giver.” (II Cor. 9, 6-7)

Chapter IX Summary and Objections

In the spiritual life, as we have outlined it, there are four main principles to be kept in mind. We have examined each of these principles, which are: The Supernatural; the Samples; the Supreme Dominion of God; the Folly of the Cross.

Certain objections are brought against the doctrines of the Supernatural Life and the Folly of the Cross:

1. “This kind of life would be Puritanical.” The word “Puritanical” as here used refers to the tendency of the Puritans to look upon earthly pleasures as evil and wicked... Now we do not look upon pleasures as sinful, nor do we say that living on the natural plane is in itself bad.

Therefore, the charge of Puritanism is simply irrelevant. What we say is that the natural order is not supernatural, and that Christians are supposed to live, not as mere humanists, but on the supernatural plane. Nature, we have repeatedly insisted, is good – indeed, a sample of God; but it is precisely for this reason that we must give up the world, for we thereby show our preference for God.

2. “This doctrine is Jansenistic.” According to the Catholic Encyclopedia (art., *Jansenius*), the basic principle of Jansenism is a denial of the supernatural order; all its other errors proceed from this. Certainly the doctrine outlined in this work does not deny the supernatural! So that it can have no essential connection with Jansenism.

The reason that this charge is levelled against the Folly of the Cross, is, perhaps, that the Jansenists were known for their austere lives, and it is alleged that the Folly of the Cross leads to Jansenistic austerity.

Now the error of the Jansenists, in this point, was not in their austere living, but in the fact that they tended to look upon austerity as the essence of Christian perfection and a mark of predestination. Contrary to this, it has been constantly insisted in this work, that Christian perfection consists essentially in charity, while mortification is only a means of increasing charity.

There is nothing wrong with austerity in itself. The Saints were austere; and the Man Who said: “Deny thyself and take up thy cross daily” was certainly teaching an austere doctrine; and He lived an austere life. The Jansenists erred in their conception of the place of mortification in the Christian life.

Therefore, this charge must also be dismissed as irrelevant. Moreover, we have not insisted on any special austerities. The Christian life is an interior life of love; we should simplify our lives so as to get rid of all acts that are not motivated by love, and we should see to it that all the actions we do perform proceed from love; this is possible to a child and places on no one an intolerable burden of external austerities. We should, as Christians, live simple lives; not “the high standard of living” so much sought after today, but the standard of living at Nazareth, should be the way of life adopted by Christians.

c. “This doctrine is negativistic.” Our emphasis is constantly on the love of God, which is certainly not negative, but the central, positive element in Christianity. We mortify ourselves only to prepare for this love. Therefore, the whole point and purpose of Christian mortification is to get rid of the natural attachments that hinder the growth of the supernatural love of God.

The love of God and union with Him which Christians seek does indeed involve mortification, and so far it is negative. But this negative phase of Christianity is altogether inseparable from the positive phase; anyone who thinks that he can love God without giving up the love of creatures is deluding himself.

“The Christian life and, *a fortiori*, the perfect life consists in two *fundamental and correlative dispositions*, each of which calls for the other, and is unable to exist without the other, both of which should inspire all other acts:

(1) The renunciation of self; and

(2) The firm determination to follow or imitate Christ. To become more and more detached from everything within or around us which is contrary to the good, and to follow Jesus as closely as possible. Such is the rule of perfection.”¹

d. “Such a life would be cheerless; and the saints were a happy lot.” It is true that saints are happy; but their happiness is supernatural.

The distinction between natural and supernatural enters here. There is a natural and a supernatural joy, a natural and a supernatural peace. Joy proceeds from love; it is the blossom or fruit of love, and arises from the love and possession of a good. If the good possessed is natural, then the joy that springs from it is natural; if the good is supernatural, then the joy is supernatural.

This is why Christian joy is a fruit of the Holy Ghost: it proceeds from supernatural charity, the love of God, and is introduced into our hearts by the Holy Ghost with grace; moreover, it increases as the activity of the Holy Ghost more and more predominates in the soul, which is at the expense of merely natural affections.

So also is Christian peace a fruit of the Holy Ghost, and likewise proceeds from charity. “Rejoice *in the Lord*.” (Phil. 4, 4)

For this reason the *Imitation* says concerning joy: “Although thou hadst all the good things that ever were created, yet couldst thou not be happy and blessed; all they blessedness and felicity lieth in God who created all things: not such *felicity as seemeth good to the foolish lovers of the world*, but such as Christ’s good and faithful servants wait for, and as the spiritual and pure in heart sometimes taste, whose conversation is in heaven.” And again: “Let it be my comfort to give up cheerfully all human

1. Rev. P. Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality*, London, Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1922, Vol. I, chap. 1. (Italics ours.)

comfort.” (*Imitation*, III, 16)

Of peace the author of the *Imitation* writes: “But let us lay the ax to the very root of our life, that, *being cleansed from affections, we may possess our souls in peace.* (I, 11) Again: “... all our peace in this sad life lieth in humble suffering rather than in not feeling adversities.” (II, 3)

Some of the saints had humor, some were gay – all had human qualities, of course. But the Church does not canonize worldlings, nor humorists, nor comedians; nor does she canonize men on account of their human qualities. She canonizes them on account of their sanctity, i.e., on account of the divinity that has transformed their lives. And in this only should they be imitated. The saints have imperfections; but this does not prove that we obtain perfection by accumulating their imperfections. If we should imitate all the imperfections of the saints, or in saintly people, we should probably go to hell. When we find imperfections in the saints, we must not use this as an argument that we should continue to live natural lives. Imperfections are unfortunate even in saints; without them the saints would be even holier.

3. Living in the Trinity

Just before His Passion, Jesus prayed: “That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us.” (John 17, 21) Thus did Jesus pray that we should realize our destiny; that we should enter into the Trinity and join the intimacy of the Three Divine Persons. This destiny begins now, since death changes nothing; so that we should at once enter into the activity of the Trinity.

Moreover, the Trinity is at hand: we are temples of the Holy Ghost and the Godhead dwells within us. “Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (I Cor. 3, 16) “Or know you not that your members are temples of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God?” (*Ibid.*, 6, 19)

How may we share in the activity of the Holy Ghost? By means of the four main principles of the spiritual life. By practicing these principles we reproduce in ourselves, and share within ourselves, the activity of the Three Divine Persons.

We enter into the Trinity by means of the humanity of Christ; for Christ, as the prayer at Mass tells us, became a sharer of our humanity, that we might in turn become sharers of His Divinity. And by living the supernatural life we enter into Christ’s humanity to divinize our own humanity. The doctrine of the supernatural life is thus the doorway to life in the Trinity. The first principle we have studied, i.e., our supernatural

destiny, corresponds to the Sacred Humanity.

The Son of God is called in the Scriptures the Glory of the Father; that is, He glorifies the Father. If then we in our turn practice the Glory of God, seeking to glorify Him in whatever we do, we share in the activity of God the Son and reproduce that activity in our own lives.

Thirdly, by means of the Samples and the Supreme Dominion, we penetrate to the Father. For by the Samples we enter into the perfections of God, and by the Supreme Dominion we enter into His supreme governing activity.

Finally, by means of the Folly of the Cross we share in the activity of the Holy Ghost. For the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Love, proceeding from the Father and the Son by love – the personified bond of love that exists between the Father and His eternal Word. By means of the Folly of the Cross, preferring Creator over creature and renouncing the latter for the former, we show our love for God; and in so doing we share in the life and activity of the Third Person of the Trinity. Thus:

The Supernatural corresponds to the Humanity of Jesus
The Glory of God corresponds to God the Son.
The Samples correspond to God the Father.
The Supreme Dominion..... corresponds to God the Father.
The Folly of the Cross..... corresponds to God the Holy Ghost.

“Yet one thing I do: forgetting what is behind me and reaching out to what is ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the high vocation of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3, 13)

PART THREE: THE SAMPLES

Chapter I The Love of God

Too often the love of God is considered in a merely abstract manner: that is, the beauty of supernatural charity is extolled, but no concrete methods are studied for obtaining it. To study in this manner is to be like a doctor who describes to his patients the merits of life without offering regimen or remedy to preserve it. We study here how to *obtain* love of God.

Now we love God when we know Him, esteem Him, and unite ourselves to Him. The power to know, esteem, and love is given to us by God to employ on Himself. We are free, of course, to use this power on the samples; and most men do so use it, making creatures the end of their study and love, becoming absorbed even in the most trivial pursuits. A man can concentrate all the energies of his soul in collecting coins, or in training fleas; but such pursuits do not constitute the purpose for which these energies were created by God.

1. We Come to Love God by Knowing Him

Knowledge is the first step in the love of God. For the will is a blind faculty and can love only that which the intellect presents to it as good. Accordingly, the mind must be filled with God, emptied of creatures.

Yet we cannot know God directly in this world. We know Him only through creatures, which, as we have seen, are samples of the divine perfections. Thus, if we do not become attached to creatures in themselves, as ends, but use them to ascend to the knowledge of God, and love them only insofar as they reflect the perfections of God, and not for any selfish reasons, we can in this way contemplate the divine perfections in them.

If this is true of samples in general, it is particularly true of man; in him may we see the perfections and the very image of God. So that it is especially through love of neighbor that we are enabled to express our love of God in this world. Hence, love of God and love of neighbor are

linked together in the two great commandments, and they moreover constitute but one virtue, not two distinct virtues, which manifests itself in two ways, i.e., in interior acts of love towards God and in external works of mercy towards men.

Both the interior and the exterior love are required of the Christian. But the way to show and prove our love for God is by loving our neighbor, since only in him do we see God. This is so true that Jesus, having reduced the essentials of Christianity to the love of God and the love of neighbor goes even further and reduces them *in practice* to the love of neighbor; “All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do you also to them. *For this is the law and the prophets.*” (Matt. 7, 12) Therefore, in practice, perfection consists in loving our neighbor; thus it is that when Jesus said, “Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,” He means above all, as the context shows, that we should love our neighbor, both good and bad, agreeable and disagreeable, just as God does. (See also Rom. 13, 8)

Since love of God and of neighbor thus spring from one virtue, the measure of anyone’s love for God is his love for his neighbor. Specifically, one’s love for God is equal to the love that one has for the man whom one loves least (or hates most). For God gives us the gift of charity in proportion as we give others charity: “For with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.” (Luke 6, 38)

Moreover, our love of neighbor must go to the extreme. Jesus says, “Love your neighbor *as yourself.*” Now, as St. Thomas remarks, a man loves himself without limit; and he must so love his neighbor. That is why Jesus can say: “A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another, *as I have loved you*, that you also love one another.” (John 13, 35) Jesus loved us unto death, and in this way must we love our neighbor; hence, in another place Jesus adds to the precept of charity, “Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” We ought to prefer the spiritual welfare of our neighbor to every other good except our own spiritual welfare. There are, of course, degrees of love for neighbor corresponding to the degrees of love for God; and we should here also strive for the highest degree.

It is not merely because man is an image of God that we must so love our neighbor. In addition to this we and our neighbors are members of the Mystical Body of Jesus, living with His divine life; and he that hurts the member hurts Jesus. If anyone steps on my finger, I say, “You are hurting *me*” (and not merely my finger). And so, when we injure our neighbor, we injure, not merely our neighbor, but Jesus as well; when we love our neighbor we love Jesus also. Therefore, the measure of the one

love is the measure of the other.

2. We Come to Love God By Esteeming Him

Esteem is but the beginning of love and differs from love's fruition as sunrise differs from the full noonday sun. Esteem is like the first stirrings of steel filings under the influence of a lodestone, whereas love, which is union, is like the union of the filings with the lodestone.

Now this esteem for God is shown by preference, that, is, by preferring God to creatures. Such preference is a necessary predisposition and the beginning of divine love, although this love, in its essence, consists in union with God. Hence, St. Francis de Sales observes, the Latin word for love of God is *dilectio*, that is, election, preference, choice.

Accordingly, while we are to know and love God through creatures, by seeing and loving the divine perfections in them, we must not love them for themselves or for selfish reasons; but we must rather be detached from them and show our love of God over them by abandoning creature pleasures. Cardinal Newman, speaking to an elegant and well-to-do audience, thus tells them how to increase in the love of God:

“These are some of the proofs which are continually brought home to us, if we attend to ourselves, of our want of love for God; and they will readily suggest others to us. If I must, before concluding, remark upon the mode of overcoming the evil, I must say plainly this, that, fanciful though it may appear at first sight to say so, *the comforts of life* are the main cause of it; and much as we may lament and struggle against it, *till we learn to dispense with them in good measure, we shall not overcome it*. Till we, in a certain sense, detach ourselves from our bodies, our minds will not be in a state to receive divine impressions, and to exert heavenly aspirations. A smooth and easy life, an uninterrupted enjoyment of the goods of Providence, full meals, soft raiment, well-furnished homes, the pleasures of sense, the feeling of security, the consciousness of wealth – these, and the like, if we are not careful, choke up all the avenues of the soul, through which the light and breath of heaven might come to us. A hard life is, alas! no certain method of becoming spiritually minded, but is one of the means by which Almighty God makes us so. We must, at least, at seasons, defraud ourselves of nature, if we would not be defrauded of grace. If we attempt to force our minds into a loving and devotional temper without this preparation, it is too plain what will follow – the grossness and coarseness, the affectation, the effeminacy, the unreality, the presumption, the hollowness, (suffer me, my brethren, while I say plainly, but seriously, what I mean), in a word, what Scriptures calls the hypocrisy which we see around us; that state of mind in which

the reason, seeing what we should be, and the conscience enjoining it, and the heart being unequal to it, some or other pretense is set up, by way of compromise, that man may say, “Peace, Peace, when there is no peace.”¹

3. We Come to Love God by Being United to Him

“He that abideth in love abideth in God, and God in him.” (John 4, 16) According to St. Thomas, love is union accompanied by a certain communication between lover and beloved. Love of God is therefore consummated by union with Him and our communication with Him is through prayer, by which we unite our minds and hearts to God. Thus, having turned away from creatures, we are now prepared to love God. The turning away from creatures is but the beginning of love; as James must first turn away from Mary in order to marry Martha, and then only can he live in union with Martha. It is the same in our relations with God: having turned aside from the sample, we are now prepared to live a life of union with God. This is why the Scriptures insist on continual prayer. Such union is the essential purpose of our lives. Only in the next world will it reach its climax; but since death changes nothing, it must be begun here, else it cannot be continued hereafter.

“Be ye filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord.” (Eph. 5, 18-19)

4. The Characteristics of the Love of God

a. It is **EXCLUSIVE**; that is, we are to love God **ONLY**. Thus, the precept says that we must love God with our **WHOLE** heart, etc. And St. Thomas teaches that, although we are not obliged to achieve this totality of divine life immediately (since this would be impossible), we must at least tend towards it as our end.

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

Some object to the notion that God is jealous; yet He Himself says

1. “Love, the One Thing Needful,” *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. V, 23.

that He is: “For I am the Lord thy God, a jealous God . . .” (Deut. 5, 9) It is true that God does not suffer through our failure to love Him, as a jealous man would suffer at the infidelity of his beloved; but God is jealous in the sense that He demands all our love.

We do not mean, of course, that only the highest degree of love can entitle us to salvation, nor that small imperfections are incompatible with a considerable degree of charity. But all worldliness is incompatible with the fullness of love. Moreover, even small attachments, if they are deliberate and habitual (as will be shown in the next chapter) prevent progress in divine love. Therefore, granted that we are not perfect now, and there are in our soul certain imperfections and attachments, we ought to be gradually removing them as they become known to us under the light of grace, so that we can grow in love.

b. It is ABSOLUTE; that is, we must not lessen it or condition it in any way. God did not say: “I want fifty per cent of your love, but will be reasonable and allow you to give the other fifty per cent to creatures.” He did not say that we may give even one per cent of our love to creatures: He exacts all of it.

How, then, can I love my neighbor, if this is so? I must love my neighbor *from a supernatural motive*, that is, because he reflects God. This is why we define charity as “a virtue by which we love God on account of His goodness and our neighbor *on account* of God. Therefore, we must love our neighbor *without withdrawing ANY love from God*. If we love our neighbor because he favors us or for other natural reasons, we fail to love God as He demands; and every such failure is at least an imperfection.

The same principle holds true also of the love for father and mother, brother and sister, wife and husband: these must be supernaturalized.

Accordingly, when spiritual writers warn us against inordinate affections for creatures, we must understand by this all *natural* affections for creatures; for an affection is inordinate (i.e., contrary to the order intended by God) when it is not centered in God and motivated by His love. Thus Father Baker writes: “A Christian’s duty, and much more the duty of a soul that aspires to perfection, is to love God alone, and other things only in relation to Him as instruments for increasing His love in our souls. All affection for creatures as such is more or less imperfect, *not merely when the affection is excessive, but because its object is something apart from God.*”¹

c. It is URGENT; that is, we should begin loving God at once, as soon as possible, and not put it off until later in life. By putting it off we insult

God. Suppose that a man would propose marriage to a girl and she would say: “I am young and popular now, and do not want to be tied down; wait until I am old and ugly and then I will marry you.” Such an answer would not be acceptable. Nor will we be pleasing to God if we put off loving Him until we are old and worn out and unwanted: we should love Him NOW while our love is worth having.

Again, it is an insult to God to put off our conversion until death. An example: James is married to Martha, but lives instead with Mary. Martha, who loves James, writes to him and asks whether he loves her, and, if he does, why he does not come home and live with her. James, let us suppose, answers her: “Of course I love you: and some day I will come home to die with you!” It is in this manner we talk to God when we put off our conversion, to the last.

Furthermore, to delay giving our love to God might – and probably would – be fatal. For God leads the soul from grace to grace; and if the soul refuses grace today, it loses, not one grace merely, but a whole series of them, since each grace would lead to another, and perhaps many others. Hence a soul that deliberately and habitually refuses grace can scarcely expect the grace of conversion at the hour of death.

Supposing, further, that the grace of conversion would be given by God at the hour of death: the soul that has spent its energies in loving the world will scarcely be able to change its love to God (i.e., to cooperate with this grace). God is merciful and willing to forgive the soul; but is the latter capable of making an act of supernatural charity? If James, instead of living with his wife Martha, lives for twenty or thirty years with Mary, he cannot change his love back to Martha simply because the priest demands that he should. And a man who would live a long life in the love of the world would experience the same psychological impossibility of changing his love suddenly to God. Martha may love James and be willing to receive him; but this does not make it possible for James to change his love to Martha. God loves the sinner also, but the sinner may not be able to change to the love of God.

Asked by the priest, the sinner on his death-bed would certainly profess a desire to go to heaven and to avoid hell – he would be a fool to speak otherwise! He has always avoided discomfort; certainly he will not welcome the thought of hell. But does such squirming constitute supernatural charity? As much can be expected from a dog that is threatened

1. Rev. Augustine Baker, O.S.B., *Custodia Cordis*, St. Louis, Mo., B. Herder Book Co., 1907, p. 5. (Italics ours.)

by his master, or from a worm that is tortured by a mischievous boy. To be saved, the sinner must make an act of contrition, either perfect or imperfect. In either case, he must renounce creatures and choose God in preference to all of them, either because of God's goodness, or else because of his fear of hell; for both perfect and imperfect contrition demand a preference of God over creatures, and they differ from one another only in their motive.

In the absence of the sacrament of penance, repentance would be even more difficult; for then there is need of perfect contrition if the sinner is to be saved. As we shall see when dealing later explicitly with sin, it is possible to experience a merely natural repentance, which is not sufficient for forgiveness.

5. The Nature of Charity

Charity is a supernatural virtue. This means that it is obtained, not by repeated acts, as is the case with natural virtues, but by infusion; so that it is infused directly into the soul with grace. Every soul, therefore, in the state of grace has charity.

But a virtue expresses itself through corresponding acts; so charity manifests itself in the works of charity. As faith resides in the understanding and produces its acts there, so charity resides in the will, which thus exercises itself in good works under the influence of this supernatural virtue. Moreover, it is through acts of charity and the works inspired by charity that the soul accumulates merit; just as a typist is paid, not because she has the habit of typing (since she may have it and fail to use it), but because she *exercises* this habit in the interests of her employer.

Sometimes it is argued – implicitly if not explicitly – that, since charity is infused, we need not trouble ourselves about acts of charity; for the virtue of charity is itself sufficient for salvation. This is true *in the abstract*; but *in practice*, in the concrete, this principle is very misleading and may well prove fatal to the spiritual welfare of the soul. In practice, we must distinguish as follows:

- a. In the case of infants and all those who have not reached the age of reason, the infused virtue of charity is sufficient for salvation without any acts of charity. Infants are, of course, incapable of any responsible acts.
- b. In the case of adults who are to be baptized, the Council of Trent requires, as a condition for receiving an infusion of grace, at least an incipient act of charity, i.e., imperfect contrition; this involves

an actual preference of God over creatures. The same is required, as we will note, for adults who wish to regain grace and supernatural charity through the sacrament of penance.

c. What about adult Catholics who have not fallen into mortal sin?

Considering their case *in the abstract*, it may be affirmed that the virtue of charity, if they preserve it throughout life, is sufficient for their salvation. But in practice it is impossible to preserve charity throughout life unless this virtue manifests itself in appropriate acts. Once the age of reason has been reached, the individual inevitably begins to perform actions, for life is action. Now these acts will either be natural or supernatural. If they are supernatural, they will increase the life of charity and add to the soul's merits. But if they are natural, either wholly or in part, according as their motive is wholly or partly natural, then they fall under what we have previously said concerning imperfect acts: i.e., imperfect acts predispose to venial sin, and venial sin predisposes to mortal sin; so that the soul, thus spurning supernatural acts, will be delivered by the "law of the members" into the "law of sin." (Rom. 7) For "he who lives according to the flesh shall die." (Rom. 8)

The same truth is brought out by the axiom: Not to progress in the spiritual life is to retrogress. The soul that does not manifest its charity by acts of charity will thus certainly fall into sin and death.

Finally, it is to be noted that, although charity is an infused virtue, its preservation and safety in the soul requires *natural facility* in making acts of charity, in turning aside from the world, and in practicing the natural virtues. Such natural facility is obtained only by repeated acts, as any natural habit is gained. Hence, by infusing charity into our souls, God does not excuse us from spiritual effort; it is by this means, on the contrary, that He summons us to the highest spiritual effort.

The reason why supernatural charity needs the natural virtues is that these are the bulwark against the passions; and when this bulwark is destroyed, or is never set up, then the passions will overwhelm the soul and press it into sin. A town beneath a dam is safe as long as the dam holds, but when the dam is destroyed the town will be lost. So is charity safe in the soul as long as the passions are held in check; and what is needed to hold them in check is the practice of natural virtues, which regulate the passions and even give facility in regulating them in proportion as they are deeply grooved in nature by constant repetition. But the supernatural virtues *give no facility* in performing actions; nor can they by themselves set up any effective protection against the inroads of passion, appetite and concupiscence.

Therefore, in practice, there is great need for natural facility in performing the works of charity, need for actual charity as well as the habitual charity infused by God; so that we cannot expect salvation if we keep inoperative the grace and charity given to us. The parable of the talents shows that, if we do not put God's gifts to work, we shall be punished.

For these reasons, as the Scriptures repeatedly point out, the practical test of love and the test which Christ demands is the *doing* of His will: "He that hath my commandments, and *keepeth* them: he it is that loveth Me... If any man love Me, *he will keep my word*, and My Father will love him." (John 14, 21-23) And St. James: "Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only deceiving your own selves." (1, 22)

Chapter II Contempt of the World

Doctrine

I. Our attitude towards the world is summarized in the phrase – *contempt of the world* – which is traditional in Christian spiritual writings.

By "contempt" we do not mean that there needs to be an active hostility towards the things of the world, so that one would go about destroying them. What is meant is that the love of God involves a withdrawal of love from the world, that we should therefore be *indifferent* to the things of the world, that we should therefore be *detached* from them, and, finally, that we should despise them in comparison with the infinite excellence and loveliness of God.

Contempt of the world *does not imply* that the things of the world are evil. On the contrary, they are good; but they are only a natural good, whereas man is destined to a supernatural good. It is precisely because they are good that they must be abandoned. Otherwise there would be no merit in giving them up for God; but by giving them up we show our preference for God over what is good and desirable. Moreover, it is only because creatures are good that they can be samples of the divine perfections; but because they are *only* samples, the Christian gives them up in order to possess these perfections themselves.

To be a Christian, then, it is not necessary to deprecate the pleasures of the world, and to deny that they are pleasures. We make a mistake if we think that saints have only “thin veils of flesh” and are consequently not attracted by the things of the world. Great saints like Augustine and Francis of Assisi were worldlings before their conversion; but they gave up all to follow our Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, after the saints once taste of the sweetness of God, the pleasures of the earth lose their attraction for them. Yet, no less a one than St. Paul says, “I chastise my body and bring it into subjection, *lest perhaps when I have preached to others I myself should become a castaway.*” (I Cor. 9, 27)

It is important to grasp the principle that the love of the world and the love of God are in *inverse proportion* to each other: as the one decreases, the other increases. St. Thomas writes: “Man is placed between the things of this world and the spiritual goods in which his eternal happiness consists; so that the more he clings to the one, the more does he recede from the other, and *vice versa.*” (I II, 108, 4) On account of the “law of the members,” the love of the world constantly increases unless checked. Meanwhile, the love of God is progressively decreasing, until there comes a time when one turns completely to creatures, thus committing mortal sin. For, as we have seen, a mortal sin is nothing but a complete turning away from God and a turning towards creatures.

Conversely, as we strip ourselves of the love of earthly things, so do we proportionately grow in the love of God. There can be a gradual disappearance of natural attachments from the soul; also a gradual growth in grace and charity. But when grace and charity leave the soul, they leave all at once; just as life leaves the body *all at once*. So that there is not a gradual loss of grace or charity with a *gradual* increase of worldliness. Worldliness as it increases, rather, undermines charity and disposes the soul for sin, just as ill health slowly undermines the body.

We have said that the Christian may love creatures *if he loves them on account of God*, and not for selfish reasons. We can go further: only a Christian is capable of really loving creatures, i.e., *as they should be loved*. The pagan, when he defends his indulgence by saying that creatures are good, that God made them, and that we are, therefore, supposed to love them, is asserting a truth; but he is also attributing to himself noble sentiments that he in fact does not possess. For he loves creatures not because they are good – that is, not because they are samples of the divine perfections – but because they are capable of serving his own *selfish* desires. His love of creatures is rooted in egotism, selfishness, pride, concupiscence; but it is not rooted in the goodness of the creatures. An example of a man who loved creatures because they are good is St. Francis of Assisi, who

celebrated in poetry and song the goodness of creatures, in which he saw only a reflection of the divine perfections. No one has ever loved the things of the world more than St. Francis; and no man has ever lived a more mortified life than St. Francis – he did not wish to enjoy creatures *for themselves or use them for his own selfish enjoyment*.

To sum up: We may and should love the creatures of this world if we love them simply as they mirror the divine perfections, but not if we use them merely to serve our selfish desire for pleasure: as we have seen, all creatures are to be employed *solely* for the glory of God. Man's inclination to love creatures in themselves, or as they serve his pleasure, while not in itself a sin, is the result of original sin. It is “natural” only in the sense that there is an affinity between man and other creatures, and that, because of concupiscence, he inclines to seek his joy in them rather than in God. Yet the use of creatures for mere pleasure, even when this pleasure is not sinful, is, nevertheless, a disorder, since all creatures are to be used for the glory of God. This is why we must mortify ourselves in regard to voluntary pleasure, but need not be troubled by involuntary pleasure. *It is disorder, not the pleasure*, that is evil. We know that disorder is present when we use creatures only for pleasure, for this motive indicates that we are using them for ourselves rather than for the glory of God. When pleasure is not voluntary, it is not being taken as an end; therefore, its presence does not indicate disorder, for it is not a motive.

2. The parable of Dives and Lazarus shows how love for the world may bring about the soul's spiritual ruin.

Dives “was clothed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day.” (Luke 16, 19) For this he was afterwards cast into hell. There was no point in his life that he committed a mortal sin; yet his whole life was a turning away from God and a turning towards creatures – which is the definition of sin. He had a chance to love God, but did not. We have seen that love of God must be manifested in practice by love of neighbor. Now Dives had the opportunity of loving God in the beggar Lazarus; but he did not do so: he used his substance for pleasure. Although there were no great crimes in his life – crimes against the natural law – he was an utterly irreligious man.

For this reason Jesus promises damnation to all who fail in their duty toward their neighbor: “Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave Me *not* to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me not to drink. I was a stranger and you took Me not in: naked, and you covered Me not: sick and in prison, and you did not visit Me... Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you it to Me.” (Matt. 25,

41-45)

3. The Scriptures teach us that we must despise the world.
 - a. St. Paul teaches absolute detachment and indifference in these words: “The time is short: it remained, that they also who have wives, be as *if they had none*; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as if they rejoiced not; and they that buy *as though they possessed not*; and they that use this world, *as if they used it not*; for the fashion of this world passeth away.” (I Cor. 7, 29-31)
 - b. “Love not the world nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the *charity of the Father is not in him*. For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, *which is not of the Father, but of the world*.” (I John 2, 15-16)
 - c. St. James speaks of those who love the world as “adulterers” because they withdraw their love from God to whom it belongs and give it to the world: “Adulterers, know you not that the friendship of the world is the enemy of God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God.” (James 4, 4)
 - d. What should be the relation of the Christian to the world? “But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Gal. 6, 14)
 - e. Once more St. Paul cries out: “But the things that were gain to me, the same I have counted LOSS for Christ. Furthermore, I count all things to be but LOSS, for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but as DUNG that I may gain Christ.” (Phil. 3, 7)

Over the whole world – not the green earth created by God, but the world created by men – over the grand occasions and spectacles, over the rich displays, the wealth, the power, the pomp of the world – over all these things, and whatever else the world delights in, the Apostle of the Gentile writes contemptuously these two words: LOSS and DUNG.

4. Hatred of the world must go deeper than a mere external renunciation of pleasures a renunciation that may conceal a secret desire to enjoy them.

This hatred must penetrate to the heart and purify the very desires; so that we are emptied of every desire for earthly things and can fill ourselves only with the desire to please God. St. John of the Cross speaks

much of this purification of the desires and shows in detail what spiritual injury is done to those who retain them. And the reason is easy to discern: if love is the final, climactic act of the will, desire is its initial act, from which love follows. First, we desire a good, then seek it, then love it when we possess it. Therefore, if we wish to love God and empty our wills of the love of the world, we must first of all purify the desires. It would not be possible to purify a village water supply by white-washing the village pump; similarly, to purify the will, we must reach down into the sources of its action, which are the first movements of desire. St. John of the Cross writes:

“The reason for which it is necessary for the soul to pass through this dark night of mortification of the desires and denials of pleasures in all things, is because *all the affections which it has for creatures are pure darkness in the eyes of God*, and, when the soul is clothed in these affections, it has no capacity for being enlightened and possessed by the pure and simple light of God; for light cannot agree with darkness; since, as St. John says (1, 5): ‘The darkness could not receive the light.’

“The reason is that two contraries cannot coexist in one person; and that darkness, which is affection for creatures, and light, which is God, are contrary to each other.

“...It must be known that the affection and attachment that the soul has for creatures renders the soul like to these creatures; and the greater is the affection, the closer is the equality and likeness between them; for love creates a likeness between that which loves and that which is loved... And thus, he that loves a creature becomes as low as is that creature, and, in some ways, lower; for *love* not only makes *the* lover equal *to* the object of his love, but even subjects him to it.”¹

5. Hatred of the world does not mean that we may not take recreation.

Recreation may be taken, and should be taken so far as is necessary, but it also must be sanctified. As St. Francis de Sales points out, we must relax our faculties and our body in order that after such relaxation we may the better serve God. In other words, we should take recreation from a supernatural motive.

The saint gives other principles to guide us in this matter.² One of these is that recreation must not become an occupation. It should not be engaged in so long or so intensely that it exhausts us, when our pretense

1. *Op. cit.*, I, 4.

2. *Introduction to a Devout Life*, N. Y., Pustet, Part III, 31-34.

for taking it is that it rests us. It should help us to do our work and in no way interfere with that work.

We may, the saint says, engage in games without fault, provided our *affections* do not linger on these games or our hearts become *attached* to them.

Obviously, then, the principle is here once more the motive: we may use recreations from a motive of utility, but not from a motive of affection. As soon as affection for creatures enters, even in recreation, imperfection likewise enters. We may use interesting or pleasant pastimes, but we should not become too absorbed in them; and our behavior, even at play, must be such as befits “temples of the Holy Ghost.”

We may know that our affections are involved in games, sports, etc., when we think of them during time other than recreation period, when we become too absorbed in winning or losing, when there is inordinate jubilation or sorrow in winning or losing, when they are prolonged beyond measure or interfere with our duties.

In almost all religious orders there is a tradition of sanctified recreation; which shows that it is possible to carry out the above prescriptions.

How do these principles apply to the MOVIES? In the same way in which they apply to other recreations: if one attends the movies from a motive of utility, the act is perfectly compatible with the supernatural life; but if one attends them from a motive of love then one is not living in accordance with the demands of the supernatural life. *We get our motives from what we love*; so that a motive of love for the movies means that we love the world. Therefore, if anyone uses the movies for recreation, let him be careful that his affections do not rest upon them.

This discussion excludes movies that are morally objectionable: a supernatural motive cannot make these right. Catholics should also avoid movies that are only partly objectionable, according to the axiom, “What is evil in part is evil (*bonum, ex integra causa, malum, ex quocumque defecta*).

There is, likewise, another class of movies, which, although not in themselves sinful, even in part, are nevertheless incompatible with supernatural standards. The reason for this incompatibility is that the movies in question are worldly. That is to say, their attractions are based on a love of the world and they can be enjoyed only by those who do love the world. These are the movies that attempt to make a paradise of this earth, representing as an ideal a life filled with creature-comforts and the

consolations of this earth. In short, they presuppose a love of the world, they appeal frankly to this love, and they increase it. Such movies cannot be considered proper entertainment for those who are sworn to despise the world. And, therefore, it is scarcely possible to go to them from a supernatural motive; one cannot act like a pagan for the love of God.

6. Hatred of the world, finally, means that we must be indifferent to the opinion others hold of us.

We must not regulate our conduct according to others' opinions. In other words, we must destroy within ourselves what is called *human respect*. "To give ourselves up to the spiritual life," says Father Faber, "it to put ourselves out of harmony with the world around us." As a consequence, the world will despise us. Jesus warned us of this, and we must be ready to face it: "If the world hate you, know you that it hath hated Me before you. If you had been of the world the world would love its own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore, the world hateth you. *Remember My word that I said to you: The servant is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted Me, they will persecute you.*" (John 15, 18-20)

"The world, half unconsciously, believes in its own infallibility. Hence, it is first of all surprised and then irritated with our venturing to act on different principles from itself. Such a line of action denies the world's supremacy, and contradicts its narrow code of prudence and discretion. Our conduct is, therefore, a reflection on the world, as if God had outlawed it, which He has. Its fashions, its sects, its pursuits, its struggles, its tyranny, and its conceits are to us no better than a self-important, grandiloquent puerility."¹

Those who seek to live a supernatural life must therefore not expect kind treatment at the hands of the world. For the world will persecute them and go to the length of calling them mad; just as Christ was also called mad. (Mark 3, 21) The lot of Christians who take Christ seriously is the same now as it was in the time of Christ: The disciple is not above his master. Yet, "Fear not, little flock, for it hath pleased your Father to give you a kingdom." (Luke 12, 32)

Jesus says: "Woe to you when men shall bless you: for according to these things did your fathers to the false prophets." (Luke 6, 26) And, again, "Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake." (Matt. 5, 11)

1. Faber, *Growth in Holiness*, Baltimore and New York, John Murphy, chap. X.

Therefore, we must not be influenced in our conduct by the opinions of the worldly: for “the sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the spirit of God.” (I Cor. 2, 14) Human respect, Father Maturin observes, is synonymous with moral cowardice.

What difference does it make what others think? “But now to think of the thing itself [fame] in its own proper nature,” says Sargent in his book *Thomas More*, “what is it but a *blast of another man’s mouth*, as soon passed as spoken?”

“Now to something of this kind, more or less [criticism, etc.], we committed ourselves when we took up the spiritual life in earnest. We knew what we were about. From that hour we parted company with the world, never more to do aught but fly from it as a plague, or face it as a foe. Human respect, therefore, must henceforth be for us either an impossibility, or an inconsistency, or a sin.”¹

Acceptance by this world and its subjects is a danger sign for the Christian. For the devil is the prince of this world; and Jesus is Prince of the kingdom in which the Christian is a citizen. There is an unceasing warfare between the two kingdoms.

“Worldlings say: ‘God has created the goods of this earth for our use and pleasure.’ Such is not the language of the saints. The Venerable Vincent Carafa of the Society of Jesus, used to say, that God has given us the goods of the earth, not only that we may enjoy them, but also that we may have the means of thanking Him, and showing Him our love by the voluntary renunciation of His gifts, and by the oblation of them to His glory. To abandon, for God’s sake, all worldly enjoyments, has always been the practice of holy souls.”²

1. *Ibid.*

2. St. Alphonsus de Liguori, *True Spouse of Christ*, Redemptorist Fathers, Brooklyn, N. Y., 1927, Chap. VIII, No. 3.

Chapter III Contempt of the World

Application

To analyze more carefully the way in which we are to use creatures, it is necessary to classify them. Creatures are samples, and it is possible to distinguish four different kinds: Necessary Samples; Captivating Samples; Indifferent Samples, Forbidden Samples. We consider these now singly, the first three kinds in this chapter, while a separate chapter is devoted to the last kind.

1. Necessary Samples

These samples are the creatures that are needed to sustain life, or to promote the efficiency of our work. We cannot “sow” them because they are wholly indispensable to us, i.e., food, clothing, rest.

What principle should guide our use of necessary samples? The same principle that guides the farmer in sowing! He knows that the more he sows, the more he will reap. Still, he cannot sow all the wheat; he must keep enough out to sustain his own life, and that of his family. So he tells his family to use what they need, not stinting them. At the same time he will permit no waste, knowing that the wheat that is wasted deprives him of possible wealth. So should we use these things that are necessary to us – not being niggardly, but using what promotes health and the efficiency of our work. Yet we should guard against taking more samples than we need and using them wastefully: for in this event we lose the crop that could be gained by sowing them.

How can we know which samples are necessary and which ones should be sowed? There is no calculus to determine this, and the mind can find no answer. But the *heart* can. There is no need to be overscrupulous; but if we really love God, we will certainly not use any more of the samples than is really necessary; for repeated use of a thing without necessity is a sure sign of an attachment. Just so, the farmer cannot figure out readily how much wheat he needs to support his family, but his love of money will guide him surely in seeing to it that there is no waste.

We must remember, too, that even though we must use the necessary samples, we give up the supernatural crop that might be produced by them if they were to be “sown.” In the same way the farmer foregoes a crop when he eats his wheat – although he can do nothing else. Therefore, when we use the samples, we cannot supernaturalize such

actions *directly*, as would be the case if we were to sow them; but we can supernaturalize them *indirectly*, by means of the supernatural motive.

The necessary caution here is that we do not deceive ourselves in saying that a thing is necessary or useful to us. Our powers of self-deceit are very great; we must guard against it, so that selfishness does not intervene to spoil our supernatural motives.

2. Captivating Samples

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

So it is with God: Life is short, and God cannot take us through the whole universe asking us if we prefer Him to this, to that, to something else, etc. But He places before us – or allows the devil to place before us – these samples that are our size, i.e., those for which we have a natural taste; and He then asks us if we prefer Him to these. Captivating samples, then, are the ones for which we have a particular natural attraction; through these, which differ in the case of every individual, God will chiefly try and purify our love.

Another way of saying this is that every one has a ruling fault and it differs from person to person. It is necessary, to search out this ruling fault and then destroy it; otherwise it will in the long run destroy us. It may be detected because it is the root of most imperfections and venial sins; its satisfaction is usually the cause of pleasure that rises within us spontaneously; and crossing it or denying it, is very often the cause of depression, discouragement, unhappiness.

The first place to go in trying to determine this ruling fault is to the seven capital sins, which are the fountain-heads of evil. But other faults, even petty ones like vanity, can come to dominate a person and cause serious sins.

The ruling passion, if left unmortified, grows stronger each day, fattening on every indulgence. In other words, God will allow us to have steadily greater opportunities to choose our captivating sample in preference to Him; so that the choice of God above all things becomes increasingly difficult to the unmortified. Eventually, God will allow each one to be supremely tempted by the sample that is most attractive to him, which, if the soul is not sufficiently inspired by the love of God, will bring it into mortal sin.

How is the soul to act in these circumstances? The same as a student

should act if he wishes to pass his final examination; i.e., he should study every day. If the soul is faithful in mortifying its ruling fault in little things, it will be master of the situation when God gives it great opportunities to prove its love. So it was because of a whole lifetime of fidelity to God's will that Abraham was able to give up his beloved son Isaac to God, being willing to the point of taking Isaac's life with his own hand. "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater; and he that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust also in that which is greater." (Luke 16, 10)

It is especially by being able to overcome the attachment to our captivating sample that we are filled with the love of God. The greatest aversion of St. Francis of Assisi before his conversion was the lepers; and it was at length when he had overcome this aversion and was able to see Jesus even in lepers, that his conversion was sealed and his soul was filled with grace and peace.

3. Indifferent Samples

These are the creatures whose use is neither bad nor good, but morally indifferent. We have seen, however, in speaking of the pagan mentality, that they are indifferent only in the abstract, whereas in the concrete they are always either good or bad, according as one's intention is good or bad. If the intention is supernatural, then these indifferent actions are supernaturalized, e.g., walking.

Nevertheless, although not in themselves evil, there is a spiritual hazard attached to the use of these indifferent samples; i.e., by using them repeatedly one almost inevitably becomes attached to them, at least the attractive ones, thereby causing charity to suffer. If there is an attachment to these indifferent samples, they are incompatible with supernatural living: the use of creatures from a motive of pleasure shows that we love creatures. We note the following indifferent samples in particular:

Dancing. In the abstract, dancing is neither good nor bad. In the concrete, whether it is bad or good, depends (as is likewise the case with all the other indifferent samples) on (1) the end of the action, which is fixed by the motive, and (2) on the circumstances attending the action.

Before dancing can be legitimate recreation for a Christian all sinful circumstances must be eliminated from it, i.e., drinking, sinful familiarities, vanity, etc. Then, supposing all such circumstances to be removed, whether or not dancing fits in with a Christian life depends on the motive. Dancing can be supernaturalized only if it is done from a motive of social utility with the ultimate purpose of glorifying God. If dancing is done from a motive of affection, i.e., because one likes to dance, then it is

natural and pagan.

Therefore, even when there is not the slightest taint of sin connected with dances, they are still to be condemned if the parties concerned allow their affections to become attached to dancing. For our love belongs to God alone. Thus, dancing is generally dangerous to the soul, not because it is sinful, but because it diverts the affections of the soul to worldly pleasures and vanity.

The Styles. The distinction between natural and supernatural intervenes also in discussing styles. Usually styles are condemned only when they are sinful; and nowadays people are very “broad-minded” about sin. But styles are also to be condemned when they are worldly. Women should not dress to please the world, but to please God. When their affections are taken up with clothes and they think only of pleasing the world, their behavior ill-befits Christian women. Of all these things do the heathens think. No matter how extreme styles become, Catholic women and girls follow them readily, stopping only at sin and arguing that “modern conditions” have changed our viewpoint on these things. Unfortunately, modern conditions *have* changed our viewpoint; but they have not changed the old Adam in us, nor have they changed the unchanging principles of morality and supernatural living.

Because men today live by a false principle – to avoid mortal sin only – many Catholics behave just like the heathens. The right principle is to avoid worldliness in dress. Christians should keep themselves decently dressed, *because they are temples of the Holy Ghost*. They should follow the styles from a distance, as though they were following an enemy, which they are.

Many modern styles are an abomination; the pagan worship of the body is pushed to such an extreme that many styles which pass as ordinary can only with difficulty, and with the help of a callous conscience, be freed from the taint of sin. It should be remembered that interior sins against purity are wholly as malicious as external sins. Jesus says that if a man looks upon a woman to lust after her, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart. And St. John Chrysostom notes, apropos of this text, that the same holds for women; that if they dress to attract the lust of men they are just as blameworthy as the men, in fact more so.

Drinking is likewise indifferent – in the abstract. But who would venture to assert, in the concrete, that a man is brought closer to God by drinking? As a matter of fact, drinking, of course, strengthens the taste for creatures and weakens the taste for God. Of course, since it is not

sinful, drinking can likewise be supernaturalized, if it is done for the love of God. But if it is done for the love of drinking, it is inconsistent with the effort to live a supernatural life.

Moreover, as with the other indifferent samples, the danger here is that of attachment to creatures; and it is scarcely possible to make a habit of drinking without becoming attached to it.¹

4. Danger of Attachment to Indifferent Samples

What importance is there in these attachments to indifferent samples? Are they to be dismissed as mere trifles? St. John of the Cross teaches that, on the contrary there is no *possibility of progress* in the spiritual life as long as the soul is held by *one attachment* for creatures. He says: “But some habits of voluntary imperfections, which are never completely conquered, prevent not only the attainment of divine union, *but also progress in perfection.*”

“These habitual imperfections are, for example, a common custom of much speaking, or some attachment which we never wish entirely to conquer – such as that to a person, a garment, a book, a cell, a particular kind of food, tittle-tattle fancies for tasting, knowing or hearing certain things, and such like. Any one of these imperfections, if the soul has become attached and habituated to it, is of as great harm to its growth and progress in virtue as though it were to fall daily into many other imperfections and casual venial sins which proceed not from a common indulgence in any common and harmful attachment, and will not hinder it so much as when it has attachment to anything. For while it has this *there is no possibility* that it will make *progress in perfection, even though the imperfection be extremely small.* For it is the same thing if a bird be held by a slender cord or a stout one; since, even if it be slender the bird will be as well held as though it were stout, for so long as it breaks it not it flies not away. It is true that the slender one is the easier to break; still, easy though it be, the bird will not fly away if it be not broken. And thus the soul that has attachment to *anything, however much virtue it possesses,* will not attain to the liberty of divine union. For the desire and the attachment of the soul have that power which the sucking fish is said to have when it clings to a ship; for, though but a very small fish, if it

1. The same observations hold true for smoking as for the other examples given. Smoking is an indifferent action. Nevertheless, if indulged in from merely sensual or “natural” motives it is an imperfection. An habitual attachment to smoking hinders the soul spiritually in the manner in which any other attachment hinders it.

succeeds in clinging to the ship, it makes it impossible for it to reach the port or to sail onward. It is sad to see certain souls in this plight; like rich vessels. they are laden with wealth and good works and spiritual exercises, and with the virtues and the favors that God grants them; and yet, because they have not the courage to break with some whim or attachment or affection (which are all the same) *they never make progress or reach the port of perfection*, though they would need to do no more than make one good flight and thus to snap that cord of desire right off, or rid themselves of that sucking-fish of desire which clings to them.”¹

There is nothing strange about this doctrine. Jesus teaches it when He says without any limitation or qualification, “Deny thyself and take up thy cross daily.” Or again when He says: “So likewise every one of you that doth not renounce *all that he possesseth* cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14, 33) And in the same chapter: “If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”

Chapter IV Forbidden Samples

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

The first question that arises in connection with these samples is this: since they are good in themselves, being, like all other samples, reflections of the divine perfections, why has God forbidden them? And, conversely, why is it that a just man must forego the use of these samples? Sometimes the “Thou shalt nots” of the Ten Commandments are represented as the arbitrary decrees of a tyrant; even good Catholics may be tempted to look upon them as arbitrary and capricious – a scarcely necessary constraint upon freedom: as though a mother would say to her child, “You may take any bottle of jam you want except the third, sixth and eleventh on the fourth shelf from the bottom.” Has God any more reason than this in forbidding us certain creatures that are undeniably good?

First, why God forbids certain creatures: God does not really forbid

1. *Op. cit.*, Bk. I, chap. XI. (Italics ours.)

the use of any creature. What He forbids is that man should use a creature for a purpose other than that intended by Him. Thus, creatures are intended for God's glory; and when man uses them from any other motive, he misuses them; and when he excludes this glory altogether by mortal sin, he makes himself the enemy of God.

But how does mortal sin exclude God's glory? In this wise: Besides the general purpose of manifesting the divine glory, every creature has a special purpose. *For the welfare of the creature* itself, God desires that this purpose be realized, and thus He forbids man to change it. Thus marriage is created to propagate the race and, in the supernatural order, to extend the Mystical Body of Our Lord. In order to realize these ends, God attaches a certain form to marriage and sets up family life. And He consequently forbids men to use marriage or sex or family life in any way that would interfere with His divine plans. Hence, sins against purity do not imply that there is anything evil about marriage or sex; these sins are an abuse of marriage and sex, because they constitute an interference with the divine plan, motivated by nothing higher than man's self-will and his desire for pleasure.

And thus also the answer to the second question appears, i.e., why the just man may not use the forbidden samples. The reason is that God's will, which ordains the use of creatures, is an all-holy will; and the just man must conform his will to the divine will; for sanctity consists essentially in the conformity of the human will to the divine will. Sanctity is love of God, and love of God is the union of our will with His will. Of course, any adjustments to be made must be made on *our* side: we cannot expect God to conform His will to ours, which is natural, changeable and imperfect. But we must adapt our will to His, which is unchangeable, all-wise, all-holy.

It is love, therefore, that must prompt us to avoid the forbidden samples; if we really love God, we will always desire what He desires; we will always use creatures in the way in which He wants them to be used, since we will always wish to unite our wills to His. Thus, if we really love God, we will not only avoid mortal sin, but we will not even take a single step in the wrong direction by committing deliberate venial sins and imperfections.

What we wish to show, then, is that the rule, "Avoid mortal sin, but enjoy the things of the world," is not a rule for Christians to follow. We have already shown that even if one succeeded in following it, one would still be acting only as a good pagan. What we wish to show here is that such conduct is without love and is also impracticable.

1. This Rule Is Without Love

An example will make this point clear. Suppose a man would say to his mother, “I have a new hammer, which I desire to amuse myself with. I am going to strike you, but I don’t want to kill you. You tell me when I have hit hard enough and often enough – so that you will not die!”

No man could talk like this if he really loved his mother: if he loved her, he would not even dream of striking her. Yet, while pretending to love God, I say as much to God when I say that I will avoid mortal sin, but will not bother about venial sins or imperfections. This is tantamount to saying: “I have the divine life in me by grace. Now I do not wish to destroy this life by mortal sin; but I wish to enjoy creatures, even though this means venial sin and imperfection.” Such a one wishes only to strike and injure God, in his desire to amuse himself with creatures, but he does not wish to destroy the divine life within him. What touching tenderness he shows for God and for the sublime gift of God, the gift of supernatural life!

“Still (it will be objected by one who follows the rule to avoid mortal sin only) – still, all that is necessary for me to enter heaven is to be in the state of grace; so long as I am in the state of grace, I have *all the essentials* of the supernatural life.”

Suppose (to answer this objection) that the man in the example given, having struck his mother repeatedly, should be asked, “Have you killed your mother? Is she dead?” And suppose that he answers: “Not at all; as you see, she is still breathing – she has all the essentials of life in her.”

Similarly, a soul may have all the essentials of charity and grace, but it may be in a bruised and bleeding condition, and liable any moment to die. This is in fact the condition of many souls: shot through with venial sins, imperfections, and love of the world, they cannot but die by sin at the slightest temptation. This is why so many souls find it hard or impossible to avoid mortal sin: they are half-dead already.

To preserve life in the physical order, one needs to have other elements besides those absolutely essential. As long as breath continues and the heart is beating, the essentials are present: but they will not be present long if one does not have food or air, or if one is losing blood continually. And in the supernatural order the soul also needs more than the bare essentials of life if it is to *continue living*. Besides infused grace and charity, it needs actual charity, which nourishes the soul; it needs mortification which alone prevents the disease of worldliness and sin from growing in the soul; it needs prayer, which to the soul is as

necessary as air is to the body, being the atmosphere in which the supernaturalized soul must breathe if it is to survive. Without these non-essential, but nevertheless, integral and necessary elements, the soul may have “all the essentials” of supernatural life – but not for long.

Another objection, closely related to the last, is: “Despite all that you say, so long as I avoid mortal sin, I cannot go to hell.”

This is strictly true – in the abstract; the difficulty is in avoiding mortal sin in the concrete. If a man says that he does not intend to die, he must take precautions against death, or his boast will be idle. If a man says, “I am determined never to catch a cold again,” and then walks into a draft, his resolution will be short-lived. So, if I am determined to avoid sin, I must take the necessary precautions – otherwise I will surely fall into sin. This means that I must get rid of the roots of sin, which, as we have seen, demands charity, mortification and prayer.

A final objection is this: “Sanctifying grace and charity are infused into the soul in baptism; all that a man has to do, therefore, is to keep them intact, that is, to avoid sin; and he will certainly obtain heaven.” Yes, indeed, in the abstract, that is all he has to do. But it would be a considerable feat! Suppose a group of children are playing in the mud, in a yard in which there are many puddles; and then suppose that another little child, all dressed in white, is sent out by its mother to play with the others, with this advice: “Now enjoy yourself with the other children – but don’t get dirty!” That is absurd; but not any more so than telling a soul to go out and enjoy the world, but not to become soiled by sin. For the world is evil and the devil is its prince; and he who engages in the pastimes of the world will infallibly fall into sin.

In order to keep the state of grace and charity, the soul must, by positive efforts, perform supernatural, meritorious works. Otherwise its acts will be natural, more or less, and will then fall under the dominion of the ruthless twin laws of the members and of sin. Not to progress in the spiritual life is to go backwards. In other words, in order to retain grace in the soul, it is necessary to live a supernatural life,

Running through all these objections and arguments are two common fallacies:

a. People commonly tend to confuse the abstract order and the concrete order. In each objection, a statement is advanced that is *abstractly* true, but which, to be realized in actual reality, demands certain conditions. Here we are concerned with actions, in order to direct them by Christian standards; it is insufficient to consider mere abstract problems as though we were philosophers, neglecting the conditions

necessary for their application. We must know also the conditions that are necessary to realize Christian ideals in the concrete; and then we must set about introducing these conditions into our lives.

b. Incorrect inferences are drawn from what is an undoubted truth; and the error, because of its association with truth, escapes notice. The undoubted truth is this: charity and grace leave the soul, not piecemeal, but all at once; and their loss is caused by mortal sin. The incorrect inference that is drawn from this truth is: since mortal sin alone kills charity, therefore, I need *only* avoid mortal sin, and may be negligent about lesser evils.

What is forgotten here is that mortal sin arises from love of the world (“a turning away from God and a turning towards creatures”); so that, while charity remains intact in the soul, the love of the world is constantly increasing; and in the soul that watches only mortal sin, this increase will remain undetected until worldliness has become strong enough to dethrone charity altogether by grave sin. So in the physical order. Life leaves the body all at once; but if one is bleeding or is diseased, and nothing is done to stop the disease or the flow of blood, then his health is being undermined; and the fact that he is still living does not change the no less obvious fact that he will soon die. So a soul may be in the state of grace, but if the love of the world is growing in that soul, it will certainly die soon; for “if you live according to the flesh you shall die.” (Rom. 8, 13)

These considerations give us an illuminating principle in the spiritual life: I need not be alarmed at imperfections *provided that I am advancing spiritually and increasing in charity*; just as a diseased or bleeding man does not need to worry provided the blood-flow is being stopped or the disease is being cured. On the contrary, imperfections and venial sin and worldliness should cause me great concern if I am not advancing spiritually. For they are a sign that I am retrogressing and will certainly fall into sin; just as the sick man, if the disease is not checked, or if he continues to lose blood, will most certainly die.

These truths can be deduced from the two axioms of Christian spirituality: imperfections predispose to venial sins, venial sins to mortal sins; and, not to progress in the spiritual life is to retrogress.¹

1. See St. Francis de Sales, “Decay and Ruin of Charity,” *Love of God*, Bk. IV. (See also St. Thomas II II, 24, 10, c.)

2. This Rule – To Avoid Mortal Sin Only – Is Impracticable.

In practice, if we seek only to avoid mortal sin, we will not know where to draw the line. While by means of definition it is easy enough to show the difference between imperfection and venial sin, and again between venial sin and mortal sin, *in practice* the dividing lines between them are vague and shadowy and difficult to ascertain. For example: How many chocolates can I eat before I commit an imperfection? How many before I commit venial sin? How long must I ignore a person before I commit a sin against charity? and precisely when is the sin venial, when mortal? What ill-luck or injury must I wish another in order to commit a venial sin – or a mortal sin – against charity or justice? When does criticism become a sin against charity, when against justice? When does sensuality become impurity? Finally, although we can define the difference between a mental reservation and a lie in the abstract, how can we tell them apart in the concrete?

Every one of these cases, simple enough to solve in abstract terms, is difficult to answer, usually impossible to answer, in actual reality. As a consequence, if we wish merely to avoid mortal sin, we cannot know where we should stop. Or if we draw the line much nearer home, and try to overcome venial sin, we still cannot know where to stop in practice.

The conditions necessary for a mortal sin, while helpful in abstract discussions, are also difficult, or impossible, to apply in practice.

1. Grievous matter: In the concrete, it is impossible to know when there is grievous matter. How much can I steal and yet go to Holy Communion the following morning? It is hard to say: theologians spend themselves in endless discussions trying to solve this question, and they end by saying that it depends on circumstances. How much can a man drink and still go to Holy Communion in the morning? At what point exactly do familiarities between members of the opposite sex become sinful? When gravely sinful? In looking at a modern picture magazine, (when would one commit an imperfection through sensuality; when a venial sin of sensuality; when a sin of impurity? When does a man who delays in paying a debt commit a grave sin against his creditors?

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

2. Sufficient reflection. How can we decide *in practice* whether there

is sufficient reflection? The mind is a spiritual power, and we cannot measure its activity by any precision instrument. There is sufficient reflection as soon as we know we are going in the wrong direction, i.e., away from God. Precisely when this is, we can only guess. So, that, if we depend on this rule to solve our problems, we will always be doubtful and worried, never sure whether we are in the state of sin or not, or whether our confessions are good.

3. Full consent of the will. This is present as soon as, knowing that we are headed in the wrong direction, we acquiesce and continue in that direction. But once more, in practice it is impossible to determine precisely whether we have done this: There is no available yardstick to measure our consent, to see whether it is “full” or not. Here, too, therefore, we are left in a state of doubt and uncertainty.

Altogether, the rule to avoid sin will increase our difficulties rather than eliminate them.

3. This Rule – To Avoid Sin – Is Not Given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount

Jesus does not discuss how much a man may steal without mortal sin, but He says: “Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth...” We are not to be interested at all in earthly things, even in those things that are necessary: “Be not solicitous, what you shall eat or what you shall put on.” Jesus teaches us that *we should not take a single step in the wrong direction*. “If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. For it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish rather than that thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee; for it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish rather than that thy whole body go into hell.” (Matt. 5, 29-30)

Jesus did not forbid mere external sins against purity, nor did He discuss when familiarities become sinful; He taught complete purity of heart: “But I say to you, that whosoever shall look upon a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (5, 27)

Jesus did not distinguish between mortal and venial sins of speech, but He said: “Let your speech be yea yea: No, no: and that which is over and above these is of evil.” (5, 37)

Finally, Jesus did not discuss when it is legitimate to fight another or when sinful; He said: “You have heard that it hath been said: An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, but I say to you not to resist evil; but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other. And if a man

will contend with thee in judgment, and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him. And whosoever will force thee one mile, go with him another two.” (5, 38-42)

4. What Rule, Then, Should One Follow in Order to Live a Supernatural Life?

There are two rules (which in the end amount to the same thing):
a. Instead of concentrating on sin *we should work to rid ourselves of natural motives*, which are imperfections. *Natural motives are the root of sin; and sin, therefore, can only be overcome if this root is destroyed.* If we cut down weeds with a lawn mower, they grow right back up again; for the roots are still in the ground. Similarly, if we confess a mortal sin but allow the roots of sin to remain in our soul, the sin will reappear even though our contrition was sincere.

The *logical* order in improving ourselves would require us to get rid of mortal sins first, then venial sins, then imperfections or natural motives. But in *actual reality* the logical order is upset by the law of the flesh; so that we have to put down the flesh by despising earthly things before we can hope to conquer sin. “Christ, therefore, having suffered in the flesh, be you also armed with the same thought: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.” (I Peter 4, 1)

b. Our aim should be to achieve perfection. As we have seen, we are all obliged to pursue it in the first place. But what we wish to emphasize here is that this is the only way in which we can be victorious over sin. Many say: “Get rid of sin first; then think about perfection.” But the fact is that, in order to avoid sin, we must seek perfection. The reason, once more, is the law of the flesh, which, unless we break its power by getting rid of love for worldly things, will draw us into sin.

If a man travels by air, he will not worry about getting his feet muddy; similarly, if a man lives on the supernatural plane, so long as he stays there, he need never fear sin. But a man who lives on the natural level is like a skater on thin ice: he is in danger, and will sooner or later break through into sin. “Whosoever is born of God committeth no sin; for His seed abideth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” (I John 3, 9)

The Council of Trent declared that in this world we can never have absolute certainty as to whether or not we are justified. If we aim only to eliminate sin (mortal) from our lives, we will have little or no security as to our spiritual condition; for as we have seen, this rule gives rise to doubts and worries as to whether we are in the state of grace or the state of sin. But we can be morally certain of justification if we aim at

perfection and endeavor earnestly to live a supernatural life.

Chapter V

Sin

The Christian should not only love God, but he should also have a deep and vigorous hatred for sin. Hatred for sin, indeed, is the obverse of the love of God, and they are as inseparable as the convex from the concave, light from illumination.

The reason for this we have already seen: love is a union of wills, love of God is a union of our will with the divine will; and if we value this union, we cannot but despise whatever is contrary to God's will. Moreover, the greater our love for God, the greater will be our hatred for sin; so that if our love of God is strong, we will hate even the smallest sins. A slovenly housekeeper will not notice dirt that offends even unobservant visitors, whereas a careful housekeeper is annoyed by every speck of dirt. Similarly, a worldling is not offended by sin, but a true lover of God is offended by the smallest sin. This answers a question often asked, namely, "Why cannot I hate sin more than I do?" The answer is that we are attached to the things of the world and have insufficient charity. For our hatred of sin follows from our love of God and hatred of the world.

1. Now the valuation that we put on divine love, and upon the grace that introduces us into this love, depends on the price that we have paid for them. If I pay one dollar for a coat, I am not concerned at losing it; if I pay ten dollars for it, I am concerned and seek to find it; but if I pay one hundred dollars, then I go to great trouble to find it. Thus my valuation of the coat depends on what I give up to obtain it. And I measure this loss in money, with which I could have purchased other goods and pleasures.

So also we value spiritual things – grace and the love of God in proportion to what we give up for them; if we give up little, then we value them little; if we give up much, then we value them greatly. And as we appraise earthly goods by means of money, so do we know and love God through creatures, the samples; so that we must "pay for" God's love by means of these samples. That is to say, we will value God in proportion as we have given up earthly things to procure His love. If we have given up nothing for God, then we will value His love little, indeed, and will not be

much concerned about sin. But if we have given up much for the love of God, then we will rate that love very high and will have a true detestation of the sin that injures or destroys it.

An Indian child, who has found a gold nugget, will give it to a prospector for a few beads or knick-knacks. The gold has cost the child nothing, and he has, therefore, no appreciation of it; but the prospector has left home and comfort and security to obtain gold – and he knows its value. Similarly, a rich man's son spends money easily because it has cost him nothing; but put him to work at twenty dollars a week and then, having learned the value of money, in labor and fatigue, he will not be so free with it.

So it is with us in the supernatural order. The reason why so many Christians hold grace and God lightly is because, like the Indian child, they have received a priceless treasure without effort or struggle, and they do not appreciate what they possess nor sufficiently lament its loss. To learn to value God and to hate sin, they must give up the things of the world; and when they have learned to do this in order to keep the love of God, then they will better know how to rate this love and fear its loss.

2. What is true of hatred for sin is true also of repentance. Repentance involves a hatred for sin. If we have sinned, in order to have our sin forgiven we must repent; that is, we must hate sin and, in particular, the very sin that attracted us and caused us to turn away from God.

Therefore, to be repentant we must hate in a special way the very creature that caused us to offend God. But how can we hate this creature when we have never given up the love of creatures? We have always loved creatures, and now we are suddenly called upon to hate the very one that we loved most, the one whose love so possessed us that we fell away from God: is it possible?

This is why worldlings find true repentance so difficult: loving creatures, they cannot now muster any hatred for them. Never having paid anything for the love of God or grace, they cannot greatly feel the loss of these spiritual goods. Thus, if we wish to be capable of repentance for past sin, or if we wish to be ready to repent in case we should ever again fall into sin, then we must give up the creatures of the world in order to gain a true appreciation of God and perceive what is meant by losing Him.

Repentance, then, is impossible without the love of God; and the latter is proportionate to our contempt of creatures. Now, if the love of God is not in us before we sin, how can it be in us after we sin? If hatred for things of the world is not in us before sin, how will it be in us after the

things of the world have caused us to sin? It is impossible to imagine that the sin itself would cause us suddenly to change, so that afterwards we would love God and hate sin. No; but we must protect ourselves against sin by paying dearly for the love of God, that is, by destroying in ourselves the love of creatures. As the Indian child gives away the nugget without sorrow, so those who live worldly lives give up the grace of God without sorrow; for in both cases a treasure has been obtained without cost.

3. It is all the more necessary to learn this true hatred and sorrow for sin because there is a sham repentance that might confuse us and make us think that we have true sorrow for sin when in reality we have not.

In other words, there is a merely natural repentance, a natural revulsion against sin and evil; but supernatural repentance is required for the forgiveness of sins. Almost always evil will carry with it a natural reaction, a revulsion, remorse. This is caused by the appetites, which are easily sated; Or by pride, which causes one to regret that he has acted in a manner that was not manly or dignified, etc. However excellent such sentiments may be, they are not sufficient for *supernatural* contrition. The latter proceeds from the love of God and cannot exist unless that love exists. Now love resides in the will; and if there is no love in the will before sin, how can there be any there after sin? If creatures were loved before the sin, can they be suddenly hated after sin? Only by a miracle of grace; for sin itself cannot introduce love of God into the will.

The difference between true and false repentance is illustrated by the repentance of St. Peter and that of Judas. Both sinned – Peter by denying his Lord, Judas, by betraying Him. But Peter loved Christ and when Christ looked upon him after the latter's threefold denial, Peter began to weep; and having loved Jesus sincerely, before, his repentance was now sincere and arose from his love.

As for Judas, no doubt he, too, loved Jesus in the beginning, for he had a true vocation, and that from Jesus Himself. But Judas also loved money, and, as always in the case of love for earthly things, this love grew and grew until finally it was greater than his love for Jesus, and caused him to sell His Master for thirty pieces of silver. Afterwards, Judas also repented; but having no love of God, he despaired of forgiveness and hanged himself. There was no love of God in him before his sin: how could there be any such love in him now? His repentance, though genuine, came from pride, remorse, or some other cause, but not from love.

4. What price does God expect us to pay for His love?

There is a sense in which it is wrong to speak of the price that must be paid for the divine love. We should not haggle over what must be given up for God: this shows a lack of generosity and an attachment for the things of earth. But there is another sense in which it is necessary to ascertain what must be paid; for Christ Himself teaches us (Luke 14, 28-33) that we must reckon the cost of entering into the kingdom of heaven, simply as a matter of foresight and preparedness. And what is this cost? “So likewise every one of you that doth not renounce *all that he possesseth cannot be My disciple.*” This means that we must be prepared to give up all things, or, in other words, that we be interiorly detached from every good.

Likewise, in the parable of the kingdom (Matt. 13), Christ indicates that we are to sell *all that we have* in order to obtain the kingdom of heaven, which is a pearl of great price; a treasure hidden in a field. Elsewhere He puts the love of God above the highest and most intimate earthly ties – above the love of father, mother, sister, brother; and He demands also that we value it more than our own life, so that we should be prepared to give up our lives for it if need be (Luke 14). The same lesson is taught in Luke 9, 59-62.

Chapter VI The Remedies for Sin

We treat here of penance: not, however, of the sacramental action and value of penance, but rather of the disposition necessary before its sacramental action can take effect.

In considering the sacraments, we often give a wrong emphasis to our study by regarding them *in themselves, independently* of the cooperation that is needed to make their reception fruitful. The sacraments give grace of themselves as soon as the various essential elements that compose them are properly combined. The grace given by the sacraments is God’s part in our sanctification. We do not need to be concerned about His part, which will be well taken care of; what we need to be concerned about is *our* part, for the deficiencies that render the sacraments fruitless are in ourselves.

Actually, most people concern themselves about God’s part in the work of sanctification, wondering whether they have sufficient grace to

practise virtue, and excusing themselves from a life of fervor on the pretext that God has not given them sufficient grace. We must get rid of this attitude; we should have confidence that God will take care of His part, that He gives us grace superabundantly; and then we can turn our attention to what really needs attention, i.e., our own preparation. For every sacrament requires proper dispositions for a fruitful reception, despite the fact that the sacraments of themselves give grace. Some require certain acts and interior dispositions on the part of the person receiving the sacrament, even for a valid reception. This is the case with penance; for receiving it validly, three acts are necessary on the part of the penitent, as follows:

1. Confession

The first is Confession. This is generally well understood. We note here only the following points by way of summary:

All mortal sins must be confessed. To withhold deliberately a mortal sin is to make the confession invalid and also to commit a sacrilege.

However, if a mortal sin is forgotten, merely, the confession is good and the penitent's sins are forgiven. He may include the forgotten sin in his next confession.

Venial sins may be confessed, and absolution may be received even if they alone are confessed. In fact, it is well to confess them, in order to include them in one's contrition and obtain the grace to overcome them. It is not necessary, however, to confess venial sins.

Sins from one's past life, mortal or venial, may be confessed. It is a good thing to make a practice of confessing some past sin, for which one is particularly sorry, each time that we go to confession. If one has no other sins, one may confess past sins (which were already confessed, perhaps repeatedly,) and receive absolution.

Imperfections, likewise, may be omitted. They may be confessed, too, if the penitent desires, for the sacramental grace will help him to overcome them. However, if one confesses only imperfections, it is impossible to receive absolution; the priest can give absolution only when some sin has been confessed. Hence it is a good practice to include in one's confession a sin from one's past life. (Read St. Francis de Sales on the subject of how to confess one's sins. His suggestions are very helpful for those seeking perfection.)¹

1. *Introduction to a Devout Life*, Part II, chap. 19.

2. Contrition

According to the Council of Trent, contrition is “sorrow of mind and detestation for sin committed, together with a resolve to sin no more (*animi dolor et detestatio de peccato commisso cum proposito non peccandi de cetero*).”

Contrition, which is likewise necessary for the validity of the sacrament, has the following essential characteristics:

a. It must be interior. That is, there must be an interior detestation and sorrow for sin. This presupposes an interior love of God; for, as we have seen, both perfect and imperfect contrition demand a choice of God above all things, the difference between them being in the motive that prompts the preference.

Hence, *sincerity* is not sufficient for the forgiveness of sins, nor is good faith; what is needed is interior contrition, truly proceeding from the heart.

Theologians teach that it is not necessary to *feel* sorrow or to manifest it in tears. For true sorrow must be in the will, not in the feelings merely. However, the gift of tears is no bad thing; if we can weep over our sins, as we should, it is a guarantee of the quality of our contrition.

b. It must be supernatural. That is, it must be exercised under the influence of grace and must proceed from a motive that is in some way referable to God, i.e., through imperfect or perfect contrition. Therefore, sorrow for sin because of injury to health, loss of social prestige, disgrace, etc., or because of a mere natural feeling of revulsion, is not sufficient, for the reason that it is merely natural.

Contrition is likewise insufficient when it is *formally servile*, that is, when it is motivated by fear of punishment *alone*, so that, were it not for being punished, one would go on sinning. This contrition is likewise natural, since it in no way refers to God: it does not acknowledge His rights, nor the evil of offending Him.

c. It must be sovereign: That is, the penitent must appreciate and detest his sin as greater than every other evil, to the extent that, rather than commit this sin again, he is *inwardly prepared to suffer anything and even to die*.

Accordingly, one may not commit a sin with the idea of having it forgiven later. A confession in such a case would be no good; or, at any rate, to be good, the penitent’s contrition would have to be such as we have described above; i.e., he must hate sin above all other things and even prefer death to it.

Many of the early martyrs could have saved their lives by consenting to sin; and they might have done so feeling that they could go to confession later. Thus, St. Cecilia, St. Agnes, St. Lawrence might have avoided death in this way. But they preferred death to sin, as they knew they must, in order to obtain absolution. For, supposing that they had consented to sin in order to save their lives, they knew that afterwards, in order to receive valid absolution, they would need to have sovereign contrition; that is, they would have to be willing to go to their death rather than commit a sin again. And if they were incapable of such contrition in the first place, under stress of temptation, would they be capable of it afterwards?

When we are truly sorry for sin, there should be an end to sin in our lives. St. Augustine, after a sinful life, went to confession only once. And so with many other saints in the early Church, when confession was not so frequent. For they knew that confession demands an interior reform of one's whole life; and after such a reform is made once, it should not have to be repeated weekly. Confession is a sacrament given for shipwrecked souls; but a soul should not be shipwrecked twice weekly. Going to confession regularly without a genuine effort to reform one's life, but with repeated falls into sin, and perhaps the same sin, is an abomination that defies description. A priest may not give absolution to those who do not reform their lives; Christ warns his ministers not to give pearls to swine or that which is holy to dogs.

The Church nowadays wants her children to go to confession frequently; not because she wants them to sin frequently, or expects it, but because she wants them to receive the sacramental grace that they need in the warfare against sin. A person abuses the sacrament who goes to confession frequently while callously continuing to live a life of sin, or while making but half-hearted efforts to overcome sin.

d. Contrition must be accompanied by a *firm purpose to sin no more*.

Such a resolution is the inevitable corollary and guarantee of a genuine contrition. Therefore, the penitent, to show his sorrow for sin, must make a complete break with sin. He must resolve that henceforth he shall sin no more, and that he shall use all the means necessary to avoid sin. Resolving to avoid sin, he must likewise make this resolution effective by avoiding the occasions of sin. By a firm purpose of amendment is not meant a half-hearted wish; it must be a full and final determination to depart from sin once and for all; together with a willingness to use all the precautions and means that may be necessary.

Of course, even after making such a resolution as this, one may be

betrayed by human weakness into sin; but if this would happen, it would not cast any doubt on the sincerity of the previous resolution. One can even foresee, while forming the purpose of amendment, that one will later be overcome by weakness; but this foresight does not invalidate the confession, provided the resolution is firm.

Nevertheless, *in the intention*, the purpose of amendment must be absolute. We meet here once again the distinction between the *order of intention* and the *order of execution*. In the order of execution, that is, in actual reality, one may fall into mortal sin even after the most sincere contrition. But in the order of intention, the purpose of amendment must be absolute and for eternity; one must be determined *never* to commit sin again. From the fact that one may, in point of fact, fall into sin later, it must not be concluded that the purpose of amendment is framed only for a certain time or under certain conditions. It is formed for eternity and without any mitigations or conditions. Thus:

Firm purpose	Order of execution:	there may be sin later on.
	Order of intention:	for eternity.

e. Contrition must also be *universal*. That is, it must cover all grievous sins without exception.

The reason is that mortal sin is removed from the soul by means of an infusion of grace, and there can be no infusion of grace so long as there is one mortal sin on the soul. A sin, then, that is excluded from one's contrition would prevent any infusion of grace; for no actual sin can be forgiven without sorrow.

3. Satisfaction

Satisfaction is the working out of a sentence, or punishment, in order to get rid of the temporal punishment due to sin; for this punishment remains even after the sin has been forgiven and the eternal punishment remitted. The penance that the priest gives in the confessional is a work of satisfaction, of sacramental satisfaction; i.e., it has a special efficacy because it is an integral part of the sacrament of penance.

The sacramental satisfaction is not necessary for the validity of the sacrament; but unless these and other works of satisfaction are performed, the temporal punishment due to sin will have to, be worked

out in purgatory.

The works of satisfaction are three: alms, fasting and prayer. All three should be used to punish past sin, and also to prevent future offenses. It is a good thing to punish one's self for the faults that one is trying to correct.

Chapter VII Hell

Hell is the punishment for mortal sin. Fear of hell is not the noblest motive for turning to God; but it will suffice when nothing else can move the sinner. Indeed, even in those who are not sinners, the thought of hell is a deterrent from sin: it will prevent them from committing sin at times when an appeal to the unselfish love of God is insufficient.

Especially in the beginning of the spiritual life, the fear of hell, together with the hope of happiness, is the principal motive in turning the soul to God. Only as the soul advances in virtue is it free from selfishness and thus made progressively more capable of unselfish charity. Yet, always, fear of hell is a guard-rail that can prevent us from lapsing into sin. Therefore, we should frequently make it the subject of our meditations, as was done even by great saints.

The punishment of hell is twofold: first, the pain of sense, for Catholic tradition holds that there is a real physical infliction of pain; secondly, the pain of loss, by which the soul is deprived of the vision of God, in which consists eternal beatitude.

1. A profitable way to meditate on hell is by means of the doctrine of samples. For just as every pleasure on earth is a sample of some happiness that awaits us in heaven, so also every ache and pain and suffering is a sample of the sufferings of the damned in hell. Thus, a headache is a sample of hell. Now to draw out the comparison, we should compare suffering here with that in hell in the three ways indicated before: in duration, in quality, and intensity.

So every pain on earth like every pleasure is transient; but in hell suffering is unending. In hell, suffering will be much more subtle and penetrating; for the pain of sense will be spiritual and will reach into the innermost recesses of the soul. Finally, suffering in hell will be infinitely more intense – perpetually unendurable, and everlasting prolongation of a suffering that seems from moment to moment insufferable. To get a

good idea of hell, we can take that suffering in our lives which was greatest, consider it at its maximum intensity, prolong it for eternity, then multiply it by infinity!

Thus, in dealing with the sufferings and mortifications of this life, which are necessary in order to preserve ourselves from sin, we ought to say to ourselves that it is better to accept and suffer these pains than to suffer the pains of hell. THIS IS THE ONE CASE IN WHICH IT IS BETTER TO TAKE THE SAMPLE THAN THAT WHICH THE SAMPLE TEACHES US OF.

For example, a woman who practices birth-control because she fears the pangs of childbirth should ask herself which is preferable – to accept this suffering on earth, which is but a sample, or to be cast into the flames of hell eternally.

2. Theologians have formal, scientific proofs for the existence of hell and its eternity. But the sufferings of this earth are themselves convincing proof that there is a hell.

a. Suffering here proves the *existence* of hell. There is so much suffering in the world – past, present, and future – that God must have infinite reserves of punishment and pain. Even on earth we can see that the possibilities of suffering are inexhaustible.

b. We can also show why the punishment of hell is eternal. When we enjoy the sinful pleasures of this world, we do not advert to the time element; that is, we do not stop to consider that these are but temporary pleasures and that we are choosing them in preference to eternal happiness. We see and choose only the pleasure in front of us, without reference to time; so that in the notion of pleasure there is no time element.

Therefore, when God punishes us, He deprives us of pleasure without reference to time. Because we indulged in sinful pleasures, He now withdraws from us all pleasure. And this withdrawal has in it no time element; that is, He withdraws pleasure from us indefinitely, or, in other words, for eternity.

Here is an example to illustrate what is meant by the pain of loss. Suppose that a woman loves her husband too much, i.e., to the extent of sinning with him; her plea is that otherwise she would lose his love and she cannot bear to be separated from him. Now, as we have seen, every joy in this world is a sample of a joy in the next. Accordingly, the love from which this woman cannot bear separation is a sample of the love that this woman might have enjoyed in heaven – God is infinitely more attractive than her husband. But the woman, having committed sin, does not go to heaven, but to hell, where she is deprived of the attractions of

God. If separation from her husband was unbearable on earth, how vastly more will she suffer at being separated from the infinite perfections of God! She will now be attracted to God infinitely more than she had ever been attracted to her husband; and now she is deprived of this happiness: she must go on forever enduring the unendurable.

3. Whether we are progressing in virtue, or whether we are growing in worldliness (for it is impossible to stand still: in spiritual things not to progress is to go backwards), our trials become increasingly difficult.

In the case of those who are growing in worldliness, we have seen that love of creatures takes more and more possession of the soul; so that it is increasingly difficult to give up creatures. In order to give them up in greater things, which concern sin, we must learn to give them up in smaller matters where no sin is involved. As an athlete trains for a big sporting event, so we must constantly train for greater and greater spiritual struggles. “Know you not that they that run in the race, all run indeed, but one receiveth the prize? So run that you may obtain, and every one that striveth for the mastery refraineth himself *from all things*: and they indeed that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible one.” (I Cor. 9, 24-25)

As for those advancing in virtue, their temptations likewise increase, and so do their difficulties; they break through one line of enemies only to find others in constantly increasing strength and ferocity. For the further a soul advances, the more furiously do the devil and the world attack it. Here also it is important that one prepare himself for greater battles by gaining smaller victories.

Thus it is necessary to gain the sanctifying power that is available in every trial. Instead of neglecting little things, we must be greedy of small opportunities – like St. Therese, who delighted in taking full advantage of every small sacrifice. This is necessary not merely to increase our merit, but in order to be able to withstand constantly increasing temptation. If we are untrained in mortification, it becomes ever more difficult to put aside a present pleasure and choose a present trial; but if we wish to avoid the pains of hell, we must accept the present trial.

As these trials get greater there will come at length a supreme trial; just as we have seen that there is a supreme opportunity of choosing our captivating sample. In the extreme case, we must be prepared to accept the trial, even when God makes it possible for us to avoid it, rather than fall into hell.

Not only trials, but voluntary mortifications as well, can be considered samples of hell. And when we are tempted to indulgence, we

should remember this, and prefer the self-denial to the pains of hell that may follow from continual indulgence. This will help to make mortification a little more palatable.

In the end, this fear of hell is a decisive deterrent from sin: even the martyrs prefer a present suffering to eternal suffering in hell. How powerful a motive hell is may be seen from the fact that people nowadays do not wish to hear anything about it. They speak slightingly of “hell and damnation” preachers and demand more positive Christianity, i.e., more about the mercy and love of God. Surely we should hear of the mercy of God – but not to the exclusion of His justice. St. Francis de Sales says that priests should preach God’s mercy to the converted, but His justice to sinners.

The fact is that worldlings see in the thought of hell a threat to their softness, their negligence, their worldliness; and that is why they do not wish to hear of it; if they had any *practical* belief in hell, they couldn’t live the way they do. The modern world does not believe in hell; sects that call themselves Christian scout the idea. Many Catholics only half believe in it – they say they cannot believe that God’s mercy would permit such suffering.

With the belief in hell, there vanishes also a belief in the devil. And the devil is delighted by this: for he can the more easily work in concealment, and what better concealment could he ask than this attitude of skepticism in those whom he wishes to ruin? One reason why it is possible for people to disbelieve in the devil is the fact that they live worldly lives. As long as they live in this way, the devil does not bother about them: he has them already – for he is the prince of this world and worldlings have him as their liege-lord. But once a soul rises to the supernatural plane, it will feel the devil’s presence; for now the devil becomes alarmed and sets to work.

Meanwhile, by a practical skepticism or failure to meditate on hell, souls fail to arm to meet a tireless and cunning adversary. They are like soldiers who throw away their weapons before the enemy.

Dom Chautard (*The Soul of the Apostolate*) suggests that we should make a formal meditation about once a month on the four last things – death, judgment, heaven, hell.

PART FOUR: THE SUPREME DOMINION OF GOD

Chapter I God's Intention

At this point we combine two of our four main principles – the Folly of the Cross and the Supreme Dominion of God – to show how they work hand-in-hand. According to the doctrine of the Folly of the Cross, we must die to our natural selves. Without help, however, we could never die completely to self; our self-love prevents it, and, in any case, there are imperfections that escape our consciousness and could, therefore, not be removed by voluntary mortification. Hence, in order that we may be sanctified, and the natural man completely destroyed, God intervenes to purify us. He does this chiefly through those around us; that is, He uses our intimates and neighbors to sanctify us. Hence, in all persecutions, annoyances, reproaches, etc., we must see the Supreme Dominion of God. By making us suffer in this way, God gives us the opportunity to live the Folly of the Cross.

There are two questions that need to be examined in this connection: First, we should know *why* God makes us suffer through others; in other words, we wish to know God's intention. Secondly, we must see how God uses creatures, even rational creatures, as blind instruments. We examine these two questions, respectively, in this chapter and the one that follows.

1. The Doctrine of Assimilation

We can distinguish four levels or orders of creatures: the inorganic, which have physical and chemical activity; the vegetative, which nourish and reproduce themselves; the animal order, which enjoys sensible knowledge; finally, rational creatures (men and angels), which possess spiritual powers (mind and will).

All these levels of creatures come from God; that is, they were all created by God. Moreover, according to the nature given them, they all tend to return to God; the purpose for which they were created is to manifest the divine glory. As a fisherman casts forth his line and then reels it in, so does God cast forth His creation and then bring it back to Himself.

However, in this movement back to God, the only creatures that will actually enter God's presence and be united to Him consciously are the human creatures (we leave the angels out of account). Men return to God immediately, while the other orders of creation return to Him only mediately, that is through man; man gathers up all the lower orders of creation and restores them to God.

To illustrate: Inorganic substances do not return to God immediately. They are gathered up into the vegetative order just above them; for plants nourish themselves on the various elements that are in the earth. Then the plants, by providing nourishment to the animal kingdom, are gathered up, or assimilated, into this higher order of creatures. Finally, man uses all three of the lower orders of creatures to sustain himself.

This process by which each order of creatures is caught up and raised to the level above it is called *assimilation* (*ad similitudinem*, to make like). Just as food is assimilated into the body, becoming a part of the body, identical with its substance, so is each order of creation assimilated to the order above it; that is, it is made like the order above it.

It is through this process of assimilation that all creatures return to God, the various orders being so many steps that ascend Godwards. Nor does the process stop when man assimilates the animals to himself. *God also assimilates man*. In order to enjoy eternal happiness, man must be assimilated to God; that is, he must be made like unto God. This is why God gives us grace, which is a sharing in the divine nature. Thus, St. John speaks of the souls in heaven: "We know that when He shall appear, we shall *be like to Him*: because we shall see Him as He is." (I John 3, 2)

Besides proving the fact that we will be made like unto God this text from St. John gives the reason for it: we will be made like to God, in order that we may know Him. That is, in order to possess the Beatific Vision, we must be made like unto God. Two reasons may be assigned for this fact:

a. A dog cannot have an adequate knowledge of man because the dog belongs to a lower order of things and his knowledge is only sensible, while man's most intimate life is intellectual and spiritual. Similarly, we are in a lower order of things than God: we are natural; God is supernatural. To be able to understand Him "as He is," i.e., on God's own level – which is to possess the Beatific Vision – we must be raised to the supernatural or divine plane of existence.

b. Friendship is possible only between equals. All true friendship presupposes a certain equality, whether of tastes, or of age, or of condition in life. Hence, a man cannot be a true friend of his servant:

when he makes his servant a friend, he loses a servant. Similarly, friendship is impossible between those who belong to different generations; or between a king and a commoner.

Thus, to be in any genuine sense friends and sons of God, we must be raised to His level: we must be supernaturalized. As we have seen in dealing with the Folly of the Cross, to be supernaturalized means that we must destroy the natural man. Hence, to be assimilated to God, we must cease to live merely natural lives.

2. The Manner of Assimilation

In order to be assimilated to a higher order of things, every creature must undergo a complete transformation. This amounts to saying that its own proper qualities must be destroyed in order that it may put on the qualities of the higher order. Thus, the chemicals in the soil are destroyed when they are assimilated into the plant; i.e., they lose their own peculiar identity and are transformed into something quite different. Again, when the plant is assimilated by an animal – say, when a head of lettuce is eaten by a rabbit – the plant is destroyed, in the sense that it is now transformed into the animal. Carrying the example further, if a hunter desires to raise the rabbit to the human level – in a word, if he wishes to eat the rabbit – he must first kill the rabbit, then remove all portions of the rabbit that are not digestible. This is the price that the rabbit must pay in order to “become a hunter.”

Now, suppose that God sees the hunter, or any other man, and decides to raise him to the divine level, that is, to sanctify him and give him the Beatific Vision. The man must undergo a complete transformation; in becoming divinized he must, in a sense, cease to be human.¹ Just as the hunter, before he can eat the rabbit, must skin it and remove indigestible parts, so also, in order to divinize man, God must remove from him whatever is in opposition to his supernatural destiny. We have seen that it is self-love and love for creatures that is in conflict with the supernatural; and this, then, must be destroyed if man is to be assimilated to God.

Therefore, in order to sanctify us, God must simply annihilate the paganism in us. In this holy work, He uses our neighbors, who, under the direction of Providence, set to work to try the soul striving for sanctity.

1. Of course the human substance remains human. This death and annihilation of the human is in the moral order; i.e., it is a death of human desires and ambitions, of merely natural affections and attachments.

This is the reason for all sufferings: It is the reason why we must be patient under injustice, reproach, humiliation and all other afflictions. For these are sent or permitted by God to effect our sanctification. “Flesh and blood cannot see God; neither can corruption possess incorruption.” In order that we may enter the divine companionship we must be wholly purged. We must be purged of the desires of the natural man (flesh and blood) with his merely human ambitions; we must be purged of the “corruption” in us, that is, of egotism and the tendency to use creatures for ourselves.

3. God’s Intention in Permitting This Suffering

In all this, God’s motive is simply love for us. He so loves us that He wishes to share His own happiness, to give us the Beatific Vision; and for this it is necessary that He purify us.

This is shown in many parts of Scripture, as we will see, but one of the most beautiful passages in explanation of suffering is in St. Paul’s letter to the Hebrews. (12, 1-15) Here the apostle quotes the Old Testament: “Whom the Lord loveth, He chastiseth; and He scourgeth every son that He receiveth.”

At first this seems a little difficult to understand. But St. Paul explains it with an example, by likening the love of God for us to the love of Father and son: “Persevere under discipline. God dealeth with you *as with His sons*: for what son is there whom the father doth not correct?” Put this way, it is not so hard to understand God’s apparently cruel love: A father loves his son, and corrects him for that very reason. When the father sees his son acting in a manner not befitting a human being, he punishes the boy in order that his imperfection may be removed and he may be a worthy son of his father. So God does not chastise us out of cruelty, but out of His loving desire to purify us from all that would hinder our happiness.

So necessary is this chastisement for us that St. Paul goes so far as to say: “But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are made partakers, *then are you bastards and not sons.*” Affliction is a sign of divine love; and if we are not afflicted we cannot be numbered among the sons of God: this is the means whereby we are purified and made worthy of the high status given to us at baptism.

Finally, St. Paul tells the purpose of this affliction: to lead to holiness: “Now all chastisement for the present, indeed, seemeth not to bring with it joy, but sorrow; but afterwards it will yield, to them that are exercised by it, the most *peaceable fruit of justice.*” (Justice means holiness.) Then the Apostle concludes: “Follow after peace and holiness; without *which*

no man can see God.”

4. Examples

God is like a surgeon. The surgeon causes us pain. Nevertheless, we thank him and pay him. Moreover, we hold him responsible for the pain and for the cure. We do not blame the instruments he uses. We accept the pain because it is the means of restoring our health. Similarly, in the spiritual order, God must remove the love of self and of creatures. This is a painful operation for which He uses many instruments, the chief ones being our neighbors and intimates. We should not blame them for the pain they cause us since they are but instruments, but we should attribute it to God. We should accept this pain for the great good that it brings us – sanctity. And we should thank God for it, and also the neighbor whom God uses in His work.

St. John of the Cross compares the soul that is being sanctified to a statue that is being carved by a number of workers, each worker contributing that in which he is skilled – so one cuts, one polishes, one paints, etc. So our neighbors have been selected by God as workmen to carve us into saints: one neighbor mortifies us in one way, another one does it in another way; until we are wholly stripped of the Old Man and the life of Christ appears resplendent in us.

St. John of the Cross also compares the divine action on the soul to fire that consumes wood. First, the fire must dry out the wood, absorbing the moisture; then it blackens the wood; finally the wood becomes transformed into the fire. So the divine love also burns the impurities from us, blackens us by suffering, then transforms us into itself, i.e., unites us to itself.

5. Texts

The following texts, besides the one given above, show the necessity and reason for suffering:

a. Book of Judith (8-10). God desired to use Judith as His instrument in delivering His people. But before she could be used in this way, He had first to free her from all earthly affections. Accordingly, He first took her husband; then, after she had lived a most austere life for many years, He was ready to employ her. And Judith herself explains the divine ways of acting to the Israelites: “And now, brethren, as you are the ancients among the people of God, and their very soul resteth upon you, comfort their hearts by your speech, that they may be mindful how our fathers were tempted¹ that they might be proved, whether they worshipped their God truly. They must remember how our Father Abraham was tempted, and

being proved by many tribulations, was made the friend of God. So Isaac, so Jacob, so Moses, and all that have pleased God, passed through *many tribulations, remaining faithful*. But they that did not receive the trials with the fear of the Lord, but uttered their impatience and the reproach of their murmuring against the Lord, were destroyed by the destroyer and perished by serpents. As for us, therefore, let us not revenge ourselves for these things which we suffer.”

b. “But this every one is sure of that worshippeth Thee, that his life, if it be under trial, shall be crowned: and if it be under tribulation, it shall be delivered: and if it be under correction, it shall be allowed to come to Thy mercy.” (Tobias 3, 21)

“And because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee.” (Tobias 12, 13) These words are addressed to the elder Tobias by the Angel Raphael. Then Tobias answered: “Thou are great, O Lord, forever, and Thy kingdom is unto all ages: For Thou scourgest, and Thou savest; Thou leadest down to hell, and bringest up again: and there is none that can escape Thy hand.” (13, 1)

c. Those that wish to *love God* are thus forewarned in Ecclesiasticus (2, 1-10): “Son, when thou comest to the service of God stand in justice and in fear, and *prepare thy soul for temptation*. Humble thy heart, and endure; incline thy ear and receive the words of understanding. Wait on God with patience; join thyself unto God and endure, that thy life may be increased in the latter end. Take all that shall be brought upon thee; and in thy humiliation keep patience. For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation. Believe God and He will recover thee; and direct thy way and trust in Him.”

d. St. Paul warns the Hebrews (10, 32-39) that they must accept afflictions: “Do not, therefore, lose your confidence, which hath a great reward. For patience is necessary for you: that doing the will of God, you may receive the promise. For yet a little and a very little while, and He that is to come will come and will not delay. But my just man liveth by faith: but if he withdraw himself, he shall not please my soul.”

e. “And lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me, there was given me a sting of the flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet me. For which thing thrice I besought the Lord that it might depart from me. And He said to me: ‘My grace is sufficient unto thee, for power is made perfect in infirmity.’ Gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities that the power

1. “Tempted” here means “tried.”

of Christ may dwell in me. For which cause I please myself in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am powerful.” (II Cor. 12, 9) In a text already cited (Rom. 5, 4), St. Paul again teaches that we should rejoice, not only in our hope as sons of God, but also in tribulations.

6. Where the Purification Must Be Effected

a. In the lower appetites; that is, in the desires of the flesh. Naturally, as a consequence of concupiscence, these desires tend towards creatures and the pleasures of earth. God purifies these desires by afflictions. Thus, if one take an inordinate pleasure in eating, God will send some sickness which will prevent the enjoyment of food. If one is vain of beauty, God sends sickness or age to spoil that beauty. If one is enamored of one’s talents, God will frustrate one’s ambitions for the use of that talent.

God does this in His mercy to teach us the worthlessness of the things of earth and to detach our heart from them that we may love Him more and more completely.

b. In our reason: “The wisdom of men,” says St. Paul, “is foolishness with God.” Therefore, we must get rid of this false wisdom in order that we may possess divine wisdom. Thus we must give up worldly wisdom and the maxims of earthly prudence in order that we may learn to live by faith: “Let no man deceive himself: if any man among you seem to be wise in this world, *let him become a fool* that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written: I will catch the wise in their own craftiness. And, again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.” (I Cor. 3, 18)

God purifies our natural judgment by faith. We must learn to give up reason and live in the darkness of faith. To this purpose, God shows us by suffering and gradual detachment the emptiness, vanity and foolishness of earthly wisdom.

It must be noticed that in saying that reason must be purged, we do not mean that reason is evil or that we must reject the truths of the natural order as found in science and philosophy. As we have seen in dealing with the “Harmony between the Natural and Supernatural,” there is harmony between natural truth and the supernatural truths of faith; for God created both.

When, therefore, we say that reason must be purged we mean that practical judgment, proceeding from a mind darkened by original sin, which causes man to use his talents in the pursuit of worldly aims. Hence, while the Christian gives up worldly wisdom, he does not give up

wisdom; but he must now live by a supernatural wisdom, a wisdom informed by faith, which is considered foolishness by men, just as God regards human wisdom as foolishness. “How be it we speak wisdom among the perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, neither of the princes of this world that come to naught. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, a wisdom which is hidden, which God ordained before the world, unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world know.” (I Cor. 2, 6)

c. In our memory there must also be a purification. The memory is a storehouse in which we keep the pleasures of this world, seeking in this way to prolong joys that are essentially transient. In order that we may rid ourselves of human consolations, our memory must be afflicted. The memory must be emptied of earthly pleasures in order to make room for the hope of heavenly joys; and as the memory of earthly joys turns to ashes, so does the hope of eternal happiness increase. Therefore, as the intellect is purified by faith, so is the memory, according to St. John of the Cross, purified by hope. To this end God sends us all kinds of disappointments, reproaches, etc. Our memory becomes a “hope chest” filled with disappointments, thus making room for God.

d. Our will finally must be purified; and this is effected by means of charity. In order that the will may be more and more filled with charity, God must first empty it of earthly loves. To this purpose He removes from us the creatures that we love, surrounds us with malice, hatred, etc. Thus, our wills are voided of the love of creatures and room made for divine love. The will reaches out to find love; instead it finds malice and thus gradually learns that it can find true, deep and lasting love in God alone.

7. Objections

Certain objections may be made against this teaching. For example, it is asked how God’s love can be genuine since He makes its object suffer. When we love a friend we try not to cause suffering to that friend; how then can God cause us to suffer if He loves us?

The reason that friends do not cause each other to suffer is that they are already equals. We are not God’s equal, and in order to love Him, we must give up our natural love for creatures and be divinized; that is, raised in a certain sense to God’s level, since our supernatural life is a share in His life; so that we are henceforth able to love Him as a friend.

In the case of human loves where there is inequality to begin with, this inequality must be removed before there is true love. Thus, if a prince marries a kitchen maid, she ceases to be a kitchen maid; else he ceases to

be a prince and descends to her level. If a millionaire marries a pauper, she ceases to be a pauper when she marries the millionaire. So also to love God we must be divinized; and to this end we must cease to be human in our tastes, inclinations and loves. God sends afflictions to remove from us merely human loves; and this must be accomplished before we are capable of entering into possession of His love.

Thus, also, to return to St. Paul's example, it is precisely because the father loves his son that he chastises him, thus eliminating objectionable traits. This is a case in which a very great human love does cause its object to suffer. Therefore, even the statement of the present objection is false; human love does *not always* guard its object from suffering.

Love requires destruction and suffering even more urgently when those who love belong to different species. Thus, the hunter shows his love for the rabbit by eating it. In order to be assimilated to a higher level of life, the rabbit must undergo destruction as to its own proper life. And in order to be assimilated to God, we must cease to be merely human.

It may be objected that a man and his dog belong to different species, that the man does not cause his dog to suffer, nor does he destroy it. In answer to this, we may say, first, that this love of a man for his dog is a mere love of benevolence, not a love of friendship; to become a love of friendship, his dog would have to be raised to the human level and thus cease to be a dog. Secondly, it should be noted that the lower species is destroyed by the higher species only when the process of assimilation takes place; so that a man does kill a chicken because he likes chicken and wishes to assimilate it to himself as food. Thirdly, even in the case of a dog, its owner will chastise it in order to remove objectionable "traits."

Chapter II

The Supreme Dominion of God

In Persons: Blind Instruments

We have seen what God's intention is in sending us suffering and affliction; it remains for us to notice how God effects this end. Briefly, He uses persons around us as instruments – blind instruments – in sanctifying our souls.

1. Without destroying man's freedom, God uses men as blind instruments in His work. In the end, how he does this is a mystery; but there is no doubt that He does it: "And we know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good, to such as according to His purpose are called to be saints." (Rom. 8, 28) St. Thomas helps us to understand this mystery a little by comparing God's providential direction of man to our use of instruments: we use an instrument *according to its nature*; thus we use a saw to cut wood and a hammer to drive nails, and not *vice versa*. When God directs man, He does it according to man's nature. Now this nature is *rational* and *free*; hence, God influences man according to his free and rational nature. For God, Who is closer to man than man is to himself, there is no difficulty in penetrating to the root of human will and freedom. It would be as senseless for God, in using men as instruments, to remove their freedom as it would be for a carpenter, before using a saw, to remove its teeth.

In the work of sanctification, God alone is the true cause, for God alone can give grace. Men, therefore, are only instruments and conditions used by God. A wire does not cause the current that runs through it, but it is necessary for carrying that current. So our neighbors are not sources of grace, but they are means used by God to convey that grace to us. Accordingly, we call our neighbors blind instruments in this work, despite the fact that they are possessed of reason and will. For, although they are responsible for their own actions, they are not privy to God's plans; and they are unaware of the purpose for which Providence uses them. The Jews, for example, were responsible for their crime of deicide; yet they did not know that they were instrumental in the redemption of mankind. Hence, Jesus could say: "*Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

2. How God uses man as a blind instrument: ultimately, as we have said, this is a mystery. Yet the divine method is to some degree, made evident by experience and the Scriptures.

a. By His control of our antecedents, God can direct our actions providentially. Our temperament, talents, sensibility, environment, background, opportunities – all these things, while they are largely "accidents" so far as we are concerned, are not accidents to God, who controls them all. There is no such thing as "chance" with God. Things happen to us "by chance" simply because they escape our control; but that does not mean that they escape God's control. The way in which sunlight colors a cloud formation is a matter of chance to us; yet every detail in such a happening follows exact laws fixed by the Creator. A leaf as it falls from a tree, blown this way and that, is obeying necessary

physical laws, and these come from God.

Thus the character, make-up, antecedents of every person are determined by God, or by laws the ultimate control of which is in God's hands. Nor can there be any doubt to one who reads the New Testament thoughtfully that God uses all things in such a way as to show a most tender solicitude for man. This is especially true where sanctification of the soul is concerned: theologians commonly say that God exercises more care in the guidance of one soul, which is a supernatural work, than in the governance of the whole natural universe. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; better are you than many sparrows." (Matt. 10, 28)

b. God is able to effect His ends by using the qualities that He has put in different people. Thus He can chastise us by means of the dispositions of our neighbors without compromising their freedom or our freedom. If I put a dog and a cat together, I do not cause them to fight; but I am certain that they will fight. God's knowledge penetrates to the very depths of every temperament and personality; He knows exactly what will happen when He puts various temperaments together; so He puts us with those who are best fitted to sanctify us. One man has a slow, easygoing disposition; another is a high-strung nervous type. God puts them together under the same roof and waits for them to "massacre" the paganism in each other!

Nothing then is left to chance. Just as a skilled surgeon knows the use of every instrument and uses each one with precision, so God in His work uses just the right instruments and with the greatest precision and delicacy. We should not think, then, that any detail of our situation has escaped God's attention; we are where God wants us to be and with whom God wants us to be. If we wish to advance spiritually, there is no use complaining, rebelling, trying to run away. Instead, we should extract whatever sanctification is available in every incident in our life. And the amount of sanctification thus available in each incident is unlimited, being exactly proportionate to the amount of faith and charity with which we receive it. . . . If a man is being operated on he does not try to leave the operating table because the operation is painful or because he wants another doctor. Neither should we run away from God's knife, as He works to remove the paganism from us, by wishing for other conditions of life, etc. Other conditions will not help: if a man leaves the operating table, the surgeon will have to come after him and finish the work; and God will have to finish His operation in the other conditions that we hope for just as surely as He must finish it now. For, in order to

obtain spiritual health, we must undergo the operation; and God in His mercy desires our health.

Thus, God arranges every situation, all the people in it, and all the moves. Some chess players, despite the great difficulty of the game and the almost infinite number of possible moves, can play a hundred games at once, moving rapidly from table to table, and winning, as a rule, all except one or two of the games. Thus, God is master of every situation, in every home, every school, every office, every institution in the world. In all this He arranges everything for the good “*of those who love Him*,” i.e., to such as are called to be *saints*. In the text cited, St. Paul adds the important qualification indicated by these italicized words. (Rom. 3, 28)

All these truths are exemplified in the lives of the saints, e.g., St. John of the Cross, St. Alphonsus Liguori.

3. *God chastises us and purges us by means of the malice of others.* This is one of the most difficult principles of all to understand in practice but it is nevertheless true. Nothing happens to us that is not at least permitted by Divine Providence (as we have seen in our general explanation of the Supreme Dominion of God). Therefore, we must see the divine will even in the *injuries* committed against us, in reproaches, insults, contempt, humiliations, etc., whether these are justly or unjustly incurred. In fact, it is the unjust things that we must be prepared to accept most promptly, for, asks St. Peter, what credit is it to a man if he accepts a punishment that he knows he deserves? “For this is thankworthy, if for conscience towards God, a man endure sorrows, *suffering wrongfully*. For what glory is it if committing sin and being buffeted for it you endure; but if doing well you suffer patiently, this is thankworthy before God.” (I Peter 2, 18)

When one is injured through the sin of another God does not want the sin, but He does want the chastisement of the one persecuted; accordingly, He arranges that the latter will get advantage from the sin. For example, God knows that Brown is an unjust man; therefore, He places Brown near Jones, who is striving to be a saint, so that Jones may have an opportunity to be purged and detached from the things of this world. This is an important distinction: God does not will the evil, but He employs it for our greatest good. This is, indeed, why God permits evil. Thus, God permits many imperfections even in those who are earnestly striving for holiness, in order that they may learn humility, and that they be given experience of their own unworthiness and of their need for divine help.

An example of this is to be found in the history of the patriarch Joseph. He was maliciously sold into slavery by his brothers; but by

means of this very crime God raised Joseph to great honor, then used him as an instrument to preserve the Jewish people.

Thus all things work to fulfill the will of God, and we should accept all the incidents of our lives, no matter how painful or evil, as from God. When Joseph, now a great man in Egypt, was reunited to the very brothers who had sold him into slavery, he said: “Be not afraid and let it not seem to you a hard case that you sold me into these countries: For God sent me before you into Egypt for your preservation... And *God sent me* that you may be preserved upon the earth and may have food to live. *Not by your counsel was I sent hither, but by the will of God.*” (Gen. 45, 5-8)

But the greatest example of all is the Redemption, which was effected by means of the malice of the Jews, and yet was willed by God the Father. The Jews who committed this crime were free and responsible; still they were but carrying out the Father’s will. Thus Jesus could pray, “Not My will, but Thine be done.” He looked behind the actions of His persecutors and saw only the all-holy will of His Father. Again, speaking of His Passion, Jesus said, “The chalice *which My Father hath given Me*, shall I not drink it?” (John 18, 11) Notice, He does not say that the Jews had filled His chalice of suffering, but the Father. St. Peter summarizes the whole matter, including both the responsibility of the Jews and of God: “The same [i.e., Christ] being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you by the hands of wicked men have slain.” (Acts 2, 23)

Even the devil works under the Providence of God, so that, although the injustices one suffers are diabolically planned, one can still see in them the will of God. God does not will the devil’s malice, but He permits the malice because He wants the effect of this malice to act on the soul; i.e., He permits the chastisement for the purification of the soul. As the doctors of old used leeches to suck poison from the body, then removed the leeches when the work was done, so God uses the devil to take the love of self and of creatures from the soul. Then, when this work is effected, God dismisses the devil. This is beautifully illustrated in the Book of Job, where we see that the devil can go only as far as God allows him and not a step farther.

All sufferings make for the spiritual welfare and fruitfulness of him that suffers. Christ says, fixing the lot of Christians (Luke 21, 16): “And you shall be betrayed by your parents and brethren and kinsmen and friends, and some of you they will put to death. And you shall be hated by all men for My name’s sake.” Then Jesus adds: “But a hair of your heads shall not perish. In your patience you shall possess your souls.” Through

all tribulations, he that abides in God by faith and charity will possess in his own soul the peace that passeth understanding.

Père de Caussade says: “The divine action makes the soul adopt just such measures as to surprise even those who wish to take it by surprise. It profits by all their efforts. They are the galley-slaves who bring the ship into port by hard rowing.”¹

4. *God chastises us by the stupidity of others.* Through malice God purges our will, which, looking for love and sympathy, finds hatred and malice. By stupidity and folly, which offend our reason, God purges our reason and mortifies our judgment, so that we may learn to live by faith alone.

To the pagan, who follows only reason and common sense and has nothing else to follow, stupidity and folly are an abomination. But they should not trouble a Christian, for the Christian lives by faith (Rom. 1), and should not mind having his judgment contradicted.

An example will show the difference between the pagan, and the Christian who really lives by faith. Suppose I am reading by candle light and some one blows the light out. I am angry, for that is the only light I have, and I cannot read without it. But suppose I am reading in broad daylight and yet have the candle burning beside my book; I will not then mind if some one blows it out; for I can read by the daylight. So a pagan who has only common sense to guide him is upset when someone contradicts his common sense; but a Christian, who has faith to guide him, is not troubled when mere natural wisdom is contradicted.

Folly is a favorite means used by God to supernaturalize our judgment and subordinate it perfectly to the rule of faith. Folly in others makes us “sow,” i.e., destroys our natural judgment, which St. Paul calls the “wisdom of the flesh.” The last citadels of the pagan, of the merely natural man, are the judgment and the will. Therefore, these, above all other powers, must be purged.

Because our judgment is hard to kill, God expends much effort in purging it. That is why there is so much folly around us; we need so much. We need it in large quantities, as in the case of air. Of course, we must remember that folly is relative. While I call Jones a fool, Jones is calling me a fool. Who is to judge between us – Brown? – whom we both think a fool?

By sowing our human wisdom, we reap the divine wisdom. By

1. Pierre de Caussade, S.J., *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, trans. by E. J. Strickland, Exeter, Catholic Records Press, 1921, p. 83.

keeping the Israelites wandering in the desert for forty years – seemingly foolish and unnecessary – God taught them unforgettable lessons of His power. So also He teaches us useful lessons by “foolishness.”

God uses all our neighbors in the work of sanctifying us. Do we think that He cannot use narrow-minded people? These make good cutting edges in His hands. Do we think that He cannot use the stupid? These make good hammers for tempering us. Do we think that He cannot use those who are irritable and mean? These are the acids which God uses in purifying us.

In the chalice of Jesus there were physical afflictions, malice and stupidity, And in the chalice of His disciples there is the same bitter draught. “Is the disciple above His master or the servant above his Lord?” If we suffer much, it is because we are very imperfect. If the operation takes a long time, it is not the doctor’s fault, but the patient’s for being so sick! If it takes God a long time to purify us, it is not His fault, but ours for being so filled with corruption. When the disease has been removed from us, the operation will end. Until that time, we should not complain, but receive all from God in faith and hope and love.

Chapter III The Supreme Dominion of God

In Superiors: Obedience

A favorite instrument in the hand of God, in His work of purging the soul, is the superior. And the reason is not far to seek; the superior can impose his will on us, thus mortifying our self-will. This self-will, as we have said, is the last stronghold of the pagan in us and the one most difficult to level. For this very reason, it is all the more essential that it should be levelled: in the last analysis the whole work of mortification resolves itself into the destruction of self-will.

The first sin, that of our First Parents, was one of disobedience. And Christ Our Lord overcame sin by an act of obedience. “Therefore, as by the offense of one, unto all men to condemnation: so also by the justice of one, unto all men to justification of life. For as by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners; so also by the obedience of one, many shall be made just.” (Rom., 5, 18)

This obedience of Christ went to the extreme limit: “He humbled himself becoming *obedient unto death*, even to the death of the cross. For which cause God also hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name which is above all names.” (Phil. 2, 8) Karl Adam, distinguished German theologian, having asked what it was in Christ’s personality that “animated and dominated” Him, says: “This can be answered at once; the ultimate and profoundest motive force, the mainspring of His actions was an unreserved surrender to His Father’s will. There is nothing the brush of the evangelists has painted so movingly and strikingly with such impressive strokes, as the mighty, burning love of Jesus for His heavenly Father. The first recorded words of Jesus are a reminder that His home is with the Father: ‘Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?’ (Luke 2, 49) And His last dying words were breathed to the Father: ‘Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.’”¹ (Luke 23, 46)

Moreover, between these two terms, the beginning and end of His life, the will of the Father was His constant nourishment: “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me.” (John 4, 34)

Here, then, are a number of reasons urgently demanding obedience:

a. Because disobedience is the source of sin, we should obey.

b. Because by disobedience we are not joined to Christ the Head. Members of His Mystical Body, to remain living members we must be united to Him in all things. Can the head of the body be separated from the members? To abide in Christ, as He says we should, we must be obedient; and in this way we share in His life and redemptive work.

c. As we share in His obedience and abnegation of self, so also we shall share in His exaltation, which St. Paul speaks of in the above text. (Phil. 2, 8)

d. By obedience we make an act of faith, for we see God’s will in the will of our superior. This is in itself a meritorious act, and, as we have seen, the necessary prelude to an increase of charity.

e. It is a means of loving God and of union with Him: for we thereby unite our will to His will, as His will is certainly manifested in the commands of all legitimate superiors: and love is a union of wills.

St. Alphonsus writes: “Obedience to rule and to the commands of superiors is *the greatest sacrifice that a Christian can offer to God, because, as St. Thomas says, ‘nothing is more amiable in the eyes of man than the liberty of his own will.’* Hence, we cannot present to God a more

1. *The Son of God*, N. Y., Sheed and Ward, 1934, chap. V.

acceptable gift than the consecration of our wills to His service. ‘For,’ says the Holy Ghost, ‘obedience is better than sacrifice.’ (I Kings, 15, 22) Obedience is more pleasing to God than all the sacrifices that we can offer to Him. They who give to the Lord their worldly goods by alms deeds, their honor by embracing contempt, and their body by mortification, by fasts and by works of penance, make only a partial consecration of themselves to Him. *But he that offers to God the sacrifice of his own will consecrates all that he possesses to God’s glory*, and can say: ‘Lord, after having given to Thee my will, I have nothing more to present to Thee.’

“The Venerable Father Sertorio Caputo used to say that obedience merits even the reward of martyrdom; because as by martyrdom a Christian submits for God’s sake to the loss of life, so by obedience he offers to the Lord the sacrifice of self-will which is, as it were, the head of the soul.”¹

1. Terms of Obedience.

There are two terms of obedience – the visible term, which is the superior, and the invisible term, which is God. To those who live by faith, the voice of the superior is a mere transmitter of God’s will. The Christian must unite himself by faith to the invisible term of obedience.

The superior is like a radio. Where the essential functions of a radio are concerned, it makes no difference whether the radio is high or low, green or black, flat or round, so long as it transmits the broadcast. This is true also of the superior: it makes no difference whether he (or she) is kind or unkind, gracious or severe; all that we must attend to is the divine command that comes through his lips.

Here, then, is once more an opportunity for exercising faith in the universal providence of God – an opportunity, therefore, of increasing one’s faith, of being united to the will of God, and of increasing charity.

The reason why superiors contradict our wills is because our wills do not conform to the divine will. And God, who desires to sanctify us, must see to it that our will does conform to His. His favorite means of doing this is by seeing to it that we are contradicted, and this especially by superiors, who have the authority to destroy our self-will.

What is said here holds true of all legitimate superiors: of ecclesiastical and civil superiors, religious superiors, the authority of parents over children, of husband over wife, of employer over employee. God uses

1. *True Spouse of Christ*, chap. VII, No, 3.

them all as a handy cutting-edge in removing the paganism of those who desire to love Him.

It is wrong to represent to those under authority that their superiors are always good, kind, just and reasonable. In the first place, if any one should obey from such a motive, he would deprive himself of supernatural merit. For there is a natural obedience as well as a supernatural obedience. Even in the order of nature children are obliged to obey parents, citizens their just government, because reason demands it. This obedience belongs to *natural* holiness: it possesses a great excellence, but it is only dubiously meritorious and at best at the lowest acceptable degree. Christian obedience should be illuminated by faith, motivated by love.

Moreover, to one who is filled with self-love and self-will superiors are not good and just and reasonable; their commands are constantly opposed to the self-will of their subjects. This is precisely why God must use superiors to oppose the wills of subjects – to destroy their egotism and so make more room in their hearts for Him. Only when we are completely purged of all self-will, can the will of superiors seem good to us; for then we will be perfectly united to the will of God, and this will as manifested through superiors will always be loved by us. Thus, there is a vast difference between obedience in beginners and obedience in the perfect; and those who are just beginning the supernatural life should not imagine that they are capable of practicing the obedience of the perfect nor should they be taught to attempt it.

2. Precepts

There are two kinds of precepts given to us by our superiors: those which are agreeable and those which are disagreeable. We must learn to accept both with equal alacrity, obeying in disagreeable things as promptly as in agreeable things.

There is a very good reason for this: if we obey only in agreeable things and not in disagreeable things, then we are following our natural bent and inclination, and such obedience is merely natural: it is not supernatural and meritorious. Therefore, in order to obtain merit in performing agreeable duties we must perform with equal readiness those which are disagreeable. Otherwise we gain no merit. For this reason St. Teresa says that the perfect obtain merit in everything, the imperfect in nothing.

St. Paul, writing to the Philippians, expressed regret that, aside from Timothy, he had no trustworthy men to send to them; and the reason that others were untrustworthy is that they *seek themselves*. “For all seek

the things that are their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's." (Phil. 2, 21) To please one's self is not the same as pleasing God. The reason why obedience is meritorious is because it destroys self-will; it must be used, therefore, to destroy and not to pamper self-will. St. Alphonsus, quoting St. Joseph Calasanctius, says: "He who in serving God seeks his own convenience, serves himself and not God." And St. Alphonsus adds: "Endeavor to perform all your actions from a motive of obedience, and you will always walk securely to salvation. To secure their profits, merchants obtain an insurance of their property. Let it be your care to make sure your eternal gain by procuring for every work the insurance of obedience – the approbation of your Superior: otherwise, your works may prove injurious, or at least unprofitable to you."¹

While good works are always useful it is possible for us to engage in good works contrary to the will of God, or at least aside from that will. For this reason Dom Chautard writes: "Woe to the man who refuses the work to which God calls him! Woe to the man who takes upon himself works without being assured that such is the will of God."² This is especially true of apostolic works, i.e., such as envision the spiritual good of our neighbor. Thus the ordinary way that we have of assuring ourselves that our works are according to the divine will is to do them under obedience to our superiors. This is the reason why Catholic Action is only such in reality when it is under the direction of the hierarchy.

3. Kinds of Obedience

There are three kinds of obedience as follows:

a. The Obedience of Judgment: We act according to the obedience of judgment when we try to justify the commands of superiors, either according to the principles of reason or of faith.

Thus, when told to do something we attempt to ascertain the reasons for the command. Perhaps by this means we come to adopt the command as reasonable, even though at first we were tempted to rebel against it. This is natural obedience.

Else we may try to justify the commands of superiors by the principles of faith. For example, we may examine these commands to find how they will promote the divine glory; we may convince ourselves that by obeying we can promote the interests of souls. Our motive is here supernatural, and, therefore, the obedience is more meritorious. But this

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Op. cit.*, p. 176.

is the least perfect kind of supernatural obedience, because it is so tardy, so dependent on our ability to justify the commands of superiors.

b. Blind Obedience: We possess this when we do not attempt to justify or explain the commands of superiors, but obey them blindly in the faith that we are doing God's will. This is a much purer act of faith; it demands a deeper belief in God's supreme dominion; and, therefore, it is a more meritorious obedience than the former. It is called "blind," not because the subject obeys thoughtlessly or without moral discrimination – on the contrary, it proceeds from delicacy of conscience – but because the subject obeys commands as from God without understanding God's hidden purpose in giving them.

c. Foolish Obedience: This is called foolish not because it is in fact foolish, but because the command of the superior seems foolish *in our judgment*, and we obey nevertheless. In this case we should give up both our own judgment and our own will and act contrary to both these faculties. Hence, we perform the purest act of faith possible, denying ourselves completely; and this is, for that reason, the most meritorious kind of obedience. In such an act of obedience we are secure even though an action may seem to be commanded imprudently. We know that God foresees and permits these commands; and they, therefore, do not escape His Providence.

Thus, we should carry obedience to the extreme of self-renunciation. We are to obey in all things except sin. Even in the case of things which are doubtfully sinful, i.e., we are not sure whether they are sinful or not – we should obey. For we are not appointed judges of our superiors, but we are their subjects. Hence, we may depart from their commands only when these commands are manifestly sinful.

These truths hold for laymen as well as for religious. There is a great spirit of disobedience today among Catholics, which shows itself when they stand in judgment on the decisions of ecclesiastical superiors and even of the Holy See. Some Catholics only obey the Church in matters where the Church has made a doctrinal decision that binds under pain of sin and heresy; they say that other documents, like encyclicals, need not be obeyed. This is false; we are bound to obey our religious superiors in all matters except if they should command something that is manifestly sinful or violates the sacred rights of conscience.

4. Perfect Obedience.

The four degrees of perfect obedience (according to St. Alphonsus de Liguori):

a. The first degree is to obey *with promptness*, “executing immediately and without reply every injunction imposed by obedience.” St. Thomas makes promptness in the performance of a good work an element that increases the merit of the work. And the reason is obvious: by promptly doing God’s will, we more perfectly and completely sacrifice our own will.

b. The second degree of obedience is to obey *with exactness*. This means that we should obey:

Punctually: “You should obey with punctuality and not rob God of any part of your sacrifice by a mutilation of the victim you offer to Him. You should carefully fulfill the whole duty imposed on you, and employ in its discharge all the time prescribed by obedience. Some are punctual in the presence of the Superior, but otherwise they comply so imperfectly with the obligations of obedience that it would be difficult to determine whether the fulfillment of their duties is a source of merit or demerit.”

Without interpretations: that is, without sophisticated interpretations intended to mitigate commands or to make them suit one’s pleasure or convictions. It is necessary to interpret a command in the sense that we must know exactly what is commanded. “But I assert that certain forced and sophisticated interpretations differ but little from formal acts of disobedience.”

c. The third degree is to obey *with joy*. “To obey with reluctance and murmuring against Superiors is a defect rather than an act of virtue. ‘If,’ says St. Bernard, ‘murmuring in your heart, you begin to judge the Superior, though you externally comply with the precept, your compliance is not a virtue, but a covering of malice.’ If you murmur interiorly against the Superior, the fulfillment of her commands is but a cloak thrown over your malice. For your obedience is only external and in your heart you disregard her authority and violate the divine law.” “The Lord loveth a cheerful giver.” (II Cor. 9, 7)

d. “The fourth and last degree of perfect obedience is to obey *with simplicity*. ‘Servants,’ says the Apostle, ‘be obedient in the simplicity of your hearts.’ (Ephes. 6, 5) To be simple at heart you must subject your own judgment to that of the Superior and esteem as just and reasonable whatever she commands. Observe: This is the obedience of the perfect; only those whose self-will is wholly destroyed will be able to find all commands good and reasonable, according to reason deeply informed

by faith. Such a soul, whose judgment and will is perfectly mortified, no longer finds the commands of superiors contrary to its own inclinations; but it looks upon all that God desires as good and just, even though not understanding the mysterious plans of God. This is the same as the foolish obedience spoken of above. For, says St. Bernard, ‘Perfect obedience is indiscreet.’ When we obey with simplicity we do not stand in judgment on the commands of the Superior; we simply obey.

“To decide and to judge and also to be prudent belongs to superiors; and they are responsible for their decisions, whereas the subjects are not responsible except for their obedience. St. Ignatius once said that should the Pope command him to undertake a voyage by sea in a ship without a mast, without oars or sails, he would blindly obey the precept. And when he was told that it would be imprudent to expose his life to danger, he answered that prudence is necessary in Superiors, but in subjects the perfection of prudence is to obey without prudence.

“To try the obedience of their subjects, Superiors sometimes impose commands that are inexpedient and even absurd. St. Francis commanded his disciples to plant cabbages with their roots uppermost. He obliged Brother Matthew to continue turning round till he fell to the ground. St. Teresa made similar trials of her children. But you will ask of what use are such precepts? In answer, I ask, why are untrained horses made sometimes to run, sometimes to stop and sometimes to go back? All these contribute to make them obedient to the bridle; and to exercise religious in what appears extravagant and useless accustoms them to subdue the stubbornness of their own will, and to subject their own judgment to that of the Superiors.”

(All the citations in this last section are taken from the *True Spouse of Christ*.¹ Although written primarily for religious who are bound by a special vow of obedience, these principles hold good, *mutatis mutandis*, for all Christians. Thus the layman, while not bound to obey religious superiors, is bound to obey his ecclesiastical and civil superiors and all others who hold legitimate authority.)

1. Chap. VII, 6.

Chapter IV

The Source of God's Supreme Dominion:

The Divine Will

1. The nature of the divine will: We can consider the divine will from two points of view: *in itself*; and in its *effects*. There is, of course, only one divine will, but it manifests itself to us differently, according as we consider it from one of these viewpoints or the other.

In itself the divine will is always good, agreeable, unchangeable. The reason is that God is infinitely good, infinitely lovable, and absolutely immutable.

In its effects the divine will is often disagreeable and changeable. Now the reason for this is not to be found in God, who is good and lovable and immutable, but in ourselves. The divine will seems disagreeable and changeable to us. In reality, the divine will is holy; but since it cuts across our unholiness, it appears disagreeable. In reality the divine will is unchangeable; it is we who change in mood and feelings, and since God appears differently to us according to our mood or state, it seems as if He changes while we remain the same. Thus it appears to man that the sun moves around the earth, whereas in fact it is just the other way.

God manifests Himself to us in two ways, as the *Imitation* says: in consolations and in tribulations. The former are pleasant, the latter unpleasant, seeming to make God changeable and at times disagreeable. But, of course, the reason for afflictions is to remove the corruption and paganism from us; so that our very afflictions reveal the divine goodness and love.

Some examples will help to explain this:

a. The sun in itself is always the same. Yet it looks different to us at different times by reason of the clouds and vapors that come between it and us. Similarly God is always the same; if He appears to change, it is because of the unpleasant vapors that arise from human corruption, shutting off the view of the divine goodness. Because the divine love sets itself to dissolve and destroy these vapors, which only happens at some pain to ourselves, we are prone to forget that it is God manifesting Himself in this pain and tribulation.

b. The light that streams through the window is pure and bright. If it appears impure or darkened to us, it is because of impurities and stains in the glass. So the divine will appears unpleasant to us because of the impurities in our nature.

c. A sick person will sometimes push aside the gentlest hand that seeks to assist him and ease the pain. Because of his sickness, the hand seems to afflict pain. So does God rest His hand lovingly and gently on us, but because of the sickness in our nature, His hand appears to crush us.

Since we must love God we must unite our wills to His; for love is a union of wills. Therefore, in all events, whether pleasant or unpleasant, we must look behind the mere appearance, and unite ourselves to God's holy will. In the word of encouragement given to us by a neighbor or superior, we should see God pushing us onwards. In an affliction, in criticism, in the rebuke of a superior, we should look behind the incident to join ourselves to the divine will that desires or permits these things for us. When a man by the name of Semei publicly cursed David, one of the King's servants wanted to cut short the insulting language, but the King said, "Let him alone and let him curse; for the Lord hath bid him curse David; and who is he that shall dare say, why hath he done so?" (II Kings, 16, 9)

"If I desire pure water only," says St. Francis de Sales, "what care I whether it be served in a golden vessel or in a glass, as in either case I take only the water: yea, I would rather have it in a glass because this has no other color than water itself, which thus I also see better. What matter whether God's will be presented to us in tribulation or in consolation, since I seek nothing in either of them but God's will, which is so much the better seen when there is no other beauty present save that of His most holy, eternal good-pleasure."¹

Indeed, the same saint teaches that the true lover of God will prefer the tribulations to the consolations; because in the former he is more sure of being conformed to the divine will: "The traveler who is in fear whether he has the right way, walks in doubt, viewing the country over, and stands in a muse at the end of almost every field to think whether he goes not astray, but he who is sure of his way walks on gaily, boldly, and swiftly; even so the love that desires to walk with God's will through consolations, walks ever in fear of taking the wrong path, and of loving (in lieu of God's good pleasure) the pleasure which is in the consolation; but the love that strikes straight through afflictions towards the will of God walks in assurance, for affliction being in no wise lovable in itself, it is an easy thing to love it only for the sake of Him that sends it."²

1. *Love of God*, IX, 4.

2. *Ibid.*, IX, 2.

2. The divine will is the source of all sanctity and efficacy. It is the source of all sanctity:

Sanctity is a divine attribute; the sanctity that is found in human beings is a participation in the divine sanctity. Hence, no man can become holy of himself, but he must obtain holiness from God; it is a supernatural gift.

Now God's sanctity consists in this, that with His divine will He wills His own infinite perfections. To be holy is to will and to love goodness. When we say that God is holy, we mean that He wills and loves the infinite goodness, which is Himself together with all the divine attributes. This is the divine self-love. To us, judging by merely human standards, it may appear at first that this self-love is a defect, whereas in fact it is the very stuff of sanctity. Since God is infinitely good, He cannot but love His Goodness; it would be unholy for Him to do otherwise.

Our own self-love is a sample of the divine self-love. Our self-love consists essentially in this that we love ourselves not for our own sakes, but for the sake of the divine image and the divine life of grace within us: in loving ourselves so, we really love God. This kind of self-love is no defect, but a perfection, and is, indeed, enjoined upon us: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor *as thyself*."

The divine sanctity, then, consists in the divine self-love, that is, in the conformity of God's will to His goodness. If we wish to be holy, we must do likewise; that is, we must conform our will to the divine goodness. We must desire and will and love God's goodness and His other perfections; and we must conform our lives to them. In doing this we conform our will to the divine will: we unite our will to God's; and in this love is sanctity. Thus we say that the divine will is the source of all sanctity because we obtain sanctity only from God and this by uniting our will to His.

It is the source of all efficacy: The will of Almighty God following the activity of the divine intellect has ordained certain laws according to which all things in the universe are governed. Such laws exist in both the supernatural and the natural orders. And the efficacy of human activity consists in discovering and knowing and cooperating with these laws. Thus to build an airplane a man must know the laws dealing with air currents, etc. Or, again, a farmer to obtain a crop must have some knowledge of the laws of nature and cooperate with these laws. He must, for example, plant seed in good ground, not in concrete.

It is the same in the supernatural world: here also there are laws governing spiritual fruitfulness and effectiveness. If, then, we wish to be

spiritually fruitful by achieving sanctity in our own lives and by communicating supernatural life and strength to others, we must do so by cooperating with the divine laws that govern the supernatural economy. In a word, we must know and unite ourselves to the divine will; for all the decrees and laws that govern the natural and the supernatural worlds proceed from this will.

From this point of view we can understand that teaching of Jesus: “Abide in Me: and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, *unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me.* I am the vine; you are the branches; he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15, 4-3)

3. The divine will is the source of all grace: since sanctity is a divine attribute, human beings can possess it only by sharing in this attribute. This is accomplished by grace, which is a participation in divinity, enabling us to share in the holiness of God. Hence, as the divine will is the source of sanctity, so it must also be the source of grace by which sanctity is realized in the soul.

Therefore, we receive grace into our souls by uniting our wills to God’s. There is no other way of receiving grace: only at that point of contact where our will touches God’s can the divine grace enter into our souls. A street car, no matter how large or well-built or powerful, can move only if its trolley is in contact with an electric wire; it runs just as long as this contact continues, and it stops as soon as the contact is broken, for without this contact there is no current to move it. It is thus with the soul seeking sanctity: grace enters the soul only when the will is united to God’s. It is this contact through which supernatural energies enter the soul; and they cease to enter it as soon as the contact is broken.

Now we are enabled to unite our wills to God’s from moment to moment by means of *the duty of the present moment*, in which the divine will for us is always to be found. Thus there should be and can be a *continuous flow* of supernatural energy into our souls. But this flow is interrupted, or stops altogether, as soon as we neglect the duty of the moment, that is, as soon as we break the contact between our will and God’s will.

Thus we should utilize what Père de Caussade calls “*the sacrament of the moment*,” for every moment is an outward sign that conveys inward grace.

It is with us as it was with Mary: when she was to become the Mother of God, the Angel Gabriel announced to her this fact. And when she had consented by her words: “Be it done unto me according to thy word,” she

was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ was conceived in her womb.

Now the grace by which we are sanctified is a participation in the divine life and it enters our souls in a manner analogous to the way in which Jesus entered Mary's womb. First, the Angel Gabriel comes in the form of the duty of the present moment and announces to us the coming of grace; then the angel awaits our word. If we consent as Mary did, saying, "Be it done according to Thy will," that is, if we accept our duty and perform it, thus uniting our wills to God's, then our souls are overshadowed by the Holy Ghost and they are penetrated by the divine life of grace. But if we turn aside from the duty of the moment, then we lose the grace that is offered to us.

In other words, behind the series of our duties which run on endlessly from moment to moment, there is a parallel series of graces. But we can penetrate to the latter series and obtain the prize of divine life only by breaking through the former series at the point of our present duty.

This teaching shows us the significance of the supernatural motive and the reason for insisting on it. For the supernatural motive is the means of uniting our will to the divine will; and, as we see, it is only through this contact that we receive grace. By doing my present duty for the love of God I unite myself to His holy will and graces enter my soul. As we said when dealing explicitly with the subject of motives, the supernatural motive is the means by which the soul is nourished with grace; it is the point of contact at which grace enters the soul; it is the sole means of nourishing the supernatural life within us; it is the valve through which, alone, charity can enter into us. The practice of uniting one's self to the divine will and keeping all motives supernatural thus finally resolves itself into the same thing.

4. The divine will, known through the duty of the moment, can be received in three ways:

a. We can receive it as the pagans received Jesus. The pagans did not recognize Jesus: "He came into the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world did not know Him." (John 1) Similarly, we may not recognize the duty of the moment and failing to recognize it, we fail also to recognize the divine life that is hidden under perhaps commonplace actions. The soul that is illuminated by faith is very far from judging as do those who measure things by their senses, being ignorant of the inestimable treasure they conceal. "He who knows that a person in disguise is the King welcomes him in a very different manner from one who seeing

the exterior aspect of an ordinary man treats him according to his appearance. Similarly, the soul that sees the will of God in the smallest things or in the most desolating or fatal events receives them all with jubilation and equal respect.”¹

b. “Else we can receive the duty of the moment as the Jews received Jesus: they cursed Him, persecuted Him, and crucified Him. So it may be that we curse the present moment and the duty it brings us. “What infidelity there is in the world! How unworthily do men think of God! Without ceasing we find occasions of criticizing the least artisan in his craft. We wish to reduce God’s action to the limits and rules that our feeble reason can imagine. We propose to reform it. We do nothing but complain and murmur. We are surprised at the ways the Jews treated Jesus. Ah! divine love, adorable will of God, Infallible action of God, how art Thou looked upon! Can the divine will intrude, can it be mistaken?

c. “Else we can receive the divine will joyfully, as true Christians receive Him in the Host. And what does it matter whether we receive Him in a large Host or a small Host? Similarly, what matter whether we receive Jesus in some small commonplace duty or in a greater work? We are all prone to look for Jesus in the greater things, but we will also find Him who was humble of heart in the most trifling incidents or duties. “If we are able to envisage each moment as the manifestation of the will of God, we shall find in it all that our heart can desire. For what can there be more reasonable, more perfect, more divine than the will of God? Can its infinite value increase through difference of time, place and circumstance? If you are given the secret of finding it at every moment in every event, you possess all that is most precious and worthy in your desires. What do you desire, holy souls? Let yourselves go, carry your longings beyond all measures and limits, dilate your hearts to an infinite extent, I have enough to fill them; there is no moment at which I cannot make you find all that you can desire.”

5. *The two wills of God: what is meant by the “duty of the moment.”*

Since the duty of the moment, by uniting our will to God is the point where grace enters the soul, it is important to know, at any given moment, what is the divine will, i.e., what is the duty of the moment.

As we have distinguished between the nature of the divine will and its effects, so also may we distinguish two modes in which the divine will manifests itself to us. Of course, in itself the divine will is one and infinitely simple; but it is manifested to us in a twofold manner.

1. Père de Caussade., S.J., *op. cit.*, p. 17.

In the first place, God may signify His will to us *explicitly* by means of direct precepts; this is called the *signified will* of God. This will is manifested to us, first, in the commandments of God; secondly, in the precepts of the Church; thirdly, in the counsels of the gospel; finally, in the duties of one's state in life.

By means, of obedience, the will must conform to the will of God as it is signified in these several ways: from the most important commandment down to the least of the duties of one's state in life, there is for the soul an opportunity of uniting itself to the divine will.

Secondly, we may distinguish the divine *will of good pleasure*. This is the divine will as manifested in events that are directly willed by God or that are at least permitted by Him. Thus every event, great or small, that occurs, manifests the will of God. These events may be sickness and afflictions, consolations, criticism, interior trials, etc. – in a word, all events whether they happen in the interior of the soul or exteriorly. By faith we can see God in every such event and thus can unite our wills to His at every moment and in every occurrence. Thus each event in our lives should be accepted in a spirit of faith and a spirit of love.

By the duty of the moment then is meant any command that proceeds from the signified will of God and every event that proceeds from the divine will of good pleasure.

6. As we have said, obedience is the virtue that we are to exercise in regard to the signified will. But the virtue that is to be exercised in regard to the will of good pleasure is *self-abandonment*.

By self-abandonment is meant a complete surrender of self to the divine will from moment to moment as this will shows itself in every incident of our lives. In the event of each moment, we are, by *faith*, to see the divine will and by charity, to unite ourselves to it. By so doing we can enjoy continuous union with God and can be constantly occupied in the love of Him.

“If the work of our sanctification presents us with difficulties apparently so insurmountable, it is because we do not know how to form a correct idea of what it consists in. In reality, holiness may be reduced to one point only: fidelity to the Order of God. Now this fidelity is equally within the capacity of all.

“Would to God that kings and their ministers, the princes of the Church and of the world, priests, soldiers, bourgeois, laborers, in a word all men, understood how easy it would be for them to attain to eminent sanctity! All they have to do is fulfill the simple duties of Christianity and of their state in life, to embrace with submission the crosses attached to

these duties and to submit themselves with faith and love to the Order of Providence in what is incessantly offered them to do and endure without search on their part.

“The Order of God, the good pleasure of God, the Will of God, the action of God, Grace, all these are one and the same thing in this life. Perfection is nothing else than the faithful cooperation of the soul with the work of God.”

(These citations are all taken from Père de Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*.¹ This work is a classic on the subject. Abandonment to the will of good pleasure is central in the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales, whose analysis of the subject (*Love of God*) is the starting point of later works. De Caussade took the thought of St. Francis, together with that of Bossuet, another important writer on the virtue of self-abandonment, and combined them in this finished and beautiful compendium.)

The whole doctrine may be summed up in the phrase of de Caussade: “The Sacrament of the present moment.” Each and every moment, by manifesting the will of God, provides an opportunity for union with this will and for receiving the graces that can come into the soul only through this union.

There is no taint of Quietism about self-abandonment: by obedience to the signified will of God, the soul actively does all that is required of it for salvation; self-abandonment is practiced only in regard to the will of good pleasure.

7. There are, then, two modes of union with God. The one is direct, accomplished by prayer, and is realized in its fullest form in the contemplative life. The other is indirect, accomplished through activity that is joined to the will of God; and this characterizes the active life. However, these two kinds of union are not to be separated: indirect union presupposes direct union, active life is energized by prayer; and activity that is not so energized is supernaturally sterile. For no natural talents, powers, organization, etc., can accomplish a supernatural effect unless they receive their efficacy from God by prayer and the renunciation of earthly things. The holy man, says the Psalmist, “is like a tree that is planted by running waters and giveth its fruit in due season.” (Ps. 1) If one wishes to bear fruit, it is necessary to remain near the living waters that gush from the fountain of prayer: “For without Me you can do nothing.”

“Thus, O my Savior, my *indirect* union with Thee by my works, that

1. Book I, pp. 1-36.

is to say, by the relations which, by Thy Will, I shall have with creatures, will become the continuation of my direct union with Thee by mental prayer, the liturgical life and the sacraments. In both cases this union will proceed from faith and charity and will take place under the influence of Thy grace. In the direct union, it is Thou and Thou alone, O my God, that I have in view; in the indirect, I apply myself to other objects. But since it is to obey Thee, these objects to which I owe my attention become *means intended by Thee* to unite myself to Thee: I leave Thee to find Thee again: *it is always Thou*, that I am seeking, with the same affection, but *in Thy will*; and this divine Will is the sole beacon that the custody of the heart allows me to fix to guide my activity in Thy service. In both cases I can, therefore, say, *'It is good for me to adhere to My God.'*¹ (Ps. 72, 28)

Chapter V The Supreme Dominion of God in Us:

The Human Will

As the Supreme Dominion resides ultimately in the Divine Will, so it resides instrumentally in the human will, which is a sample of the divine. Therefore, if we are to see the Supreme Dominion in the actions of all creatures, we must see it especially (by faith, of course) in the actions which proceed from the human will.

In this section we study the Supreme Dominion of God as it is to be found in each of us.

1. What Is Meant by the Will

The will may be defined as “the rational appetite.” There are two appetites in man: the one is his sensible appetite, which desires sensible goods; the other is the rational appetite, which desires the good that is presented to it by the mind. Thus, the instinctive desire for food is in the sensible appetite, while the will, which is a spiritual faculty, seeks goods of a higher order and imposes its control on the lower appetites.

The will, then, exists on the same level as the mind. It is, like the mind, a spiritual faculty of the soul; and mind and will may be thought of

1. Dom Chautard, *op. cit.*, pp. 246, 247.

as the right and left “arms” of the soul. The will differs from the mind in that it is a blind faculty and depends on the mind for guidance. Thus, the will chooses a good that is presented to it by the mind. This is why it is so important that the mind be filled with God and not with creatures.

The first and elementary act of the will, since it is an appetite, is *desire*: it desires the good that is presented to it by the mind. Thus, a man desires the career of a doctor. The will sets to work all the other faculties in order to fulfill the desire. Consequently, the man sets to work to learn medicine. This is why we say that *action* comes from the will, and why we think of the will as controlling action. Lastly, we possess and enjoy the good that we have desired and striven after, so that the last and climactic act of the will is *love*. This analysis shows us how necessary it is that *our desires be purified* of creatures and filled with God if we wish to love God; for love proceeds from desire.

Other emotions like horror, grief, fear, proceed from the will: they are the obverse of desire, love and joy (but they do not concern us in the present matter).

2. The Difference Between the Will and the Sensible Appetite

As the will is the seat of all love, so also it is the seat of all sin: sin resides *exclusively* in the will. In dealing with temptation, it is important to remember this; for temptation proceeds, not from the will, but from the lower appetites. Because they proceed from the lower, sensible appetites, they are *only temptations*; and a temptation becomes a sin only if the will acquiesces in it.

An essential difference between will and instinct (or sensible appetite) is this: the will is free, but the instinct is not. That is why sin is in the will and why there can be no sin in the instinct. For example: I feel hungry, Now I am not free not to feel hungry – hunger is a necessity of nature. But I am free to decide whether or not I will eat, what, and how much I will eat. The hunger is mere instinct, but the other acts come from the free will. Similarly, by the necessity of my sensible nature, I feel sleepy. I cannot by an effort of my will destroy my sleepiness, or my thirst or any other sense appetite), but I can, by exercising my will, defer going to sleep.

It is very necessary for our peace of mind to understand this clearly. Sin is always in the will, never in the instinct. Persistent temptations, originating in our sensible nature, do not become sins unless they are freely consented to by the will. . . . Thus the inclination of the flesh towards a sinful act does not constitute a sin even though it is a pleasurable feeling. If it were not pleasurable, it would be no temptation; but as long

as the will says, “I do not want this pleasure,” there is no sin.

This distinction is of particular value in regard to temptations of the flesh. As long as we do not want these temptations, they are not sins. Thus, the fact that impure thoughts or desires arise in the mind, and even persist there, does not constitute sin: for this, the permission and acquiescence of the will is needed. A steak may be very desirable to me on Friday (instinct), but I do not sin unless I deliberately eat the steak (will).

Although instinct is separate from the will, it greatly influences the will in fallen nature. We must make the will supreme over instinct. We can do this by mortifying our sensible appetites. If you want a drink, wait five minutes. If you want a particular piece of meat, take another. By this means, sensible appetites are gradually brought under control. Such mortification, therefore, is a great help in overcoming temptation and in developing self-control.

Father Scupoli (*The Spiritual Combat*) says that our rational will stands midway between the divine will and the sensible appetites. Both the divine will and the sensible appetites “court” the rational will: each of them wants the rational will to choose it. It is our duty as Christians to conform our will to God’s in all things, and not to heed the persuasion of the appetites.

3. The Will Is Our Citadel

That is, the human will is a fortress, absolutely impregnable, and we are safe as long as we stay inside; but the moment that we leave the will, the devil can make trouble for us.

The will is absolutely impregnable because no one can force our wills or enter into them. Even God stands aloof from the human will. He respects its freedom, holding out graces to us, but not forcing our acceptance. No human being can force our wills. Nor can the devil enter them or force them.

When we step outside our will we enter the intellect, looking for reasons why God does this or that to us, or why He commands this or that. Now the devil can enter the intellect, deceiving us with falsehood. Hence, we should not enter the intellect, but *live in the citadel of the will* and refuse to argue with Satan.

This principle is illustrated by the sin of Eve. Had Eve stayed in the will and obeyed God blindly, as she should have done, she would not have fallen into sin. But the devil wanted to get her into the intellect; and when she gave as her reason for not eating the forbidden fruit that God had commanded her not to do so, the devil immediately asked her,

“Why?” hoping that she would leave the safety of her will and begin to reason. She did begin to reason, thus failing in faith in God, and she soon fell into sin.

We are never to ask the why of any of God’s ordinances, but simply accept them.

Thus, if God sends us consolations, we should never ask why. If we do, the devil will suggest that we are becoming saints and cause us to sin by vainglory. Nor should we ask why God sends afflictions, dryness, contempt, etc. The devil will suggest reasons: for example, that we do not please God, and that, therefore, we should give up meditation and mortification; thus he endeavors to make us fall.

We must live *by faith*, believing in the goodness and wisdom of God. Nor should we seek to question God’s ways by our reason. In every event that God sends us, whether consolation or affliction, we should simply say that we want from this event whatever God wants us to have, without trying to investigate any further.

When a soul gives itself to God, it is troubled by all sorts of interior trials. There will be nights, i.e., periods of darkness, in which the soul can see nothing, but must live by faith alone. There will be periods of aridity, or dryness, in which the soul gets no consolation from spiritual things. By means of such darkness God purifies our faith (since we must then live unsupported by reason); and by aridities He purifies our love (showing us that we must not seek His consolations)... In such cases we should do what we would in analogous circumstances in the physical order. When night comes, it would be foolish to try to hasten its passing; we must simply wait patiently until dawn. If we are passing through a desert on a journey, it does no good to complain; we must simply wait until this part of the trip is over.

So, in all kinds of interior trials, we must practice patience, and we must make our way guided only by the light of faith – a light which St. John of the Cross likens to darkness! For when we live by faith we understand nothing, nor do we seek any human consolation...

As for temptation, it is always the harbinger of grace, the herald that announces God’s coming. For when God wishes to come to the soul, He first sends temptation to purify us; every increase in the divine life of grace within us demands first a further purification.

When we have been sufficiently tried by temptation, God comes to us. We may then look upon temptation as a kind of herald or ambassador of God... The thought should help us to be strong in the face of temptation. For who would fall in love with the ambassador if it were

possible to marry the prince? If we refuse the offer of temptation, we can possess Christ Himself.

4. The Will Is Our Sanctuary

Only the acts of the will are meritorious because only the acts of the will are free. Thus, the activity of all our other powers – mind, imagination, bodily powers – becomes meritorious only when it is offered by the will. Hence, eating, for example, is not of itself a meritorious supernatural act; it becomes so only when it is freely offered to God by the will.

The supreme offering that can be made to God is that of the will itself. In all things we must seek the will of God, obey the will of God, conform our will to God's will. Thus, the will immolates itself. And since this gift is so precious in God's sight, the will should seek in all events the opportunity to immolate itself. Every affliction must be accepted as the will of God, a sacrifice of one's own will on the altar within our sanctuary. By living within the will, as in a sanctuary, we can possess perfect peace.

Another example. An airplane pilot guides his frail craft through storms and air-pockets, over mountains, chasms, etc. He is surrounded on every side by unknown dangers. If he saw all these dangers and worried about them, he would (at the very least) lose his peace of mind. But he does not worry about them because he knows that he is perfectly safe as long as he follows his instruments.

It is like this in the spiritual life. We are surrounded by all kinds of dangers: afflictions, contempt, humiliations, etc. . . . If we worry about these things and seek to investigate their reason we will lose our peace of mind. We must ignore these dangers; and as the pilot is guided by a radio beam, so must we go on, guided solely by faith. So long as we follow faith we are secure amid all dangers; and we can ignore all dangers, living at peace in the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

PART FIVE: THE FOLLY OF THE CROSS

Chapter I

Almsgiving: The Sowing of External Goods

We have already distinguished the three kinds of natural goods – external, bodily, and interior – which are pursued by men. We now study in detail how these goods are to be used in the supernatural order, that they may be profitable to our own souls and the souls of others, according to the injunction of Jesus: “Make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of iniquity, that when you shall fail they may receive you into everlasting dwellings.” (Luke 1, 9) Otherwise, Our Lord will have to lament over us: “The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.”

1. The Necessity of Almsgiving

The necessity and utility of almsdeeds can be seen with the help of the basic principles of the Christian life that we have been describing.

a. The Supernatural

If we view almsgiving from the natural point of view there is no need for it. Why should I use my possessions to help a stranger? Accordingly, there is little charity among those who live worldly lives; they use their money to secure their own enjoyment. Modern humanitarian charity, as shown in most social welfare work, is purely natural, and therefore not charity at all. It is motivated by a desire for social and economic efficiency and thus seeks its reward on this earth. That is why it can promote birth control, euthanasia, etc.; hence, it also involves usually the humiliation and regimentation of those unfortunates whom it seeks to help. Social relief *in itself* (i.e., in the abstract) is good, and it *could* be animated by Christian principles (although in this case it would change its external form somewhat, too). As a matter of fact, it is animated, not by supernatural charity, but by the naturalistic, humanitarian principles of the nineteenth century.

At the supernatural level, matters are altogether different; the stranger is no longer a stranger. Like me, he is the image of God; like me

he is destined to become a “son of God”; like me he has been redeemed by Jesus Christ and is, therefore, bound to me by a blood tie more intimate and more precious than that by which brothers are bound together. He and I are now members of the same family with Mary as our Mother and God as our Father and Jesus as our Brother; should I not then help a Brother of Jesus?

From the supernatural point of view, giving an alms is like changing money from my left to my right pocket. If I am obliged to help my natural brother, how much higher is the obligation to help my supernatural brother!

b. The Glory of God

This doctrine manifests another reason or rather two reasons for giving alms.

In the first place, since we are obliged to glorify God, what better way is there of doing it than by imitating Him? “Imitation is the sincerest flattery.” If a man wishes to flatter his employer, it is better for him to copy the latter’s clothes, etc., than to indulge in mere verbal flattery, the sincerity of which in any case will be suspected.

So, likewise, to glorify God, we cannot do better than to imitate Him in all His attributes, including the generosity with which He has lavished His gifts upon us both in the order of nature and of grace.

Secondly, not only must we ourselves glorify God, but we must also use His creatures to do so. Accordingly, we should use money for that purpose. By almsgiving we do this; and moreover we give our neighbor whom we help an occasion to thank and glorify God.

c. The Supreme Dominion of God

God’s Supreme Dominion extends to the property and wealth that we possess. We are but stewards given the management of certain goods for a time. But we shall have one day to render an account of our stewardship, as the Gospel parable teaches, and God will expect an increase in grace and merits through our use of the goods that He has given us.

This is why St. Thomas (and with him the popes of modern times who have written the social encyclicals), while affirming the right of property, does not defend the complete and irresponsible ownership that is claimed by modern property holders. St. Thomas teaches that property, in addition to taking care of one’s own needs, must be used for the good of one’s fellows.

Now, if God is really the owner of our money, while we are but His agents in its use, how can I withhold help from my neighbor who is destined to supernatural happiness as surely as I am? Suppose a man sends a boy on an errand, giving him some money to purchase goods. Certainly the man would be angry and would punish the boy, if the latter, instead of using the money as he was told, were to use it for himself. In the eyes of God, we are like the boy on the errand; for God gives us whatever we have to accomplish the errand of glorifying Him. If we use our possession for our own pleasure, and not for the glory of God, we behave like the boy that steals his employer's money; and we will certainly be punished.

St. John Chrysostom, in this connection, gives certain counsels concerning almsgiving:¹

1. We are *sent* to *help* our neighbor, not to *judge* him. We have neither the authority nor the knowledge to judge in most cases whether or not our neighbor is worthy. Therefore, we may turn him away in his need on the pretext that he is shiftless, lazy, etc. There is just one exception to this: we should give alms when we *know* that it is not to be used in committing sin.

2. We should not give an alms with an air of patronization, as though we were conferring a favor. We are performing a duty; and in doing it, we receive a greater favor than we give. For we give a temporal good while we obtain a spiritual good. Instead of making the poor man cringe and beg for the money, the saint says the rich man should go down on *his* knee to receive the greater favor, i.e., grace.

3. Similarly, instead of making the poor hunt for us, we who possess the goods of this world should hunt them out. And when we find a poor man we should not say: "Why should I give this man anything? Just because I happened upon him first, am I to be burdened with his care?" If one were to happen upon a treasure, the saint suggests, would he say, "Why hasn't someone else found this? Do I have to take it just because I happened upon it first?" He that finds a poor man, finds a spiritual treasure that should be taken up at once.

1. Rev. Albe J. Luddy, O. Cist., *Life and Teaching of St. Bernard*, Dublin, M. H. Gill and Son, Ltd., 1937, p. 148. See also *Homilies in Roman Breviary*.

d. The Folly of the Cross

The Folly of the Cross finally teaches us that we should sow the treasures of this earth in order to reap the treasures of the next world. Therefore, we should sow our money; and we do this by giving it to the poor.

It is sometimes said that when we die we cannot take our possessions with us. This is not true: we can take any or all of our possessions with us into heaven when we die – indeed, we can multiply them infinitely in the next world. As we have seen, all the goods of this world are samples of the goods of heaven, and by “sowing” the samples, we obtain them again in heaven, only in greater quantity and quality and intensity. Accordingly, if there are possessions that we prize in a particular way, we can have them in our permanent home in heaven merely by “sowing” them.

Once more we “sow” them by giving them to the poor. Then, as St. John Chrysostom puts it, the poor become our porters, carrying our goods before us to furnish our heavenly mansion. When a rich man travels, the saint says, he buys furniture and works of art; but he does not use them to decorate his hotel room or the lodgings where he is stopping temporarily: he sends them ahead by porters to adorn his palace at home. So with us in the supernatural order. If there are any samples that we are specially fond of, we would certainly be foolish to use them to decorate our temporary quarters; we are but pilgrims in a land of exile, and, if we see anything here that attracts us, we should make the poor our porters and send it on to our heavenly home! The sensible thing to do (sensible from the supernatural point of view) with all keepsakes and valuables is to “sow” them, thus reducing our belongings to such as are demanded by the strictest necessity.

2. The Excellence of Almsgiving

a. Almsgiving shows love for God, and this in two ways: First, by assisting our needy neighbor, we show love for the divine image in him and for the Precious Blood that redeemed him. Second, by giving alms we sacrifice the creature-pleasures that we might have procured with this money. We show our preference for God over creatures. The practice of almsgiving perfectly fulfills the duty of charity; for, as we know, charity involves a withdrawal of love from creatures and then union with God. Almsgiving so fully realizes the nature of religion that St. James, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, could summarize all religious practices in it: “Religion clean and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulations; and to keep one’s self unspotted from this world.” (1, 27)

b. Almsgiving is the practice of the Gospels. Jesus Himself, “went about doing good,” and the poor were the especial objects of His love and solicitude. One of the first works done by the Apostles in the infant Church was the appointment of seven deacons to take care of poor widows (Acts 6), and Christian social work dates from that time.

The first Council of the Church, that of Jerusalem (Acts 15), after deciding in favor of St. Paul that the Gentile converts were exempt from the law of circumcision, made just one demand of him, namely: “Only that we should be mindful of the poor; which same thing I was careful to do.” (Gal. 2, 10)

St. Paul was faithful to this commission, and in his second letter to the Corinthians (8-10) he writes a beautiful exhortation concerning alms: “For you know the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that being rich He became poor for your sakes; that through His Poverty you may be rich. And herein I give my advice; for this is profitable for you have begun not only to do, but also to be willing a year ago. Now, therefore, perform ye it also in deed; that, as your mind is forward to be willing, so it may be to perform, out of that which you have.”

Finally, assistance to the poor has always been the practice of the saints; and the Church has sponsored religious communities and all kinds of charitable institutions dedicated to the purpose of helping the poor.

c. Almsgiving draws all kinds of blessings down upon us. Jesus promises that a cup of cold water given in His Name will not go unrewarded. More than this, He promises eternal happiness in heaven to those who perform the works of charity: “Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me to eat: I was thirsty and you gave me to drink...” (Matt. 25) And in the same place He promises everlasting damnation to those who fail to perform the works of charity.

3. The Measure of Almsgiving

a. The amount to be given in alms can be determined in three different ways. First, we may follow the theological rule, which says that we should give of our superfluity. This rule is not practicable at the present time, because modern standards of living and the modern pleasure philosophy have so multiplied our fictitious necessities that no one acknowledges that he has a superfluity. A rise in income is quickly consumed by the purchase of a larger car, a more spacious house, a summer home, a yacht, etc. The second rule is that given by the Old Testament: that we should give tithes, that is, one-tenth of our income.

This is a very good rule, and it comes from God. The third rule is the supernatural rule, which tells us to give as much as we can. The reason is, of course, that we reap according to the amount that we sow: “Now, this I say: He who soweth sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who soweth in blessings, shall also reap of blessings. Every one as he hath determined in his heart, not with sadness or of necessity: For God loveth a cheerful giver.” (II Cor. 9, 6)

b. Those who have no money to give the poor can give them of their time and affection. We can sow time by visiting the poor; and, if we have nothing else to give them, we can offer them help, solace, companionship, encouragement, thereby showing our practical belief in the doctrine of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

We can also give them of our affection. Christians should love poverty and the poor; for the simple and sufficient reason that Christ loved them and identified Himself with them. All the Christians who enter religious communities take a voluntary vow of poverty; that is, they make voluntary paupers of themselves. These should have a special love of poverty.

But all Christians, even if they do not take the vow of poverty, must preserve the spirit of poverty if they wish to be saved. Even in the case of religious, it is the spirit of poverty that counts most. For, as St. Francis de Sales points out, it is possible to live in poverty and yet to be rich in spirit. Now poverty of spirit consists in this, that one despises, not merely money, but also, and in particular, the pleasures and creature-comforts that money can buy. Poverty of spirit thus manifests itself in a refusal to use the things of the world for enjoyment only and in limiting their use to the demands of necessity.

Above all, the spirit of poverty shows itself in a genuine love for the poor. Thus, there should be no such thing as snobbishness or human respect among Christians. “My brethren, have not the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ of glory with respect of persons. For if there shall come into your assembly a man having a golden ring, in fine apparel, and there shall come in also a poor man in mean attire, and you have respect to him that is clothed with the fine apparel, and shall say to him: Sit thou here well; but say to the poor man: Stand thou there, or sit under my footstool: do you not judge within yourselves, and are become judges of unjust thoughts? Hearken, my dearest brethren: hath not God chosen the poor in this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him? But you have dishonored the poor man.” (James 2, 1-6)

Despite all efforts to dilute this truth, the fact remains that the rich, although in an enviable position in the eyes of the world, are in a perilous position in regard to their eternal salvation. Nor is there any doubt about Christ's preference for the poor: "But let the brother of low condition glory in his exaltation; and the rich in his being low, because as the flower of the grass shall he pass away. For the sun rose with a burning heat, and parched the grass, and the flower thereof fell off, and the beauty of the shape thereof perished; so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways." (James 1, 9)

Chapter II

Mortification: The Sowing of Bodily Goods

1. The Necessity of Mortification

a. The plan of God the Father demands mortification. God the Father has decreed that man shall enjoy a supernatural destiny, and in order to achieve this destiny he must be stripped of the natural man. Man must deny the desires of the body in order to cultivate those of the spirit.

b. The plan of God the Son demands that we unite our mortifications with His sufferings in order that we may possess His divine life and so enter into happiness. Of ourselves we could not enter into heaven; it is only by being united to the Son that we can pass the heavenly gate. We must, in the words of the Apostle, "put on Christ." And this is accomplished only by stripping ourselves of the "old man and his deeds" by mortification. Hence, mortification is really necessary that we may possess the divine life: "Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest." (II Cor. 4, 10)

c. The plan of God the Holy Ghost, which is to sanctify us, also demands that we be transformed into divine beings; hence we must give up what is merely natural and human.

d. Because of sin, both original and actual, we must practice mortification. Although original sin is remitted by baptism, its effects remain. And these effects will cause further actual sin unless they are removed or controlled by mortification. Actual sins demand mortification by way of satisfaction and propitiation.

It should be noticed that sin is a secondary reason for mortification: even though there were no actual sin, mortification would still be necessary; for we must die, not merely to sin, but to nature. This point has practical importance, for a great deal of slackness about mortification can be traced to two causes, neither of which can excuse from the works of penance: first, those who have not greatly sinned (or who imagine that they have not) excuse themselves from mortification on this account; others who may have sinned, but have no great hatred of sin, for reasons which we have already considered, fail to mortify themselves because they associate mortification only with sin.

2. Three Doctrinal Propositions Concerning Mortification

a. *The obligation to mortify ourselves does not derive merely from Church law, but from the divine law.* The Church simply interprets this law and fixes the minimum observance. Jesus Himself either expressly teaches or assumes the obligation in the following texts: (Luke 13, 1-5; Matt. 3, 17; Matt. 6, 16, Matt. 17, 20; Matt. 9, 15)

St. Paul constantly teaches mortification, thus: “Know you not that they that run in the race all run indeed, but one receiveth the prize? So run that you may obtain. And every one that striveth for the mastery refraineth himself from all things: and they, indeed, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible one. I, therefore, so run not as at an uncertainty: I so fight, not as one beating the air; but I chastise my body and bring it under subjection; lest perhaps when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway.” (I Cor. 9, 24-27)

b. *Mortification is necessary for salvation.* “Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish.” (Luke 13, 1-5) The translators of the Douay Bible had in mind the errors of the Protestants when they rendered this text, and by choosing the words “do penance,” instead of the word “repent,” they bring home the fact that, not mere interior penance, but the external works of penance are required. In this text, it is clear, Jesus fixes an indispensable condition for salvation: “*Unless* you do penance...” “But mortification in itself, and to a certain degree and under given circumstances, is of precept and necessary to salvation. This is not only true of the self-inflicted pains which are sometimes of obligation in order to overcome vehement temptations or of those various mortifications which are needful in order to avoid sin. But a definite amount of fasting and abstinence, irrespective of the temptations or circumstances of individuals, is imposed by the Church on all her children under pain of eternal damnation.”¹

c. *When it is said that mortification is necessary for salvation, both*

interior and exterior mortifications are included.

“Mortification is both interior and exterior; and, of course, the superior excellence of the interior is beyond question. But if there is one doctrine more important than another on this subject, it is that there can be no interior mortification without exterior; and this last must come first. In a word, to be spiritual, bodily mortification is indispensable.”¹

Father Leen says the same thing: “Our mortification must be thorough; it must affect our interior, as well as our exterior, our minds as well as our senses. To confine ourselves to bodily penance and to neglect the curbing of our interior powers is to perform a useless task; whilst, on the other hand, to neglect corporal mortifications in the pretense of devoting one’s self merely to interior ones as being of more importance is to engage ourselves in a futile endeavor.”² Again: “It [i.e., mortification] exercises itself on the outward and on the inward man, and accordingly is either interior or exterior. To mortify one’s self merely under one to the exclusion of the other of those aspects is practically to lose one’s time. Without the double mortification, what St. Paul called the ‘Flesh’ is not sufficiently subdued.”³

Of those who excuse themselves from bodily mortification on the pretext that interior mortification is more important, Father Faber says: “I tremble when people speak of interior mortification, it sounds so like a confession that they are leading comfortable lives.” And St. Vincent de Paul: “He who makes little of exterior mortifications, saying that interior ones are much more perfect, makes one to know that he is not mortified, either interiorly or exteriorly.”⁴

3. Objections

From Faber’s excellent treatment of the subject,⁵ we answer certain objections that are made against mortification:

a. “Some have spoken as if bodily mortification were less necessary in modern times than it was before, and consequently that the recommen-

1. Faber, *op. cit.*, chap. XI.

1. *Ibid.*

2. Edward Leen, C.S.Sp., *Progress Through Mental Prayer*, N. Y., Sheed and Ward, 1938, pp. 241, 242.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

4. Theodore Maynard, *Apostle of Charity*, N. Y., Dial Press, 1939, p. 106 (footnote).

5. *Op. cit.*, chap. XI.

dations of spiritual writers under this head are to be taken with considerable abatement. If this means that a less degree of exterior mortification is necessary for holiness now than was necessary for the past ages of the Church, nothing can be more untrue, and it comes up to the verge of condemned propositions.

“The degree of mortification and its idea must remain the same in all ages of the Church: for penance is an abiding mark of the Church. To do penance because the kingdom of heaven is at hand is the especial work of a justified soul. To get grace, to keep it and to multiply it, penance is necessary at every step. And when we say that holiness is a note of the Catholic Church, we show forth the necessity of mortification; for one implies the other, the first includes the last.”

b. Objection: “Increased valetudinarianism in modern times makes mortification impracticable.”

Answer: “We must, of course, make allowance for health. Nevertheless, the plea of health, while it is always to be listened to, is to be listened to with suspicion. We must always be jealous of the side on which nature and self are serving as volunteers. Great, then, as we must admit the consequences of a state of valetudinarianism to be on the spiritual life, a general and plenary dispensation from corporal austerities is not one of them; and we must remember also that our forefathers who troubled their heads little enough about their nerves, and had no tea to drink, were accustomed to hear from Father Baker, who only gave utterance to the old mystical tradition, that a state of robust health was positively a disqualification for the higher stages of the spiritual life.”

St. Alphonsus gives this maxim: “Woe to him that loves health more than sanctity.” (*Selva*, Maxims)

c. Another objection, “and one sometimes urged in behalf of priests and religious, is that modern hard work is a substitute for ancient penance. I do not say... that this objection expresses no truth, but only that it will not bear all the weight men put upon it. Certain kinds of penance are incompatible with hard work; while at the same time the excessive exterior propensities which hard work gives us are so perilous to the soul that certain other kinds of penance are all the more necessary to correct this disturbing force. All great missionaries, Seneri and Pinamonti, Leonard of Port Maurice and Paul of the Cross, have worn instruments of penance. The penalties of life, as Da Ponte calls them, are doubtless an excellent penance when endured with an interior spirit, and worth far more than a hundred self-inflicted pains. Yet he who maintains that the endurance of the former is a dispensation from infliction of the

latter, will find himself out of harmony with the whole stream of approved spiritual teaching in the Church; and the brevity of his perseverance in the interior life will soon show both himself and others the completeness of his delusion. Without bodily penance, zealous apostolic work hardens the heart far more than it sanctifies it.”

d. Another “class of objectors tells us to be content with the trials God sends us, which are neither few nor light. If they told us that the gay suffering and graceful welcome of these dispensations were of infinitely greater price than the sting of the discipline or the twinge of the catenella, most true and most important would the lesson be... But the objectors fall into that mistake of exaggeration, which runs through so many of the spiritual books. Because A is more important than B, they jump to the conclusion that B is of no importance at all. Because the mortifications which God sends are more efficacious and less delusive, if rightly taken, than the mortifications we inflict on ourselves, it does not follow but that these last are, not only an important, but an indispensable element in the spiritual life. We may answer them briefly as follows. Yes, the best of all penance is to take in the spirit of interior compunction the mortifications which the wise and affectionate course of God’s fatherly providence brings upon us; but unless we have practiced ourselves in the generous habit of voluntary penances, the chances are very much indeed against our forming this interior spirit of penance, and, therefore, of getting the full profit out of the involuntary trials God sends us.”

e. Objection: “Mortifications are all right for Carmelites and Trappists – we even expect them in this case – but they are not necessary for people of the world.”

Answer: This is inverted logic, We must reason precisely the other way: If they are necessary for Carmelites and Trappists, how much more necessary are mortifications for those who do not enjoy the protection of a cloistered life? St. Francis de Sales, gentlest of saints, recommends corporal penances to lay people.¹

f. “Bodily mortification,” to take a final objection, is subject to abuse.” This is true, but the abuse of a thing is never an argument against its right use. We answer with Father Leen: “... This danger of the misuse of corporal austerities should not discourage their use. Even though beginners make mistakes in the exercise of bodily penances, these mistakes are corrected by time and good will with prudent direction. The awkward movements of the child must precede the assured and firm step

1. *Introduction to a Devout Life*, Part III, chap. XXIII, p. 208.

of the adult. Corporal mortifications are to be commended in spite of the risks that attend their use.”¹

4. The Practice of Mortification

We treat here of exterior mortification only, for we have already dealt with interior mortification when speaking of the Folly of the Cross (the sowing of the judgment and the will) and the Supreme Dominion of God.

Mortification should be systematic and thorough; we begin with the external senses:

MORTIFICATION OF THE EYES. The concupiscence of the eyes must be overcome; and to this end we must work directly contrary to the influence of the world, for the world encourages this concupiscence. First of all, then, we must refuse to observe whatsoever has any trace or beginning of sin in it, as pornographic advertisements, movies, picture magazines. We must, however, fight *here* not only impurity, which must be exterminated utterly, but *also sensuality*, which, besides being a fault in itself, leads to impurity.

Here, as elsewhere, we must have not merely the object of destroying sin, but also of destroying the natural taste for creatures. Therefore, we should give up all delight in curious or interesting sights even when there is no trace of sin. In other words, we should use our eyes from motives of necessity and utility, but never out of idle curiosity. Our object must be to empty the senses and dry up their life, so that we may live in the spirit and be filled with the knowledge of God. Therefore, all voluntary delight in creatures should be excluded.

MORTIFICATION OF THE HEARING. What was said about the sense of sight applies also here. We must get rid of, not merely that which leads to sin, but also all wilful delight in worldly matters. We must not be interested in the news of the world – for interest betrays love – either of the world at large or of our own small circle, except insofar as is necessary for our health or work. “Keeping up” does not require listening to all the broadcasts of news, etc. The radio brings the world right into our homes nowadays. If people listen to the cheap romances that come in over the radio, if they listen to all the news and enjoyments of the world, can they live a life of union with God? The radio should be used from a motive of utility only.

This principle holds for newspapers, also. An intelligent knowledge

1. *Op. cit.*, p. 253.

of the world does not demand our reading about crimes, worthless tidbits of news, garbled and inaccurate sensational accounts of world affairs, all the advertisements, the comics, etc.

Moreover, we should not indulge in worldly conversations, but seek to think and speak of the things of God, and cultivate such acquaintances as help us in this.

Connected closely with the mortification of the hearing is that of the tongue. If we are not to listen to gossip, neither are we to indulge in it. We should not be interested in the doings of our neighbors; those who lead an interior life will exclude everything from their attention that interferes with their union with God. St. James goes so far as to say: “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man. He is able also with a bridle to lead about the whole body.” (3, 2) That is, control of the tongue is so important, and so difficult, that when we have achieved it, we are already perfect; it takes a saint to converse without committing faults. “And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.” (James 3, 2) St. James also says: “Any man thinking himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue, but deceiving his own heart, this *man’s religion is vain.*” (1, 26) In this connection the whole third chapter of St. James’ epistle should be read.

“Musicians should exercise a check on their desire to hear music, should deliberately shut their ears to all that is merely sensuous and should refuse themselves the pleasure of hearing again in their imagination the good music that appeals to them.”¹

The touch is also mortified by those extraordinary penances and penitential instruments used by the saints. Both St. Francis de Sales and St. Alphonsus de Liguori recommend their moderate use by Christians in general. Individuals should make use of these penances under the guidance of their spiritual director.

MORTIFICATION OF THE IMAGINATION. This task is largely taken care of by the mortification of the external senses; but if the latter are not mortified, then it is impossible to mortify the imagination. In general, we should exclude all images that have only pleasure as their object. We should not then engage in reveries, day-dreaming, etc. Furthermore, we must give up what stimulates the imagination unnecessarily – movies, pictures, but especially romances and novels. We should not read novels from a motive of pleasure; and we should shun the romances in newspapers, magazines, and on the radio, etc. Once more, there is no question of sin; but feeding one’s mind with romantic tales is no way of fulfilling Christ’s command

1. *Ibid.*, p. 247.

to pray always. We must empty the imagination of earthly things. This mortification of the imagination is the same as that of the memory, spoken of by St. John of the Cross.

Chapter III

Afflictions: The Sowing of Interior Goods

1. There are two main reasons why God sends us afflictions.

The first reason is this: There are in us two contrary loves, the love of the world and the love of God; and in order to sanctify ourselves the former must be destroyed. We, ourselves, by means of voluntary mortifications, could never destroy this love of the world in our souls – it is planted in our natures too deeply – and, therefore, God must take a hand in the matter by sending us afflictions, by which we are detached gradually from the love of creatures.

St. Francis de Sales gives this example to show what takes place: A gardener, when he transplants a flower or shrub, must be careful to preserve not only the large central roots, but also the numerous tiny rootlets that go out in all directions; for these latter nourish the plant, and, if they are injured, the plant will die. For this reason, the gardener detaches these rootlets one by one and preserves them carefully when he replants. In the same way, when the soul is transplanted to heaven, its numerous affections, large and small, for the creatures of the world must be broken so that it may be free of earthly interests; and only then is it ready to enter into its eternal happiness. The means that Almighty God employs in detaching us from the earth are to be found in the trials and afflictions of life; for an affliction is nothing else than the loss of some created good.

The second reason for afflictions is that they purify our passions, enlighten our intellects and transform our wills.

1. They purify our passions: Human passions are by no means evil; they are, in fact, good and powerful sources of energy. But in actual life they are very generally employed in a wrong way, that is, in the love of creatures. Hence they must be purified, so that they may be used rightly in a life of devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ.

God purifies them by afflictions: A boy is fond of sports, for example, and God allows him to meet with an accident that prevents him from

participating in sports. Or a girl is vain of her beauty, and God deprives her of it, either by age or by some accident. A person likes good food and God allows him to suffer from a bad stomach... and so on.

2. Afflictions enlighten the intellect: The Christian must live by faith and not by human prudence. We have seen how, to do this, he must sow his judgment; and also how, in order to help him, God surrounds him with stupidity, so that he can live only by faith.

God also sends other afflictions to enlighten the intellect, that it may proceed exclusively by the pure light of faith. When the soul has learned to accept contradiction and sow its judgment, it begins to find its happiness in spiritual consolations, divine inspirations, etc. But God wants us to seek Him, and not His consolations. He uses the latter in order to attract the soul, but then He withdraws them in order that the soul may purify its love for Him. Thus, the soul suffers from aridity, so that it can no longer meditate or pray well. Else God allows it to be severely tempted against faith. He wishes to see if the soul will be faithful amid lack of consolations. For, as we are told by the saints, we must rather seek the God of consolations than the consolations of God.

Those who are lukewarm are also often afflicted through their intellects, for God wants them to turn to Him. Their minds, instead of being directed to God, are occupied with the samples. And now God sends them scruples or temptations against faith in order that they will forget the samples and occupy their minds with Him.

3. As we noted in the above paragraph, our love of God in the beginning is very imperfect, being mixed with much self-love. This shows in the souls seeking after spiritual consolations. In order to purify the will, therefore, which is the faculty from which love proceeds, God afflicts it as well as the intellect. He does this much as a girl tries the love of a suitor; the girl pouts, acts coy, protests that her suitor does not love her, merely in order to hear him declare that he does love her. In the same way God tries our love by severe temptations: The soul, instead of getting consolation from spiritual things is suddenly tempted against faith, or is tempted to blaspheme, or is tempted to impurity, perhaps at the very time that it is preparing to receive Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

In such a case, God wants the soul to protest its love by acts of faith, charity, etc., even though there is no consolation in doing so. To a person trying earnestly to live a supernatural life, these spiritual afflictions are very trying – much more trying than any other kind. For generous souls quickly learn to put aside the pleasures of this world and to stand the trials that come through others; in order to purify them further,

therefore, God must try them in spiritual things. *The important thing to remember in all these spiritual trials is that the soul must be absolutely faithful to prayer and to all its devotions* regardless of how it feels. If it feels unreligious or even irreligious, it must, nevertheless, go on living only by faith. The reason why the soul must conduct itself in this way is apparent from the nature of these trials; God sends them or permits them in order that the soul may prove its love is unselfish. To stop prayer because of a halt of sensible feeling or even because of the loss of more interior consolations would show that the soul is thinking of self, not of God.

At such times the devil is very active and anxious that the soul give up mental prayer, especially making it feel that prayer in such circumstances would be hypocritical. St. Teresa says that this is a favorite temptation of the devil. To overcome it we should remember that, despite all imperfections, we are never acting as hypocrites when we act in accordance with the baptismal seal that stamps us children of God: even though we do not *feet* religious, we are still children of God.

Thus it is that God sends all kinds of afflictions, sensible and spiritual, natural and supernatural, in order to perfect us in sanctity: “But the God of all grace, who hath called us all into His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little, will Himself perfect you and confirm you and establish you.” (I Peter 5, 10)

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love Him.” (James 1, 12)

4. How can we accept afflictions? Sufferings and affliction do not sanctify the soul automatically: on the contrary, they may harden it, embitter it, or make it callous. Their effect will depend on the dispositions of the soul itself, that is, how the soul receives its afflictions.

We can receive afflictions like pagans. First of all, we can be like the Stoics, to whom it was a matter of pride not to flinch under sufferings. For a man to complain under suffering was to them a sign of weakness. Their conduct had about it a certain nobility, but it was rooted in pride and also resulted in harshness and coldness.

Secondly, we can receive afflictions like fatalists. We will then say: “Well, this had to happen. It was in the books – it was fate. There is nothing I can do about it; hence, I may as well not complain, for complaint would only be senseless.” This way of looking at suffering begets gloominess, bitterness, and callousness.

We can accept afflictions like the damned souls. These curse their afflictions and they also curse God for causing them. There are men and

women on earth who receive afflictions in the same way – in anticipation of hell. When they are called on to suffer, they turn against God and the Church, call God unjust, curse Him and blaspheme.

Finally, we can accept afflictions like Christians, in a spirit of faith, of hope, and of charity. We should do this by offering our trials in union with those of Jesus, according to the example of St. Paul: “*I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the suffering of Christ, in my flesh, for His body, which is the Church.*” (Col. 1, 24)

In other words, as Jesus redeemed the world through suffering, so are we to add our sufferings to His, in order to apply the fruits of redemption to souls. We can do as the Little Flower, who, in her last illness, offered up every step that she took about the convent garden for some far-off missionary.

“But the sufferings of Christ,” you object, “are infinite: how can we fill them up?” St. Augustine explains this by means of the doctrine of the Mystical Body, of which Christ is the head and we are the members; so that the members must share in all the activity of the Head: “The sufferings of Christ were filled up, but in the Head only; there were wanting still the sufferings of Christ in His members. Christ came first as the Head; His Mystic Body follows.”¹

The spirit in which we receive afflictions should be one of joy, likewise according to the example of St. Paul: “*I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulations.*” (II Cor. 7, 4) And again: “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.” (II Cor. 6, 10)

The reason for such joy is obvious: suffering is the means to sanctify one’s self and others. Great zeal for souls, which is the inevitable accompaniment of love for God, can only rejoice in the suffering that causes souls to be saved. The Christian, besides the fact that he himself needs afflictions to strip him of the natural, must pay in suffering for every soul that he helps spiritually.

To be able to accept afflictions as Christians, we should make the following acts:

An Act of Faith: We must make an act of faith in the Father Who created this trial for us. We must see the action of God in every event in our lives: even as Tobias, after a life of good works, saw the Providence of God behind the dung that fell and blinded him as he slept;

1. Dom Chautard, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

or as Job saw the hand of God in all his afflictions; or as Jesus saw the Father's will behind all His sufferings.

An Act of Hope: We must make this act in union with God the Son, Who redeemed us by suffering, and Who will reward us in heaven for accepting this trial now.

An Act of Charity: We must make this act to God, the Holy Ghost, Who is sanctifying us; and Who, therefore, will infallibly give us a divine gift for what we lose now. Every suffering is a sign that we are going to receive a favor from God; just as every favor from God must prepare us for greater sufferings.

Finally, in our afflictions, we should not seek natural consolations, for we thus rob ourselves of graces and defeat God's merciful plans for us. Therefore, although we may seek advice from friends, we should not run to them for consolation in time of trial: we should seek our consolation before the tabernacle. When sick, we should not "kill time" by reading novels, listening to the radio, etc. But we should unite ourselves in prayer and suffering to Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter IV

Death: The Sowing of Everything

"For whosoever shall save his life, shall lose it; for he that shall lose his life for My sake, shall save it." (Luke 9, 24)



We can consider the subject of death from both the natural and supernatural points of view.

1. Natural View of Death

From the natural point of view it is difficult and repugnant to reflect on death: for death is, in a sense, contrary to nature. It is, indeed, both natural and contrary to nature, according to the point from which we view it.

a. Death is natural to the *body*, but not to the soul, which is immortal. The reason why death is natural to the body is that the body is composed of a number of heterogeneous and even opposed elements. The soul gathers these elements together under a principle of unity (itself) for a time. But because of the processes of change and corruption which take place in all material things, the disintegrating forces finally triumph; and body and soul separate in death.

But the soul is essentially immortal because it is essentially simple; that is to say, it is not composed of parts, but is an indivisible entity; hence, it cannot be resolved into its respective parts, or elements, for the sufficient reason that it has none; hence, it cannot die.

Therefore, death is natural to the body, but it is contrary to the nature of the soul and our spiritual personality. For this reason the soul revolts against the idea of death. Indeed, even the body, like all created natures, tends to conserve itself in existence. Hence, from the point of view of the body, as well as the soul, the thought of death is repugnant.

b. While death is natural in the way described, it is also a punishment for sin: death became the lot of the human race because of the transgression of Adam. When God created Adam He gave him in addition to the state of original justice, certain preternatural gifts, of which one was bodily immortality. Thus, although death is natural, God had intercepted this law in the case of Adam and had given him bodily immortality as a special gift. When Adam sinned, losing his supernatural state of justice, he also lost these preternatural gifts and fell under the law of death.

From this point of view also, then, it is unpleasant to think of death, and there is a tendency to reject the thought; for it reminds us of our punishment by God and the miserable state of our nature since the Fall.

c. Another reason why it is difficult to meditate on death is that the love of creatures pulls us away from the thought into further pleasures. Even as we attend the funerals of those whom we love, we plan for our future work, or our future pleasures: as when a man hurries off from a funeral to attend a ball game. We are so caught up by the love of creatures that the thought of death makes no lasting impression on the generality of men, despite its very frequent occurrence and its awful significance.

2. The Supernatural View of Death

Rising to this level far above the natural, we find that death takes on a different aspect. Here we learn that:

a. We should think of death. The reason is a very good one: all men are sentenced to die, and their everlasting destiny depends on the

condition of their soul at the instant of death: “It is appointed unto men once to die and after death the judgment.” (Heb. 9, 27) Death changes nothing; we must be ready at any instant.

b. We should also prepare for death; this follows from the above consideration. Since we may die at any moment, we should always act as though we were on the eve of death. In fact, this can and should be taken as a rule of life: to perform each action as though we were certain of dying immediately afterwards.

The thought of death and preparation for it should be normal in the life of a Christian and they should cause him no distress. For the pagan, or for one who lives as a pagan, it is different: he does not know what is beyond death; therefore, he takes here what happiness it is possible for him to get. But the Christian is aware of what lies beyond; it is taught him by faith. To him death is but a passage from an exile to the Fatherland. Faith teaches him that his life shall continue forever, that the seed of supernatural life which he possesses in grace, will, through death, blossom forth into eternal glory.

Suppose that James, having worked at a great distance from his home and wife for several years, is now enabled to return. James has a photograph of his wife on his desk, and now a friend, seeing the photograph and hearing that James is shortly to return to his home, says: “Too bad, James, that you must leave that nice photograph and go back to your wife!” If James loves his wife, does he share the opinion of his friend in this matter?

When we die, we leave what is but a sample, or a photograph, in order to possess God Himself, in Whom all our happiness consists. Certainly a Christian who really loves God will not see anything to be regretted in this; rather will he rejoice. So St. Paul felt: “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (Phil. 1, 21) And he even goes further: “I will to be dissolved and to be with Christ.” (Phil. 1, 23)

Love is perfected by the union of the lovers: and all who love desire to be united with their beloved. We who love God shall we not desire to be united to our Beloved? And if we do, shall our desire be deemed eccentric? Perhaps; but only by those who do not love God, whose love is attached in preference to the things of the world.

c. We should *rehearse* for death; and we do this by what Catholic writers call *mystical death*. Mystical death is a state in which we are wholly detached from all things of earth and, above all, from our own selfishness and egotism. Then can we say with the Apostle: “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by

whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Gal. 6, 14)

This death must be complete, not a mere occasional mortification. We should be able to say with St. Paul: “I die daily.” One deliberate attachment is sufficient to prevent this death to the world, and sufficient to prevent any progress in the spiritual life. Blessed Angela of Foligno says: “If, therefore, O my soul, thou hast perfect poverty, thou hast put away that mean [by a *mean* is meant an attachment that intervenes between God and the soul] which holdeth thee from perfect union and conjunction with the good Master. And the first degree of that perfect poverty have we set forth, *that which is neither to have nor to desire aught of the things of the world, save so much as is sufficient for the straitest necessity. But even this poverty is not enough* for thee, O soul, save thou also turn aside from the love of every person, yea, thy father and mother and daughter, and from the love even of thine own body. And by this I mean when such love of kinsfolk or of any other cuts thee off from the true love of the Supreme Father, eternal God. For then thou *hast set a mean between thyself and God*, when thou lovest aught that separateth thee from His love. And this, as said a certain holy soul, is the reason why many who seem very spiritual are deceived, *for, although, they do great penance, living in continual bodily discipline, they come not to a perfect state*, having either towards themselves or some other special love which is a mean between them and God.”¹

To every Christian are the words of the Apostle addressed: “For you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God.” (Cor. 3, 2) Now one is dead only when he is wholly dead: a corpse is not very convincing if every once in a while he opens an eye to see some curious sight, or pricks his ears to get a choice piece of gossip, or reaches eagerly for some dainty – to ease the tedium of being a corpse!

In so dying to the world, the soul must unite itself to Christ, for, as we have seen, even the greatest mortification is of no value except it is joined to Christ’s suffering and thereby made meritorious. Moreover, as Christ the Head has suffered and died, so also must the members of His Mystical Body; the members cannot be separated from the Head. Thus, the soul must say: “With Christ I am nailed to the Cross.” (Gal. 2, 19) And when it strives to “put on Christ” the soul must understand that, to do this, it must “know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and *the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death.*” (Phil. 2, 10)

1. St. Angela Foligno, *Way of the Cross*, trans. by Alan G. McDougal, London, Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1926, p. 29.

St. Francis de Sales recounts the following legend to illustrate how the Christian should die with Christ:¹

“A maiden of the isle of Sestos had brought up a young eagle with the care children are wont to bestow upon such affairs; the eagle being come to its full growth began little by little to fly and chase birds, according to its natural instinct; then getting more strength it seized upon wild beasts, never failing faithfully to take home the prey to its dear mistress, as if in acknowledgment of the bringing up it had had from her. Now it happened upon a day that this young damsel died, while the poor eagle was on the hunt, and her body, according to the custom of the time and country was publicly placed upon the funeral pile to be burnt; and even as the flame began to seize upon the maiden, the eagle came up with a strong and eager flight, and, when it beheld this unlooked-for and sad spectacle, pierced with grief, it opened its talons, let fall its prey, and spread itself upon its poor beloved mistress; and covering her with its wings, as it were to defend her from the fire, or for pity’s sake to embrace her, it remained there constant and immovable, courageously dying and burning with her; the ardour of its affection not giving way to flames and ardours, of fire, that so it might become the victim and holocaust of its brave and prodigious love, as its mistress was of death and fire.”

Generous souls, who wish to answer Christ’s urgent invitation, “Follow Me!” must be prepared to do so in the courageous words of St. Thomas the Apostle, spoken as Jesus insisted on making that last fatal trip to Jerusalem: “LET US ALSO GO, THAT WE MAY DIE WITH HIM.” (John 11, 16)

1. *Love of God*, VII, 8.

APPENDIX

Chapter I Nature and Grace

An objection that will inevitably come to the informed reader's mind, when we speak in these pages of an opposition between the natural and supernatural orders, or of mortifying and destroying the natural, is that these teachings conflict with the axiom of theology, "Grace presupposes nature and does not destroy it." "We are accustomed" – it will be said – "to hear that there is harmony between nature and grace. How then can there be a conflict between them? Or why should we mortify what is natural in us?"

There is no reason to be scandalized at this doctrine; it is neither new nor surprising. A famous chapter of the *Imitation* (III, 54) describes at great length and in detail the opposition between nature and grace. This chapter should be read and pondered by those interested in the present question. What we wish to affirm, however, is this: *there is absolutely no contradiction between our teaching here (or the teaching of the Imitation) and the axiom mentioned above.* The truth is, that we must at one and the same time affirm a conflict and a harmony between nature and grace; and whoever fails to grasp this fact will fall into most lamentable errors concerning the spiritual life.

1. The key to an understanding of the difficulty is in the two meanings of the word *nature*. These meanings have been noted in Part I, Chapter III. First, there is the *formal* meaning, i.e., nature considered in itself (*in se*) in its essential or formal qualities; using this sense, we consider nature *in the abstract*, apart from the actual conditions in which it exists since the Fall. Then there is the *material* meaning of nature: nature considered in the concrete, as it actually exists, blemished with the concupiscence that results from the Fall. *What is true of nature when considered in the formal sense is not true of it if it is taken in the material sense, and vice versa.*

When we say that there is harmony between nature and grace, *this is true only if we consider nature in the formal sense*; it is false if we take nature in the material sense, for it would then mean that grace presupposes (or perfects) concupiscence, man's inclination towards evil, and all the unhappy effects of the Fall. On the other hand, when it is said that

there is conflict between nature and grace, this is also true, but only in the material sense; it is false if considered formally. Now when St. Thomas says that grace presupposes nature and does not destroy it, he is speaking of nature in the formal sense, nature in itself. This is clear from the fact that this saint holds also, with the whole of Christian tradition, that the effects of the Fall remain in nature even after baptism.¹

St. Thomas, in enunciating this principle, does not intend to teach that the blemish caused by original sin is good and that it is the basis for the operations of grace. On the other hand, when the *Imitation* speaks of the opposite movements of nature and grace, it is speaking of nature in the material sense; otherwise it would fall into the error of the Manichees, i.e., that nature is evil essentially (as some authors, failing to grasp this distinction, have foolishly maintained).

2. Accordingly, the distinction between the material and formal meaning of the word *nature* is of the greatest practical significance. To illustrate this, let us consider the words of Jacques Maritain:

“Hence arises in particular the distinction between the material and formal statement. We speak *materially* when we do not take the things of which we speak precisely as possessing the characters denoted by the words we use; we speak *formally* when in the things of which we speak we consider not so much the subject which possesses these characters as the characters themselves, with the sharp contour and clear-cut line they describe in it. *This distinction is extremely important.* Formal statement should, indeed, be the constant aim of philosophy; and, on the other hand, *many propositions are true formaliter loquendo which are false materialiter loquendo, and vice versa.*”

Here is one of the statements which, in the list of examples given by Maritain, is “true if understood formally, but false if understood materially”:

“Everything which is, is good (so far as it is).”²

This distinction must be kept constantly in mind in dealing with nature, as is clear from the impossible consequences which would

1. “Original sin is the inherited, though not the personal, guilt of each of the sons of Adam who have sinned in him and have lost grace and consequently eternal life, together with the propensity to evil *which each one has to subdue and overcome by means of grace, penance, effort, and moral endeavor.*” – Pius XI, *Mit Brennender Sorge*.

2. *An Introduction to Philosophy*, London, Sheed and Ward, 1932, p. 253. (Italics ours.)

otherwise follow (explained in paragraph 1). Generally, it may be affirmed that philosophers use the word *nature* in its formal sense, for, as Maritain says, this is the aim of philosophy. The reason is that philosophy and speculative theology wish to isolate nature, as it were, in order to study its properties and inherent tendencies independently of the other forces that come to play on it through grace and the Fall. Ascetical writers, who deal with concrete realities and wish to give practical rules for living, generally use nature in the material sense. If this is borne in mind, there will be no difficulty reconciling the apparently contradictory statements of these two groups of writers.

Lest the reader have any misgivings concerning our interpretation of the maxim under consideration, let us add the testimony of a distinguished contemporary Thomist, Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrance, O.P.:

“In respect to the supernatural life, we know the principle of St. Thomas: ‘Grace perfects nature and does not destroy it.’ *A great spirit of faith is necessary, however, if we are always to interpret this principle correctly without inclining towards naturalism.* Some persons will understand this principle materially, or will be more attentive to nature which must be perfected than to grace which should produce this transformation in us. Furthermore, considering nature as it actually is since original sin, they will not sufficiently distinguish in nature what is essential and good, what ought to be perfected, from what ought to be mortified: egoism under all its forms gross or subtle. By failing to make this distinction, they find a real opposition between the doctrine of St. Thomas *thus materialistically interpreted and the famous chapter of the Imitation (III, 54), ‘On the Divers Movements of Nature and Grace.’* They forget what the holy doctor teaches about the wounds consequent upon original sin which remain in the baptized soul.”¹

4. As a result of the confusion of these two senses in which the word *nature* is used, harmful results follow in the lives of Christians. Here are some of these results:

a. A practical naturalism (this is mentioned by Father Garrigou-Lagrance in the above passage). Forgetful of the effects of the Fall, we treat nature as though it need not be mortified or purified, and the idea of penance is lost sight of. “St. Thomas maintains the infinite elevation of grace above our nature and also the harmony between the two. But he adds that *this harmony really appears only after a profound purification of*

1. *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, p. 54. (Italics ours.)

nature, by mortification and the cross, as the lives of the saints show.”¹

Pope Pius XI writes: “Certainly we know... and deplore the fact that in our day the idea and the name of expiation and penance have lost in great part the power of rousing enthusiasm of heart and heroism of sacrifice. In other times they were able to inspire such feelings, for they appeared in the eyes of men of faith as sealed with a divine mark in the likeness of Christ and His Saints: but nowadays there are some who would put aside external mortifications as things of the past – without mentioning the modern autonomous man who despises penance as bearing the mark of servitude.”²

b. A criticism that Catholics make of Communism is that it contains a practical denial of Original Sin and aims to make a perfect society out of imperfect men.

“You cannot make a good omelet out of rotten eggs,” wrote F. J. Sheed... The same error is encountered in the “optimism” of Rousseau – indeed, it is an error that lies at the bottom of almost all the modern false concepts of society. Rousseau regarded human nature as good in its primitive state and taught that it was spoiled only in the course of time by society. The practical consequence of this theory is that men are urged to return to nature.

It is, indeed, lamentable that Catholics should fall into the very mistakes of their opponents. And this has certainly happened, as is shown by the zeal with which so many Catholics defend the order of nature while neglecting the order of grace. They thereby fall into a practical denial, or forgetfulness, of Original Sin; and this brings in its wake errors concerning the Christian life as grievous as those of Rousseau and the Communists. “As a fact the notion of the need of penance and expiation is lost in proportion as belief in God is weakened, *and the idea of an original sin and of a first rebellion of man against God becomes confused and disappears.*”³ Christianity is weakened, falsely humanized, compelled to sanction or overlook the ravages of concupiscence in nature. In reality, nature must be purified – as if by fire, to use the illustration of the Scriptures, if it is to be harmonized with grace. Christian humanism is vastly different from pagan naturalism.

c. Another consequence of the confusion that we are dealing with is that erroneous notions of Christian spirituality are spread abroad and a

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1. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
 2. *Caritate Christi Compulsi*.
 3. *Ibid.*

false valuation is put upon spiritual writings. Incredibly enough, so great a classic as the *Imitation of Christ*, which has led uncounted souls to a deeper love of Christ, has repeatedly been the target of attacks in our day from writers infected with naturalism. These writers are wont to distinguish two schools of spirituality – the one is the gloomy school, and into this they put the *Imitation*. They regard the *Imitation* almost as Manichean – chiefly because of the chapter that we have mentioned concerning the different movements of nature and grace. They deplore its insistence on mortification and self-denial. Even saints, and Doctors of the Church are not altogether safe from this attack – St. Augustine, in particular, St. John of the Cross, St. Alphonsus Liguori, and even St. Paul. Are we not exaggerating our own authority and the enlightenment of our age when we – with a Christianity that is so frequently tepid and at times deeply infected with naturalism – speak disparagingly and even contemptuously of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, as well as of great directors of souls; instead of sitting humbly at their feet!

d. Even when it is admitted, in the correct sense, that there is harmony between the order of nature and of grace, our chief interest should be in that of grace: we have been divinized by grace, and this is far and away the most important thing about us – much more important than the fact that we have a human nature that is essentially good: for grace is infinitely above nature. We are henceforth not to live mere natural or human lives, but divinized lives: “For you all are the children of the light. (I Thess. 5, 5) “Walk then, as children of the light.” (Eph. 5, 8) Our zeal should be not for the merely human or natural, but for the supernatural.

“Some persons . . . will be more attentive to nature which must be perfected than to grace which should produce this transformation in us.” Such an attitude results from a wrong interpretation of the axiom, “Grace perfects nature and does not destroy it.” Hence, there arises a spiritual literature which emphasizes the human, a school of hagiography that is concerned more with the human element in the saints than the divine. Christianity is pictured as a kind of pious humanism with liturgical decorations; and the maximum morality is to observe the natural law and to live in accordance with reason. Aristotle is substituted for Christ. Whoever would mortify nature is tinged with Manicheism; whoever would rise above nature is a fanatic. The perfect Christian is the man of refinement, a humanist. . . This is the “optimistic” school of spirituality. It takes as its guiding star, St. Francis de Sales, the saint famous for the remark that a drop of honey catches more flies than a barrel of vinegar. Unfortunately, this seems as much as most members of this school know

about the writings of St. Francis de Sales! If they would look a little deeper, they would find that his teachings, for all his kindness, coincide exactly with that of the “gloomy” saints mentioned before.¹ There is only one spirituality: Christ’s. No saint can create an independent school, and the only value that a human teacher has is that he brings us closer to the mind of Christ. “Is Christ divided?” (I Cor. 1, 13)

5. One effect of these false ideas is so important that it deserves separate attention. It is commonly said that we should attend to the natural virtues, then build the supernatural virtues upon these as upon a foundation. This is done even by teachers, who encourage sports, etc., for the reason that natural virtues are thereby developed... The practical result of this attitude is that the theological virtues are neglected almost entirely, and particular care and attention is given only to the natural virtues. And the defenders of this opinion consider that they have sufficient warrant for this policy in the axiom, “Grace perfects nature and does not destroy it.”

In fact, however, this manner of thinking and acting has mischievous results; and it is not in the least justified by the maxim upon which it leans for support. This maxim is also to be understood formally, i.e., according to the exact value of the words; for it is a scientific or philosophical statement. Now the axiom does not say that grace is *founded* or based on nature; it does not say that nature is the *basis* of grace. Hence, we cannot conclude from it that the natural order is the foundation of the supernatural order, or that the latter is to be raised on the former.

Actually just the reverse is true: the natural order is based on the supernatural as on its foundation. “According to the grace of God that is given to me, as a wise architect, I have laid *the foundation*; and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. *For other foundation no man can lay, but that which is laid: which is Christ Jesus.*” (I Cor. 3, 10-11) No doubt in order of time man possesses his human nature before he receives a share in the divine nature; yet, in the eternal decree of God, man’s entrance into the supernatural order through grace is first, i.e., first in importance and first in the intention of God. God gave us our human nature only that we might, through serving Him in it, come to possess supernatural happiness. “As He chose us in Him [i.e., Christ] *before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and unspotted in His sight in charity: who hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ unto

1. He also said, for example, that if he should find one desire in his heart that was not for God, he would tear it out.

Himself: according to the purpose of His will...” (Eph. 1, 4-5) The primary fact of importance is not our humanity, but our divine sonship.

What the axiom says is that grace *presupposes* or *perfects* nature – which is quite a different thing. Examples will help in its understanding. A house is erected upon a stone foundation built by masons; yet this foundation itself, if the house is to stand firmly, must be built on a deeper foundation of rock or solid ground. So, also, human nature, which is the starting-point of our efforts to serve God, is itself based on the supernatural order. The natural order, then, we may compare with the man-made stone foundation of the house; the supernatural order is like the rock upon which this foundation itself rests. This is the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7, 24-27), as we have explained in the chapter, “Jesus Speaks of the Supernatural Life.”

Another example: Smith (let us suppose) goes to Paris to act as an agent for an American firm. Paris is now the basis of his operations in Europe; yet his supplies, his salary, his directions as to policy, all come to him from America, which, therefore, is the real or final basis of his work. If Smith comes home again, both the order and the money to do so come from his employers in America... We are, on this earth, agents for God, and all our abilities and powers, both natural and supernatural, come from God. He it is, too, Who directs us to come home to remain eternally with Him, and He gives us the means necessary to accomplish this. When Smith starts home, Paris is the beginning of his journey; when we start home to God this earth is the beginning of our journey; yet in the end we depend wholly on God Himself, not on the earth or our human nature.

It is a great error to begin character education with the natural virtues; for *in the long run* it is impossible to practice even the natural virtues without supernatural aid, i.e., without living a supernatural life. It is true that it is possible (this is explicit Christian teaching) to perform good natural actions without the assistance of grace; otherwise we would have to conclude that all actions of pagans and infidels are sinful – a proposition that has been condemned by the Church. Yet while theologians affirm this truth on the one hand, nevertheless, on the other, they put it down as a wholly certain truth that, “*It is morally impossible for fallen man, without the assistance of grace to observe the whole natural law and overcome all temptations.*”¹

1. Very Rev. Adolphe Tanquerey, *Synopsis Theologiæ Dogmaticæ*, 22nd ed., Desclée et Socii, Paris-Rome, 1930, Vol. III, p. 143.

In the following words, Pope Pius XII shows the relationship of grace and nature and that it is grace and not nature which is the foundation of all spiritual effort:

“For Christ alone is the *corner stone* (Eph. 2, 20) on which man and society can find stability and salvation. On this Cornerstone the Church is built... On the other hand, any other building which has not been founded solidly on the teaching of Christ rests on shifting sands, and is destined to perish miserably.” (*Summi Pontificatus*)

APPENDIX

Chapter II

Are Natural Actions Meritorious?

Put in more complete form, the question to which we address ourselves here is: are all natural actions meritorious when performed by one in the state of grace? That they are meritorious is a view held by many Catholics, who claim St. Thomas as authority for it.

The practical consequences that come from acting upon this teaching are enormous. It would seem to follow from it that all actions *which are not sinful* are supernatural and meritorious; and this is in fact the interpretation put upon it by the spiritually careless and inert. Accordingly, even actions which are filled with egotism and imperfection would be meritorious provided that they do not actually transgress any law of God. Thus, drinking, worldly recreations, dancing, etc., would be meritorious simply because of the fact that they are performed by one in the state of grace, no matter how much selfishness or sensuality may be hidden in such actions. This view, indeed, would release people from all spiritual effort except that of going to the sacraments; it would allow them to live perfectly human, natural lives, while remaining as unconscious of their supernatural duties as a ground mole is of light... It paralyzes from the beginning any effort that might be made to stem the flood of paganism that is carrying us away today. Yet the authority of the Angelic Doctor is claimed for it; so that there would seem to be no possi-

bility of doing anything to eliminate the harm that it causes. It is obvious, however, that no saint would condone religious carelessness; and it is, therefore, necessary to examine the origin of this lax view more carefully.

This “interpretation” of the Thomistic view is in reality a misinterpretation. We do not deny that the teaching so misinterpreted is that of St. Thomas. *Nor do we deny the teaching itself – the principles of Christian living set down in these pages do not at all contradict the view of St. Thomas.* What we do say is that the doctrine of St. Thomas is materialized by men with imperfect spiritual perceptions – that is to say, *it is taken to mean something that St. Thomas never intended it to mean.*

1. The key to understanding the whole matter is the distinction that was explained in Appendix I, namely, that between the formal and material sense of the words “nature” and “natural.” When a writer or teacher speaks of “natural” actions, it is necessary to know whether he speaks materially or formally; for if he speaks formally, *then his statement will likely be false if understood materially, and vice versa.*

Now a natural action, in the formal sense, is an act of one of the natural virtues (prudence, justice, etc.); that is to say, it is an action produced by bringing into play the intelligence and will, the essential powers of human nature. Or again, in the formal sense, a natural action is one that contains all the requirements for a morally good action. These requirements are three: a good object, a good intention, good (or indifferent) circumstances. If any action fulfills all three of these conditions, it is a morally good natural action. Now when St. Thomas teaches that all natural actions performed in the state of grace are meritorious, *he is to be understood only in the formal sense.* So understood, his opinion is in line with Christian tradition; although it is not even then to be taken as defined Catholic doctrine. *If understood materially, however, this proposition (i.e., that all natural actions of one in the state of grace are meritorious) is false and cannot be defended as Christian at all;* so understood, it would amount to an axiom of paganism. It would make meritorious actions performed under the influence of egotism, sensuality, concupiscence; it would open the way to the grossest hedonism and provide it with theological sanction.

A natural action, *in the material sense,* is one that is vitiated or corrupted by the concupiscence of fallen nature. This corruption shows in our actions in egotism and selfishness, i.e., the use of our talents and powers, and of other creatures also, for selfish ends, rather than for the glory of God. Such actions, although there may be much good in them, are blemished by the pursuit of selfish pleasures and satisfactions, the desire for honor, praise, etc. They are not necessarily sinful (although

they can easily become so); but at best they are corrupt.¹ *The authority of St. Thomas*, or of any other reputable theologian or writer, *cannot be used to support the belief that natural actions*, considered in the material sense, *are meritorious*. They may be partly meritorious, as we have explained in dealing with imperfections, but, to the extent that they are imperfect or selfish, they fail to obtain merit. “We ought not to love, but rather seek to remove by the ardor of love, the infection of guilt and the corruption of punishment that is in our body.”²

Now the mischievous results that we have pointed out come precisely from understanding the Thomistic view in a material sense. For this is the sense which men have in mind ordinarily when they speak of natural actions; they see them as they are, in the concrete, corrupted by original sin. On the other hand, those who aim at accurate scientific expression, use words in the formal sense. Hence, what St. Thomas and his followers mean to be understood formally is taken materially to justify all kinds of worldliness and negligence – a thing which could be done only by men wanting in spiritual perceptiveness and knowledge of theology.

2. The above interpretation of St. Thomas’ doctrine is confirmed by the following considerations:

a. It is apparent from the very definitions that we have given. Error follows invariably when the formal and material meanings of words and statements are confused. We have given rules above for discerning which meaning is intended in a given case. The formal meaning is usual among philosophers, ethicists, and speculative theologians. Moreover, among those trained in these disciplines, the same meaning becomes known; indeed, in the case of the word “nature,” it has become so general that the material meaning is overlooked almost entirely. This meaning of the word is found in the Scriptures: “He who lives according to the flesh shall die” (Rom. 8, 13), in ascetical writers, and is more common in general usage; for it is based on observing things as they are in the concrete rather than on analysis of their ideal condition.

Thus, for example, Pope Pius XII writes, “Your chief enemy is within you – that *natural* drag of our fallen humanity to self-seeking and sin.”³

1. Whether or not imperfections involve guilt of sin is controverted. See *The Thomist* for July and October, 1942, “The Morality of Imperfections” by J. C. Osbourne, O.P.

2. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, II II, 25, 5: “*Sed infectionem culpæ et corruptionem pœnæ in corpore nostro diligere non debemus, sed potius ad eius remotionem anhelare desiderio caritatis.*”

b. This is also the interpretation of theologians who adopt St. Thomas' view. Thus Lehmkuhl writes: "If St. Thomas ascribes a certain merit to every good work of a *just* man, as in 2nd. dist. 40, q. 1, a. 5, 'Every act of one possessing charity is either meritorious or a sin and there is none indifferent,' it can be thus understood that he feels that every *just* man, *if he lives uprightly (si bene agat)* necessarily acts from a supernatural motive, since St. Thomas thinks that for any tending toward the ultimate end the just man somehow needs and actually enjoys the divine impulse through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and this motion and impulse most certainly supply the supernatural motives."¹

The words that have been italicized here clearly show that both St. Thomas and Lehmkuhl, in asserting that natural acts are meritorious, are using the word "natural" in the formal meaning; i.e., they are speaking of good natural, or morally good actions – the actions of a *just* man who acts uprightly. It cannot then be concluded that the actions of an indifferent or tepid or imperfect man are meritorious simply because he is in the state of grace. The word *just* in this passage is likewise to be understood formally. So understood, the passage means that, if a man is in the state of grace, all his actions, *insofar as they are just*, are meritorious. It most certainly does not mean that his actions, insofar as they are tainted with selfishness and egotism, are meritorious; yet this is what it is taken to mean by those who understand the proposition materially. Now in concrete reality, it is ordinarily with more or less imperfect Christians that we have to deal, not with saints. These imperfect Christians, while perhaps in the state of grace, are deeply infected with egotism, which also permeates their actions. Is it to be concluded that this imperfection, simply because it is not sinful, is meritorious?

c. The most important confirmation of our interpretation is to be found in the Doctrine of Imperfect Actions, which we have treated in the body of the text. For it is not to be thought, as is so often done, that there are only two kinds of actions, namely sinful and fully meritorious actions, and that there is a clean-cut cleavage between them. *All theologians are at one in affirming that between these two kinds of actions there is a third group.* Different names are given to these actions, and also different explanations; but as to the central fact, i.e., that they really exist, there is complete unanimity.

Some writers call them natural actions and hold, contrary to St.

3. *Address to the Eucharistic Congress of the Twin cities, U.S.A., June 26, 1941.*
(Italics ours.)

1. *Theologia Moralis*, Friburg, Herder, 1895, Vol. I, p. 165.

Thomas, that they are indifferent. Thus, Father Edward Leen writes: “It depends on the soul that this influence (i.e., of grace) should be operative. Philosophers distinguish between acts that are of man and acts that are human. The latter are of moral value, the former are not. *So it is possible for a soul, even in the state of grace, to elicit acts that are not inspired by grace.* Such acts belong only materially to the soul, as united with the Savior. They are what ascetical writers call natural acts, and being such, are not meritorious of supernatural life. Christ’s merits do not enter into acts of this kind.”¹

Thomists, who believe that no action is indifferent, prefer to call these acts that we are speaking of *imperfect* actions or imperfections. For them an imperfection is a morally good act which can be ordained to the end of charity, but which lacks a certain perfection suitable to spiritual progress.² We have treated of these actions in the chapter on “The Law of the Flesh,” paragraph 1; we therefore refer the reader to this chapter and also to the references given there. Thomists regard these actions as partly meritorious; nevertheless, as we have seen in treating the subject (*loc. cit.*), *these imperfections work to the detriment of the soul*; they dispose the soul for sin and lead towards it, without, however, being themselves sinful. “Imperfections lead to venial sin, venial sin leads to mortal sin.”

“In this matter, it is important to see how, according to the opinion of the best Thomists, imperfections differ from venial sin. At first glance, this distinction seems contrary to two principles enunciated by St. Thomas. He teaches that there are no deliberate individual or concrete acts which are indifferent, that is, which are neither morally good nor morally bad... Elsewhere St. Thomas teaches that the perfection of charity falls under the precept of the love of God, if not as matter, or something to be accomplished, at least as the end toward which every Christian, each according to his condition, should tend... St. Thomas, nevertheless, often speaks of good acts which are imperfect. This is the case with acts of charity that are notably inferior to our degree of charity (*actus remissi*): for example, when, having five talents, we act as though we had only two.”³

What we wish to emphasize here is that *no theologians hold that all the actions of a man are meritorious simply because he happens to be in the state of grace.* Such a teaching would open the way to every kind of

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1. *True Vine and its Branches*, p. 103.
 2. Garrigou-Lagrange, *op. cit.*, p. 430.
 3. Garrigou-Lagrange, *op. cit.*, p. 429.

selfishness and would make this selfishness a virtue.

3. When theologians speak of nature and natural actions in the formal sense, they are considering them *in the abstract*, apart from the actual conditions in which they are found. When, therefore, we go over to the practical order, to consider these actions in the concrete (materially), due allowances must be made for the particular circumstances of the individual. Now in a concrete case, actions will receive their special character from the mentality of those who perform them. Hence, we can distinguish in general two cases, or two sets of circumstances, in which natural actions can be found under different modifying influences; and these correspond to the mentalities that we have elsewhere described, namely, the pagan and the Christian mentality.

The *pagan* mentality is that of the man who acts habitually out of the desire for pleasure or out of self-love: his actions, although not sinful, are habitually imperfect. Obviously, in such a man egotism will prevent his actions from meeting the standard of formally good natural actions; so that it would be a grievous error for him to imagine that all his imperfections are pleasing in the sight of God. An action is meritorious only insofar as it is performed under the influence of divine grace; in the case which we are considering, although the man is in the state of grace, the actual motive of his actions is egotism.

The other case is that of the Christian mentality, i.e., of the saint. The saint has mortified the corrupt tendencies of nature till they are no longer the active influence in his life. He has cleared away imperfections to the extent that grace now has a free hand to act. The saint is capable of performing natural actions which conform to the standard of formally good natural actions. It sounds paradoxical, yet it is true, that only the supernatural man is capable, at least habitually, of perfect natural actions; for in him nature has been purified. Hence if St. Thomas' opinion has any validity (as we shall see, it is by no means certain), this validity, *in the concrete*, applies only to the saints or, at least, to those who have gone far in mortifying the concupiscence of the flesh.

The matter can be illustrated by an example. Suppose that James, who is a philanderer, is married to Mary. When, therefore, Mary sees him talking to other women, knowing his character, she will be suspicious and jealous. Sometimes her suspicions will be fully justified; sometimes, no doubt, James will speak to these other women out of necessity or for some legitimate end. Nevertheless, even when he has a just reason, James will be suspected by his wife because of his known character; and these suspicions will probably be correct on such occasions, too, for James, because of his weakness, will not be able to restrain himself from flirting

a little even when he has a good reason for talking to women. So it is with God and an imperfect soul who is attached to the creatures of the world. Such a soul will use creatures, not out of love for God, but out of love for them; and even when the creatures are necessary, as in eating, still the soul's weakness will cause imperfection to enter here also. Therefore, the saints tell us that scarcely any of the actions of an imperfect soul are meritorious; and God is displeased with such service.

Suppose, on the other hand, that James is an absolutely faithful husband. Then, when Mary sees him talking to others, she is untroubled, being secure in the possession of his love. Thus, also, when a saint uses the creatures of the world, he uses them only for God, for that is his habitual desire and tendency; and even if in a given case the saint may forget to refer his action to God, still it would be supernaturalized through his habitual disposition. Thus, for the perfect soul all actions are meritorious.

Therefore, only perfect souls may *safely* avail themselves of the opinion of St. Thomas; and they do not need to, because of their habit of living in God's presence.

4. One last word concerning the value of this Thomistic teaching. Here we wish to speak of two things: how the teaching of these notes corresponds with the doctrine of St. Thomas; whether this opinion of St. Thomas may (or should) be adopted as the basis for practice.

a. The teaching contained in these notes on the supernatural life does *not conflict* with the doctrine of St. Thomas concerning the merit of natural actions. However, there are other opinions equally probable, and we do not wish to oppose them, either. The controversy is a speculative one that does not affect practice; hence in these notes, which are concerned only with the practice of the Christian life, we take no position in the matter, leaving the reader to adopt whatever view he considers the true one.

The opinion opposed to that of St. Thomas is that of St. Alphonsus, who holds that a supernatural intention (at least a virtual supernatural intention) is required to make an action meritorious. *The difference between the two opinions is simply in the kind of intention required.* St. Thomas holds that a formally good natural intention is required; St. Alphonsus requires a supernatural intention. It is not to be imagined that St. Thomas considers that a meritorious action *need have no good intention*: every good natural action (in the formal sense) contains, *as part of its make-up*, a good natural intention. Hence, even St. Thomas requires that an action have a good intention to be meritorious. Only, he

is satisfied with a naturally good intention. The reason is this: What makes an action supernatural is the fact that it is performed under an impulse of grace. The intention, of itself, is unimportant. In practice, however, the intention becomes important because impurities in it will hinder, more or less, the subtle impulses of grace from reaching our actions and will cause these actions to be performed out of egotism or sensuality. Supernaturalizing the intention removes the impurity and permits the free movement of grace. But even when an intention is naturally good, i.e., without impurities, there is nothing to hinder the operation of grace; so that such an action is probably (but only probably) meritorious.

Now the teaching we have set down in Chapter Four conforms perfectly with the minimum requirement of St. Thomas. There we stated that in using creatures *a motive of utility* is required. It is not possible to require less; it would not be possible to go lower and have a good natural motive. *Our teaching does not insist on any particular kind of intention nor any prescribed frequency with which the intention should be repeated. Our concern is solely with the purity of intention*, concerning which there is no controversy. Although a motive of utility is a minimum requirement, it is necessary that this motive be free from selfishness if the action is to be meritorious; and for even this a high degree of detachment and a spirit of mortification are necessary.

Let it be noted here that the expression “natural motive” may also be used both in the formal and the material sense. That is to say, we may consider natural motives *in themselves* or in the concrete. In themselves they are good – since they spring from human nature, which is essentially good. In the concrete they are tainted with concupiscence. When we say that natural motives are to be destroyed, we mean natural motives considered in the concrete. Natural motives considered *in themselves*, i.e., in the abstract, need not be destroyed; but they unfortunately do not exist, at least in imperfect Christians. Only the perfect, who have mortified nature and have removed its taint (so far as this is possible), are capable, at least habitually, of formally good natural motives... Of course, if one is seeking perfection, it is certainly better to act from supernatural motives always and not to concern oneself about natural motives at all; and, therefore, the saint, although he alone is capable of performing a pure natural action, does not do so.¹

b. Concerning the value of the Thomistic opinion considered in itself: it is rated as a *probable opinion*; this means that there is reason to hold it as truth, but that, nevertheless, it cannot be set down as a certain truth. There are times when it is permissible to use a probable opinion to

regulate one's practice. One of the times when it is not permissible to use such an opinion is when it concerns a necessary means of salvation.

Now the present controversy concerns the doctrine of merit, which is a necessary means of salvation; for we can enjoy heaven only if we merit it. Therefore, it is *not* safe to employ St. Thomas' opinion in practice.

Suppose a man wishes to cross the ocean and two ships are offered to him. The one is leaky and unsafe; it provides very cheap transportation, but it may never reach the opposite shore. The other ship, while more expensive to travel on, is perfectly safe and will most certainly bring him to the other shore. Which would he choose, especially if he has great wealth and the cost of transportation is of no importance to him? This comparison well illustrates the difference between the opinion of St. Thomas and that of St. Alphonsus. The former is probable, but it may not be able to bring us to the port of salvation; the latter is perfectly safe and all it requires is a slight additional effort, within the reach of all, and for which Almighty God gives us an abundance of grace.

No one should base his practice on an opinion that is unsafe; and no priest may teach a merely probably opinion as certainly true... For this reason, although we may theoretically favor this Thomistic opinion, *in practice* there is nothing to do but follow the safe opinion. Therefore, we say that the controversy over motives exists only in the speculative and theoretical sphere; in practice, there is no controversy. All are agreed on the need for purity of intention; all are agreed, likewise, that in practice a supernatural intention should be formed and even repeated. Typical of this stand is Father Joseph Noldin, S.J., who, although he defends the minimum opinion, admits that it should not be used in practice. He says:

“Since this opinion, which we say is preferable, is not *certain*, the just man should frequently form supernatural intentions, especially the motive of love: *for where we are dealing with the conditions required for merit, the probability of an opinion* is of no help, but only the truth. Indeed, even if the truth of this opinion (of St. Thomas) is not to be doubted, the faithful should be

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1. This acceptance of the motive of utility agrees also with the teaching of Father Joseph Noldin, S.J., who requires only the absolute minimum for meritorious works. He holds that an action with a morally indifferent end, and therefore with an indifferent motive, may be meritorious. A motive of utility is indifferent; and an action having such a motive, we have said, may be meritorious. Of course, any action to be meritorious must have grace, and not concupiscence, as its principle.

taught, by apt motives, to work for the most perfect intention, especially the intention of charity frequently renewed, For the more perfect an intention is, and the more frequently renewed, especially a supernatural intention, the more does it help; and sometimes, indeed, it is necessary, for strengthening the will against temptations and for constantly fulfilling the more difficult laws of Christianity.¹

Of course, as we have said when explaining the different mentalities, once an intention is formed, it tends to remain as it is formed. Yet, because of the concupiscence in us, our motives easily become sullied; as water, although of itself it tends to remain pure, yet becomes dirty and poisonous because of the *dirt that comes* to settle in it. Hence, the frequent repetition of one's supernatural intention, even though it is not absolutely necessary, is nevertheless *a useful device* for securing the purity of our motives. For this reason, St. Alphonsus recommends that in practice we renew our intention before every important action of the day. Père de Caussade goes further and suggests that we renew the intention before the action and again during it; for so imperfect are we, that even when we have begun something well, we are prone to be diverted by vanity and the desire for our own selfish satisfaction. Dom Chautard asks that we maintain a custody of the heart, which is a constant vigilance over the intention. Such vigilance is not burdensome, because it springs from love; is it burdensome to think of someone that we love? Consult on this matter St. Alphonsus, *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, chapter XIX; Dom Chautard, *The Soul of the Apostolate*, Part V, section IV (see also the footnote to the first paragraph of this section); Rodriguez, *The Practice of Christian Perfection and Virtue*, Vol. I. treatise III. The last reference contains fourteen chapters on purity of intention.

Commendable, indeed, is the effort, so general today among Catholic writers and teachers, to demonstrate and spread the great truth that all men, lay as well as religious, are called to sanctity; and that lay men may, therefore, attain it in the world by following their divinely appointed vocations. On the other hand, in seeking to further this effort, great care must be exercised that the high ideal of Christian holiness may not be diminished or cheapened. Men must conform their lives to the ideal; they must not reduce the ideal to pamper the sensuality of their fallen nature.

1. *Summa Theologiae Moralis*, 21st ed., Ratisbon, 1932, Vol. I, p. 111.

APPENDIX

Chapter III Christian Moderation

Against religious fervor, the pagan mentality cries, “Virtue is in the happy mean.” Is this true? Is it true that Christianity is a moderate religion? To answer this, we must consider briefly the nature of the virtues.

In general, there are two kinds of virtues: the acquired, or natural virtues; the infused, or supernatural virtues. Then there are two kinds of infused virtues: the moral and theological virtues.

Virtue	Acquired	Intellectual: Art, Science, Wisdom.
		Moral: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance.
	Infused	Moral: Prudence, Justice, etc.
		Theological: Faith, Hope, Charity.

1. The Acquired Virtues

A virtue is a habit. Now habits may exist in the will, in the intellect, or they may be mere physical habits, like typing, etc. When the habit is good, it is called a virtue. Good habits that reside in the will are called moral virtues; those that reside in the intellect are intellectual virtues.

These habits are “acquired” because they are obtained by repeated exercise of the same act. Once acquired, such a habit gives great facility, so that its acts become semi-automatic. Thus, the habit of typing gives facility in typing; and the virtue of justice gives facility in giving to others what is their due.

These acquired moral virtues, although they make him who possesses them “good,” are without supernatural value; they can obtain such merit, however, if they are animated or “informed” by charity, i.e., by a supernatural motive, or under the influence of grace.

These virtues consist in the happy mean. For their measure is reason, and reason prescribes moderation. Thus Aristotle says: “First of all, then, we have to observe, that moral qualities (i.e., virtues) are so constituted as to be destroyed by excess and deficiency – as we see is the case with bodily strength and health (for one is forced to explain what is invisible by means of visible illustrations). Strength is destroyed both by too much and by too little food and drink; while it is produced, increased and preserved by suitable quantities. The same, therefore, is true of Temperance, Courage, and the other virtues. The man who runs away from everything in fear and never endures anything becomes a coward; the man who fears nothing whatsoever but encounters everything becomes rash. Similarly he that indulges in every pleasure and refrains from none turns out a profligate, and he that shuns all pleasure, as boorish persons do, becomes what may be called insensible. Thus, Temperance and Courage are destroyed by excess and deficiency, and preserved by the observance of the mean.” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, II, ii, 6)

2. The Infused Moral Virtues

These correspond to the acquired virtues, but they exist on the supernatural level. They are not obtained by practice, nor are they strengthened by practice, as the acquired virtues are, nor do they give facility in the performance of their respective acts. They are infused into the soul with charity, when one is brought into the state of grace; they grow all together, in proportion as one’s charity grows, as the fingers on the hand of a child grow all together. While not giving any facility in operation, they do give him who possesses them:

- a. The power to perform supernatural acts, which exceed merely natural powers;
- b. A taste for supernatural objects and a certain connaturality with supernatural ends.

The rule of the infused virtues is not reason, but faith. And faith, in ruling our conduct, adds a few important truths that reason has no knowledge of at all. Thus faith tells us of our supernatural destiny, and that we should mortify the natural man. Faith also tells us of original sin, of concupiscence, etc., which makes it impossible for us to treat human nature as if it were free from the tendency to evil. Therefore, although these infused moral virtues still prescribe the mean, or moderation, it is *a*

different mean from that of the acquired virtues; it is now *fixed by faith* and not by reason. And the effect that faith has on the mean is to “step it up,” as we say that a machine is “stepped up,” or as wine is “stepped up” by the addition of alcohol.

Thus, Aristotle tells us that to abstain from all pleasures is boorish; whereas St. John of the Cross, inspired by faith, directs us to give up all pleasures except those that directly lead to the glory of God. Human prudence directs us to obtain a moderate share of this world’s goods and to pursue other earthly ends with moderation. Christian prudence teaches us to scorn the things of this earth and to despise all things for God. Supernatural prudence, therefore, would seem imprudent to the prudent pagan. Natural fortitude gives us courage in pursuing worldly ends; supernatural courage enables us to put aside all worldly ends.

Obviously, then, it would be a great mistake to substitute the mean that belongs to the natural virtues for that which belongs to the supernatural virtues. It is to substitute Aristotle for Christ. If grace presupposes nature, it is not on that account to be identified with nature.

To insist, then, on mere natural moderation is, under pretense of virtue, to introduce mediocrity into our supernatural life. To the pagan any mortification besides that prescribed by moderation would be an extreme; the Christian virtues begin with this extreme and teach us to be moderate in our mortifications.

Of course, even Christians should cultivate carefully the natural virtues, for they give facility in the performance of good acts. But these natural virtues are mere auxiliaries of the supernatural virtues.

According to the teaching of St. Thomas, “The Christian moral virtues are infused and, because of their formal object, essentially distinct from the highest acquired moral virtues described by the greatest philosophers. These acquired moral virtues, useful as they may be, could be continually developed without ever attaining the formal object of the Christian virtues. An infinite difference exists between Aristotelian temperance, governed solely by right reason, and Christian temperance, ruled by divine faith and supernatural prudence. St. Thomas says: ‘Evidently the measure to be imposed on our passions differs essentially according as it springs from the human rule of reason or from the divine rule. For example, in the use of food the measure prescribed by reason is the avoidance of what is harmful to health and to the exercise of reason itself, while according to the divine law, as St. Paul says, man must chastise his body and bring it into subjection by abstinence and other similar austerities.’ This measure, which belongs to the supernatural

order, is in fact animated by that which unaided reason is ignorant of, but which faith teaches us about the results of original sin and our personal sins, about the infinite elevation of our supernatural end, about the obligation of loving God, the Author of grace, more than ourselves and above all; and of renouncing self in order to follow our Lord Jesus Christ.

“St. Thomas is equally insistent on the necessity of a progressive purification in order that the Christian moral virtues, aided by the acquired virtues, may reach their perfection. He shows us what they should become in those who really strive for divine union. ‘Then,’ he says, ‘prudence scorns the things of the world for the contemplation of divine things; it directs all the thoughts of the soul toward God. Temperance abandons, so far as nature can bear it, what the body demands; fortitude prevents the soul from becoming frightened in the face of death and when confronted with the unknown supernatural.’ Loftier still, he says, are the virtues of the soul that is already purified, those of the blessed and of the great saints on earth.”¹

“As for the infused moral virtues, such as Christian prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, they differ from the corresponding acquired moral virtues because they have a superior rule in other words, not only natural reason, but reason illumined by faith; they are inspired by much loftier views. It is thus that Christian temperance implies a mortification which purely natural ethics would not know... What a difference there is between the temperance described by Aristotle and that of which St. Augustine speaks.”²

3. The Theological Virtues

They are called theological because their object is God Himself (*Theos*). Hence, their measure also comes from God Himself, His infinite nature, and neither from reason nor faith. Since God is measureless, therefore, the theological virtues are also measureless. We are not to believe in God or hope in God moderately, but without limit. Nor are we to love God moderately, reserving a moderate love for the things of the world. As we have seen in dealing with Christian perfection, the measure of our love for God, as St. Bernard says, is to love Him without measure (*modus diligendi Deum est sine modo diligere*).

“St. Thomas says: ‘We can never love God as much as He ought to be loved, nor believe and hope in Him as much as we should.’ Moreover, the

1. Garrigou-Lagrange, *op. cit.*, pp. 61, 62.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

theological virtues differ from the moral virtues in that they do not essentially consist in a happy mean. Their object, their formal motive, their essential measure is God Himself, His infinite truth and goodness...¹

Here, even more than with the infused moral virtues, to set up the happy mean as the measure of virtue, particularly of charity, is “the peculiarity of mediocrity or of tepidity, erected into a system under pretext of moderation.”² The same author reminds us that the happy mean prescribed even by the acquired virtues is a summit and not a compromise.

We are, after all, Christians and not Aristotelians. We are to utilize the order of nature, but we are to live in the order of grace. If Aristotle taught that virtue is in the happy mean, Christ said (in the vision of St. John): “I know thy works, that thou are neither cold, nor hot. I would thou were cold, or hot. But because thou are lukewarm, and neither cold, nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth.” (Apoc. 3, 15)

4. Christian Heroism

Because we are to love God without measure, Jesus constantly made heroic demands of His followers. Thus, in the parable (Matt. 13) in which He compares the kingdom of Heaven to “a treasure hidden in a field,” He teaches that we should sell *all that we have* to obtain this treasure; and this is to be done *for joy*. Likewise, we are told, in the same place, that, as a merchant sells all to get a pearl of great price, so should we give up all to obtain the kingdom of heaven.

In Luke 14, 28-33, Jesus teaches that we must coldly realize beforehand what Christianity is going to cost us. A man who wishes to build a tower, He says, reckons the cost beforehand, that he may be able to finish it and not be derided by his neighbors for his lack of foresight. Or a king who is at war will first see if he can meet his opponent on even terms; if not, he will seek to make peace. So must we plan beforehand what we must pay to be Christians. And what is the price? “So likewise every one of you that doth not renounce *all that he possesseth*, cannot be My disciple.”

St. Thomas, interpreting this text, teaches that, while it is not necessary to give up the physical ownership of all things, it is necessary to be *prepared* to give them up, to be so disposed in our minds and

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1. *Ibid.*
 2. *Ibid.* (footnote).

especially in our affections that we can give them up without regret. In other words, while it is lawful to use the things of the world, we must not have any affection for them.

Theologians commonly associate heroic virtue with the third stage of the Christian life, that of the perfect, who have advanced far in spiritual things. And since all men are called to perfection, as we have shown they are, then all men are called ultimately to heroic virtue; not, indeed, as something to be realized immediately, but as an end for which they should strive ceaselessly.

“Nowadays the devil has made such a mess of everything in the system of life on earth that the world will presently become uninhabitable for anybody but Saints. The rest will drag their lives out in despair or fall below the level of man. The antimonies of human life are too exasperated, the burden of matter too oppressive; merely to exist, one has to expose oneself to too many snares. Christian heroism will one day become the sole solution for the problems of life. Then, as God proportions His graces to human needs and tempts nobody beyond his strength, we shall doubtless see coincident with the worst condition in human history a flowering of sanctity...”¹

“Jesus is in every respect a heroic, epic figure, heroism incarnate. And it was this heroic spirit, this unconditional staking of their lives for the known truth, that He demanded also of His disciples. The heroic is to Him a matter of course. To the rich young man who had observed all the commandments, but one thing was wanting, that he should sell all he had and follow Jesus. The true disciple must be so valiant, so resolutely purposeful that he will not even take the time to bury his own father. ‘Let the dead bury their dead.’ His concern must not be for the dead, but for the living. What makes a disciple a disciple is that he ‘hate his father, and mother, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also’; that is, in the Aramaic figure of speech, that he set all these aside in order to follow Jesus.”²

The call to heroism is not a discouraging call, but an inspiring call.

For a description of what can truly be called Christian moderation see G. K. Chesterton’s discussion of the “Paradoxes of Christianity.”³

“Paganism declared that virtue was in a balance; Christianity declared that it was in a conflict; the collision of two passions apparently

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1. Maritain, *The Things That Are Not Caesar’s*, N. Y., Scribner’s, 1930, p. 80.
 2. Karl Adam, *op. cit.*, pp. 97, 98.
 3. *Orthodoxy*, N. Y., Dodd Mead, 1938, chap. VI.

opposite. Of course, they were not really inconsistent; but they were such that it was hard to hold simultaneously.”

For example, Chesterton gives the conflict between personal dignity and humility, showing how Christianity separated the two ideas and then exaggerated them both, so that in one way Man was to be haughtier than he had ever been before; in another way he was to be humbler than he had ever been before. “In so far as I am Man I am the chief of creatures. In so far as I am *a* man I am the chief of sinners. . . . Christianity got over the difficulty of combining furious opposites, by keeping them both, and by keeping them both furious. The Church was positive on both points. One can hardly think too little of one’s self. One can hardly think too much of one’s soul.”

Another case is that of charity versus hatred, both of which were kept by Christianity while both were diluted by paganism. “Christianity came in here as before. It came in startlingly with a sword, and clove one thing from another. It divided the crime from the criminal. The criminal we must forgive until seventy times seven. The crime we must not forgive at all. . . . There was room for wrath and love to run wild. And the more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it had established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild.”¹

When the idea of moderation is misunderstood or brought in where it does not apply, the result is not moderation, but mediocrity and spiritual tepidity. The worldling

“takes as his standard of judgment the opinion of the world, and sometimes becomes its very slave that he may obtain its favors. In the opinion of the world wisdom in the conduct of life usually consists not in the golden mean between two extreme vices, but in an easy-going mediocrity lying midway between the true good and excessive crudeness or perversity in evil-doing. In the eyes of the world Christian perfection is as much an excess in one direction as downright wickedness is in the other. We must avoid extremes in everything, we are told. And so the mediocre comes to be called good, whereas it is nothing but an unstable, confused state lying between the good and the bad. People forget the meaning of school marks given to children on their reports: very good, good, fair, mediocre, bad, very bad. The difference between the mediocre and the good is lost sight of, the one is confused with the other; instead of rising higher, a man will remain permanently halfway. Hence, the word

1. *Ibid.*

charity is sometimes applied to a reprehensible toleration of the worst evils. Calling itself tolerance and prudent moderation, this 'wisdom of the flesh' is equally indulgent to vice and indifferent to virtue."¹

1. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Providence*, St. Louis, Mo., B. Herder Book Co., 1937, p. 132.