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THE RELIGIOUS LIFE
AND THE VOWS

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE
AND THE VOWS

A TREATISE BY
MONSEIGNEUR CHARLES GAY
BISHOP OF ANTHÉDON

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

O. S. B.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE
REV. WILLIAM T. GORDON
PRIEST OF THE ORATORY

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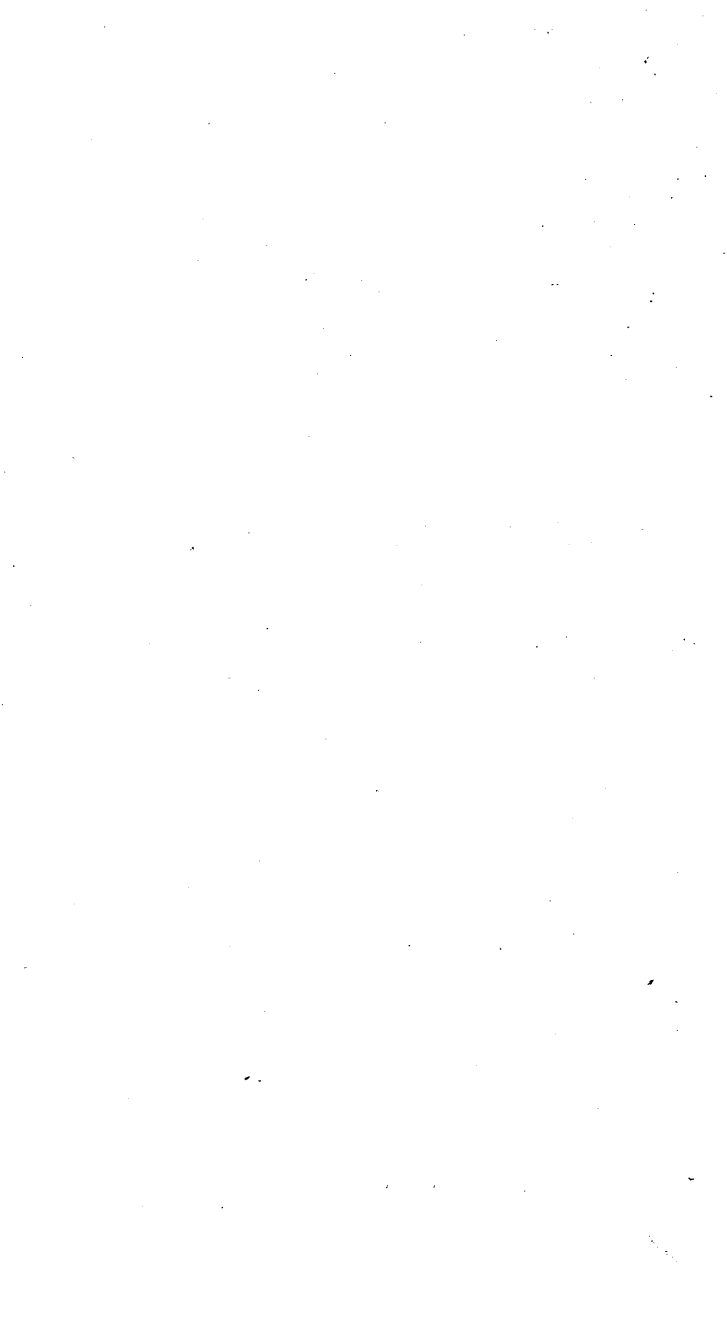
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TRANSLATORS' PREFACE

THE translators of this Volume are well aware of its many defects from a literary point of view, for which they must beg the indulgence of readers. They have to say in their excuse that, if French is always a difficult language to put into perfectly idiomatic English—which all who have seriously tried the work must acknowledge—Monseigneur Gay's French is especially so. His style and his thoughts are both somewhat redundant, and his expressions often very peculiar as well as un-English; so that there are many passages where it has been impossible to avoid a more French turn of phrase than is agreeable to Saxon ears. It is hoped that the goodness of the writer's matter may compensate for faults in the manner of translation.

O. S. B.

BERGHOLT, *March* 19, 1898.



INTRODUCTION

THIS "Treatise on Religious Life" is a translation of three admirable chapters in Monseigneur Gay's work on "The Christian Life and Virtues," which has been so greatly appreciated in France. In his preface, the author tells us that his book, though primarily addressed to Religious, is also intended for the edification of all classes of Christians, and this is true even of the three chapters on the evangelical counsels, which are now presented to the public in an English translation.

Mgr. Gay has done for ascetical theology what Father Faber did for some portions of dogmatic theology; he has made it attractive to the general reader by not treating it in a dry and merely scientific manner, but with a largeness of view and a poetic enthusiasm which conveys to many souls a revelation of the wonder and beauty of God's love in dealing with His creatures. We are confirmed in this view by the fact that the Vicar Apostolic of Geneva, in writing to the author in praise of his work, compares it to the writings of Father Faber; and Mgr. Gay himself, in the letter which accompanied the presentation of his work to the Library

of the London Oratory, speaks of his admiration for Father Faber's works, and of the obligation he felt himself to be under to him. This translation, then, of that part of Mgr. Gay's book which treats of the evangelical counsels will, we are confident, be much appreciated by Religious of both sexes, and we trust that those who have not been called to consecrate themselves to God by the Vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, will still find in this treatise many holy thoughts which will increase their love of Our Lord, and stimulate them to strive after perfection in the various vocations God may have given them.

While we are grateful to the translators for the boon they have thus conferred on us, we venture to hope that they will complete their good work, and give us a new translation of the whole of Mgr. Gay's treatise on Christian virtues, and thus they will earn a large share in the reward of those who "instruct many unto justice."

WILLIAM T. GORDON,
Priest of the Oratory.

28th March 1898.

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

INTRODUCTION

(BEFORE discussing the first of the three Evangelical Counsels, which concerns Holy Poverty in particular, it is necessary to explain the nature, reason, and extent of these Counsels that God has given us in general.)

Man needs counsel as well as precept. He is not always conscious of this need, but it exists. Life is so complicated; so many and such difficult duties, such arduous and absorbing business press upon us; so many divers roads lie, crossing each other, before us; the things around us present such varied aspects. There are innumerable false lights to deceive, delusive appearances to seduce, and storms to frighten us; while, over and above all this, says Holy Scripture, our own views are so short-sighted, our thoughts perforce so timid, and our ventures at the same time so hazardous. Even the most upright conscience and the sincerest love of goodness will not always save man from the pitfalls of error, doubt, or perplexity. Hence a counsel is often needed that we may escape these evils, and a counsel is often enough.

In this sense it is that Scripture speaks when it says, "Do thou nothing without counsel, and thou shalt not repent when thou hast done."¹ In this course there lies so much safety as to afford us a most precious element of happiness. Further, the Sage tells us, "Ointment and perfumes rejoice the heart; and the good counsels of a friend are sweet to the soul."² It follows that one of the best and most highly rewarded works of mercy is to give alms by counsel; and what makes a true friend so great a treasure is that he becomes, by his very relation to us, a faithful adviser.

Jesus is the friend to whom no other can be compared; indeed He may be called the only friend, so far does He surpass the rest. Coming as He did into this world, and taking on Himself our human nature, surely He of all friends is the one to give us counsels. To begin with, He gives us laws. "I am appointed King," he says, "by the Lord over Sion His holy mountain"—meaning the Church, and through her the whole world—"preaching His commandments." Before all things He is a sovereign, and lays claim to founding a kingdom. The Gospel is, in fact, the proclamation and the institution of the reign of God. The religion of Jesus is to be called the New Law—the law of grace, love, and liberty, no doubt; but at the same time a real *law*, founded on real rights, proceeding from a real dominion, expressing the wishes of a master, intimated

¹ Eccles. xxxii. 24.

² Prov. xxvii. 9.

to real subjects, and binding all these wishes together by a moral obligation of the strongest kind. The glory of Jesus Christ, and still more our own weakness, required this. For who can help acknowledging that this law is the brightest light to our feet, our chief weapon wherewith to fight self, and our strongest shield against the many enemies that conspire to ruin us? Moreover, like every Divine utterance, it is a sword with two edges, capable of influencing by the fear of threatened chastisements when it has failed to conquer by the force of its own beauty, or even by the greatness of promised rewards.

The Gospel, therefore, contains formal commands; and those who choose to see in Christianity nothing but a simple suggestion made by God to His creatures, or a matter of sentiment interesting to the heart, but not binding on the conscience, are struck with blindness, if they are not impudent liars. Most assuredly man is free to choose, and can follow the path he prefers throughout his life; but his choice is made between obedience and rebellion, and is merely the alternative left to him for a certain time, *within which* he has to lose or save himself once for all.

Jesus Christ's religion, then, includes precepts: on these it is primarily founded, and these are at first sight its most striking features. But, beyond these, could Our Lord help giving us explicit counsels? We know the seven names of that Holy

Spirit Who "rests on" the Saviour: that is to say, Who dwells substantially within Him and there finds His delight; and one of these names is "the Spirit of Counsel." When, therefore, after His Resurrection and in virtue of His sacred Passion, Our Lord pours forth on us that virtue with which He is filled, He does it in His capacity of the Spirit of Counsel. Scripture teaches us that this is so, when it tells us that one of the privileges of the just man (which is to be understood of the believer) is to be "directed in his counsel": that is, counselled in his difficulties, in his complications, in all the most delicate and important crises of his life. The spirit of Jesus counsels and instructs us implicitly in the secret recesses of our heart by the touches of His grace, and by what St. John calls His *unction*; and this inward communication alone does much for us. But, being what we are—still oppressed by the darkness and infirmities of nature, although in a state of grace—nay, even when advanced in sanctity—would this be enough? And, consequently, would it be just or possible for Our Lord to stop short here in His work of forming our souls and directing our lives?

Before, however, going further in such an inquiry, we should remember that for us to ask at all whether God can or can not do anything is always to some extent over-bold, since—putting aside what is bad or absurd—it is clear that He can do everything. Moreover, so far from being fit to judge

whether such and such an act is or is not necessary for Him to perform, we are hardly capable of appreciating the expediency of those that He has performed. Practically, indeed, His right to do a thing is merely the fact that He has done it; or, at least, this fact is the proof and expression of His right. This is why, in sacred science, as soon as the existence of a Divine fact has been demonstrated, the best thing to do, usually, is to start from this fact as from a principle, and to rest all our reasoning upon it. This, besides being the most respectful, is evidently the wisest course.

The truth, then, is that Jesus Christ, in addition to the laws He brought with Him, *has* given us counsels here below. We find all through the Gospels, side by side with the express desires formulated by Our Lord, practical thoughts which He sets forth, moral precepts, as it were, indicated by Him, and almost always accompanied by exhortations addressed to us. Now this is exactly what constitutes a "counsel," and distinguishes it from a precept. One is derived from authority, the other is allied to wisdom; one is the action of a will, the other the fruit of a mind. If, in some respects, the will seems to unite with the mind in setting forth a counsel, it is never more than a dawning and incomplete will, which "would and would not"; a will, that is, which stops short at desire instead of going on to give an order. Hence, while a precept obliges and cannot be infringed without sin, a counsel leaves

us free. Undoubtedly we must esteem and respect it. We are bound to believe and acknowledge that all these counsels are good, wise, and salutary to man. He who thinks evil of them, and disparages them—as, unfortunately, many in the world do—is first summoning God's reason before the bar of his own judgment, which is an act of extreme insolence; and there condemning it, which is the very height of outrage and folly. Still, whether or not to regulate our own lives by the maxims of the heavenly Counsellor, is for us to decide by our own choice. It is indisputably praiseworthy to do it; and he who chooses this path certainly deserves and will infallibly receive a greater reward in the future, not to speak of numerous advantages that it will give him even here below. Nevertheless, he who does not so choose commits no fault whatever; and he will find neither a more severe judge, nor a heavier account, on the score of such an omission.

What wonderful discretion this displays on the part of God, and with what reverence does He treat His creatures! In strict justice, He might exact all things from us: that is, all possible things; for—the impossible excepted—where do His rights end? He might, at least, demand a great deal more than He does; but He confines Himself strictly to what is indispensable.

Now, it is absolutely necessary for all to reach their last end, and to take those means which are the only ones for doing so; and it is to this end that the

precepts lead. When it is a case of life or death for His children, the Father's love is not satisfied without bringing a commanding sovereignty, a controlling justice, and a chastising omnipotence to bear on its own interests. But beyond this—as to the employment of particular means, which may be more sure, more expeditious, and productive of a grander success than other means—He gives us only a counsel and leaves us our liberty. “If you keep the Law” (He seems to say) “well and good: you will have eternal life; but if you wish to be perfect, if you would have the hundredfold, and sit on a throne to judge the nations of the saints, singing a canticle unknown to others, then go, sell your possessions to give to the poor, remain virgins, and follow me closely step by step. What I thus counsel is no doubt your *best* course; happy are you if you listen to Me, still happier if I convince you! Yet, if the ordinary life of the just man suits you better, confine yourself to it; you will incur no disgrace with Me.” Such is the Gospel, and the special character of the New Covenant. There is grace in the Law alone; for the very grace that established it also merits and obtains for us enough to fulfil it. Moreover, this Law, made so sweet and easy to us, is in itself full of attractions. It could not help being so, since Jesus Himself makes it known to us; to Him it unites us, and He was the first to observe it. But beyond the Law another region stretches, higher, freer, more luminous, and more fertile as

well. A country set apart, though free for all to enter; where love alone speaks, and speaks in its own name; where love discourses with love only, receiving no gifts save such as love spontaneously offers. In this region the creature is left so completely her own mistress that, by giving herself, she actually becomes capable, if we may so speak, of conferring the shadow of a favour upon God. Is not such communication as this between God and man most acceptable—worthy of the one, honourable to the other? This intercourse it is that the Counsels establish; and hence it is that these Counsels hold so high a place in that new era of Religion in which the servants of God are His children, no longer receiving the spirit of bondage, but “the spirit of the adoption of sons, whereby we cry ‘Abba, Father!’”¹ It is because we are contemplating this New Covenant that we dare to ask whether, in the moral economy instituted by Him, our Lord *could* have failed to add counsels to precepts; and whether it was not almost necessary, in the Gospels, that many virtuous works—and especially the most virtuous of all, and those most pleasing to God—should be merely counselled? Yes! it is fitting indeed that between us and that God Who died that we might live, and Who feeds us daily with His consecrated flesh, the heart, and the heart freely moved—grace alone, in short—should be the chief medium; and this, especially, because by demand-

¹ Rom. viii. 15.

ing less, God obtains more, and by acting less as a Master, He is incomparably better served.

Happy, then, again are those who hear these holy Counsels! All, indeed, actually hear them; for God, speaking through Jesus Christ, gave them in the presence of crowds; but all do not grasp them to the point of being themselves arrested and persuaded by them. For this a special grace is needed; the Word must knock at the door, and the Holy Spirit must come to open it, and to finish the work that speaking has begun. The number of those who receive this grace without answering to it is no doubt great; though all those who do follow the counsels follow them only because of having received it, and have no right to glorify themselves. But they have a true right indeed to rejoice; for can any gift be compared to one which, by opening the source of such rare virtues, becomes the very principle of a life excelling all others?

Special counsels abound in Christian morality, because there are so many ways, some more perfect than others, of fulfilling what is commanded. Hence every virtue has its accompanying counsels. Between the compulsory virtue that just exempts the soul from its opposite sin, and the heroic virtue that makes a saint, how many degrees are there not which the free-will of man may reach, though God does not exact it of him! Still, all are agreed—and the Gospel makes it of faith—that Jesus Christ has given us three Principal Counsels; which

counsels, efficaciously sanctifying those who accept them, put all who undertake them by vow into a state of perfection. The reasons for these three Counsels are at once clear and deep.

All real life consists in love. By giving us our life, God, Who is the First Love, destines us to share His own; and the only condition He places upon the attainment of this great destiny, is that our love should answer to His. Knowledge itself only exists for the sake of love: if it does not tend to this, it is but abortive, and its strength, thus repressed, may kill him to whom it was meant to give life. The soul that lives the fullest life here below in the sight of God is the one who loves most, and who consequently deserves, in heaven, to possess the object of her love most perfectly. But if love is life it is also, necessarily, law; for law is never anything but the Divine formula of life, whence it comes that the penalty of breaking it is death. If, then, the three Evangelical Counsels relate to the law, and serve only for preparing a soul the better to accomplish it, they must also, by a rigorous consequence, relate to Love: since Love is the Law at its summit and in its fulness.

It is easy to see that all the three Counsels do tend towards Love, and that they profit and wait upon it. They cure the evils that are fatal to it; they break the bonds that fetter it; and by protecting its integrity, while helping on its progress, they secure its final triumph. These three special

offices of the "Counsels" can only be slightly indicated here; but, besides suggesting the precious lights which they are sure to bring forth if meditated upon, this indication will serve as the sketch of a picture to be worked out in detail and completed later on.

The evil which kills love in us has been often named: it is called concupiscence; and this concupiscence has three branches. Now, each Evangelical Counsel is a Divine remedy with the power of curing one of these. The lust of the eyes yield to poverty and that of the flesh to chastity; whilst pride falls under the blow struck at it by obedience. Whoever, therefore, follows the Counsels—especially if he has vowed to follow them always—saves the life of love in himself by destroying all forces contrary to it in their very first principle.

But, besides giving life to Love, the Counsels give it freedom. Love in its nature tends above itself; God is its centre, its home, its last end; it goes to God by its own movement, and sometimes even unconsciously. Still, in this world, it is also at times conscious of being held back; and this is the violence of which St. Paul declares that it causes us to send forth "unspeakable groanings."¹ Even when the ignoble chains of sin have been broken by grace, we must still be subject to the enslaving necessities of earth. For instance, the many cares arising from *things*, such as the worries of making, keeping, or

¹ Rom. viii. 26.

managing money, or the still greater cares connected with *persons*, especially those related to us—the husband we have given ourselves to, the children who depend upon us—all such human ties as may be both sweet and noble in themselves, but are burdens nevertheless; and, lastly, the cares which every man meets with in himself, from the difficulty of finding out his true path and always walking straight forward in it, of making and keeping a position, of habitually deciding for himself, and of ceaselessly living here below under the weight of serious and alarming responsibilities—such cares as these are necessities of our existence.

We must of course remember, to the honour of God and for the consolation of souls, that love *can* live and work even in these fetters. The grace of Jesus Christ is strong, pliable, versatile, omnipresent; it is accommodated to every regular state of life. Thus, for the rich, there are almsgiving, liberality, and economy—which last, if practised in a Christian way, implies so many virtues; and again, there is the spirit of poverty, which the saints have known how to preserve even in courts and on the throne. For the married—not to speak of the special chastity which belongs to them—innumerable pure, living, obvious sources of devotion and self-sacrifice are provided, both by nature itself and by the duties of their state; while for those who are their own masters, how many opportunities spring up daily beneath their feet of turning to God for help; of

trusting and giving themselves up to His Divine Providence; of being self-restrained, prudent, strong, faithful, and magnanimous. And all these things help love.

Yet we need not be very deep students of human nature or of the world, to see that virtues which can only exist by means of a struggle, and which always have to triumph over the hurtful atmosphere in whose midst they must be practised, cannot fail to be very rare; and that consequently, by breaking ties which enslave the majority of mankind to a deplorable and almost fatal extent, the Evangelical Counsels bestow a quite exceptional lot in life on the soul. By giving her for her portion liberty without price, they ensure marvellous advantages, and hence marvellous success to the love within her.

And it is through this liberty that love is made victor at last; for directly it is free it becomes "lord of all"; obstacles to its way being once removed, it expands and fills all things of its own accord. The soul that is vowed to the Counsels, as Scripture says, "waits upon God."¹ She is free to belong to One alone, and hence to tend towards Him with all her powers, to consecrate her whole time to Him, to use her whole life for Him. What, then, can hinder her from becoming His conquest and His prey?—His prey, because He is a "consuming fire,"² and His conquest, because He is by nature a sovereign and by will a conqueror. And

¹ Ps. xlv. 11.

² Heb. xii. 29.

to be thus consumed and mastered by God is the final triumph of love, because it has fulfilled the condition of fully answering to His love, by overcoming all things.

We may partly imagine what liberty must have been given to love in the soul of the Blessed Virgin, by the grace of the Immaculate Conception, and to the love of God for her, as well as to that she gave to Him. Nothing in her soul could possibly oppose, or hinder, or constrain that mutual attraction, that intimate understanding, that pure love, which at all times impelled the Creator and His creature one towards the other. All intercourse between them was straightforward, simple, swift, strong, certain, full of sweetness, and indescribably satisfying. Now, effects somewhat analogous to this result are produced in a soul which is established in evangelical nakedness by the vows. These vows give back to her, as far as possible, a kind of original justice; and it is exactly for this reason that Religious Profession is called a "second baptism." The soul is *born again* by it, and the first fact of her new history which dates from this fresh birth is the inauguration of the full reign of God within her. We must therefore take literally all that Our Lord says of the eight beatitudes, which clearly refer to these three great Counsels and are summed up in them. Whosoever undertakes to follow them for ever, seeks his own happiness, by setting his foot on the royal road of holiness and perfection.

Hence, then, at least in part, we see the grounds and the scope of those holy Counsels given us by God in the Law of Grace.

It was necessary to make all this clear in order that, when they come to be studied separately, each one in its own particular form, a true and high idea of them should be formed, and hence a more reverent and zealous attention paid to their study.

We may now directly discuss the question of that blessed Voluntary poverty which is the first step towards establishing those who vow themselves to it in the Religious state.

We will first explain in what Religious poverty consists, giving special importance to the obligations imposed by it, but also dwelling on the feelings that it must inspire, the direction that it should give to conduct, and the general character that it impresses on life; so that when what is really necessary to its existence has been clearly set forth, the various degrees, leading up to perfection, which it may reach, may be seen. But as the matter of this Counsel is so important as to be quite fundamental, and as it would be impossible to make it too attractive to hearts often so strongly opposed to it by nature, we shall, secondly, enlarge upon the many and powerful motives which may be held out to us for undertaking to practise, at whatever cost, this really indispensable virtue.



HOLY POVERTY

HOLY POVERTY

PART I

TREATING OF THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS POVERTY :
THE OBLIGATIONS IMPOSED BY IT, AND THE MODE
OF LIFE IT INSPIRES.

RELIGIOUS poverty consists in divesting one's self of all riches, and in detachment from them, for the love of the eternal good, which is God Himself.

We have said *divesting one's self*. All Christians ought to be poor in a certain measure and sense of the word. Jesus has said that "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."¹ And still more formally He declares, "If a man does not renounce all he possesses, he cannot be My disciple."² But to fulfil this poverty of precept, it is sufficient to keep the heart detached in the midst of riches—to use this world as if we used it not, and, as Venerable Bede says, quoting St. Augustine, "to possess the goods of this earth without being enslaved and chained down by them." This degree

¹ Matt. xix. 24.

² Luke xiv. 33.

of poverty is obligatory. The Counsel goes much further, and the result is proportionably greater. "If thou wouldst be perfect," Our Lord says, "go sell what thou hast, and give the price to the poor."¹ Whoever obeys this injunction, strips himself of all and remains naked. Such is the Religious, and it is this which exteriorly distinguishes him from a Christian in the world. But it follows as a matter of course that God would have him in the first place interiorly detached from all the goods which he exteriorly abandons. Let the hand be empty of gold and silver certainly, but above all let the heart be pure from avarice. God is not deceived by appearances, and His kingdom is in the soul.

It is the *vow* of poverty which despoils the Religious, but it is the *virtue* of poverty which teaches him detachment; so that the vow and the virtue, although both have the same object, are two very different things. The virtue is the end of the vow, whereas the vow is only a means of exercising the virtue more perfectly. The virtue is the sanctuary, the vow is but the rampart which surrounds and protects it. The virtue has a much wider scope than the vow, its field of action is very great, and it tends towards the highest perfection; while, on the contrary, the vow, as such, is exclusively limited to the sphere of obligation—not, certainly, that one is obliged to make it, but, after it has once been made, it obliges. The virtue may be wounded.

¹ Matt. xix. 21.

without violating the vow, which corresponds to it; whereas the vow cannot be broken without, as a necessary consequence, wounding the virtue. In short, the vow is only for this world, the virtue endures for ever. This is the order of Providence: all good acts tend to increase some virtue; all virtue strengthens love, and love consumes itself and us in God.

This is why we have so particularly laid down that the giving up, and casting off by a Religious of temporal goods, must be done for the love of the eternal good. To throw our gold to beggars because we do not care for it, or from a motive of vain-glory, or from a proud disdain of riches, or to make one's self a name, or from attachment to some system, or (although too absurd to be believed possible) from natural fancy, is certainly not to embrace the poverty of Jesus Christ. It is very often a sin, and if it happens not to be a positive sin, at least it is an act which in no degree whatever tends towards salvation or moral perfection. "Sell thy goods," our Master says, but immediately after adds, "and follow Me,"¹ thus showing for what end all possessions must be sacrificed. Leave thy field, thy fortune, and the rest, but "for My name." Here is the principle which, giving to the act its Christian character, imparts to it also its heavenly value. It is, then, for God's sake, and for the sake of the present and future intercourse of his soul with

¹ Mark x. 21.

God, that the Religious leaves and detaches himself from all things. The proper *object* of this double despoliation, interior and exterior, is everything that is comprehended under the general name of riches.

Some explanations are here necessary. There are several degrees of Religious poverty, and these different degrees demand different vows. In some Congregations only temporary vows are made; and even in the institutes where perpetual vows are taken, these vows, although similar as to their duration, are not always so as to their extent. The Rules and Constitutions of each Order and Congregation determine exactly the measure of poverty to which a Religious binds himself on becoming a member of that Order or Congregation. The Church approves all these degrees, because all are holy and tend towards holiness, and are certainly comprised in the Counsel given by Our Lord. The least among them at once places a person in a state incomparably far above that of any proprietor whatever, no matter how generous he may be in giving alms. St. Thomas teaches and proves the fact. He says the merit of Religious, as to the giving of alms, surpasses that of seculars in the same way as that which is universal, surpasses that which is only particular, and as a holocaust surpasses other sacrifices. Nevertheless it is clear that the Church keeps her highest esteem, her tenderest affection, and without doubt also her greatest favours, for those who profess

the strictest vows and are bound to the most absolute poverty.

The most perfect of these vows is that by which any one absolutely renounces the right of ever possessing anything whatsoever. By this vow the professed Religious is rendered incapable of receiving, or acquiring, claiming, inheriting, or leaving in legacy; of selling, lending, or giving; and, in short, of any act of ownership whatsoever, as if he were already dead. Although the civil law does not recognise this incapacity in Religious, still, as it never had any right of itself to establish such a thing, so neither has it any right to prevent it. Being an act entirely spiritual in its essence, a vow can only be subordinate to God and His holy Church. Without doubt this vow has its results in the temporal order; but these results keep the character of the act which produced them and become sharers in its nature. "If the root be holy," says St. Paul, "then are the branches holy."¹ In a word, the Church alone, as recognising this vow, can recognise the incapacity which is its result, and if, as is evidently her custom, she accepts the vow of absolute poverty, that, in itself is enough to constitute its reality before God, and to bind the conscience.

The least perfect of these vows of poverty is that by which, while keeping the radical proprietorship of our goods, and even the right of bestowing them, we only renounce doing this in our own way. In this

¹ Rom. xi. 16.

case we truly remain possessors of our fortune, and are only dependent as to the use we make of it. However limited is the extent of such a vow, as it manifestly restrains and holds in check the natural exercise of the right of proprietorship, which is the free and entire disposal of all that belongs to any one, it implies a true sacrifice, and constitutes a kind of poverty which no law exacts; hence it is poverty of counsel, and is strictly sufficient to place man in the Religious state.

But, independently of general principles, as applied to particular Religious institutes, the fundamental rule is, that a sin is committed against the vow every time that, by an interior or an exterior act, any one oversteps the measure of poverty which is customary, and which is implied in the special vows by which the members of the respective Communities are bound.

If we must yet speak a little more in detail of the duties which these different vows entail, and especially of the two extremes, the strictest and the most lenient—from which it is easy to deduce the rest—the following rules will be found safe, and are recognised by all.

First, we will explain in what the least vow of poverty consists. He who has bound himself to it, may not, without the knowledge and consent of his superior, dispose, either actually, or even mentally, of those goods, the manner of whose employment he has not regulated before his profession. If the

occasion presents itself of actually exercising the proprietorship of which he has kept the right, he may represent his ideas to his superior, and even, if necessity requires, make known his desires; he may try to influence him by the good reasons he gives and plead the cause which he believes to be either the truest or the best, discreetly and humbly. But he must not make up his mind, nor decide upon anything of his own will. For the rest, we believe, we speak as God would have us speak, when we say to those living under this law, that because the imperfection of their vow makes them spiritually less rich, they must take all the more care to enrich themselves by practising diligently the virtue of poverty. By right of possession they are less poor; let them be more so in spirit, by being more detached. Let them think less of their goods, because the proprietorship rests with them; and when the time comes for arranging about them, let them be all the more yielding to the decision of superiors, inasmuch as the latter have less liberty in saying what they wish.

But let those who have vowed total poverty remember that from henceforth, by the grace of God, they possess nothing in the world. This is the teaching of all the Fathers, and, whatever their Rule may be, the text will be found to contain this most express declaration, "Nothing belongs to you personally"; neither their patrimony nor their dowry; neither the goods of the Community, nor anything

whatsoever of those objects which the Community has given them for their use; neither their habit, their breviary, or other books; not the furniture of their cell, nor the pictures or relics they may have; no, not even a pin, or a needleful of cotton; the bread that they eat is not theirs until they have eaten it. A beggar may do what he likes with a piece of bread that is given him; he can either keep it or throw it away, give or sell it—a Religious has not this right.

He cannot lawfully use a piece of bread for any other purpose than that for which it was given to him. As much of it as is not used remains the property of others, so that he is truly more poor than the poorest of the poor. And more wonderful still, far from possessing any exterior object, “monks,” as the admirable St. Benedict says, “are men whose very bodies and wills are not in their own power.” So that if, without the express or wisely presumed leave of the superior, a Religious appropriates anything whatever belonging to the Community, or to any one at all—be it even an object without an owner, such as something found and not reclaimed; if without the aforesaid permission he receives as a present, or borrows anything; if he himself gives, lends, exchanges or alienates an object, even if it were ordinarily given for his use;—or if, finally, through his own fault, he loses or spoils any object he is using, above all when it has been officially confided to his care, he

ceases to be poor and sins against the vow. Furthermore, if, without disposing in any way of a thing, he uses it with a kind of intimate feeling which excludes the idea of the common good, and speaks of it naturally in any possessive term, then he sins. A simple voluntary regret, the mere desire—if consented to—of possessing anything whatsoever, would be a sin of the same kind. We know well that the Christian law applies above all to the interior, and that to all God has said, “Thou shalt not covet.” Undoubtedly if this thought, this desire, or regret, passes from the heart to the lips, the fault is greater; and if the speech is heard, to the guilt of the act itself is added the graver guilt of scandal. But even if they remain hidden in the secret of the soul, such acts are opposed to the vow, and so are real faults.

But it must be well understood that this going against the vow in small matters, whether by an interior or an exterior act of proprietorship, does not constitute a mortal sin for a religious. In this, as in every other case, in order to commit mortal sin, fulness of consent and gravity of matter are required. Thus, ordinarily speaking, he who takes an object merely to make use of it, does not sin so gravely as one does who takes a thing to appropriate it to himself. He who appropriates something that is necessary, does not commit the same fault as he who appropriates a superfluous object. In the same way, lending or giving to a person outside the

monastery is a greater sin than doing so to a member of the Community. The universally received rule is that, in the matter of theft, what would suffice to constitute a mortal sin by the general law, would equally be a grave sin for the Religious who took the thing without leave. It must be understood that any Rule prescribing poverty, does not *of itself* oblige under pain of sin; yet he who fails in the poverty which it prescribes commits a very real sin; not, let it be clearly understood, because such acts are forbidden by the Rule, but because of the vow by which he has bound himself. If, for instance, a Religious Rule commanded some point of morality, belonging already to the natural, divine, or ecclesiastical law, would it not be true that such a mandate could not be transgressed without sinning, not—once more we repeat—because of the Rule in itself, but because of the law which the legislator has thought good to recall in his Rule? The teaching is the same for all points of the Rule to which the vows bind.

And finally we may add that every sin, be it more or less grievous against the vow, is a manifold sin, for, besides the faults against the virtue of poverty, it implies disobedience and injustice; and, because of the broken vow, a sin against Religion and a true sacrilege. Even to such an extent as this does the vow of poverty bind those who make it.

But, as we have already said, the vow is only to

lead to the virtue—to be its rampart and protector—the virtue is the foundation and the principle, forming the true state of the soul, and supplying its merit. This virtue of poverty will languish in the soul if it is merely prevented from dying: it must be strengthened, and made to grow and bring forth fruit. That a soul be detached from all that the vow has deprived it of, at least so far as not seriously to break its engagements, is sufficient to keep the virtue just alive in such a soul; but it is far from being enough to give it full and perfect life. How then does Religious poverty attain to its perfection, and what does it inspire in those who follow it?

Above all it inspires a retrenchment of all superfluity, both in the use of superfluous things and in the superfluous use of things necessary.

The very word superfluity means something beyond what is necessary. And when we speak here of necessaries, we do not mean those things which are indispensably necessary to prevent our dying of cold, or of hunger, and thirst; we mean all that is befitting and proper to the Religious state. Hence it comes to pass that the term “necessaries” is relative to the Rule one has embraced, to the occupation one is employed in, to the state of one’s health, and even to those particular wants one may lawfully have, and of which superiors are the judges. All that goes beyond this, is just that superfluity which must be faithfully and generously retrenched.

We may take the holy poverty of Jesus as our

torch, and in its light examine our habits. We may see if in the things used, in those claimed, either for one's self or for one's office, even in those wished for, there is anything which we could really do without. The most convenient thing is superfluous when one which is less so would suffice; so is a new thing when an old one can be used: what we do not want till to-morrow is superfluous to-day, because to-day we do not require its use.

Remedies are superfluous, when with ordinary courage one can bear the pain. And yet what illusions are there not on this point? what pretexts for asking! what efforts to obtain! and what sophisms to keep what we do not wish to part with! For one soul who fears superfluity, are there not a hundred whom it has led astray?

Certainly there should be moderation in all things, and the poverty which has a horror of imaginary wants, is twin sister to that holy simplicity which frankly makes known real wants. But who is not aware that on this point of its own interests nature is blind, partial, and exacting! When, then, we think that we stand in need of this or that, let us be diffident of ourselves and take time to reflect, a time proportionate to the urgency of the want, to the intensity of our desire, to the importance of the thing desired, to the difficulty of procuring it, and to the effect which obtaining it may have upon the other members of the Community. Having, then, well weighed the matter, and being disposed to

believe our superiors rather than ourselves, let us submit beforehand to their judgment; and if their answer is a refusal, supposing a Religious has not enough virtue to rejoice, let him strive at least to have sufficient to remain quiet and resigned.

The great secret here, the radical, universal, and infallible means, is Common Life.

Love Common Life; have a love for the common food and clothing, books, instruments of labour, the common customs, and even, except in particular cases approved by superiors, the common spiritual helps. We know the liberty that the Church gives upon that point, and far be it from us to underrate, and, above all, to restrain it; this liberty is sacred, and it is indispensable. But as St. Paul says, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient," and surely also we speak in the spirit of holy Church when we say—even in spiritual helps—love, and as far as possible choose that which is common to all. Oh, how precious is that poverty which makes a Religious in all things one with the Community. By it superfluity is cut away with one stroke; by it the spirit of proprietorship is nailed to the Cross, illusion is rendered impossible, and self-love is disconcerted. Such a way of life has all the greater merit as it secures the public good, together with the particular good of him who practises it. If sometimes there is some inequality among the goods used in common, as it is impossible there should not be—for example, a more

worn habit, coarser food, a less beautiful or devotional picture, a poor or inconvenient cell, in which one or other of the Religious must of necessity be put—would a true lover of poverty make choice of these things? No, because poverty has no choice, it takes that which is given. But this blessed virtue would incline his heart to take the worst, and perhaps to pray that it might fall to his lot; and if it does so happen that the worst is given to him, to look upon this gift as a grace, to thank God for it, and to rejoice in it, as for some good fortune.

Over and above simply retrenching superfluity, Religious poverty draws us to love even the temporary privation of necessaries. Is this practically a case that really occurs often? Jesus said to His Apostles, "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, did you want anything?"¹ And as to ourselves, since we have been in Religion, have we really been in want of anything? If it so happens that the monastery has a sure and sufficient revenue to depend upon, what has ever been wanting to us? And if it has none, or so little as to leave something to be looked for from Divine Providence, has this Providence ever deceived our trust? St. Teresa writes: "The less we have the less anxious I am, and Our Lord knows that I feel greater pain when the alms exceed what is necessary than when we are in want of something. I have never yet been able to say that we were in want, but our

¹ Luke xxii. 35.

Divine Master has quickly come to our help." And what house could not say the same, at least if it is faithful to the spirit of poverty, without which, as our saint declares, we lose all right to assistance from God, and expose ourselves to dying of hunger. David says in the 36th Psalm, "I have not seen the just forsaken, nor his seed seeking bread,"¹ and who has seen the poor of Jesus Christ unable to procure theirs? Nevertheless God can, and maybe He will some day put our confidence to the test, and appearing to be deaf to our prayers, defer coming to our assistance. St. Teresa evidently had this thought in her mind, when she wrote these words in her Constitutions: "There can be no regular hour for dinner, because that must be when the dinner is forthcoming." And even under a mitigated Rule, are not many unforeseen accidents possible, not to speak of forgets, which for the moment cause real privation? But what is this, I ask, compared to the condition of those who, without having made the vow of poverty, practise it through necessity? Where is the poor man in the world who does not sometimes want for bread to nourish him, clothes to cover, and a fire to warm him—rest in his labours, and remedies in his sickness? What would be the value of a Religious poverty which, far from sometimes exposing us to want, offered to those who had vowed themselves to it greater security and abundance than they.

¹ Ps. xxxvi. 25.

often found in their own families? "To wish to be poor, and not thereby to suffer inconveniences, is too great an ambition," says St. Francis of Sales, "for you would have the honour of poverty, and the comfort of riches." To which St. Teresa adds, "This is truly to deceive the world." Are there none among you who, first deceiving themselves on this point, do not also deceive outsiders? "Alas," says St. Vincent Ferrer, "how numerous are those who are proud of the name of being poor, but often on what condition? That they want for nothing. They say they are the friends of poverty, but when its true friends present themselves, viz. hunger, thirst, indigence, and humiliations, they fly as far off as possible." Let us not fly under these circumstances. The more rarely they happen, when God does permit them, the more we ought to bless Him for it, and put forth all our zeal to profit by it. Remember what Jesus has said by the voice of the Psalmist, "I am poor and in suffering."¹ May our poverty also, at least sometimes, cause us to suffer something!

But even in making use of things needful or necessary, poverty detaches us from them. A Religious who loves poverty is patiently courageous in suffering want, remaining free and indifferent about what he uses. Everything serves, nothing captivates him. Give him what he has not, take away what he has, dispose as you like of all his

¹ Ps. lxxviii. 30.

surroundings and of himself, he does not murmur, he never complains. He would blush to spend his time and his thoughts on such trifles—his soul so noble a creation—his time which he has vowed to God! Yes, he would be ashamed to do it. He is given away, he does not belong to himself—he is sold, as St. John Climacus says. You can ask him for nothing that he does not look upon as already given in principle, and that he does not give up at once as naturally as the merchant hands over to the buyer the goods he has paid for. His heart is not attached to his health or natural talents, or his customs or devotions, or, with greater reason, to his employment. Even should it happen that by a larger dowry, or more generous gifts than ordinary, or by more active work, he has notably increased the goods of the Community, he does not take advantage of this; and he never seeks or claims, were it only interiorly, more notice, or greater ease or conveniences than the rest. It pleases him to have nothing. The sight of his poverty, far from troubling, ravishes him with delight. He willingly repeats what Jeremias—or rather Jesus through his mouth—has said: “I am the man that sees my poverty,¹ regarding it with tranquillity, contemplating it with love, and bearing it, not only with patience, but also with thanksgiving.” He sings with David, “I am alone and poor.”² If he has the One, Who is his All, what does the rest matter?

¹ Lament. Jer. iii. 1.

² Ps. xxiv. 16.

The less he has of other things, the more sure he is of possessing this One, his All. Therefore is he satisfied and well content. Oh! the goodness, the perfection of a soul who is truly poor!

But if for a moment nature should surprise him, if a more frequent thought, a stronger temptation, or a more earnest desire to possess something, or a fear of no longer possessing it, comes into his mind, and so causes him to suspect some secret attachment, he hastens to avow it, and begs that his superiors will cure him by taking away or refusing the object which, by preoccupying his mind, might, perhaps, take from God even the smallest share of his affections.

Notice how careful is the Religious with the true spirit of poverty. He is solicitously careful of everything confided to him, not looking upon the things under his charge only in their natural light, but rather as sacred trusts. Thus it is not enough for him to take simple care of them, but he also holds them in respect and veneration. Being less an economist in this matter than a Religious, he treats the common goods of the monastery as the property of Jesus Christ, and consequently, although keeping due proportion, as he would treat the sacred vestments and the vessels for the Holy Sacrifice. If such a one is in office, his cares may be greater, yet they cause him no uneasiness, nor disturb his peace of mind. When annoyances arise, he guards himself against being ruffled by them, occupying

himself in the faithful performance of his duties, and in preserving the spirit of his state, leaving the rest to Divine Providence. "God desires that we should rely on Him, each one according to his vocation," as St. Francis of Sales admirably says. "It is not required of laymen, and those living in the world, that they should lean upon Providence in the same way as we ecclesiastics ought to do; nor are we, again, required to do so in the same degree as Religious." And he goes on to show that in Religious this hope in God should be boundless. In this manner did the holy foundress of the Sœurs du Sauveur, Mother Mary of Jesus, act when, being superior of thirty houses, she was able to write—"I could not be uneasy about gold or silver. I shall have it when it is necessary, that is very certain. God is my friend and my most faithful steward. He gives according as it is needful; my only fear is to be wanting in confidence." This ought, in fact, to be the great, if not the only dread of a superior in this matter of temporalities. If, being thus disposed, he leans wholly on God, and relies on Him in all he does, he will never be carried away by the least spirit of cupidity, tenacity, or stinginess, when engaged in unavoidable business, such as selling, buying, exchanging, paying; in short, in the management and dispensing of the common goods. It is clear, first of all, that every superior ought carefully to procure all necessaries for his Religious. In God's holy Church, a superior

means a pastor, one who feeds: in communities all superiors are called fathers. This is enough to show them their duty, and the spirit which God wishes to see animating them. Let nothing then be given except what is in conformity with the Rule, and becoming to a state of poverty; but let that which the Rule does allow be given with exactitude and even with a discreet abundance, above all to the weak and sick.

Is it necessary to speak here of almsgiving? Yet on whom is the duty of giving alms more incumbent than on those whom God aids so continually, and often so magnificently? St. Paul desires Timothy to charge the rich of this world "not to trust in the uncertainty of riches . . . to do good, to be rich in good works, to give easily, to communicate to others, to lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the true life."¹ Let superiors of all orders and conditions meditate well upon these words. Assuredly to confide in God is not to tempt Him. As there is an earthly and carnal prudence, so also is there a heavenly prudence, from which we must not depart; while holding as certain that one of the most fruitful sources of blessings, spiritual and even temporal, in a community, is generous almsgiving.

As to business matters, properly so called, which superiors have to manage and decide concerning temporalities, with or without the advice of their

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 17.

communities, is it to be understood that because these are not personal affairs, they are to be treated in a harsh and narrow-minded spirit? Would it not be a disgrace that a man of the world, a tradesman, sometimes even a common workman, should find in a Religious—not less probity and delicacy, God forbid!—but less generosity and a less conciliatory spirit than they would expect from each other?

What could be more opposed to the Gospel and the Religious spirit? Is it because each individual member of the Community has made a vow of poverty that the monastery, or rather the one who represents it, is dispensed from having the spirit or showing the virtue of poverty? The monastery, it is true, must be represented and its interests defended. But must not Christ also be represented, and His glory defended? A great evil may be committed by not taking care of this point. Is it not a serious fault to bring a monastery into disrepute, and to expose its inmates to the contempt of the world, when it is so important that they should be respected? For in the persons of Religious it is truly the Church who is revered in her chosen ones; and also Religion itself, of which they ought to show themselves the witnesses, the apostles, the honour, and the living proofs.

As the Religious, possessing the spirit of poverty, is careful yet generous when befitting, so he shows himself, above all, laborious. He saves time but

never spares trouble. Do not the poor work long and hard? Do they pay attention to all their ailments? Do they discontinue labour on account of fatigue? No; their necessities urge them on; they submit, and often without murmuring. Shall we do less in the Religious state? The Spirit of Faith, the Will of God, the Holy Rule, conscience, zeal of perfection, are not these incentives—nay, necessities? Yet still those who have the privilege of leading a contemplative life should keep themselves from the other extreme, and never allow a house dedicated to prayer to be turned into an ordinary workshop. Employ peacefully, as in the personal service of God, the time set apart for manual labour, and rely on Him for help. For holy tears and sighs have the power of making the earth fruitful as much as bodily labours; and when our toil seems in vain, prayer is able to draw down manna from heaven.

What more can be said? The true lover of poverty is constant in a spirit of poverty; even in sickness he is found true to himself. The poor bear sickness in their own way, quite differently from the rich. We must not forget this in our sufferings, but strive to be content with little, and not to desire or seek for special care or costly remedies. The more unreservedly we leave ourselves in God's hands, the greater care will He inspire our superiors to take of us, and the more He will bless their endeavours to relieve us. For it is not our great aim in Religion

to prolong our life by every means in our power, but rather to use every effort to attain the perfection of our souls; and there is nothing which can more contribute to this than poverty of spirit, even when joined to material poverty, which deprives us of that natural vigour which so often accompanies robust health, and makes us feel pleasure in all things—virtue included.

So far we have spoken of what the virtue of poverty inspires with regard to those goods which we call riches, and which form its special and immediate field of action. But it can give to the word “zeal” the most delicate of meanings, as the Holy Scripture testifies when it says, “Thou hast commanded Thy commandments to be kept most diligently.”¹ As the spirit of poverty gains ground in the soul, and casts out those things which encumber it, it causes that dilation of heart which the Holy Spirit speaks of: “I have run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou didst enlarge my heart.”² So that, inevitably, it goes beyond its own proper domain, and spurs the soul on to disengage itself—first interiorly, and then outwardly, according as God gives the grace—from those other goods which are naturally so dear to us, namely, honour, esteem, credit, influence, affection, joy, and even knowledge. Not, certainly, that any of these things are bad in themselves; or that, in as far as they have reference to God, to the future life, or to the

¹ Ps. cxviii. 4.

² Ibid. 32.

supernatural interests of one's own and of others' souls, the spirit of poverty forbids our esteeming or desiring them, and consequently our seeking to possess them. But the virtue of poverty leads the soul to cease loving them, to pass them by, to repudiate, and to fly from them, in so far as they are human goods, and regard this world, in so far as they can flatter and nourish our earthly nature, in so far, for example, as some particular science may inflate a man, give him renown, lead him into vain researches, spoil the simplicity of his heart, and mar the clearness of that interior eye, which alone directly perceives the things of God, in so far as this affection for creatures takes hold of, distracts, and preoccupies the soul; or that it inebriates us with joy and forces us to stop short; or that esteem, credit, and success produce illusions, swell the heart, and make it self-confident, in so far, to put it all into one word, as all this fosters and keeps up a spirit of proprietorship, which is, as it were, the life of self-love, and, consequently, an obstacle to pure charity, and the fulness of God's reign in the soul. The darkness of night being thus cast upon all sensible and inferior things, the impoverished Religious can then say, like the Spouse in the canticle: "I am black." Seeing him thus, the world is frightened or scandalised, and, when it does not despise, pities him. Yet he may well add, "but beautiful!" and why? Because what has thus discoloured and blackened him is the Sun of the divine beauty,

which has for ever ravished him, and in comparison with which all else appears to him as darkness. "Nolite considerare quod fusca sum, quia decoloravit me sol"¹ ("Do not consider that I am brown, for the sun hath altered my colour.")

God Himself often adds to this darkness, for He alone can perfect the divine work which this virtue accomplishes; and this is why He has reserved it to Himself to put the finishing touches to it. Generous souls know that in doing this He spares nothing. In this world we have no exact idea, and still less a complete one, of the refinement of purity which a soul must have reached before it can be fit to enjoy the Beatific Union; especially in the case of certain souls predestined for a higher degree of union. This is the secret of Purgatory, and only to some chosen few among the saints has even a slight understanding of it been granted. This divine purity cannot in this world be the abiding state of the human soul, unless it is the effect of continual self-abnegation, of which the sacrifices and detachments resulting from the vow of poverty are but the shadow and the far distant prelude: sacrifices so painful and so searching that the Scripture compares them to the action of sword and fire; but of a two-edged sword, sharp, penetrating, and irresistible, "reaching," as St. Paul tells us, "unto the division of the soul and spirit;"² and to a fire so intense and so devouring, that the soul God casts into it, is, as it were, in a

¹ Cant. i. 5.

² Heb. iv. 12.

furnace. "Elegi te in camino paupertatis."¹ By this continual impoverishment God reduces the soul to such a state of nakedness, that she appears to herself to be truly nothing. This is positively Purgatory begun on earth. We can form some idea of it by reading the account St. Catherine of Genoa has left us of her interior life.

It is the virtue of poverty which subjects man to these operations, and preserves him in this state. It makes him completely docile, and keeps him confident; it buries him in humility, and binds him with the strongest bonds of love. But this degree of poverty is so sublime, and its fruits become so divine, that heaven only is worthy to behold them, in that perfect and delightful state which we call eternal life, where alone the labour and merit of poverty can truly be understood and recompensed.

There remain for us now to consider the numerous and powerful motives which should draw us to practise faithfully, courageously, and perfectly this admirable virtue.

¹ Isaias xlvi. 10.

PART II

THE MOTIVES ON WHICH THE PRACTICE AND LOVE OF HOLY POVERTY ARE FOUNDED: THERE ARE SIX PRINCIPAL ONES.

WE have been speaking of numerous and powerful motives. The truth is, that when we once begin to think of them in the light of God, they rise before us in crowds, each one being sufficient not only to compel the assent of the mind, but also to ravish the heart, and decide our future conduct for ever.

We will choose from among them six. First of all come the interests of our own monastery, that is to say, of the Order under whose standard we are fighting, and of the holy Religious family of which we have the honour and the grace to be a member.

Certainly, if there be in the Divine Law a great commandment, after the first three precepts which regard God and His service, it is this: "Honour thy father and thy mother." If there be a sacred duty dear to the heart, and sweet to fulfil, it is that of filial piety. Who can tell how far a Religious is indebted as a child to Religion, especially his own particular form of Religion, that is to say, to his Congregation and his Community? In fact, what

is there that he does *not* owe it, and what does he not receive from it each day? What hard labour, tears, and often even blood, has he not cost it? We are not now speaking of the Passion of Jesus, from the depths of which all Religious Orders come forth, nor yet of the Compassion of Mary, which in union with Our Lord's Passion has conceived them all; but of the passion, if we may so call it, of our Founders and Reformers, of their works, their penances, and their anguish, and of all that their disciples from generation to generation, who have already become our masters and ancestors, have added over and above to these treasures of charity; because the community lives upon what they first began. God said to His people: "Look unto the rock whence you are hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you are dug out. Look unto Abraham your father, and to Sara that bore you."¹ Let us also call to mind and meditate on the history of those to whom we owe our name, our Rule, our spirit, our very existence, in fact, as Religious, and say whether—do what we may—we can ever pay them the debt we owe. Our Community is most truly our mother; and like the great Jerusalem above of which the Scripture speaks, has come down from heaven, all impregnated with the divine maternity, that is to say, with the authority, the fruitfulness, and the loving tenderness of God, whose expression and organ it is. If filial love is becoming anywhere, surely it is so here. But, even before the obligation of honouring,

¹ Isaias li. 1.

assisting, and serving such a mother, of working for her prosperity, and to gladden her heart, are we not also under the obligation of not causing her grief and sadness, or doing anything to harm or inflict shame upon her, or that might cause her ruin?

Yet this is truly what every Religious does, who is not faithful with regard to poverty; and although perhaps he may mostly fail through thoughtlessness and without malice, yet he cannot do so without incurring the gravest responsibility.

It is the teaching of all theologians, as well as the unanimous opinion of all the Founders of Religious Orders, that poverty is the foundation and the root of the Religious life, "its wall of defence," as St. Ignatius says. History shows that they were not deceived in this, for the history of the poverty or wealth of monastic houses is also that of their progress or decay. Doubtless there have been, and may still be seen, Religious Orders which, as such, possess considerable wealth; and this not only useful, but even indispensable, on account of the pious works they undertake, or even for the special end they have in view, such as the education of youth. But if the Religious life flourishes among them it is because, by the wisdom of the Rules, the vigour of discipline, and the perfection of obedience, each Religious is poorer in spirit in proportion as the whole body is richer.

What does a Religious do, then, in a monastery who is habitually unfaithful to poverty? He does

what those horrible worms, the bane of agriculturists, do to the plants. He devours for himself the sap of that blessed tree, which for so many years has sheltered him under its foliage, and nourished him with its fruits; thus, drying up its trunk, he would make it sterile, doing the work of Satan in its regard. Laxity, which is the spiritual ruin of monasteries, and prepares the way for their temporal ruin, never creeps in, except by the individual laxity of the members. And it is very often by the falling off in the practice of poverty that this laxity begins. Evil is contagious; this one above all. Nature, held captive in Religion, unceasingly seeks pretexts for asserting itself, and what better pretext can it have than example, especially if given by the seniors? Certainly those who are older in Religion are under a stricter obligation on this point than the younger ones. If they allege that they are more feeble, might we not reply that they ought also to be more perfect?

Let each one, then, say to himself: The day that I begin to grow negligent and lax in the practice of poverty, I expose myself first to sin, and, moreover, to a sin against my vow; because if the vow is made to protect the virtue, it is true that in its turn the virtue is a guarantee for the faithful observance of the vow. But, over and above this, I become a germ of pestilence and death, sown in the monastery, and consequently in the whole Order. St. Francis of Sales wrote thus to the "Filles de Dieu" in Paris: "The asp of dissolution and disorder has not yet

made its entrance into your house; but beware! for these faults are its eggs. If you cherish them in your bosom, they will some day, when you are not thinking, cause you ruin and perdition." Yet this house was otherwise so virtuous and regular that the saint does not hesitate to call it *excellent*: what faults can he then be so severely blaming? They were little faults against poverty. "It is Ismael attacking Jacob," he says, speaking of this disorder; "chase him away, banish him. Be he as little as you like, be he a child, if that pleases you, or no bigger than a worm, yet he will do you no good; he will harm you, and ruin and spoil your house itself."

There is perhaps nothing on which Founders insist more strongly in their Rules, their Constitutions, and their counsels. When there is question of poverty, their souls, previously quiet and gentle as lambs, now, in their zeal, share the strength of the lion. You know that terrible and solemn chastisement which the Fathers of the Desert, in imitation of St. Peter's punishment of Ananias, inflicted on all those who, when they died, were found to have been guilty of proprietorship. All the Fathers assembled round the corpse and thus addressed it: "May thy money perish with thee!" and it was buried in infamy. This custom has been consecrated by the right of Canon Law. St. Dominic, when dying, menaced with God's curse and his own, whosoever should tarnish by the dust of earthly possessions the brightness of the poverty which ought to shine in the

Order of Friar-Preachers. Once St. Vincent of Paul cursed with a threefold curse those of his Congregation who should follow their own self-interest.¹ St. Teresa, who in other things was so maternal in her government, ordains that where it is a question of poverty, rigour and severe chastisement be used. She writes in her "Path to Perfection": "Think, my daughters, for the love of Our Lord, that our motto is Holy Poverty; . . . let your most cherished desire then be to preserve this poverty intact. Let everything be in keeping with our glorious escutcheon: our dwellings, our clothing, our desires, our words, and above all our thoughts. So long as you remain faithful in this matter, you need have no fear of seeing the regularity which reigns in the house spoilt. . . . Above all, take care never to build grand houses; and I ask this of you for the love of God, and by Our Lord's Precious Blood. If you ever did such a thing, the wish, which in my conscience I form, is, that the building may fall to the ground the day that it is finished." Think of what great consequence a point must be, the breaking of which such charitable and enlightened souls have united in anathematising so strongly. Who would dare to expose himself to the maledictions of the saints?

The second motive which ought to inspire us with zeal for this virtue, is the close connection which it has with our moral and religious perfection. Let us

¹ His Life, by Obelly, Book iii.

listen to our Divine Master, the Eternal Wisdom Himself, who in the excess of His mercy deigns to teach us here below. Jesus opens His mouth to teach the crowd assembled on the mountain, and He begins with the Beatitudes. It is His first lesson, because happiness is our first and most essential want. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," He says—thus at the outset showing the all-important fact that happiness and holiness are identical. Upon this first step He raises seven others, that by these degrees of ascension the soul may mount to the highest pinnacle of the mountain of perfection, and there may contemplate God face to face. But the step of poverty is the foundation, and supports the whole edifice. So to attach one's self to heavenly goods, and to feel only disgust and disdain for all others, to have no heart but for God, and to be one Heart with Him, this is the end; but the beginning is to detach the heart from earth, that is, to be poor in spirit.

We do not sufficiently realise what a chain riches are to the soul, nor how they bind her fast down to this world. To understand this, one must give them up; yet that is not sufficient, for one generous act is soon made: an impulse of the heart is enough for that, and how easily our hearts are stirred! We must likewise have the will and the strength to live in poverty. It is when our wants are frustrated, our particular attachments broken, our open or hidden passions condemned to die, that we begin

to understand what poverty is. It is not a question here of avarice or cupidity, but of that large and always gaping opening which riches provide for the satisfaction of our desires—not only of those that are bad, which riches are a perpetual temptation to gratify, but of those which are lawful—our natural, human, earthly desires. I speak of that sort of wall which riches raise between the soul and that mortification of the senses, Christian austerity, and evangelical penance, from which no child of Adam is dispensed, of that strange exemption which they ensure to those who possess them from the greater part of the evils which lie heavy upon the human race. “They are not in the labour of men,” says the Psalmist, “neither shall they be scourged like other men.”¹ Again, we speak of that stamp of solidity and fixedness which riches imprint on our life here below; on that life which we must look upon as transitory, if we would not forfeit God and our eternal destiny; and, yet again, of that independence which they favour, of the power with which they invest us, of that proud patronage they enable one to exercise, and of the supremacy they appear to give to their possessor, thus conceiving, nourishing, and, as it were, authorising pride. Finally, that atmosphere of base flattery and deceit, of policy and servility, which is often, and almost irresistibly, what the rich are surrounded by.

See what deep root such a man has taken in

¹ Ps. lxxii. 5.

this world, and how every day the roots strike deeper down! See, too, how the rich man clings to this world, and how completely he is at ease in it! What weight he has there; how calm, expansive, and cheerful he feels! How easily he admires himself, and how instinctively makes a centre of himself! All his surroundings serve inwardly to nourish his foolish vanity, and he is often so attached to them that they become an imperious want. All this lowers him morally; nevertheless, strange to say, it tends to exalt his personality, by presenting itself to him as if it were a part of his own being, and a sort of natural halo round his life. The greatest misfortune of such a man is, that he can almost do without hope. Can the heart be moved, warmed, and delighted with the thought of heaven, to which this world offers so many joys, and perhaps, except for their short duration, such joys as he prefers? Does he truly feel his exile? Is not death rather the end than the beginning of all things to him? I say that he can almost do without hope; but, in fact, he seems even able to dispense with Providence. He has so many reasons for willingly saying to himself, "My soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thy rest, eat, drink, make good cheer."¹ Even if he has the happiness to believe like the rest of men in the manifest and indispensable Providence of God, nevertheless he seldom has recourse to it,

¹ Luke xii. 19.

asks but little from it, and that without humility. Can you imagine a more unhealthy and dangerous condition than that of a man such as this, who necessarily feels so slightly the immense, deep, and incessant want that a creature has of God? Reflecting on all these natural and almost fatal consequences of riches, does not their possession appear to be an opposition and antipathy to the evangelical spirit, an obstacle in the way of a perfect life, and a shadow, if not a wall, between God and the soul? The Holy Scripture says that it is a prodigy for a rich man to be humble, sincerely dependent, living with his heart detached from this world, truly poor in spirit. "Blessed is the (rich) man that is found without blemish, and that hath not gone after gold, nor put his trust in money, nor in treasures. Who is he and we will praise him? for he has truly done wonders in his life;"¹ his life itself is a miracle. God can always work miracles, and, thanks to His all-powerful grace, He does so. "With men this is impossible," He tells us, "but with God all things are possible."² Still, how can we forget, and above all here, that if the young man whom Jesus loved and called, left Our Lord to go on his course, and went away sad, it was only because he had great possessions?

Religious poverty dissipates all these shadows we have spoken of, destroying the opposition and taking away the obstacle, by substituting itself as a powerful

¹ Eccles. xxxi. 9.

² Matt. xix. 26.

means of arriving at our desired end. It is like a sudden emancipation of the soul. It does more than disengage it, for it opens the way clear and broad before it, causing it to rise above itself, vivifying and filling it with impulse, as though it had suddenly grown wings to fly with.

St. Ambrose spoke well when he said that this blessed poverty is the mother and nurse of all the other virtues. And St. Ignatius of Loyola calls it "the mother of souls"—a mother who, if she does not actually conceive them, at least delivers them into the hands of God, Who is the source of all their life. There is such a close relationship between poverty of spirit and humility, that most of the Fathers apply them equally to the first of the eight beatitudes. Several even look upon it as exclusively applying to this last virtue. In fact, we have shown that riches always tend to exalt our personality; poverty, on the contrary, lessens it: who does not know and feel that it is exactly between this exaltation and the abnegation of self-love, that the problem of salvation lies, and the great struggle of flesh against spirit, which lasts through our whole existence, takes place? One of the beauties of poverty and one of its most active principles in its influence on souls, is, that it is the outward form of the creature's most essential state, though, alas, not easily recognised, *e.g.* the state of indigence. This is truly our essential state. We have only to look at a child just born, or, if that is

not enough, at a dying man. Can there be any one more dependent, poorer, or more destitute of all things? These two extremities of life mark its true character. Riches can, in a measure, cover this abyss, but cannot do away with it; and from the cradle to the tomb, man remains a being who is in want, and in hunger, always hungry, hungering after a multitude of things, many of which will always be wanting to him: so that, crying out incessantly in his hunger, he is often obliged to do so in his misery. Poverty prevents us from forgetting this, which means to say, that it prevents us from forgetting ourselves. It keeps the soul in truth, and thus it contributes to making it humble. Can you not see at the first glance how true was the word that Our Lord spoke to his servant Angela of Foligno, when He said, "Pride cannot exist except in those who possess, or believe themselves to possess, something. Man and angels when they fell, both fell through pride, for they believed themselves to be possessors. Neither angels nor men possess anything, all belongs to God"? How deep yet simple is this, and what light comes from it!

By understanding from experience that we possess nothing exteriorly, and seeing this habitually on all occasions, and with a distinctness which each privation and each new suffering makes more evident, we can much more easily grasp the idea that neither do we possess anything interiorly; and therefore that we are no more proprietors of our own selves

than we are of anything else. What new vistas of thought this idea opens up upon God, upon the absolute nature of His Being, upon the height of His perfections, upon the sovereignty of His rights! How it helps us to see all things in the light of this one thing—our own utter destitution—and to accept readily whatever may come as a natural result of it! What a solid foundation it makes for renunciation; how it even enables us to be beforehand with death itself! How straight does a soul thus enlightened point to the Divine lodestar, and hence how safely is she guided in her course! Nothingness, she holds for nothing, and does not attempt to take for a support, and the less she leans upon this nothing, which is herself, the more she leans upon that great All, which is God, the only Being who, possessing all things in Himself alone, corresponds exactly to her own total lack of all possessions. Such a soul as this can experience, as can none other, the truth of that law by which “God gives grace to the humble.” The soul which has understood this poverty, which rejoices in it, which practises it, becomes as it were, a pure receptacle for God to fill. And God is inclined to fill this receptacle, poor vessel though it be; for His very nature is a fulness of giving; and it is His unfailling custom to stoop towards what is little, to comfort what suffers, and to fill what is empty. At the same time what a source of peace and of patience! The Religious that is truly poor looks for so little, even if he looks for

anything at all. All that he receives assumes in his eyes the form of a grace. He lives but on alms, knowing that he cannot live otherwise, and he accepts this. His poverty has stripped him interiorly of all rights; not only has he none, but he has renounced ever having any. What a barrier does not this form within against revolt and indignation, or even murmuring? No injustice has been done him, because he has no title to anything. Undoubtedly he suffers, and sometimes much; but he is not deceived about himself; and, if he allows a sigh to escape him, he never lets fall a complaint. Can any disposition be imagined more radically favourable to God's free, active, and continual pouring forth of Himself in the soul, which is the essence of Christian life, and the principle of all true virtue? This humble and peaceful soul cannot but be gentle, is sober and chaste. St. Paul says, "The world is crucified to me, and I to the world."¹ What cross does he here speak of but that of poverty, placed between the world of sense and the soul! Nay more, between the senses and the whole lower nature. Everything is placed at a distance, and, as it were, shut out. Being unable to hold any as possessions, what joy can the soul take in them? Any necessity that may arise for dealing with exterior goods, or for using that part of its being which corresponds to, and comes in contact with them, is now almost entirely a cause

¹ Galat. vi. 14.

of suffering. What place, then, is left here for sin? In the very same things in which the rich find occasion of sin, by placing their joy therein, the poor of spirit find an occasion of suffering and expiation: by them the former contract new debts, whilst the latter acquit themselves of old ones. As regards those things which tempt and seduce the greater part of mankind, he who professes evangelical poverty is like the lily spoken of in Scripture, preserving its uprightness and purity, because it is surrounded by thorns.

Now is not a soul so severed from earthly ties, so unspotted from this lower world, likely to make progress in faith each day, and through faith in true knowledge? that knowledge which consists in the understanding of divine things and spiritual relish for them? What interest could it ever have in not believing the truth which Jesus teaches it? and will it not recognise the wisdom, discretion, and advantage of what He deigns to ask? Poverty of spirit has no objection to make; it is ignorant of sophistry; it is, as it were, ready for all that comes to it from above. The sun, rising above the horizon, does not more easily light up a cloudless atmosphere than the Word of God illuminates a soul made simple by poverty, whether His voice speaks to it through the Church, the Holy Scriptures, or of Itself by inspiration. Poverty places the soul in the ranks of those little ones to whom, as Jesus testifies, God reveals His highest secrets,

especially those which He hides from the eyes of the wise and great ones of the earth, and from all who proudly imagine that they belong to themselves.

The poor Religious lives yet more by hope than by bread, for where his treasure is, there is his heart also; and his treasure is not here below. By means of present things, he pushes forward to future ones; the former are to him a proof of the latter, as a shadow proves the presence of light: and, thus convinced of the reality of the future, he looks at the things that appertain to it as wholly desirable. His life is but a journeying towards his heavenly fatherland, and the words of the Psalmist can be used by him as they can by none other:¹ "My soul hath thirsted after the living God," and, "the thirst that consumes it is manifold." Indeed every realisation of what is wanting to him is changed into desire for that Infinite Possession, after which he should aspire, into prayer for obtaining It, and hope of possessing It.

Finally, and above all, such a one is free to love God. Inasmuch as riches furnish pretexts for not hearkening to the call of God, so does poverty render man apt and prompt to hear His voice, to respond to His demands, to follow all His movements, and to fulfil all His desires; and thus while he so vigorously mortifies the "old Adam" of cupidity, how can he help keeping alive that "new

¹ Ps. lxxii. 2.

man," who is all charity? If, on the one hand, voluntary poverty is a preparation and a direct incitement to love, in that, depriving us of all that is not itself, it clearly shows that in our eyes it is the only one thing worthy of being desired and sought for. In the book of Wisdom it is written, "I esteemed riches nothing in comparison of her, neither did I compare her to any precious stone: for all gold in comparison of her, is as a little sand, and silver in respect to her shall be counted as clay."¹ Love, on the other hand, necessarily leads to poverty, poverty of spirit, of heart, and of deed, by the abundance with which it fills the whole soul, and by the experience which it gives that, in possessing it, the soul possesses all things. St. Gregory makes use of an ingenious simile, and says that a man who loves much, is like one who travels into a hot country, the heat of the air in itself obliges him to wear less clothing; in the same manner, he who loves casts aside all else. So that poverty and love, at first mutually serving one another as devoted friends, later on embrace each other as brother and sister; and finally, in a higher region, nearer to Him Who dwells Three in One, they are united as in the conjugal tie, the two being but one spirit, bringing forth the same fruits, and presenting them to the heavenly Father. St. Francis of Assisi was learned in this science, and lived this life, of which he is one of the most wonderful examples in the

¹ Wisd. vii. 8, 9.

Church. Poverty handed him over as a prey to love, and love, in consuming him, crowned his poverty.

While treating of the moral perfection engendered by poverty, we must not omit to quote the teaching of God Himself to another admirable lover of poverty, St. Catharine of Siena." "Know, my child, that all good, all peace, and all repose is born of poverty. Look at My beloved poor ones, and admire the holy joy in which they pass their lives. They are never sad, except for the offences which are committed against Me; and this sorrow, instead of afflicting, nourishes their soul. Through poverty they have found sovereign riches. They have left cloudy darkness for perfect light. . . . Their intercourse with their fellow-creatures is full of love, from which they except no one. . . . Poverty is a queen in possession of a kingdom which no one can disturb. Peace reigns there, and justice abounds, because all cause of injustice is abandoned. The walls of this city are strong, not being made of a soft earth, nor built upon sand, which might be overturned by a slight wind. They are built upon the immovable stone, which is Jesus Christ, my Son. There day is without night, there summer knows no winter, because the mother of this great queen is infinite charity."

It is thus Our Lord's promise is realised, "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell all thou hast, and give the price to the poor."¹ As Origen remarks, by this we

¹ Matt. xix. 21.

are not to understand that this perfection is acquired all at once, and by the simple fact of professing voluntary poverty; but it disposes the soul to aspire to perfection, and gives, together with full liberty to employ herself in tending towards it, a sort of right to the special graces which lead to it: so that, beginning from that point, if the soul is faithful to its graces, they will infallibly lead her up to that degree of perfection which God has destined for her, and of which she is capable.

Moreover—and this is the third motive we bring forward—poverty establishes between God and the soul many intimate and admirable relations, which the Holy Scripture mentions in many passages in a clear and precise form, that can leave no doubt; so that we find not only the saints, but God Himself testifying to this truth.

David, full of the Holy Spirit, cries out: “O God, to Thee is the poor man left; his interests are confided to Thee, and Thou makest his interests Thy own.”¹ God is his refuge, and his whole strength, being “a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the whirlwind, a shadow from the heat.”² God, as it were, never takes His eyes off him, and seems to love him, with a love of preference above all others. “His eyes look on the poor man.”³ He has made special laws for his benefit, and has their observance so much at heart, that He strengthens them by His most emphatic

¹ Ps. x.

² Isaias xxv. 4.

³ Ps. x. 5.

sanction and earnest blessing on those who observe them. He first tells his chosen people that the poor shall never be wanting in the land. Here is a fact, already appearing like an institution, a true social institution meant for all to profit by. Then God goes on to say: "I command thee to open thy hand to thy needy and poor brother, that liveth in thy land;"¹ this land which is Mine, but which I lend to you. Even this does not suffice, for He furthermore adds, concerning pledges given for loans by the poor: "If he be poor, the pledge shall not lodge with thee that night. . . . Thou shalt restore it to him presently, before the going down of the sun, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee, and thou mayest have justice before the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not refuse the hire of the needy and poor, but thou shalt pay him the price of his labour the same day, because he is poor, lest he cry against thee to the Lord, and it be reputed to thee as a sin."²

If the poor man sighs and groans, God becomes angry; if he is oppressed, the Almighty rises up to defend him. "He hath not forgotten the cry of the poor."³ He has become "their refuge and their helper."⁴ If the poor man enters within himself to pray, even before his heart has formed its desire, God has understood it and granted it. He spares him in his chastisements, and, even if he has sinned,

¹ Deut. xv. 11.

³ Ps. ix. 13.

² Deut. xxiv. 12, *et seq.*

⁴ *Ibid.* 10.

God grants him a more easy and complete pardon on account of the hardships of this present life. This suffering poverty! how like it is to a devouring fire, in which he who submits to it is in a furnace. "I have chosen thee in the furnace of poverty."¹ It is a crucible of election, and when the soul has passed through it, when it is purified and refined like gold, God then glorifies it, for the "name of the poor shall be honourable in His sight."² Then this chosen friend of God, however much he may have been humbled and depised, abandoned by the world like Lazarus, or lodged like Job on a dunghill, shall be raised up by the almighty hand of God, his miserable rags exchanged for royal raiment, and he shall be placed on a throne in the assembly of the saints, "with the princes of his people."³ An angel was sent to Elias, to give him material bread, but by a far greater favour the soul of the lover of poverty shall be nourished with a delicious and exquisite food. "The poor shall eat and shall be filled,"⁴ says the Psalmist. And of what shall this nourishment consist? Of the sweetness of God Himself, in the ineffable unction which flows from Him, in the unfathomable delight which is tasted in participating in His life. God will fill them with delight in giving them His Word. He will satiate them by the infusion of His Holy Spirit.

This was clearly demonstrated when the Divine Word first appeared in this world, clothed in our

¹ Isaias xlvi. 10. ² Ps. lxxi. 14. ³ Ps. cxii. 8. ⁴ Ps. xxi. 27.

nature; for one of the functions prophetically assigned to Him was that of judging the poor, that justice might be rendered to them, and lightening the hard and heavy yoke under which they laboured; He was not only their judge, but their friend and brother. The poor were the first who knew of His birth; and it was announced to them by the angels. And, as they were the first called to His crib, so too from among the poor came the first evangelists, the first converts, the first honoured by the title of Apostles, by the intimacy of their Master, and by co-operation with Him in His ministry of salvation. Since then they have ever formed the aristocracy of the Church, and are the nearest to God's Heart.

Let us think over all this, examine each of these prerogatives, and try to understand all these special and wonderful privileges, beyond all price, which God has declared to be regularly and irrevocably established between Himself and the poor. Is not this gain, were it the only one, worth all the riches in the world, and truly the hundredfold for what has been given up?

The Church may be likened to a fleet, sailing on the waves of time, under the guidance of Christ, Who is infallible wisdom, invincible power, providence full of love. The entire fleet is surveyed, directed, and assisted by Him, even to the humblest little boats. We think it would be true to say that the poor in spirit, and above all those who have made a vow of poverty, sail with the Chief Himself in the Admiral's

ship. Yet all this is but an exterior view of this divine relationship. Who can speak of the interior? of what the faithful, pure, and fervent heart experiences in this supernatural atmosphere of heavenly illumination, inestimable graces, and holy delights?

One reason partly explains this, and gives us a new motive to love poverty: it is that poverty makes the soul like to God.

One may ask: Is God rich or poor? According as one or other view is taken, the reply will be different. If we consider exterior things, the resources at our disposal, in fact all that we here below call riches, and which are so to us, God possesses nothing of all this. In Himself He has neither clothing nor house, nor domain, nor lands; He has no treasures, no armies, no servants; He is without food, nor has He instruments, or natural powers of acting; in fact, nothing whatsoever. The beauty of the flower lies in its nakedness; but it has a root from which it springs, sap which gives it life, the atmosphere which it inhales, and in which it expands; the sun gives it heat, and the rain seasonable refreshment; and these are its riches. God has not what the flower has. The angels likewise have no need of earthly goods. The light in which they are clothed is but the splendour of their being. If they take a sensible form it is for our profit, not their own; and once their mission is fulfilled, this form vanishes as smoke into the air. If they act upon this corporeal world, it is a service they render to us, and not a necessity

of their own. They have no worldly goods whatever; and, had they any, they would not know what to do with them. Nevertheless, angels have their riches, as they have their needs; need of light, need of help, need of love, need of joy. These goods, if we may so call them, are not drawn from the depths of their own being, they are bestowed upon them, they receive them; and inasmuch as they are received, while yet in principle they remain true gifts, they nevertheless constitute a real possession. The angels then are rich. God is not like them; He has nothing foreign to His nature. From this point of view, then, God is poor. He is the great, the only example of poverty; and this poverty, like everything in God, is infinite. Creation does not change it. It belongs to Him, and is His domain; everything in it is His, because He made it. But, although subject to His almighty power, creation in no way affects the essence of God; He possesses it for its own good, not for His; through beneficence, not from need. So that in reality He remains exclusively what He is eternally, devoid of all exterior goods, in His own supreme Essence.

On the other hand, we see that God is the great and only example of riches; and that His riches are as infinite as His poverty. Where then is this divine source of riches? In God. Of what does it consist? Even of God Himself. Life, knowledge, wisdom, power, beauty, glory, love, calm, happiness — God is all this. Possessing Himself is possessing

all good, in its perfection and in an unchangeable manner; and God beholds Himself and sees all things; He loves Himself, and is satisfied; He rejoices therein, and His happiness is complete.

Now, how does one who is truly poor imitate this divine Model? "Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven."¹ Being poor, he becomes rich, and that because he is poor; poor in this world, therefore rich in heaven; outwardly poor, inwardly rich; poor as far as the carnal man is concerned, rich spiritually, with true riches from and of God. He is simultaneously rich and poor, like God Himself, and thus he resembles Him. Because he has entered freely and as far as he can into that state of freedom from all exterior things in which God lives, he enters at the same time into that higher order of wealth which is essential to the Divinity. "Having nothing, yet possessing all things," as St. Paul says when he is describing the Apostles; or as St. Francis exclaimed when stripping himself of the last garment he had received from his father, "Ah! from henceforth I can truly say, 'Our Father, Who art in heaven.'" Thus is this great doctrine, this wonderful exchange, this precious pearl of poverty to be understood; and all earthly goods are to be bartered for it.

This blessed poverty clothes the soul in a supernatural beauty; it brings it to a height of excellence and a dignity to which neither knowledge, nor wis-

¹ Mark x. 21.

dom, nor power, nor any purely natural virtues could enable it to attain. In a word, poverty effects a divine transformation in the soul. One who practises it has, as it were, the same tastes and ways as God; he resembles Him in character, and begins to lead His life—it is more than the mere apprenticeship and preparation for heaven. The Gospel does not say, Blessed are the poor, for they *shall* receive the kingdom of heaven; but it says, “for theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven,”¹ which already belongs to them, even whilst in this world. They are content with God alone, being assured that He is sufficient for them, and they declare this openly. And if their lower nature repines, they let it do so, making it wait until “that which is mortal in us may be swallowed up by life.”² Thus it is clearly seen that our wealth is within us, as the Gospel teaches; and not outside, as the world so vehemently affirms. On this point, if to our human nature God only does not appear to suffice, we must, nevertheless, be inflexible in our will to be satisfied with Him alone; and He will surely in His own good time and in full measure give us all that is necessary to lead us to the happy end of our earthly pilgrimage.

God is pre-eminently all things; that is to say, that all that appears to us to be good, true, beautiful, or useful in the universe, in the multiplied and various forms of creatures, not only comes from God as from its principle, but, actually exists in Him in

¹ Matt. v. 3.

² 2 Cor. v. 4.

an incomparably more excellent, or, as we should say, transcendental degree; so that, whatever power or capabilities He may bestow on His creatures, He is always adorably self-sufficient, working with or without their interposition as He pleases. See now how almost divine is the lot and the life of God's poor. As He is all to Himself, so does He become their all. It is their right that God should personally become to them a compensation for all they have left for Him; and He, as it were, binds Himself to provide for them, at least all the necessaries of life. The Lord said to the Levites, "You will not have a heritage in Israel, for I am your heritage."¹ Will not one so favoured cry out, "My inheritance is goodly to me"?² This is truly the song of the poor, for God is all their fortune. And when this wise and powerful Lord sees well, He frequently and unhesitatingly makes use of the ministry of His creatures to relieve the necessities of His poor. If, on the one hand, He is one day to employ the whole universe to punish and overthrow the wicked, so, on the other, it is easy for Him to apply all things to the service of His saints. And even here, by giving to this aid the appearance of a miracle, God is faithful to His own promise of personal assistance. From Elias to St. Anthony, from St. Anthony to St. Francis, from St. Francis to the Curé d'Ars, the lives of these poor ones of the great God have been filled with these miraculous interventions. It might be

¹ Ezech, xliv. 28.

² Ps. xv. 6.

said that miracles spring up spontaneously in the supernatural atmosphere wherein poverty dwells, or rather where it is created by the mere fact of her presence. There are the miracles worked by God for the poor; and there are also the miracles worked by the poor in the name of God. No one can be well acquainted with the lives of the saints, without noticing how often the special lovers of poverty are also the greatest wonder-workers. St. Martin of Tours is one of the most marvellous examples of this class of saints. St. Leo, many centuries ago, speaking of St. Peter, said, "You remember the answer given by the Apostle to the lame man at the gate of the temple, 'I have neither silver nor gold, but what I have, I give unto thee: arise and walk.' What is richer than this poverty? Peter has no gold, but God has given him far greater personal riches. With a word he heals the infirm man, and he who was too poor to possess the necessary coin, stamped with the effigy of Cæsar, required to pay the Roman tribute, had the power of reforming in a living man the divine effigy of Christ. And again, although he had not a penny to bestow, yet was he able to spread around him an abundance of the richest graces, which healed and raised up the hearts of thousands of believers as easily and efficaciously, as the body of the lame man had been cured and straightened a little before by his word and command."¹ It is, then, certain that poverty,

¹ St. Leo, Sermon xciv.

while depriving us of all terrestrial things, gives us the dominion over them, and for this reason the saints call a poor man a king. "To despise temporal possessions is to become a king in this world," writes St. Teresa; and St. Bernard said, "The friendship of the poor makes us the friends of the king; but the love of poverty makes us ourselves as kings." The poor enter, according to St. Ambrose, into a participation in the sovereignty of God over the whole universe; which is equivalent to saying that poverty re-establishes sinful man as far as possible in that state of original dignity in which inferior nature was perfectly submissive to him, as to its immediate and supreme sovereign. This partly explains what we have said in another place of the special facility for working miracles accorded to this class of saints. And this facility, we repeat, arises from their resemblance to God, of which their poverty is the principle.

Is this all? No; for poverty has been the portion of Jesus on earth. We dare not affirm this to be a more sublime motive than the preceding one, but without doubt it is one which appeals more strongly to the hearts of all men, more especially to those consecrated and chaste virginal souls who are named in a special manner His Spouses. For who will so make the life of Jesus their own as those who have already been mystically espoused to His Divine Person? It is one of the sayings of Blessed Angela of Foligno that no true friendship can exist

between one who is rich and one who is poor. And if friendship cannot exist, how much less love and conjugal union? Does a woman ever marry a man without also being united to his condition in life? Could she, as a true wife, live in riches while her husband was suffering poverty? No, for by this very fact she would show that she had ceased to love him; and this is the first step to unfaithfulness. Well, we know it already, but must repeat it once more, the condition of Jesus on earth, desired, chosen, and jealously kept to throughout His whole life, was that of poverty.

We say, chosen and kept to, because we can realise that if the natural creation often groans and suffers violence when it sees itself obliged to submit to sin and sinners, what would its joy have been in ministering to its Head, its Creator, its true Owner, its God? It would have longed to cast at His feet all that it possessed of life and beauty, of usefulness and pleasure; it would have rendered Him homage, only too honoured and too happy to bring Him this tribute of praise. This sweet mystery is hidden under those words of St. Paul: "Who having joy set before Him,"¹ and, except by mankind, offered by all His creatures. And this outburst of creation was refused by Christ, because He had resolved to refuse joy and take the Cross in exchange. Poverty did not constitute the whole of the Cross, yet it formed one of the principal branches, if not the

¹ Heb. xii. 2.

trunk of it. The more we meditate on it, the more suitable does poverty seem to Jesus. Can we picture the Messiah to ourselves as the Jews did, surpassing Solomon by His riches, and environed with a pomp which would have eclipsed that of the kings of Assyria? Can we imagine Jesus in a magnificent and fortified capital, dwelling in a splendid palace, guarded by soldiers, served by attendants of every rank; having here His throne, there His archives, in one place His banqueting hall, in another spacious saloons; in short, all possible pomp and splendour, so miserable in itself, yet so much desired, and necessary for concealing the indigence of earthly monarchs, and for sustaining their dignity before their subjects? Would all this display have been in harmony with the Victim Who took upon Himself our sins, with this august Penitent, Who came to pay the debts due to the justice of God?

Considering Our divine Lord only as the Teacher of the human race, the Pastor of souls, and their Instructor in divine things, would it be fitting if He had begun by appropriating to Himself all this assemblage of vulgar riches, which, from the fruit of the forbidden tree to the unbridled luxury of the Roman emperors, have ever been the chief source of sin, the cause of blindness, and the stimulant of the vilest passions; the veil hiding from us our last end, our obstacle in the way of life, the rival of God in our souls, and the principal weapon used by Satan to draw them down and destroy them? Is it even

necessary to explain that such a being would not be truly Christ; for, instead of showing forth the Divinity and doing the work of God, this earthly magnificence would only have compromised the one and hindered the other. What sign would it have been of the Godhead to appear either so needy or so avaricious of the lowest things that men can possess? of what they seek with the greater longing, the more ignorant and unenlightened they are? and of that which, although useful to a few, yet nevertheless to the greater number is only a cause of moral and physical corruption? Then, again, riches have created great resources, and have consequently established a real human power. Now, to achieve some work with great means to help us cannot be called an astonishing act of superhuman strength. But to form something out of nothing, to do great deeds, to found the Church, to constitute and order this new creation surpassing the old in beauty, and which, after existing for centuries, filling and enlightening them with its teaching, will pass into the divine and unchangeable realities of eternity—is this the work of man or God? The entire human race has answered this question. Tertullian was right in saying: “If I see before me a Christ without glory, despised and dishonoured, that is truly my own Christ, for He is shown to be so by His poverty and abjection.”

Yet the perfect fitness of the state of poverty neither rendered it less hard nor less painful to the Divine Humanity: and it was precisely because it

was difficult, painful, and abject that He chose it. Jesus Christ was poor, and as it was also fitting, His poverty reached a point far beyond that of any of His creatures. He was born poor, of poor parents, in a poor stable; His cradle was a manger, and a few poor rags His only clothing. He was poor in Egypt, poor in Nazareth; He was poor in His hidden life, and still more poor in His public life. He surrounded Himself with the poor, and chose poor disciples. He who bestows purple robes on kings, only possessed for Himself one poor woollen garment; He who nourishes both the angels and the birds, suffered from hunger. He who created the sun endured cold; He who has only to "open His hand that every living creature may be filled with blessing,"¹ has not even the coin required to pay the tribute. He to whom the seraphim serve as a footstool, has not whereon to lay His head. At the end of His life He possessed absolutely nothing; His people revolted from Him, the chosen head of His Church denied Him, His Apostles abandoned Him, His honour was taken from Him by a public condemnation, and He allowed His power to be visibly crushed by the combined forces of hell. His own Almighty strength He delivered up as a prey to agony and death; His beauty, even His human form, was hidden and disappeared under bleeding wounds and torn flesh. He shed His precious Blood to the last drop; He yielded His life to him who would

¹ Ps. cxliv. 16.

take it. His Mother He gave up to St. John; even His heavenly Father, always and indissolubly one with Him, He allowed Himself to be separated from, as far as any sensible influence or union was concerned; and this last deprivation caused the bitter cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"¹

Was this enough? did He on the cross, or at least in the sepulchre, desert this dearly loved companion of His whole life? Justice at length asserted her right, and the splendour inherent to Christ, which for thirty-three years had remained hidden, began to appear at His Resurrection. It was a miracle that He did not ascend at once to the only place befitting Him, the right hand of the Father. He was, as it were, at last obliged to quit this first degree of poverty, and to share in the riches of His Father, as He shares in His glory. And yet, by a secret which love learned from wisdom, and which His omnipotence enabled Him to carry out, Jesus Christ found means to unite within Himself these two conditions apparently so contradictory; to dwell in the height of heaven rich in His Divinity, and to remain on earth poor in His Humanity, even until the end of the world. For Jesus remains poor in the Holy Eucharist where His human Body is present, and He remains poor in the Church which is His mystical Body.

Truly, how poor is He in the Holy Eucharist!

¹ Ps. xxi. 1.

Consider in His tabernacle that Jesus who illuminates the highest heavens. What are His surroundings? What a dwelling! what humiliations! what neglect! Alas! we must also add, what treatment! Not only insults, but profanation, and innumerable abominations to which He is every day exposed, and which nearly every day He endures. If this is an abyss of charity in which the angels lose themselves, is it not also truly an abyss of poverty, and which of the two shall be called the more profound? Again, can we assert that He is poorer in this state of the Eucharist than in that of His mystical body? For as He is priest in His priests, martyr in His martyrs, and virgin in His virgins, so He is poor in His poor; and these always are, and always will be, most numerous in His Church. For, more than under the Jewish dispensation, the poor form in the Church of Christ an institution, so well founded and so essential that no power can destroy it. Poverty is part of our Christian inheritance, it is one of the channels of vivifying grace; it forms one of the most striking features of resemblance between Christ and the Church, and a distinctive mark of the holiness which flows from that resemblance, to shine in the eyes of the world and condemn it, when it will not be convinced and converted. Now Jesus, Who dwells in the whole body of His Church, does so more especially in the persons of the poor, who are the chief members, and He is in them poor in every way, as in the days of His mortal life: poor in spirit,

temporally poor, poor in goods, in credit, in power; poor in earthly joys, poor in esteem and approbation, poor in human success, and alas! poor above all in love; since, in exchange for the love He gives, and the services he renders; for the divine graces he bestows, and the sacrifices of self which He makes every instant without complaining or counting them, we are all witnesses that for the most part He only receives ingratitude, indifference, or forgetfulness, when He does not receive even outrage and hatred.

“We will run after Thee in the odour of Thy ointments,” says the spouse in the Canticles.¹ This is to be understood most especially of the sacred poverty of Jesus. We cannot meditate on it without feeling irresistibly drawn to follow always, and with fervour, unto its perfection this vow of poverty which we have had the grace of making; we would animate our whole life by its spirit, happy indeed if we are able to give ourselves up wholly and without any reserve to the divine impulse ever urging us on to fresh heights of virtue. We may not be content with mere renunciation, and detachment from those perishable earthly goods which Our Divine Spouse esteemed as nothing, and which He would never possess for Himself; but with humility, reverence, and love we must endeavour to penetrate into the mystery of His interior poverty, to share in it, as is befitting a true spouse, and, at least by desire and longing, to disengage ourselves from all that is not

¹ Cant. i. 3.

purely God. Anything less than Himself we shall no longer call profit or riches, but "loss"; as St. Paul does, insomuch as it is capable of hindering our perfect union with God. Yes, even in regard to high, spiritual, and interior possessions, we may prefer to have less rather than more, from the fear that the attachment that might arise to these favours might merit their complete withdrawal. Oh, that we could centre our idea of riches in the sole possession of God! Here, ambition, ardent desire, passionate longing are more than permitted, they are counselled, or rather commanded, for the limits of our desire to possess God should be the same as those of our love for God—illimitable. Suppose (what is impossible) that the most holy Soul of Christ had not been originally created in the state of the Hypostatic union which makes the Divinity its perfect and immediate possession, and that by any means it would have been possible to acquire this union, the Soul of Christ would have desired nothing so much; it would have longed for it beyond measure, and purchased it at any cost. Therefore we misunderstand the true spirit of poverty and of humility, which on this point is the same thing, when we are led through a mistaken idea to form less fervent and less generous desires of God. What St. John of the Cross and other spiritual writers teach on this subject is to be understood of the *gifts* of God, not of God Himself, Who is above all His gifts, and Who alone is our last end. And even again con-

cerning these gifts, besides several which cannot be separated from the possession of Almighty God, such as grace in this world, and light and glory in the next, and which it would therefore be a real sin not to have any desire of at all, and a great imperfection only to desire in a half-hearted way, besides these, extending the doctrine to all the gifts of God, whatever they may be, the soul, poor in spirit, even knowing that it can never merit them, constantly asks for them and ardently seeks for them; not for the consolation they would bring, but for the more elevated knowledge and love which they would inspire of their Creator, whom we can never know enough nor love enough.

We will now add only one more word, suggest one more motive. This Religious poverty which detaches us, delivers us, and spiritualises us, which establishes between the soul and God such tender relations, which makes us true images of the Divinity; this poverty which places us in a practical communion with the life of Jesus, and distinguishes our love for Him by stability, depth, and generosity, also associates us to His divine mission, and gives us the means of powerfully co-operating in it. The work of reparation and redemption, of enlightenment and sanctification, of reconciliation and of universal peace in truth and in love—this is the mission of Christ, and also that of His chosen poor, the natural and infallible effect of their mutual poverty.

It is for us who have left all, renouncing by vow

the possession of anything in this world, to repair the iniquity caused in this world by that odious and indefatigable incitement to evil—earthly riches. And how ought not the clear knowledge and certainty of our aim to sweeten the burden of our privations, and of all the sufferings entailed by them? “I am poor and I suffer,” we may exclaim, “but by these means ‘I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ,’¹ I continue this sacred Passion, I localise, I appropriate it to myself, I extend it and apply it to others; and as from a consecrated altar where Jesus is still sacrificed, so from my soul, thus voluntarily despoiled, arises a sacrifice before the throne of God, to make some amends for the glory incessantly snatched from Him by the worship of riches and earthly prosperity.”

At the same time the poor Religious is enabled to enlighten and sanctify others. He upholds the Gospel by professing it so publicly in its most arduous and perfect points. He proves by his own life the reality of grace, for a supernatural assistance alone can give grace to perform supernatural actions, and above all to persevere in a state so crucifying to nature. He practically honours the power of prayer and the Sacraments, so manifestly his comfort and support. He preaches; even by his silence and by his hidden life he teaches Jesus Christ. He declares by the fact of his perseverance in the Religious state that true happiness is not to be found

¹ Coloss. i. 24.

where worldlings seek it, that it is possible to live joyfully without attachment to anything in this world; indeed, that the fewer attachments we have the greater will be our joy. He is the guarantee of the divine promises, the eloquent commentator of the mystery of the Cross, the prophet of heaven, and the witness who has already anticipated the delights to be found there. He raises the souls of other men on high with his own. He teaches almsgiving to the rich and patience to the poor, for he obliges the former to reflect, and encourages the latter to hope; he reminds the rich of hell, and the poor of heaven.

Again, he labours at that great reconciliation which the hateful separations caused by sin has rendered necessary. Jesus came to bring to us the precept, the grace, and the secret of that heavenly peace one with another, which Satan detests and hinders; because, as he is hatred itself, all that love says or gives, or all that is bound together in love, contradicts his hatred, overturns his plans, weakens his power, and wounds him—not in his heart, for he no longer has any, but in the place where it should be, that is to say, in the very centre of his being. The poor of Jesus Christ have ever laboured at this universal peacemaking. First of all, how many times have they not saved the Church, the treasure and source of all peace. The great Pope Innocent III., in a dream, now become historical, saw the walls of the Lateran

Church, the Mother and Mistress of all the Churches, tremble, and it seemed as if they were about to fall, when one single man of mean appearance sustained the tottering edifice. And this poor man, Innocent was destined soon to see in person, for he was no other than St. Francis of Assisi, the father of an innumerable family of the poor of Christ, and whose Rule the Pope, after some hesitation, at last fully approved and confirmed. St. Augustin is of opinion that towards the end of the world saints will arise surpassing in heroic sanctity any of those who have been honoured and invoked in the Church in the preceding ages. They are to be her glory and her strength in those terrible days of trial; and precisely because the conflict is to be so terrible, and that evil, in the person of Antichrist, will apparently conquer the just and reign triumphantly over all—on this very account these giants of virtue will also be beyond comparison perfect in their poverty.

If the world would allow it, these poor ones of Christ who save the Church would likewise bring peace to the world. There is only one evil, the root of all evils, and St. Paul names it—"cupidity and avarice."¹ There is only one good, whence all good flows—charity. Imagine the spirit of the poor of Jesus Christ dwelling in the hearts of all men! War would no longer exist, least of all civil war; the arms of men, instead of being raised to harm and destroy one another, would be

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 10.

only used for mutual aid; the different classes of society, although distinct because such is the dispensation of God's providence, would nevertheless remain united, as God wills and commands, and while keeping up friendly relations, would assist and strengthen each other. Because mankind sought "first the kingdom of God and His justice, all things else would be added to them."¹ True brotherhood is established by love; and thus earth, notwithstanding its hard labours and its inevitable tears, would become the vestibule of heaven. And it is to this the teaching of our Divine Master leads us. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."²

¹ Matt. vi. 33.

² Matt. v. 3.

ON CHASTITY

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No one denies the importance, from a moral point of view, of questions concerning the body; yet the moral life belongs entirely to the soul. The soul alone understands the Law: and alone possesses, together with the capacity for infringing it, the power of observing this Law and of bringing under its yoke all that is subject to her own dominion.

The soul being the centre of those passions which produce vice or virtue, accordingly as they are well or ill regulated, is consequently the seat of both virtues and vices. What is "the moral law" but "*right order in the relations of things*"? and what is the "morality" of a rational being but his bringing himself, of his own accord, into harmony with this sacred order? Now, if the human soul is placed in a necessary, ceaseless, intimate, and delicate relationship with any one thing, surely it is with that body of which she is the substantial form, life, unity, and support—that body without which she cannot exist for one moment on this earth—nay, from which death itself parts her for a time only, and that by a violent act of which sin is the sole cause. The innumerable relations which the soul either possesses

or makes for herself with the external world may almost all be resolved into that primary and paramount tie which binds her to her own body; so much so, that ninety-nine times in a hundred, it is solely in the service, or for the profit, of this body that she pursues whatever object attracts her, lays hold of it, and uses it. The desire of possession comes simply from the wish to enjoy, and especially to enjoy with the senses. Lust—that is, inordinate desire—is not merely the close companion of luxury, it is actually born of the provisions for pleasure that luxury provides.

Further, who is not well aware, since man lost his true balance by forsaking God, how completely the soul has become drawn down towards the body, not to say almost buried in it? Who can fail to see the enormous place occupied by mere animal life in individuals—still more so if we look at the mass of mankind? There are surely enslaving requirements enough of actual necessity in this life; but let us add to these all the inordinate desires that spring from man's passions, from his covetousness, his daring and presumption, his pride in prosperity, his tendency to excess; in short, from all his ill-regulated natural propensities, and we see the realisation of that saying of Holy Scripture, terrible from its very truth: that since sin came, and on account of sin, "man has become flesh, and all flesh has corrupted its way upon the earth."¹

¹ Gen. vi. 3-12.

To questions so grave as those raised by such a state of things, we expect Christianity to give exact and peremptory answers; and it does so. Upon this matter, as upon all others, it has said all there is to say: all, at least, that is of any consequence to us here below, until the time comes which will unveil for us, above, everything we need to satisfy us perfectly.

Christianity, then, teaches *the dogmatics of the body*; it formulates a moral law for it, tells its history, explains its condition, reveals its final destiny; and it teaches all this, like everything else, magisterially, without hesitating and without allowing the least hesitation as to our acceptance of the teaching, when, having displayed its commission, it has once pronounced its doctrine. Then—because Christianity is not only a light to show truth, but has in itself the grace and power of working—it takes this body, the cause of whose fall it has explained, raises it, cures it by degrees of the languor which hangs about it even after it has been raised, and step by step leads it up through all the different stages of its allotted destiny. But what model does Christianity set before us in this work? Nothing less than the Flesh of Christ Himself, which is man's actual remedy as well as his example; that Flesh, weak and afflicted at first because of the iniquity whose burden it innocently bore, and whose debt it paid; but afterwards delivered, glorious and blessed, the debt paid, and the Father's love for His incarnate Son free to take its full course.

One word—a learned and a deep one—sums up the order prescribed by the moral law for the soul's relations with the body—the word *Chastity*; and this is at the same time the name of a duty and of a virtue.

In the classification of the virtues, Chastity is connected with that great cardinal virtue named “temperance,” and forms, as it were, one separate domain of a large region governed by this temperance. As a natural virtue, it may be looked upon as a kind of royal habit of the soul, by means of which she keeps all the acts of the body, even to its slightest movements, completely beneath her sway. Or again, Chastity is like a powerful ally lending his strength to the ruler, Reason, so that not one of the subjects of this ruler, and especially none of the bodily organs, may be disobedient to his orders or deaf to his warnings.

Then, when Chastity, no longer a merely natural moral law, becomes a Christian and supernatural virtue, not only does its strength immensely increase, but it no longer serves Reason alone; it becomes the servant of Faith, of the true Queen, divinely consecrated, on whom reason itself depends. Thus, inspired by Faith and espousing her cause, Chastity binds that whole lower world of the body by a strong and close compact; a compact of light and of love, which impels it to practise restraint and to do works not merely good but holy. By this means it gives order, and a divine order, to the whole

organic system of human nature, at least as far as this system depends on our own free will and falls under the moral law. Hence Chastity performs the office, as it were, of God's own hand applied to the human body, governing it entirely, at all times, and without dispute.

Chastity is a virtue whose characteristics are of the austere order; it is stern, strong, masculine, jealous of the least deviation, delicate and difficult in practice, but nevertheless full of delights.

It is austere, because to establish peace and harmony in this heterogeneous and turbulent body that sin has fashioned means truly to tame it, and this cannot be done except by treating it hardly, in fact, by ill-treating it. Chastity and chastisement, even in English—though less obviously so than in Latin, whence we have the words—are two analogous terms, springing from the same root and expressing similar ideas, though the latter rather expresses the means employed for obtaining the end expressed in the former word.

It is also a strong virtue, because this it must be, to enable it to fulfil its somewhat rough office of austerity, and also to resist the many seductions that surround it; for Chastity is placed in this peculiar position; that it is never laid siege to except by flattery, and that its enemies employ no more alarming weapons against it than caresses and blandishments. Thus it must be a *masculine* virtue, for the counsel so often given in Scripture, "to do

manfully and let your heart be strengthened," applies directly to this; and hence those who want courage to be perfectly chaste—*i.e.* firm in self-restraint—are called "effeminate." Again, Chastity is *jealous*, jealous for the honour of God, whose interests it defends, whose work it does, whose dominion it helps to uphold. Its eye is as a flame, its hand as a burning torch; it is like the cherub that guards the entrance of the earthly paradise. Withal, this virtue is of inexpressible delicacy; armed, ready for combat, as it always appears, it is yet like the doves who flee at the mere sound of a footstep, or like a tender flower, shaken by a breath of wind, withered up by a ray of sun, killed by a slight frost. It is timid and readily blushes; it loves the shade and holds itself apart; it is discreet, takes many precautions, and lives by rule; it loves no practices better than those of humility, mortification, and prudence. All this shows that chastity is necessarily a very *difficult* virtue. First, it is a complex one, presupposing many others with whose help it cannot dispense. Then, it compels man to continuous effort, and will not allow him to sleep or stand idle. St. John Climacus calls Chastity "a sublime denial of nature, or rather a victory gained over her, and a noble challenge offered by a mortal body to those heavenly spirits that cannot die."

All this implies nothing easy. Still, despite all the labour and suffering it entails, it is a virtue full of delights. Just because it makes us repudiate and

despise the delights of this lower world, it helps us to deserve those of the world above, and even prepares us to enjoy them. In the book of Canticles, the Holy Spirit sees the spouse who has left the earth and its joys, and she "cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her Beloved"; that is, she is wholly and perfectly chaste.

In a certain degree, which each person knows, Chastity is a commandment; if the body become our master, even for a moment, the moral being is overturned and has fallen into disorder. Nothing defiled or uncrowned shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; flesh and blood have no right there; hence, the man whose passions have made him subject to flesh and blood will be shut out from this kingdom.

Whatever, then, may be the particular state we are called to, we are bound scrupulously to preserve the degree of Chastity that belongs to it.

But, beyond this common Chastity of precept, the Gospel reveals and preaches a much more excellent kind, which is called "of counsel." Just as Our Lord counsels the renunciation of all those goods which we put under the head of riches, so He also counsels repudiation, for His sake, even of those bodily gratifications which, in the less holy states, it is enough for us to use soberly. How helpful such a counsel is to the cause of the purity, liberty, dignity, and peace of the soul is clear at first sight. Now, this is perfect Chastity, and when

it has been always preserved it constitutes that "Holy Virginity" which is as the precious pearl of the New Covenant, and forms the chief link of humanity with God, for we may say that, next to love, it is to this virtue that we *owe* Jesus Christ, And since the Divine Master gave this counsel, we all know how His disciples have carried it out, and have exalted it before the world by their lives and their deaths. There have been almost as many martyrs for Virginity as for Faith, of which, indeed, it is only one of the choicest fruits.

But whoever has really come to understand the treasure that lies hidden in this virtue begins to feel the need of a safeguard for it; and what better one can there be than a vow? If a vow comes so opportunely to confirm the soul's renunciation of outward goods, how much more to the purpose is it when we want an inward defence against the weakness and enticements of the flesh? Here we really need an indestructible wall, which we can only get by establishing its foundations beyond time. We put an inviolable seal on our sacrifice; we give ourselves for ever to Him who lives for ever; for, while by vowing Poverty we gave up our property, by vowing Chastity we at least begin giving up ourselves. Hence the offering is a better one, more worthy of God, and more profitable to our own souls for eternity. All Religious make this vow, and they are only Religious on condition of making it; herein lies their safety and their honour. Moreover, though

by the terms of this vow they only promise to give up those special joys that form the actual subject-matter of the virtue of Chastity, they really, and above all, embrace that higher chastity of the soul, without which the other would be little worth, even though it implied true virginity. "For," cries St. Thomas, "when the soul voluntarily unites herself *in spirit* to certain things by means of imagination, memory, thought, affection, desire, she may actually enjoy them in a certain sense. When the soul is chaste she moderates this enjoyment; but if, for want of moderation, the enjoyment goes beyond just bounds, then it becomes what Scripture calls an 'interior fornication,' and is consequently an act of grave impurity. If, then," continues the holy Doctor, "the soul, taking lawful delight in spiritual union with God, abstains at the same time from seeking pleasure in union with creatures outside the bounds of Divine order (*i.e.* what is commonly called 'inordinate' pleasure), then it is spiritually chaste, and becomes one of those virgins of whom St. Paul writes, 'For I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.'"

To sum up: Chastity, properly speaking, and looked at on its practical side, is only a religious respect which the soul has for her own body, for the love of God Whom she has espoused in Jesus Christ; and therein is the actual matter of the vow of Chastity; but further, from scrupulously carrying out every-

thing that is necessarily contained in this vow, the soul goes on to that perfect purification and detachment which consists in practising the same restraint and watchfulness in her interior enjoyment of all created things which the vow demands of her in regard to the body.

There is no need to speak in much detail here about the special duties of this virtue. In fact there are very few of these duties to which a Christian conscience, and still more the conscience of a Religious, is not habitually alive. Instinct alone is usually enough here, and in case of real need (which is rarer and slighter than people imagine) there are always plenty of spiritual books for instructing in details. It may be added that in the whole of Christian morality there is not one point on which Divine Love Itself instructs souls more naturally, efficaciously, and chastely, which is after all of most consequence—than on this one. It does better than teach, It makes us feel what It teaches, relish what It has made us feel, and practise heartily and perseveringly what we relish.

Leaving, then, to this divine Teacher all necessary instruction for the practice of Chastity, we think it more to the purpose here to consider, in the light of Faith, the nature and conditions of that body, or rather of that whole being which is in fact *ourselves*, which the holy Profession of Religion binds us to keep chaste in the very highest possible degree. We will consider its astonishing dignity, its mar-

vellous gifts, its heavenly mission, its most holy qualities, all of them so many clear titles to our deep reverence. Then raising our eyes, we will seek to understand somewhat of those infinite perfections that proclaim the sovereignty and form the triumph of the sublime Spouse, for Whose love this perpetual chastity is vowed, and to Whom those who have taken the vow are consecrated and bound. This double line of thought cannot well be followed without exciting in us the strong desire to be virgins for ever, and to become more perfect day by day.

PART I

OF THE RESPECT MAN OWES TO HIMSELF: THIS
RESPECT IS PAID BY THE OBSERVANCE OF
CHASTITY.

THE essence of Chastity, whether corporal or spiritual, lies in that *religious respect* which, as has been said above, man owes to himself. Now, what are the true grounds of this respect? The first and most obvious one is this—that man is wholly the property of God. Reason alone can see this, and asserts it; but what splendour faith adds to the sight, what force to the assertion! It shows us plainly that the right we have in our possessions here below is in fact barely more than a semblance of a right. True, in as far as it exists, it is a real one, which we exercise by God's appointment, and which He has ordained for the order and preservation of society. But the right, though real and legitimate for this world, is limited on all sides, and held on the slenderest tenure. God, and God only, is the true proprietor of all things. He possesses because He created; and because He alone can say, "My work," so He alone may say, "My property." Man is God's *thing*, because he is God's *creature*: God owns him by a right of absolute possession.

We belong to God *essentially*: that is, by the mere character of His nature and of ours. Further, we belong to Him *entirely*: not on the surface only, or in part, or for a time, or in a certain degree. Again, He possesses with his whole being, and His dominion reaches to our very depths, lays hold of the roots of our nature, and takes in the whole extent of our life, with all its capacities, actual and potential. This right that God has over us is founded not upon one title, but upon every title, and it is being constantly exercised; every moment, under every form, through everything, in spite of everything. In short, it is of so sovereign a kind that, just as God could originally have brought us out of nothing, or not brought us, as He pleased, so He can now plunge us back into our nothingness if He sees good to do so. And—mark this well—God's dominion over us is active, and never in the condition of either an inert power or an unapplied principle. To possess us means, in Him, to hold us, nay, to grasp us; God actually and continuously holds us in His grasp.

Let us suppose a man to be the depositary of some piece of property which, through a right of custom, attached to it by the depositor's kindness, yields him some kind of profit or advantage, it is clear that this right in no wise detracts from that of the owner, who remains the sole proprietor; while the deposit remains a deposit, and must be accounted for by the depositary whenever he is called upon to give it up.

Such is the case of man, endowed by God with liberty, and morally master of himself. Sin, which is the abuse of liberty, no more loosens man from his Creator than does liberty itself. The sinner is as much the property of God as the just man, though he belongs to Him in a different way; nay, we may almost say that he is even more God's property, since he has unhappily found means to turn the Hand which held him in so gentle a grasp into a terrible chain.¹

But this is not all that sin has done. In its very principle, or, at least, since its first appearance among men, it has actually been the cause of God's doing what might have been thought impossible. Who would have conceived that anything could add to the essential right of possession that the Creator has over His creatures? Yet the mystery of Christ's redemption of the world doubles this primary right; for what God already possesses He, by this act, buys back, pays for, and takes to Himself again.

Who, then, shall measure the depth, the height, the breadth, and the unassailable nature of this dominion that God has over us, and of that double sense in which we belong to Him as the result of it? "You are not your own,"² says St. Paul to all Christians. Let us see how far this saying extends.

Look at man, that is, mankind as a whole, not

¹ "Horrendum est incidere in manus Dei viventis."—Heb. x. 31.

² 1 Corinth. vi. 19.

only Religious, simply under this one aspect, as *God's property*, the object of His rights, His thing. Does he not immediately assume an importance, a dignity, a moral beauty, almost a majesty, which actually constrain the soul to all those feelings of respect, and to all those acts of restraint and reserve in his regard, which are the real expression, as well as the practice, of the virtue of Chastity ?

Who, then, can despise—still less, who can dare to claim for himself—a being thus appropriated by God ? Who will venture to use it indiscreetly, inconsiderately, irregularly ; above all, who would think of abusing it for evil ? It is an undoubted fact that every fault committed against Chastity implies, at least in some degree, the actual forgetting of this right of property. Hence the very best guarantee we can have for practising the virtue is to keep this thought constantly before our eyes, and to ponder it well in our hearts. St. Paul thinks so ; for, after saying, “ You are not your own, for you are bought with a great price,” he adds, “ Glorify God in your body.”

But man is not only Divinely *possessed* : he is Divinely *loved*. This is, so to speak, a second investiture for him, an increase of dignity, a fresh title to sincere reverence and chaste usage. We all know the price that affection adds to the value of things. A mere nothing, when we love it, becomes a considerable piece of property ; looked at in itself, it may be so trifling that one would even take it with-

out scruple; but know that a heart is attached to it, and the thought of stealing it becomes horrible.

In that withering but pathetic parable which Nathan used to humble and convert David, he speaks of the worth of that one little ewe-lamb to the heart of the poor man whom he pictures as possessing it. Certainly, in itself, it was little; but the poor man had bought and fed that ewe-lamb; he had seen it grow up in the midst of his children; it ate from his own hand, and drank out of the cup whence he drank himself; it slept at night in his bosom; in short, "it was unto him as a daughter,"¹ said the Prophet. Is not this in fact our own history? is not each one of us, in the sight of Providence, this little ewe-lamb? What a shelter, what a sanctuary, what a wall of defence, did not such a love as this create for so helpless a creature? And what must have been the crime of that pitiless stranger who snatched it away?

If, then, affection coming from the heart of a mere man could give so strong a right to a poor little animal, what must the love of God do for man? To what height must it not raise him? What must it not add to his greatness? Scientists calculate the weight of the column of air that each of us bears up. But who can tell the weight of love under which every child of Adam lives? St. Paul speaks of the "eternal weight of glory"² which the elect will bear, without being crushed or

¹ 2 Kings xii. 3.

² 2 Corinth. iv. 17.

oppressed by it, in heaven: no doubt in the same way that one wears a royal vestment or a diadem. This burden can be nothing else than the supreme revelation and the splendour of that burden of Divine Love which, in this world, forms, as it were, the atmospheric column of souls, and beneath which we live, walk, and work. "My love is my weight," said St. Augustin. Who can weigh the heart of a God? And this Heart, the Scriptures assert,¹ is set upon every individual among mankind without exception. God does not merely see us, He looks at us; it is not enough for Him to hold us, He embraces us; no one can come near us, accost us, or touch us, save beneath the gaze and within the shelter of the embrace of our loving Creator. There we are by day, there we are by night; there we are when temptation comes upon us; there we are when creatures hold intercourse with us, creatures who, alas! may seduce us from the right way even when they come with the object of serving us. There, within the same shelter, our liberty makes its choice; and, whenever the choice is a bad one, it snatches us thence and throws us far away! Can we believe that we should ever fall, and as easily as we do, into such evil and misfortune as this, if only each one of us, keeping the eye of his soul open, would never look at either himself or any one else outside this immense and holy love which enfolds and protects, while it honours us?

¹ Job vii. 17.

For could we thus keep our soul's eye open and attentive without also keeping our hand restrained and our heart chaste?

Add to all this, that God's love for man is neither idle nor barren. God loves too ardently not to be very ambitious of making the being who is dear to Him happy. Therefore He has allotted to man a sublime destiny. It was said of John the Baptist at the hour of his birth: "What one, think ye, shall this child be?"¹ It was a question, but one that implied a hope, for this new-born child, of some marvellous destiny. One may really say the same thing beside every cradle: What do you think this child will be? If we pretend to divine his earthly future, we are dealing with the unknown, and what is in fact not of much consequence. If, waiting a little longer, we question the child's own free choice as to his destined career, we may get nothing but uncertain answers; for the most upright will may bend, and the best-laid plans fail; even up to our very last moments, the success of our life remains an undecided question.

But on the side of love, of that love which prevents and overrules us, and on the side of the will of God, the answer is prompt and precise. God has made us for Himself; He intends to have us with Him; He means us to see His light, to live by His life, to taste His joy, and to be illuminated by His glory; and all this in a region beyond time and

¹ St. Luke, i. 66.

change, fully, peaceably, and for ever. Our very body, which sin has made tributary to death, and which must inevitably pay its tribute, does not remain the prey of the tomb: life will have the victory over death; and from that dust, which is nameless, because it is formless, and seems even to be "no more a substance now," the human body will rise, living, young, resplendent, immortal, to share the glory and happiness of the soul. Such is our actual future—our real destiny. True, by one false stroke man may miss and lose it: but if this happens, he himself, and he alone, will have brought about the loss. He will have done this because he chose; and he will have done and chosen it in *spite of God*. Yes, if since sin appeared we can no longer enter heaven without doing violence to ourselves;¹ so, since the coming of Jesus Christ (which means, practically, from eternity), we can no longer go down to hell without doing violence to God. God does not will His creatures to perish:² He who is their life is also their end, and will be so eternally. No sun so attracts its satellites as God, the living Sun and universal centre, attracts the beings He has created. We are, then, all living here below, not only surrounded by the splendour of this divine destiny, but under the dominion of this unspeakably powerful attraction.

This call, this charm, is the very basis of all things: it is going on in all places, and at all times;

¹ Matt. xi. 12.

² Ezech. xviii. 31, 32.

it is the chief labour of those two workers of whom Our Lord said : " My Father worketh until now, and I work." ¹ We know not what others may think ; but it seems that such certainties as these, which, for Faith, are almost visions, give so high a notion of what man is, and inundate him with lights that are both so delightful and so terrible, that it really becomes impossible to any one who is impressed by them, not only to refrain from soiling by the smallest stain, a being of such dignity, but to help esteeming it highly, and paying it every sort of honour.

More especially as this state of things is not all for the future ; God, who exhorts man to rise early, Himself forestalls our day. He does not wait for reason to awake in us to let loose our free-will ; on His own account and on ours He is in haste ; such is love : it makes sure by being beforehand with its object. It is not enough for Him to have the end, He wants the beginning too ; and, as He will be our Omega, so He chooses to be our Alpha. Baptism, as we have seen, which usually follows immediately—and always may so follow—the hour of every human being's birth, is the supernatural taking possession of His creature by God. It is, so to speak, the Divine seizure of man in the name of Christ and of His rights as Redeemer. This marks the child with an inward, spiritual, sacred, God-like, and ineffaceable seal ; and this seal is the very name of God,

¹ John. v. 17.

Whose substance is impressed on the being: a name divinely living, divinely quickening; a name full of truth, and overflowing with grace.

Man is made to belong so closely to God by this seal of Baptism, that that other appropriation we have been speaking of, seems to be slight by comparison. Judge by St. Paul: the unbaptized, he says, are "strangers to God," and, so to speak, barbarians: "being aliens from the conversation of Israel, and strangers to the testament, having no hope of the promise, and without God in this world."¹ Nevertheless, all we have said remains the pure truth, and not one iota of it shall fail. What, then, is the special relationship that Baptism brings about between God and man?

It is this: that the seed of our whole destiny is contained in it. Whom do we so honour and care for as a woman about to become a mother? Now, every baptized person bears a God within his breast. Glory is only the full blossoming of grace; that is of the divine germ that baptism planted in the fragile child of Adam. If the child dies, the harvest springs up at once and ripens suddenly beneath the first ray of the Eternal Sun. If he lives, the seed remains entrusted to his charge; he will often have to defend it, and constantly to cultivate it, but it will always be within him; and more than this, it will be daily growing, and in growing it will cause God Himself to increase in him. God Himself began this work,

¹ Ephes. ii. 12.

and God Himself, though henceforth not alone, will bring it to an end. Man was divinely born, and his growth is to be divine; and as soon as he chooses, or others choose for him (for any baptized child, were it but an hour old, may be enriched with this gift), a fresh Sacrament will give him the strength which that Baptism began in him. Yet further: though eternal in its nature, yet this supernatural life, in us, is subject to the conditions of time; and, though all-powerful in itself, still it contracts from us something of our weakness. In short, like our natural life, it has to be fed and supported; but because it is divine, its nourishment must be divine also. The food, then, of the Christian life is Christ—no other than God Himself: the Christian eats his God *Himself* in that Eucharist which, if he thinks well, he may receive every day. Behold this being! We see him, certainly, with our eyes; but at the same time we do not see him truly, for God alone, Who created man's marvellous dignity, can measure it, or even conceive it, properly. We need not here refer to the other Sacraments, which, according to a scholastic saying, are all the right of man, and were instituted for his use—the Eucharist is enough. The Eucharist exists, and man lives by the Eucharist. Were there no other reason for it, would not this alone make man a sacred being; and would not sin, on this account, and, above all, sins against Chastity, be execrable? Therefore, is not Chastity, both of body and soul, the most important of all duties; and

being the most necessary of virtues for us, ought we not also to find it the easiest? ought it not to flow easily from the two sources of our Baptism and our Communion? and is it not, of all virtues, the one which most becomes the supernatural state in which God has deigned to place us? No, indeed: as there is a tabernacle, and to that tabernacle a door, and behind that door a Host, and in front of that Host a holy table at which we eat of It, we need not wonder at the number of souls that, for the love of God, choose to remain virgins: the wonder is that in every generation such souls are not even countless. This, indeed, was the vision of the Prophet when he looked forward to the days of the Messias, which really meant the days of the Eucharist: "For holy stones shall be lifted up over his land. For what is the good thing of him, and what is his beautiful thing, but the corn of the elect, and wine springing forth virgins?"¹

But even now we have not come to an end of our gifts: for what is the result of this Baptism, of this Eucharist, of all this mystery of grace and of divine love and possession? We not only become the property and the likeness of Jesus, but the very members which make up His Body. St. Paul says this expressly: "You are the body of Christ;"² and again: "Know you not that your bodies are the members of Christ?"³ Thus, we must remember, it is the whole man, body and soul, which is concerned in this mystery and becomes united to the Incarnate

¹ Zachar. ix. 17.

² I Cor. xii. 27.

³ Ibid. vi. 15.

Word, as in us the body is joined to the head. What the Fathers teach us seems frightening from its very boldness, and yet it is the true doctrine. Pope St. Leo says that "the body of the baptized has become the flesh of the Crucified"; and St. Augustin, commenting on St. John, cries: "Wonder and rejoice! for we have become Christ. If He is the Head, we are the members: He and we together are the one whole man." And one might quote a hundred other such passages.

The truth is, that we shall never know in this world how real, how close, how deep, and how living is that union which binds us to Jesus and causes us to become His Body. But we often, through weak understanding and faintness of faith, and because it is a mystical union, think of it as only imaginary; or at least as a vague and abstract thing which has no reality outside our own minds. Now, the essence of this union, its actual source, its support, and its substance, is that same Holy Spirit Who unites the Father and the Son in the adorable Trinity, and Who caused Mary to conceive Christ in her chaste womb. Yes; the same Holy Spirit Who brought about that marvellous union of body and soul with the Word, which formed the God-man, Jesus Himself, also brings about the union of our being with Christ, and hence the unity of His whole mystical body. Oh, my Saviour! if we forget this dogma, which is the triumph of Thy mercy and the height of our glory; if, because our love is weak,

we look at it only from afar or through earthly clouds that dim and lessen its beauty, Thou didst not forget it in the days of Thy earthly sojourn. Thou not only sawest it in the far-reaching light of Thy divine knowledge, but Thou didst actually experience it Thyself, and—as St. Paul has written of obedience—didst learn it at Thy own cost.¹ Yes; when in Gethsemani Thy body was deluged with a sweat of blood; when, in the Prætorium, the pitiless whips tore Thy flesh to shreds; when, above all, on the cross, drowned in a sea of woes, and with Thy own divine will forcing Thy human nature to that extreme point of grief which must end in death, Thou didst say, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”—when Thou didst immediately add that *it was just*, for that Thou hadst taken the sins of the world upon Thee, and that they cried out against Thee and kept Thee afar off;² then, O lover of souls! O divine victim! O Jesus! Thou didst know with Thy whole being how true, how living, and how effectual is that union of Thyself and Thy sinful members, and that marvellous incorporation of the whole guilty human race with Thee which results from it!

What, then, is the immediate, rigorous, and inevitable consequence of this truth and of all those others that we have set forth? It is really clear to

¹ “He learned obedience by the things which he suffered.”—Heb. v. 8.

² “O God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? *far from my salvation are the words of my sins.*”—Ps. xxi. 1.

every one; but, because it rests on so high and so holy a ground, the Holy Spirit Himself has chosen to express it by means of St. Paul; and with what vigour he has done it! "Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of a harlot?"¹ Henceforth the vice of impurity becomes a sacrilege. Are we not, then, forced to the conclusion that all Christian graces tend to chastity?

The better we understand the astonishing dignity to which this grace raises us, the more thoroughly we also understand the severe care we must use to guard that virtue. As Christ in uniting Himself to us truly takes upon Him all our weaknesses and even the *likeness* of our faults, so we truly have a share in His graces, in His states of being, in His relations with things, in short, in all that He has as man, and in all that He is as God. We are His, He is ours; we are in Him, he is in us—this is what may be read in every page of the Gospel.

Before all things, Jesus Christ is the dwelling-place of God. "For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead corporally,"² says St. Paul; that is, as St. Thomas explains it, truly, substantially, entirely. Our Lord's whole sacred Humanity is the throne, sanctuary, and temple of that Godhead. Therefore we, in our rank and measure—below Christ, because of Him and through Him, but also like Him—we too are temples, sanctuaries, and thrones of God. "Know you not," again says this

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 15.

² Coloss. ii. 9.

wonderful Apostle, who seems privileged to enlighten us on all these mysteries, "that your members are the temples of the Holy Ghost, Who is in you?"¹ Thus, we are real temples; temples, not only dedicated to God, but inhabited by Him. Now, this temple, Tertullian teaches, has a guardian-priestess, namely Chastity; and she defends the entrance of it from all that is impure or profane. He says, further, that Chastity may be said to fulfil the functions of a priestess in guarding this temple, because mere respect, courtesy, or restraint are not enough for this office; an actual religion and acts of worship are needed for it—the chastity called for here is the same thing as sanctity. The house of God must needs be holy, and can contain nothing but what is holy. Ah! if the Holy Spirit could say even of that ancient tabernacle where God dwelt only in a type, "Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord,"² and again, "Reverence my sanctuary;"³ if destroying thunders burst from the summit of Mount Sinai, where God was merely represented by an angel, when any one dared to approach; what must be the sacredness of those living temples of the living God which are members of the Holy Church, being first the members of Jesus? This is why, if unhappily "any man violate the temple of God," St. Paul tells us, "him shall God destroy."⁴

But the Christian not only shares the conditions

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 19.

² Ps. xcii. 5.

³ Levit. xxvi. 2.

⁴ 1 Cor. iii. 17.

of Our Lord's humanity: he enters into all its relations, especially into its relations with the Three Divine Persons.

And first: like Christ, the Christian is the Son of God, having the right to say to God "Father!" and having actually received the Spirit of God, that he may say it efficaciously as well as truly. Yes: "we are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."¹ We are freely begotten of Him by His word; and in this begetting have received with His name, His life, a life which, while it lasts and reigns in us, keeps us from sinning, preserves us in innocence, and leads us on to sanctity. God is light: as sons of God, then, we are "sons of the day";² and, as St. Paul says, "light in the Lord."³ What intercourse can there be between this light which we now are, and that darkness which we once were? Do we light a candle to hide it beneath a bushel? Or do we become a star of heaven to lie grovelling on the earth? Are we made for God, only to live lower than rational men? Such a birth brings obligations; and not to live up to them, is such a crime as ought to be unheard-of and even impossible. We are the sons of God, and we ought to walk in this world upright and firm; with loins girt, with eyes open, with soul raised up; to work in truth, to fulfil justice, to live, as the Scripture says, "worthy of God";⁴ shining by our teaching, by our manners, by our works; thinking,

¹ John i. 13. ² Thess. v. 8. ³ Ephes. v. 8. ⁴ Coloss. i. 10.

loving, wishing, doing nothing but what God may behold, nothing that does not even call for His gaze, nothing in which He cannot take pleasure and rejoice. What is all this, in short, but to say that in body, heart, and mind, every child of God should be *chaste*? “Oh, how beautiful!” cries the Sage, “how beautiful is the generation of chaste souls, all shining with light!” Light, Chastity, the Divine life, and the Christian life—all are one in the sight of God.

We are sons of the Father: what are we to the Son? His Spouses. “The kingdom of heaven,” says the Gospel, “is likened to a king who made a marriage feast for his son:”¹ God would fain espouse the whole of humanity by faith; He announces this intention to us in the Scriptures, and to carry it out He sends us His Word. The Christ *is* the Spouse, and He comes *as* the Spouse. He who is Life wishes us to possess that life in its fulness, so He gives us Himself, and thus makes us, like Himself, sources of life; for those who belong to a race can propagate it. Faith makes man a virgin by uniting him to the Word; and Charity, quickening Faith, and so sealing the union, makes him fruitful. In brief: every supernaturalised creature, adopted and made God-like by Faith, becomes Christ’s sister; and as soon as Faith blossoms into love, this Sister becomes a Spouse. “My sister, my Spouse!” as he says in the *Canticle of Canticles*.²

¹ Matt. xxii. 2.

² Cant. iv. 9.

No doubt there are degrees in this grace, and numberless ones; they correspond exactly to the degrees of Charity, and perhaps there are even as many as there are souls who love. No matter what state a soul may be in, or what relations she may form, as regards this world, so long as she is in the grace of God, she is the Spouse of Jesus Christ; for the Spouse, St. Bernard says, "is every soul who loves." Even one who has chosen to give to a son of the human family the sacred name of Spouse, has not thereby lost the right to call her Saviour by that name.

Nevertheless it is clear that those states of life, besides opening out a far freer and wider field for divine charity, are a proof that those who embrace them have made deliberate choice of loving God more, and in a better way: it is clear, also, that such states form a closer, holier, and more intimate union between the soul and Our Lord than any others. As the very essence of conjugal union is that it should be free and voluntary, the more free-will there is in the contracting parties, the deeper and truer is the union. Now, on the part of the Divine Spouse Who calls, this vocation to priestly or religious virginity is the summit of grace, and consequently of love. God desires nothing so much as ties like this between Himself and His creatures, and His heart rests nowhere so perfectly as in souls that have formed them. If He has not made them the subject of a commandment, this only shows what

a high price He attaches to them. We all know that those who love, desire nothing so passionately as the thing that they will not even express a wish for, because the desire for it can only be satisfied if the object of their love divines and forestalls the wish. And as regards the creature who thus espouses her Lord, can she, on her side, give Him more? Certainly not, for such an alliance absolutely excludes all others; and, moreover, like that city "whose foundations are in the holy mountains,"¹ the union being sealed by a vow, passes into a sphere beyond changeable things, and is thus saved from all chance of repentance. In the whole order of the various states of union with God, nothing can be compared to that sacred contract which, in the presence and with the sanction of that great witness, the Church, weds a soul under a vow of Chastity to Jesus Christ. Indeed, in so high and perfect a degree do these souls become His Spouses, that in the ordinary language of Christians this name is appropriated and almost entirely reserved to them. Theirs it is to understand in full what is said to others only in parables; theirs to enter into the store-rooms of the King; theirs to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, and to sing Him a canticle whose melody none else can sing.

From all this it appears that every Christian soul, but more especially the soul of every Religious, is made the Spouse of the Son of God in a double

¹ Ps. lxxxvi. 1.

manner, for this marvellous marriage has two aspects, the soul is espoused to the Word, after the pattern of the sacred Humanity, and again espoused to Christ like Mary and the Church; that is, she in a certain manner shares in the mystery of the Hypostatic Union, which is the source and type of every union in the order of grace; and then further, in her own degree she becomes the Eve of the heavenly Adam, "His helper like Himself,"¹ associated with His human life, His mysteries, His labours, His sorrows, His priesthood, and His sacrifice. She is like Him, and, so to speak, shares His office as witness and messenger of the Father, minister of grace and of eternal life, and victim for worship, redemption, and sanctification. In short, a Spouse according to the fullest meaning of the word, and the more perfectly she has left all things to attach herself to her Beloved, the more fully she enjoys her privileges.

Does not all this make us feel keenly what such a tie presupposes, nay, calls for, commands, and exacts, in the matter of chastity, whether corporal or spiritual? Chastity here becomes invested with the qualities of fidelity; of that fidelity of the heart which is in some respects even more important than that of the conscience, and of that conjugal fidelity which is the most sacred of all affections of the heart. Hence it is that any impure act, which we have already said is a sacrilege, becomes in this case

¹ Gen. ii. 20.

a positive act of adultery committed against Jesus Christ. But, putting aside so detestable a crime, and one which we may hardly name in the assembly of the saints, to what higher degree of perfection in the ways of Chastity will not a soul be impelled by the certainty that she is Spouse of the Son of God, the Son of a Virgin Mother, Jesus Christ our Lord, model and king of Virgins, and this above all if she has vowed complete and perpetual chastity?

“She that is married,” writes St. Paul, “thinketh how she may please her husband.” This is quite natural, and rather commanded than forbidden; but by this, as St. Paul says of the husband, “she is divided”; and this is the necessary condition of her being. But, on the contrary, “the unmarried woman,” the virgin and the Spouse of Christ, “thinketh on the things of the Lord”;¹ she can care for and attend to nothing but the affairs of God. She has no anxiety beyond pleasing Him, by being holy in body and mind, and growing every day in this double form of sanctity. In her Spouse she finds all delights. Just as by the vow of Poverty Jesus becomes her whole portion, so, when she vowed her Chastity to Him, He became her sole joy. She reserves herself for Him; except Himself, and all that comes from Him or leads to Him, she wishes for nothing on earth. It is true, her Spouse is absent from her sight, and in this respect she is a widow, though the widowhood is indeed only appa-

¹ 1. Cor. vii. 33, 34.

rent, for, so far from being dead, her Spouse is living a radiant and immortal life; but she is widowed as to her senses. She sees not, knows not, and may not touch Him whom she loves. She possesses Him only by faith, enjoys Him only in hope. This, however, is a subject not of complaint, but of triumph to her, for such a condition gives her the opportunity of both practising a more courageous and meritorious form of Chastity, and of showing a more disinterested love for Him who possesses her heart. Yes, she prefers giving up all joy in this world, and especially sensual joy. I do not only mean seeking it, which God forbid she should even think of, but even receiving it from any creature whatsoever, merely as a creature, that is, without reference to God. What matters it to her? Everything passes away save the One whom alone she cherishes. She knows what He is, where He is, and that infallibly, and soon, He must come and appear. She waits therefore in peace; and while waiting she keeps her mind fixed on Him she waits for. She contemplates Him, admires Him, compels herself to imitate Him, works at becoming like Him. She has read that He is a lily, and "feedeth among the lilies";¹ in other words, that being, as He is, true God, He lives only on victims—pure and spotless victims; and this is what she would always be, a perpetual feast for Him. Does she ever offend her Spouse? Perhaps, for with all her faith she is so weak; with all

¹ Cant. ii. 16.

her love so sorely tempted! But if she forgets, if she turns aside, if she falls—her fault, barely perceived, is drowned in a flood of such tears as make her appear more beautiful than if she had not wept.

All these things help to make her pure, and she takes care that everything around her shall contribute to her purity. Purity attracts her, a universal and divine purity. She feels that in this matter excess is impossible, that she will never reach the height of purity of which she dreams. She lives, therefore, on desire, on enthusiasm, on aspirations: her very labour is her peace. She purifies her body and her senses by making them every day more dependent on the spirit; so much so that even here below, as St. Cyprian writes, "this body begins to put on something of the spiritual and glorious state promised to the risen faithful." She purifies her conscience by scrupulously avoiding even the shadow of evil, and by never leaving the slightest weakness for a moment unpunished. She purifies her understanding by the perpetual practice of Faith, by constant consideration of supernatural realities, and by courageous renunciation of every recollection, thought, or occupation which does not tend towards the desired end. Lastly, she purifies her heart and soul by freeing herself at all cost, and keeping herself wholly detached from all creatures, and above all from herself, for she knows that this is the height of purity, because it is the supreme demand of love and the one condition of its full freedom. "I have "

(by my vows) "put off my garment" (that is, my earthly life), she says, with the great Spouse of the Canticle of Canticles; "how shall I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?"¹ Ah, rather, "My hands shall drop myrrh, and my fingers shall distil the choicest myrrh." You instinctively see, beneath these sweet and transparent symbols, the chaste, virginal, and divinely anointed life of a true Spouse of Christ.

This holy marriage of souls to the Son of God is in itself the very source of the highest and most excellent chastity in such of these souls as are faithful; it is the consummation of grace in us, and endows us with the most perfect faculties.

A husband, besides giving himself, brings a marriage portion to his wife. This portion, which may be, to begin with, only a pledge of affection, becomes afterwards a resource for daily life—sometimes the only resource. The spouse, or rather the union with him, is the happiness of the house; but the marriage portion provides its comforts, whence spring peace and safety. When the Word espoused His human nature, He followed this custom—we may even say this law—of all marriages: He brought His portion with Him. Now, it is of these gifts, of these graces, of these powers, of these supernatural goods, of innumerable beauties and unknown qualities with which this blessed humanity was adorned from the moment of its conception, in short, of this very

¹ Cant. v. 3 and 5.

humanity itself, that it has been said, "Many daughters have gathered together riches: thou hast surpassed them all."¹

But this was not enough. To a union so transcending all things as to be absolutely exceptional, there must correspond an endowment equally transcendent and exceptional. Where the Spouse was God Himself, and the union consequently was truly divine, the marriage portion too must be divine; and created gifts, no matter of what kind, could not duly correspond either to the love of such a husband, or to the dignity of such a wife, and of the life that, from the very nature of their union, she must live with Him and for Him. Hence, according to the unanimous opinion of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, what the Word truly gave as the marriage portion to His Humanity was the Holy Ghost, Who proceeds from Him as well as from the Father, and Who is in substance *the fulness of Sanctity*. Such was the living and eternal unction wherewith He anointed this nature He had assumed; such was the treasure He bestowed on it; such the inexhaustible source whence it was to draw life and energy for its sojourn in this world. This was why even though, as regards the Hypostatic Union, He had perfect possession of the Sacred Humanity for Himself—the Word never worked in it except by the Holy Spirit. Scripture asserts this several times in explicit terms, and speaks of it especially with regard

¹ Prov. xxxi. 29.

to His being led into the desert, and to His sacrifice on the cross.¹ But it was the same with all His acts; and it is an undoubted point in theology that Our Lord did nothing, as man, except by the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Now, this mystery of endowment is extended to us just as the union itself is. We, too, in espousing the Word, receive all sorts of created graces; we must do so, for, without it, all our powers remaining perfectly human, we should be incapable of treating supernaturally with God; of seeing Him, hearing Him, sharing His life, acting after His manner, or giving glory to Him. Our whole being, then, is adorned, enriched, and filled with those supernatural gifts which are as the jewels with which our heavenly Spouse decks us. But for us who are the members of His Humanity, as well as for His Humanity itself, this is not enough to content His love. He brings us, further—only in a measure, no doubt, but still really—and commits to our care, the sublime dowry of His divine Spirit. With the fruits, we possess the root; with the created gifts, the uncreated ones; with the bounties of love, love itself; so that by Jesus, in Jesus, and like Jesus, we have within ourselves, and for our own, the Holy Ghost, Who marks and informs our minds with His own character; according as it is written that “He who is joined to the Lord is one Spirit.”² And elsewhere: “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of

¹ Matt. iv. 1.

² Cor. vi. 17.

His ;”¹ and, again, that true Christians, the true brothers of Christ, and His members, “Whosoever are led by the Spirit of God,”² are the sons of God. This, then, thanks to Jesus Christ, is our appointed relation towards the Third and most adorable divine Person, who unites the Two Persons whence He proceeds, and completes the eternal development of the essential life of the Divinity. We are not merely resting-places or temples for Him ; we become His means of working, His agents, His organs. He is the living and permanent foundation of our supernatural state ; and He thus becomes the very principle of all the works which that holy state ought to bring forth. This is what Our Saviour calls “the fountain of water springing up into life everlasting.”³

It is this presence that constitutes our power ; but, clearly, such a power constitutes a duty for us. What duty ? The same duty as before (*i.e.* before Our Lord assumed our humanity), but now become much more imperious, more urgent, yet at the same time easier than ever ; the duty of being chaste, pure, virginal, heavenly, holy, and truly divine in all that we think, in all that we love, in all that we wish, or say, or do ; the duty of never acting, either inwardly or outwardly, under the influence of ill-regulated passions, or even under that of nature apart from grace ; the duty of being in everything, always, and at all costs, docile to that Spirit which

¹ Rom. viii. 9.

² *Ibid.* 14.

³ John iv. 14.

is in us only that It may reign—in short, the duty of never acting except in God, according to the sublime words of Our Lord: “But he that doth truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, because they are done in God.” That is—starting from God as our beginning—we are to tend towards Him as our end; and are to keep ourselves strictly within the thoughts and the wishes of God Himself, Who is our law and example. This is, distinctly, perfect Chastity: a constant state of the soul, St. Augustin writes, which keeps her in such good order that she never allows the superior part to become subject to the inferior; but, on the contrary, makes the Divine rule, invariably, the guide of the human.

God having decreed that His Word should live in a human form upon earth, chose that He should be brought forth and nourished there by a Virgin. This mystery of grace and union being extended to all Christians, and making of each one a true Christ, it seemed needful that every baptized person should also have a Virgin for Mother and Nurse. After Mary—after the Church—this divine Mother and indispensable Nurse of the Christian is, as you can now see, holy Chastity.

We have tried to set forth what Catholic theology teaches as to the state and the qualities of this being who is at once the subject and the object of Chastity. What, now, does it unfold to us of the nature, the perfections, and the attractions of that God Whose

love is the formal cause alike of the ordinary Chastity which He commands, and of the perfect Chastity which He counsels and inspires; while at the same time He imparts to both their Christian character, their eternal bearing, and their heavenly value? With the help of grace, let us look into this further question.

PART II

STUDY OF THE PERFECTIONS OF GOD, WHICH, BY
GAINING AND RETAINING OUR LOVE, CONFIRM
CHASTITY WITHIN US.

EVERY act which violates Chastity comes in its principle from a wandering of heart. Doubtless, when the heart lowers and forgets itself under the influence of those natural inclinations which it ought to control and master, as the higher reason of man controls and masters his speech; when love becomes concupiscence, handing over the entire soul to the ignoble tyranny of the senses; and when, consequently, the life of mere instinct, getting the upper hand of the will, guides and determines the choice of deeds, faults of impurity are committed with which the affections of the heart have no share; and such faults as these are, of course, the gravest and most shameful ones. But the first false steps, the first falls, made in this path are usually caused by a love that goes astray. It is not without a deep meaning that Chastity, under one of its chief aspects, is called *continence*, which means *containing*, in the sense of "holding in"; for its office, and consequently its very essence as a virtue, is to hold

in our love, which means to hold in our whole soul; for love is the weight of the soul, and draws it wherever it goes. By "holding in" love we understand keeping it in its proper place, which is a sublime place; preserving it in its integrity, restraining it within its own law, and not allowing it to work except for its true end and in its true sphere. Such is the work of Chastity. It does not contain the soul as one body contains another, but rather after the manner in which spirits contain anything; that is, exactly as our soul contains or holds in our body, being its integral principle, and the controlling force which prevents it from dissolving and falling into dust.

What is it that disturbs this order of things? What causes the heart to break away from the control of continence, and being no longer held in, to escape, become scattered abroad, and at last to lose itself—losing us, alas! with it? The history of prodigal hearts is too common among mankind not to be a very well-known history. What attracts the heart, and snatches it from the arms of Chastity, is always either some beauty that has seduced it, some love that has wounded it, or some joy that has intoxicated it. Often these three causes combined produce such disorders, but there are no other causes for them.

Now, if God is perfect Beauty, infinite Love, absolute Joy; if the soul knows this—can feel hourly more and more convinced of it, with that

certainty which almost amounts to sight—does her chastity then run the risk of perishing? Nay, does it not thus become—even carried to the extent of the counsels, and sealed by a vow—a duty? A duty moreover so rational, so urgent, so noble, at the same time so sweet, that it loses, as it were, the character of an obligation and puts on that of an actual deliverance; while in performing it, one seems less to be practising a virtue than profiting by a gift and enjoying, or relishing, a grace. St. Thomas implies this when he says that the great foundations of spiritual Chastity, and consequently what constitute its clearest light, its supreme law, its life, and the principle of its endurance, splendour, and fertility, are the theological virtues, and especially Charity.

But what is our God—the God of our Reason, the God of our Faith—if not the overflowing source of all beauty, the Being whence all beauty is derived and in which all beauty subsists—in short, Beauty itself?

Strange condition of man on earth! If one passion exists in him which is natural, deep-seated, and long lived, it is that of the Beautiful. The Beautiful lays hold of him with a strong grasp and carries him out of himself: not that every sort of beauty strikes all men in this way, but that there is no man who is not conscious of an overpowering charm in presence of the particular form of beauty which his own nature and education enable him to under-

stand; or who does not feel, with that delicious kind of stupor which is the essence of admiration, that sense of interior expansion which we call joy. We have only to look at his face at the moment such experiences cross his path: it lights up, and sometimes almost seems transformed, as if it were the property of beauty never to be looked at without causing the beholder to reflect something of itself.

This innate love of the Beautiful is one of the characteristics of human nature. It is in itself enough to place us scientifically in a class above the brute, which is incapable of such a sense. But it does still more, and better, than this: it acts as a lever that raises us to God, and is really in its essence one of the many forms of our fundamental capacity for being united with Him. It is more than an ornament: it is an instrument, a mark of our origin; it points to our true end, and gives us an impetus in the right direction for reaching it. It must do so; for when we consider the natural forms that fill the universe—forms, some of which are absolutely ravishing, and none without beauty—reason alone tells us that these are but signs expressing realities that are greater, and, on that very account, more perfect. The artificial forms which try to imitate these natural ones are never anything but the expression, such as it is, of an ideal conceived by some intelligence. What, then, can the works of the Divine Artist be if not the signs of His thoughts? The Holy Spirit tells us so in the

book of Wisdom: "With Whose beauty if they, being delighted, took them to be gods, let them know how much the Lord of them is more beautiful than they; for the first author of beauty made all those things. Or if they admitted their power and their effects, let them understand by them, that He that made them is mightier than they; for by the greatness of the beauty, and of the creature, the Creator of them may be seen, so as to be known thereby."¹

Thus, all external beauty is a sort of witness that God gives of Himself here below, a veil in which He enwraps Himself—a shadow of His beneficent presence—a call from His voice—a bait thrown by His hand—a sweet and tender invitation—even a sigh of love that His Heart lets escape towards us. Thus, without being taught, we know that the Beautiful is only *the form of the Good*; and hence it is that we not only admire, but love it, feeling for it a double attraction; as if God, the better to reveal Himself and to strengthen our purpose, stretched forth both His arms to us in every created Beauty beneath which He lies hid.

Alas! alas! and yet again alas! for it is the great sadness of this earth, and the shame of humanity, that out of the means we make the obstacle—the bait turns to poison—creatures become our snare. What should show God to us is just what hides Him; what was meant to preach Him to us leads

¹ Wisdom xiii. 3, 4, 5.

us to forget Him ; what had begun to give Him to us ends by making us lose Him altogether. In short, the chief and often successful rival of the supreme and eternal Beauty is the least and most ephemeral of all beauties—that of the body. But, in point of fact, this disorder is one whose horrible frequency no more excuses its injustice than it covers its unreasonableness ; for it is, in reality, a disorder contrary to nature itself, and does violence to reason even more than it outrages faith. All creatures are truly, by right, revelations of God, His ambassadors ; and this is an obvious fact to all souls of good-will.

Therefore, let us follow our nature ; I mean our *good* nature, the one that God made, and that sin has been powerless to unmake. Above all, let us follow our grace, which, originally a movement to us from God, has now become an impulse in us towards Him, endowing us with a divine capacity for knowing Him. Sure of being powerfully helped by Him, since we never seek Him except because He seeks us first, and since He desires to disclose Himself to us far more ardently than we can wish to behold Him, we may take all these created images of Him that are so attractive as so many means afforded us of humbly, patiently, and lovingly studying His beauty. Though His face remains, and must remain, hidden for the present, so many rays escape from it through His creation, that it will end by ceasing to be strange to us. And if He Himself

declares, as we read in the holy books, that it is, before all things, His beauty that establishes His empire, then this is because such of our hearts as are conquered by it, have had at least a glimpse of it. Does not the Spouse of the Canticles say, in speaking of Him, that He stands behind a "lattice."¹ Perhaps by this "lattice" is meant a stone wall, perhaps only a trellis; but even if it is a stone wall, it is one that opens here and there, since, by the very testimony of the Holy Spirit, God looks at us through these openings. Who knows, then, that some day or other our eyes may not meet His? As we cannot see Him clearly here below, what a comfort for us to see at least something of Him! What a gain for our love; what a focus, what a defence, and what a spur to our chastity!

Let us, then, study the beauty of God first in that visible world that surrounds us, whence it shines forth in all directions. Let us gaze on it in the splendour of day, in the deep and majestic peace of night, in the earth so richly adorned, in the vast ocean, in the immense firmament peopled by the stars with their marvellous evolutions. Let us behold it in that fulness of created life which is like the soul of the universe, and is perpetually giving birth to fresh productions. Let us see it, still more radiant, in that indescribable harmony of nature which causes all varieties to combine, all contrasts to agree, and disorder itself to be only the servant of order; so

¹ Cant. Canticorum ii. 9.

that the whole of creation, by the attraction, interweaving, and completion of all things, makes one melodious concert. We need have no fear, in pursuing this study, lest the spectacle of sensible things should mislead or even distract us; when we learn to seek God purely and sincerely in nature, she will become to us what she really is in herself—holy and sanctifying; and not only shall we remain virgins in mind and heart through contemplating her, but we shall become more and more virginal as we see her more clearly.

Still, we must go beyond this elementary world, which, according to Christian Philosophy, is after all only that of the *footprints* of God. Beautiful as all the creatures it comprises may appear to us, they are really nothing more, in relation to the Divine Beauty, than what—for example—the blessed marks of Jesus' and Mary's feet were on the sands of Palestine. We must rise in our thoughts up to those spiritual creatures who, being closer to God, are like His very shadows and mirrors, or even His actual likeness. As regards the Angels, despite the certain and most precious lights which Catholic theology sheds for us on their nature and state, it is perhaps a little difficult for most of us to contemplate God in these magnificent and blessed Spirits. If it could be given to us to see Him reflected by the least amongst them, we should possess a knowledge of Him far above that which the most perfect knowledge of the material world

could produce in us. But, without going above our own level, we may see God in His created spirits by looking at *souls*—at our own, and at those of our brethren. What masterpieces are here! What a manifestation of Divine power and what a book to study, even when looked at only in the order of nature; still more so when we come to consider these masterpieces—their state, their life, their history—in the order of grace. And when they reach the life of glory, what will not the sight be? Let us consider God in the souls of the saints; of the patriarchs; of the apostles, martyrs, confessors, and virgins. Looking at Him first in each one separately, we will go on to contemplate Him in that marvellous society formed by their union, and we shall see that the beauty of this heaven formed of living and loving hearts unutterably surpasses that of the visible heavens.

We must not stop even here; making an effort to reflect on God even as He is in Himself, we may study the beauty of His understanding; and is not this a form of beauty fraught with most seductive power? The greatness and the astonishing multiplicity of the works of God; the science they display; the unequalled art that shines forth in them; the wise and powerful laws that regulate them; the simplicity, calmness, inflexibility, and, at the same time, true sweetness with which the universe and its inhabitants, especially those possessed of free-will, are governed; all these things cannot fail to give

some idea of that incomprehensible understanding. Again, the beauty of God may be studied in His character, which opens another wonderful and ravishing view of Him; and, in order to pursue this study, whatever we know of the personal acts of this adorable God, of His modes of procedure, of what Holy Scripture calls His *ways*, and what we might perhaps name His customs, should be called to mind over and over again. All His manners of being, so to speak—His habits of living and working with regard to small and great, weak and strong, saints and sinners, friends and enemies—should be thought over. What nature is to His works, the sacred books and the whole supernatural history of mankind are to His character. They are like two editions, or rather two parts of one and the same Bible—the great Bible of the Divine Nature. The first of these revelations shows us, in the intellectual order, something infinitely superior to genius; the second discloses, in the moral order, something immeasurably surpassing heroism. To speak of genius is to call up an image of flashing, rapid illuminations—of sudden intuitions; to speak of heroism is to awaken the idea of conspicuous, surpassing, and extraordinary actions. There is nothing like either in God: both intelligence and character are unspeakably sublime; but everything in Him is also simple, unchangeable, uniform, continuous, peaceful, everything working in its own order, firmly and persistently; and hence St. James has written that in the “Father of lights

there is no change, nor shadow of alteration";¹ still less is there the smallest sign of effort, or of anything approaching laboriousness.

Next, we may study one by one those countless Divine perfections which we are compelled by the weakness of our understanding to think of separately, though reason itself proves that they must really all be identical, being, as they are, simply that one and only Perfection which is God Himself. It is impossible to reflect on these for one single hour without coming to understand that each of them is a treasure, a little world apart, of beauty, truth, goodness, and life; that each one exhibits some special aspect of the absolute beauty of God: some feature, so to speak, of His physiognomy—for surely we need not doubt that He has one. Does not Holy Scripture speak to us in innumerable places of His "Face" and His "Countenance"? which expressions must evidently be understood of His whole appearance, of all that will be seen when we behold Him. And how could He, who has given to every creature its proper form, be without a form Himself? Let us not doubt that He has one, and one so special to Himself that it distinguishes Him absolutely from all that is not Himself, even from whatever may bear the strongest likeness to Him among His works. True, God is a pure spirit: nevertheless, it would be a great mistake to imagine that His beauty is only of a *moral* kind, in the sense we

¹ 1 James i. 17.

are used to attach to that word; God has a *physical* beauty of His own, and, logically speaking, this beauty comes first in Him; for He is beautiful in what He *does*, only because of being, before all things, beautiful in what He *is*. Ah, poor children of Adam that we are, we may exhaust ourselves in imagining perfect lines, curves full of grace, colours at once bright and soft; or, again, delicately turned musical phrases, harmonies whose divers parts combined produce the most exquisitely melodious whole. We may climb to the very topmost peak of all the ideals that sense can form, far beyond every masterpiece that nature or art has ever presented to our eyes; and, further, we may abstract from all these, in thought, the imperfection that must of necessity accompany every created thing. Having done this, and so having formed as nearly true a conception of perfect beauty as we can compass here below, we can go on to fill our minds with the inevitable truth that if all these things exist outside of us, or even within us, that is, in our understanding, and if even there they are wonderful, it is because their type exists in God, and because God is the complete and perfect model of them, so that when we see Him in heaven we shall enjoy the accumulated delight which the elements of sensible beauty—whether separate or united—give us in this world, together with other delights, a thousand times more exquisite, of which we have not even a foreshadowing. David says it: “I shall be satisfied when Thy

glory shall appear,¹ filled—inundated—overflowing with wonder, love, and happiness, for we shall be face to face with an incomparable Form—the true and adequate form of absolute good. We shall see an unspeakable splendour that is unspeakably sweet, an exquisite purity, an unequalled grace, a full and grand harmony, a perfect unity: and all these combined will make one magnificent symphony with Unity—living, essential, eternal Unity—for its theme, for ever expanding and reaching out into infinity: and this is Beauty.²

Is this thought so high as to be inaccessible? It is certainly not so either to faith, to prayer, or to love. Above all, it is not so to Virginity, which is permitted to see things invisible to the crowd. If, however, any one finds it too high as yet, let this not cause discouragement or sadness. What is closed to us this morning may be opened this evening; what escapes us to-day may be grasped to-morrow. But even though, up to that unknown hour when we are destined to enter into the full enjoyment of God, we were to have this purely divine world hidden from us, yet He would not have left us without means of satisfying that innate craving we feel for a beauty above us which, by fixing our hearts on itself, shall be a safeguard to our chastity. God was made flesh, and henceforth He *is* flesh for Eternity. The personal beauty

¹ Psalm xvi. 15.

² “Unity is the Form of all beauty.”—ST. AUG.

of God, which is His "Word"—the One whom Scripture calls "the brightness of Eternal light and the image of His goodness;"¹ also, "the brightness of His glory, and the figure of His substance;"² the Eternal Son of the Father—has been seen on earth; He has made Himself man like us, and has had His dwelling amongst us. Let us, then, gaze on God in His authentic place so to speak, where He has come on purpose to show Himself. Let us look at Him through that Humanity of Jesus, which is too perfectly possessed by His Divinity, too holy, too pure, not to be most transparent. Ah! these are the "lattices" of the Canticles, the lattices through which God, present and living, looks at, treats with, and speaks to His creatures. Neither nature, nor art, nor even the apparition of an angel could reveal or express God as does this sacred Humanity. True, we have not seen it, and cannot see it with the bodily eye; but we need not complain of this, or be too ready to envy the lot of Our Lord's contemporaries in His passing life on earth. How many were there who saw Jesus bodily, and who yet neither admired, loved, nor recognised Him? "The flesh profiteth nothing."³ Certainly He was "beautiful among the sons of men;"⁴ beautiful as none but a God could be, so that we wonder how His divinity can ever have been doubted. It was, in fact, because this beauty was too holy to be discovered by all

¹ Wisdom vii. 26.

³ John vi. 64.

² Heb. i. 3.

⁴ Ps. xlv. 3.

men indifferently, as common beauty may be; a right heart, faith of heart, purity of heart, were indispensable conditions for rightly discerning it; and the divers degrees of these virtues gave the divers measures of this vision. What Jesus was, for example, to His most holy Mother, that He was to no one else; what He was to His intimate friends, that he was not to strangers; what He was to the just, the pure, the humble, and the believing, He could not be to the incredulous, the proud, the impure, or the sinner. Now, when, by the help of either received types, or descriptions that certain ancient histories have given, or private revelations, or even the works born of Christian genius, we form interior images of the Saviour, we are distinctly, with regard to the real beauty and efficaciousness of this divine image, in a situation analogous to that of the contemporaries of Jesus. The thing of chief importance here is our own moral state; and the more Christ becomes formed in us, as St. Paul says,¹ the more we become like Him in spirit, heart, and conduct, the more grace, and power of imagining Him as He is, we shall obtain in prayer.

Well, then, in the midst of that most inward light which invariably shines in the depths of every baptized soul, let us contemplate this God-made man. We must first, undoubtedly, gaze at His interior beauty; that of His human mind and His sacred Heart; at His inimitable character, and at

¹ Galat. iv. 19.

that whole indescribable "moral physiognomy" which stands forth from the Gospel pages reverently studied and understood. But we must go on to contemplate His wonderful body, assuredly the most perfect of all bodies—all chaste, all virginal, all beaming with holiness as well as with beauty. Behold in succession His Feet, His Hands, His opened Side, His Eyes, His Lips, His Forehead, His whole Face! Follow Jesus into all the mysteries and all the states of His life: see Him a child at Bethlehem, sleeping in His crib or lying in Mary's arms; a growing boy working with Joseph, a young man, formed and perfect. Gaze at Him, on Thabor, in the Cenacle, and again on Calvary, where, in proportion as His exterior beauty becomes faded, His interior beauty increases and shines forth; so that at no time is He spiritually so beautiful as when He has, so to speak, hardly a human form. Merely to seek for Him thus is one of the sweetest pleasures the soul can taste on earth; but when, by dint of faith, humility, desire, confidence, patience, and love, we deserve at last to catch such a glimpse of Him as may be caught even through the mists of earth, we shall then be able to bear witness whether or not our heart is melted, conquered, and won over in all holiness to His service. Yes! His beauty establishes His empire. It is this that gained that chaste Spouse of the Canticles who, when she once begins to talk of the beauty of her Spouse, knows not where to end, so completely is she, as it were,

carried beyond herself, and unable to refrain from proclaiming aloud and before all men how marvellous is all that she sees when she considers Him as He is! Again, it was this Divine beauty that had won the Virgin Agnes when, with the accent of triumph, she cried out, "What would you have of me? I have already a Spouse who loves me and whom I love. The Bridegroom who has my faith is He whom the angels serve, and whose beauty the stars of heaven wonder at. I love the Christ, born of a Virgin Mother and of a Virgin God; when I love Him, I am chaste; when I touch Him, I am pure; and when I espouse Him, I am more truly a Virgin than ever!"

Let us be sure, then, that a serious and devout study of the Beauty of God, whether in His works, or in Himself, or in His Word made flesh—in Jesus is one of the greatest secrets of the spiritual life, because being one of the most burning centres of love, it is consequently a powerful and infallible incentive to Chastity.

Still, whatever may be the power of Beauty for attracting and attaching the heart of man, it can hardly do this lastingly except in as far as the love that it calls forth is accepted and returned. A beauty without heart or life, such as that of purely material beings, may charm the imagination and cause some joy to the mind; but, if we put aside that low concupiscence which is really only the passion of proprietorship roused by things of

this kind, such beauty calls forth nothing but a feeling of admiration, which, so far from exhausting all that the heart has to give, is but a mere movement of its surface. A beauty that is living and intelligent, but yet devoid of goodness, at first shocks, as though it were something out of order; and, in some cases, ends by so irritating the heart that repulsion grows into actual hatred. As has been said, nature requires beauty to be good; this is its law, and we cannot see it violated without suffering. But though it may be enough for our understanding that what is beautiful should be good in itself, our heart can be gained only by goodness which is concerned with us; which is beneficent, or at least benevolent, in our regard: which, in short, is a being that *loves us*.

Is this the case with the Divine Beauty? In itself, it is incontestably a beauty that expresses infinite goodness; goodness is its foundation, its principle, its substance. But have we any claim on its goodness? Is it good to us? Does it love us? Our hearts have given an answer to this question almost before it was asked. Every creature who is not blind or ungrateful will reply, "Yes." Who then can have so much right to make this answer as man? Not merely humanity in general; but every member of the race, every child born of woman, whatever may be his worth, his rank, his state. Every man, personally, is the object of a true love on the part of the Sovereign Beauty of

which we have tried to speak; the object of an incomparable Love, possessing the dimensions and perfections of the Being Who has conceived it.

There is no need to speak in detail here of the general characteristics of this strange love: it is manifestly gratuitous, generous, magnificent; it is merciful, sympathetic, patient, disinterested, devoted, inexhaustible, and unconquerable. But it is of consequence to remark one special point, which, in the order of things we are considering, is the most practically important for us; and that is, that this love has all the characteristics, the intimacy, the ardour, and the tenderness, of the love of a spouse. It is with such a love as this that God (as He exists in this attribute of indescribable beauty) has loved each one of us from all eternity, with a love of desire and of deliberate will. All His other modes of loving man, for example, in His capacity of Creator, of Master, of Father, or even of Friend, tend towards and are summed up in this particular love: and hence it is that all the acts which His love for us causes Him to perform, only go to prepare, confirm, and bring about that Union which is the ultimate aim, and also the repose, of that supreme love.

Meditation on this dogma—for it really is one—brings the Christian soul face to face with a veritable abyss, an abyss whose depths none but the soul of Jesus, and after Him the soul of Mary, have sounded. But whoever has not come at least to

the brink of it, knows neither the gift of God nor God Himself; and whoever, having been as far as this, has not gone on to gaze into the immeasurable gulf, has not profited as he ought by the gift. Infinite Beauty has the love of a spouse for every living man! Nothing can reveal to us more clearly than this fact, the absolute power of love: for the consequence of the indisputable fact of which we are speaking is that, even in God, Love rules all. Indeed, what means God's loving His creatures and giving Himself to them by the title of Spouse, but that the Universal is made particular, that the Infinite comes in some sense to have a beginning, that immensity reduces itself to the realisation of what seems an impossible thing? Now this impossible thing, Love has done. "My beloved to me,"¹ says the Spouse triumphantly. God is my own private possession just as I am His: He belongs to me as if He belonged to no one else. From this perfect gift, on which a whole state of being—and an eternal one—is founded, spring those sacred flames of which Jesus Christ said: "I am come to cast fire on the earth, and what will I but that it should be kindled?"² and with the flames spring up flowers of life, and of tenderness, such as remind us of David's prophecies of heaven: "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house;"³ and of that other word of Jesus to the Samaritan woman: "If thou didst know the gift of God, and who he is

¹ Cant. ii. 16.

² Luke xiii. 49.

³ Ps. xxxv. 9.

that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldst perhaps have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water;”¹ and of yet another saying, even more sublime if possible, which, being the last word of the last discourse that Jesus made, seems to be the last work of His heart: “Father! that the love, wherewith thou hast loved Me, may be in them, and I in them.”²

All this shows how that personal, burning, tender love of God for His poor human creatures was manifested to us in and through Jesus Christ, like many other of His Divine perfections and operations. We need not even go so far as to remember that, Christ being personally the Bridegroom, it is He Himself Who utters all those sayings in the book of Canticles to the happy Bride; a soul ever so little enlightened and given to the interior life cannot help seeing a ray of that priceless love shoot across the atmosphere in which she lives, when she thinks of Jesus weeping over the death of Lazarus, or allowing His beloved Disciple to repose on His breast at the Last Supper, or saying to the despairing Magdalen in the garden of the Resurrection, “Mary!” It is such things as these that we have called “Divine familiarities,” and which we must acknowledge to be adorable. Any single one of them would more than suffice for the glory and happiness of a whole lifetime, though it were as long as those of the patriarchs; but, for the honour

¹ John iv. 10.

² Ibid. xvii. 26.

of His own heart, and the consolation of ours, God has not only made these familiarities frequent: He has made them regular and even obligatory—obligatory to Himself as far as possible, and quite so to us. In short, it has pleased Him to make a real *institution* of them—the chief and central institution of His religion and His worship, and by that very fact a universal and perpetual one. The Eucharist, which every Christian is bound to receive, is the appointed witness, the customary official practice, the inestimable daily gift, of that conjugal love by which God unites Himself personally to each one of us, with a closeness impossible to any other union on earth.

Now, what is the natural effect of such a love, so expressed? and what is the answer of the heart well inclined to God's law, which sees its Maker loving it to such a degree? True, our soul is not infinite; nevertheless, so numberless, varied, and extensive are the powers with which God has endowed her that by their means she can conceive all things, and up to a certain point even God Himself; and not only does she conceive them by her understanding, but she keeps their images, or the ideas she has formed of them, in her memory, and by her will—which finds rest and pleasure in them—she embraces all those beings dwelling within her knowledge and made present to her by remembrance: and hence the soul herself is called a world. When, therefore, amid so many sights disclosed to her view by her

reason, senses, and faith, she sees that incomprehensible God, already the object of her wonder and adoration, as it were concentrating all His attributes in that one attribute of Love; and then, further, concentrating this prodigious love upon her—poor weak creature that she is, so that He may give Himself to her as entirely as the bridegroom does to the bride, she not only melts with tenderness, surprise, and gratitude, as is related of the Spouse in the Canticles; but, in imitation of Him whom she beholds, she also reduces the whole army of powers within her, nay, even her external faculties, to the simple one of love; and this love she consecrates, vows, appropriates, and delivers over to God alone. In respect of earth and of time, this may indeed be called a sacrifice; but whosoever beholds it from the heights of heaven, or in the light that streams thence, will see in it only an act of justice fulfilled, and, still more, an indescribable grace received. Can we, then, fail to understand, how, by the mere existence of this reciprocal love, such a soul is wholly chaste, that chastity has become the inward law and the absolute necessity of her life, and, consequently, her habitual and invariable condition? She is more than chaste, she is virginal; she is more than virginal, she is holy: and all this is the work of Beauty giving itself to her in Love!

Beauty is the vestibule of love, but joy is its sanctuary. There is nothing that the soul so covets as joy; this is what she hopes for in beauty and

wishes to find in love. Everything else she merely traverses, seeking her rest beyond. Joy is her end, and she tends, even hastens, towards it by a law of her being. Her whole nature is set in this direction, and goes straight towards it as though to a centre. The soul desires joy so passionately, that, rather than fail to find it at all she will seek it in forbidden pleasures—that is, in evil—and will actually snatch it thence. This longing is a positive fire, lighted in us by nature herself; and the endless griefs of this world, so far from extinguishing or diminishing it, only serve to stir it up; for, to the afflicted soul, the supreme hope of consolation and deliverance is added to the other attractions of joy. But just as fire, which is all-helpful and beneficent when burning within our sight and under control, becomes the most terrible of forces if left to itself unwatched, so does this passion of joy, which powerfully impels us towards God when enlightened and controlled by faith, drag us inevitably down to the depths of ruin and death, the moment it is allowed to become independent of faith and reason, and merely to follow the instinct of its own vehemence. If it were possible for beauty and love united *not* to produce joy by their relations with any being, that being would not be restrained by beauty and love; he would become disgusted with them—he would turn away and flee from them with a feeling that they had betrayed him—that is, with contempt and anger. But when, according to the true order of

things, beauty and love produce their natural fruit of joy, the soul is incapable of resistance: she cannot get away, being chained by that "triple tie" which Scripture says "cannot easily be broken."¹ Hence, if a soul does but come to see and know that, as God is in Himself Beauty and Love, so He is also Joy—perfect, whole, inexhaustible, and eternal joy—it becomes impossible to her to part from Him, or to help adhering entirely to Him, unceasingly and with her full strength.

Nothing short of madness would make any one actually deny that God is absolute joy, nor, again, that this joy is communicable; all who have the happiness of being Christians believe and profess that He truly wills to communicate it to us, and has even promised to do so. But however firm an assurance of this we may have within us, our hearts suffer; and as this joy is only to come, and the certainty of having bread—even to satiety—tomorrow does not satisfy the hunger of to-day, we are all inclined, while we wait, to complain.

Suppose it were the case that all happiness of mankind were postponed to the future: who would even then dare to find cause for scandal or murmuring? Had Adam, while innocent, not been placed at once in the earthly paradise, but been obliged to earn the unspeakable happiness of entering in, and possessing the essential joy of God, by hard work and privation for a time of all sensible joys, would

¹ Eccles. iv. 12.

it have been a severe or unjust condition? Certainly not; since for him as well as for us, there is not the shadow of a proportion between those tribulations of a few days, and the eternal happiness which is to be their price. And, if this would have been true of Adam, while just and innocent, how much truer must it be of his sinful children! In fact, if the price of heaven were much higher than in fact it is, our lot would still be beautiful and the mercy of God magnificent. And what mean, wretched, even false and corrupt joys man is only too glad to pay for here below by the most wearisome delays, and by sacrifices that are far more painful than those we make for the sake of heavenly bliss!

But is it the case that earth is nothing but a place of desolation and mourning? Is it true that this life is nothing but a succession of unmingled evils, without relief or compensation? Does God really forbid or grudge us every sort of satisfaction, everything cheering, every kind of pleasure? and do Christians, especially, see the days of their pilgrimage go by without ever being allowed to taste one drop of that divine joy whose substantial source—as their faith teaches them—is within themselves?

God said to Abraham, "Try to count the stars";¹ let us try to count the joys God has given us. "He opens His hand," says the Psalmist, "and fills every living creature with blessing."² It was at the very beginning of the world that He thus opened His

¹ Gen. xv. 5.

² Ps. cxliv. 16.

hand, and from that time—even after sin came—He has not closed it for one second. There are days of rain; but how many days of sunshine! There are rough winters; but what flowery springs and fruitful autumns! There are some frightful noises, but what sweet songs of birds, and what delightful harmonies throughout nature! And above this lower world, through which God himself so often smiles at us, what other and greater joys there are! Who can tell those, for example, of science, art, or industry? Who can speak of those springing from family ties, from friendship, from love? Yet all these do but belong to the natural order of good things, common to the whole of humanity, without distinction of race, country, social position, or even moral state; for the Gospel says, and we are witnesses of its truth: “Your Father who is in heaven, who maketh His sun to rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and unjust.”¹ Yes; all this, cries St. Augustin, “is the consolation of the wretched and even of the reprobate; it is not the reward of the elect.” But then, he goes on, “if these consolations are such, so many, and so excellent, what will be that reward?”

Without mounting as far as this, let us look at the joys poured forth even in this world by the divine hand, in the order of grace—that order opened to us by Baptism, wherein we dwell up to our last hour. By rights, sin is no longer there: if

¹ Matt. v. 45.

in one sense we say that it enters in (for sin, as such, does not exclude the baptized man from the Church), it is only that it may be forgiven and destroyed; and who can fail to see that the disappearance of sin means the appearance of joy and the beginning of its reign? In fact, joy does more than begin to reign in the order of grace—though, of course, in respect of our promised happiness, it is but a prelude: its reign increases and is strengthened every day, till at last, in faithful souls, it obtains calm and undisputed sway. All Christianity is simply a joy. Do not the prophets of the old alliance always represent its appearance as an era of joy? And when it comes into the world, with Jesus, does not the infallibly truthful voice of Heaven itself immediately announce to the shepherds—“Behold, we bring you tidings of great *joy*, which shall be to all people:”¹ first to yourselves, and then to all living and yet to come? Jesus, born at Bethlehem; *He* is the joy of God Itself, come down upon earth; and Jesus comes but to give Himself. He is the source of that river, which, says David, rapid as a torrent, “maketh the city of God joyful”²—that is, Holy Church. The Spirit, again, which consecrates and fills that Church on the day of Pentecost, when, finally ripening, she yields her first-fruits: this Holy Spirit is an unction of joy, “the oil of gladness,”³ as He Himself declares; and the Church, filled with this unction,

¹ Luke ii. 10.

² Ps. xlv. 5.

³ Ps. xlv. 8.

works only to create bliss. Exactly in proportion as she propagates sanctity she also propagates happiness. Looked at rightly, the whole life of the Church is simply a feast; she calls every one of her days a *feria*, which means a holiday, a time of leisure and rejoicing; and hence she is always singing. What other society does such a thing—would ever have dreamt of doing it, or could have done it? Yet for nineteen centuries this divine society has never ceased singing, and so she will continue to do till the end of the world. And song, with her, is not a mere pastime or a pleasure that she takes or gives at her own times and seasons; it is a need, a duty, and one that is always required and always fulfilled; it is her regular speech and one form of her worship. Her children used to sing in the catacombs—they have sung on scaffolds—they always sing over biers. They will never sing so much or with such joyful hearts as when they look, across the ruins heaped up by Antichrist, towards the East, there at last to salute the coming of the perfect and final redemption. What a sign! What a revelation and a privilege! Joy is not merely the aim of the Church and the goal she points out to us all: it enters into her very constitution, and actually forms her chief work.

Nay, more: from a word often repeated by St. Paul,¹ we might conclude that it is one of her laws,

¹ Philipp. iii. 1.

and a primary law for all who can understand it; it might even be proved that all morality may be reduced to this, and that joy is at once the sum and the summit of our duties. But this prescribed joy is first made by the Church and then given by her to whoever will take it. Does not joy naturally spring from the lights that she sheds on the world by her doctrine, from the views she opens up, from the hopes that she establishes and nourishes, the pardons she grants, the treasures of all kinds that she dispenses, the Sacraments she administers, and the Sacrifice she offers; from the prayers she sends up to God, the numberless mercies she shows to man, the liberty she gives back to him, and the peace she secures for him? "My Lord!" sang the Royal Prophet, "how great is the multitude of thy sweetness, which thou hast hidden for them who fear thee!"¹ All Scripture is full of the recital of these joys, tasted by the servants and children of God. They are both unspeakable and innumerable—joys of heart, of mind, of conscience, of the whole soul; joys even of the senses, such as those of the external culture afforded by nature and art; inward joys, again, still more keen, because of being higher in their aim, more chaste and sober in their objects. And what can we say of Christian joys? There are private, public, social, and even universal ones. In their nature, all these joys are unchangeable, and the gifts of God are without repentance. The world

¹ Ps. xxx. 20.

can have no concern in them, save to envy them when it is not too blind to believe in them: hell itself is powerless to snatch them from us; sin alone can first disturb our enjoyment of them, and take them away altogether when our fall is complete. But none sin, save those who will: and a fault has but to be regretted and acknowledged to be forgiven; and then there results in the reconciled soul an increase of love and joy, a great exultation throughout the Church in heaven.

Such is the triumphant power of this joy that God gives to His own, and which becomes at last their ordinary condition on earth, that it not only resists sorrow, though besieged by it on all sides, but even transforms it, seizing upon it at first as fire seizes on wood; then drawing it in, appropriating, and finally, as it were, identifying itself with it. Elsewhere it has been said that one learns to be happy in grief and to enjoy suffering. But where, outside ourselves—outside God's own family and God Himself—are such lasting, strong, victorious joys to be found? Our adorable Saviour has said, "Can we gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?"¹ In the order of nature such a thing is impossible, and could only happen by a miracle: in the order of grace it is a daily fact. Yes, since the thorns that Adam's sin planted in the soil of earth were used to crown the blessed head of Jesus and to pierce His virginal flesh, thorns produce grapes,

¹ Matt. vii. 16.

and figs are gathered from thistles. And just because of the supernatural growth of these fruits, their taste is more delicious than if they had ripened on their natural stems. Is not that Sacrament of joy—that embodiment of all other Christian joys—that more than Angelic Bread, “having in it all that is delicious and the sweetness of every taste”¹—the Eucharist, which came forth from the sacrifice and the bleeding cross of Jesus, greater than any grape or fig growing on thorny bushes? And if the whole substance of our joy consists in grace, does not all grace flow from the Passion of Jesus? Yes, to be afflicted with Jesus must from henceforth remain the sweetest thing on earth; and to suffer for His name is to have floods of joy let in upon one’s soul. “They went away full of joy,” is said of the Apostles, unjustly cited before the tribunal of their country; and why were they joyful? “Because they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus.”² And St. Paul, who was not present on this occasion, but for whom it was reserved to suffer yet more than the others for that Name, says: “I am filled with comfort; I exceedingly abound with joy in all my tribulation.”³

Even to this degree, then, it is that we enter, as the Gospel says, into the joy of Our Lord. For if God gives us joys, it is all because He is Himself Joy in His very essence, just as He is beauty and love

¹ Wisd. xvi. 20.

² Acts v. 41.

³ 2 Cor. vii. 4.

by essence. Grace, according to St. Peter, is a participation in the Divine Nature; and since for God to exist and to be happy are one and the same thing, therefore we cannot share His nature without sharing His joy; and the more perfectly we become participators in the one, the more do we become so in the other. What a light does not this throw on our lives and our ways! What a principle of action! what a rule and safeguard! what a spur to perseverance! Our Christian joys here are the first rays of that eternal joy which is God Himself: the sign of His presence, the effect of His love, the fruit of His union with us. God showed this vision to St. Augustin that it might, by winning him, complete his conversion:—

“There was discovered to me on that part towards which I turned my face, though as yet I trembled to pass over, the chaste dignity of Continency, serene and modestly cheerful, kindly enticing me to come forward, and to fear nothing, and stretching forth her loving hands to receive and embrace me, full of whole crowds of good examples. There were great numbers of boys and girls; there was a multitude of young men and maidens and persons of all ages; grave widows and women grown old in virginity; all these souls were chaste, and in none of them was this chastity barren, but rather like a fruitful mother, begetting in them a multitude of true joys, as so many fruits she owed to Thy love, O God, Who art her Spouse.”

This experience of Divine joys may go very far even on earth; so far, indeed, that the Saints of God have sometimes been heard to cry out to Him, "It is too much, O Lord, too much! stop—spare me—or I must die!" But even carried to this height, which becomes excess, present joy can never be anything but the shadow of that which is divinely promised to whosoever shall have had the strength and wisdom to be holily happy here below, and to cling faithfully to Christian joys, disdaining all others. Could one be rapt in ecstasy like St. Teresa, or spiritually intoxicated like St. Francis, it must still remain true that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God hath prepared for those who love Him."¹

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

OF OBEDIENCE



OF OBEDIENCE

THERE is an equal charm in seeking out and difficulty in defining, what must have passed within the Soul of Jesus Christ, at the moment when, being drawn forth from nothing, by Divine Omnipotence, it experienced, at the same time with the consciousness of its own existence, that of its personal union with the Word of God. Though born into this transitory life, and for the express purpose of leading such a life, nevertheless this Soul enjoyed from the first—at least in its superior part—the heavenly Life of the Blessed and the Vision which is the essence of that life. To exist; to be hypostatically united to the Word; to see God face to face with a perfection which none other of the Blessed will ever attain to—all was one and the same thing for the Sacred Humanity; and to bring all this about an instant was enough. It need scarcely be said that no words can adequately express what took place at that moment. The Soul of Jesus must have been instantly and wholly enraptured. Beholding God at once in His nature and in His gifts—that is, in Himself and in itself—it forthwith darted towards Him with a movement so spontaneous, so impetuous,

and so direct; it embraced Him with such vigour, and united itself to Him so ardently, that this second and voluntary union was as nearly as possible the same as that hypostatic union which had preceded it and brought it about; so that the unequalled grace conferred could not have been met by a more perfect correspondence from any created being whatsoever.

Outside Himself, God had never before been so much loved, not even by Mary, at the moment in which she surrendered herself fully to the adorable mystery of Our Lord's Incarnation. That first act of love from Jesus to His Father corresponded exactly to the perfect lovableness of the Divine Nature. But if all the essential characteristics of love are necessarily contained in this supreme act, there was yet one of these which probably dominated the others, especially at this first moment and in consequence of that first look whose immediate and unavoidable effect it seems to be—and this is the characteristic of adoration.

The Soul of Jesus saw all things in God. But this soul was a creature, and this was enough to cause it to be more struck by the absolute and surpassing dominion of the One thus revealed to it, than by anything else.

In fact, to see God means, for every created being, to see a Lord and Master; and the flood of Divine light which poured in upon the Humanity of Christ only made Him discover all the more clearly the

inexpressible disproportion that exists between the divine and human natures. He saw that the astonishing condescension of the higher of the two raised it to a yet sublimer height, and added to the already infinite rights of Divinity those which are born of an incomparable benefit conferred. Here, then, it seems clear that respect must have taken precedence of tenderness, and if the first movement of Christ was, in its final term, a consummate union with God, there can be no doubt that its principle was an act of perfect self-annihilation, which is precisely what constitutes adoration.

Hence it is that the Blessed Soul of Jesus immediately assumed an attitude towards God which may be called fundamental, because it is invariably to be found underlying all His acts; because, often actually inspiring these acts, it is always mingled with them; because it determines their direction and gives them their true form; and because, lastly, it gives the chief and pervading character to Our Lord's whole life. A Being whose own light, and whose perfect rectitude, compelled it to such profound annihilation before God, could not but regard itself as His most humble subject and most docile servant, and remain in that position. This subjection and service were, to Our Lord, practical Truth, Order, Law, and Justice in one; this alone put him into harmony with God, and sealed their concord. It was the first homage that Christ as Man had to pay to the Divinity—the necessary foundation of all His relations with it—as

well as the very soul of all the duties to which these relations gave rise.

Thus, by the double title of His Human Nature and His Will—which, being once fixed, fixed everything else in Him—Jesus was the first subject of God, and the first and most devoted of His servants. Under this noble name the prophets had many times announced Him; and God Himself had been pleased so to designate His Messias. Hence, in the case of Jesus all things reduced themselves, morally speaking, to obedience, and that fundamental attitude of His which has been referred to was the attitude of a person obeying. The light of beatitude was, so to speak, its sap; adoration was its living root; and obedience was to become the stem which should push forth innumerable branches and produce millions of fruits. In short, just as Scripture tells us that Jesus “was made flesh,” so does it also tell us that “He was made obedient.” To be made flesh was His constituted human state; to be made obedient, the condition He embraced: one followed from the other, and the latter rests upon the former; and hence it is in a manner essential and cannot change.

Further, this obedience of Our Lord did not relate only to the sovereignty of God looked at in itself, but to that sovereignty as exercised over Him. Jesus knew and saw beforehand how far this would go, and that God would push it even to extremes. He saw and knew, moreover, that He Himself would offer, if one may so speak, a wide field for the opera-

tions of the Divine dominion wherein it might work out its designs. Indeed, this was the primary cause of His coming and His existence. He had entered this world only for the honour of the Divine Rights; that is to say, in order that these rights should now at last receive the worship, love, and submission which is their due. It was necessary that for at least once in the course of time God should be able to do in one of His own creatures whatever seemed good to Him, without hindrance or delay, without reservation or limit. It was necessary, too, that from the depths of creation one voice should come forth freely which, from conviction as well as from love, should fully re-echo that adorable assent which God Himself gives, in His interior life, to the absolute perfection which is the very essence of His superiority and of His omnipotent authority over all things.

Even supposing that Jesus had come into a world free from sin, to be there simply the High Priest and Divine Head of the universe, He would have found the same order of things as here below. He would have found Himself in the presence of just those same august rights, demanding of man the same respectful docility. He alone, then as now, could have satisfactorily and entirely acquitted our debt towards God. It is said that certain potentates never considered themselves to have reached the full height of their power, or at least did not hold that power to have been sufficiently honoured,

until they had been waited upon by kings. In them, this was detestable pride. But such is the excellence of God, that, if it pleases Him to be served—and this must necessarily please Him when once He has made creatures—He can only be so quite worthily by a creature who shall be deified in his own person, such as is Jesus—true God and true Man.

The mere sight of the Rights of God, then, would in any case have made Jesus the most submissive of all beings. But who can fail to see the immense extent to which this desire for obeying must have increased in Him, when he saw all these Rights violated by sinful humanity? For sin is always simply a violation of the Rights of God, being, before all things, disobedience: and hence it is written that “by the disobedience of one man, many (the whole human race) were made sinners.”¹

True, we love our parents at all times, and no occasion comes amiss for testifying our love to them; but let a father or mother be insulted or ill-used, and do we not love them far more and feel the need of being lavish in proofs of our love? Such, with regard to His Father, was the position of Our Lord. Hence, just as His natural attraction towards God was increased by His passionate desire to make up for all the ingratitude, indifference, or even hatred, of that erring crowd of which He had made Himself head, so also His obedience was made

¹ Rom. v. 19.

all the more profound by the hunger He felt for repairing and covering all our insubordination. It was, therefore, not enough that His obedience should reach the point of service; it must go farther and become sacrifice. It must make of Him, not merely a subject, but a victim; and thus it came about that St. Paul, having first said that "Christ was made obedient," adds immediately afterwards, "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."¹

Now, this double obedience was simultaneously offered to God by Jesus Christ in that first movement of His Soul which opened the whole series of His actions here below. His entire life—that life which could not be fully recorded even in a book as large as the world—was but the successive development and blossoming, so to speak, of that complete initial act of submission. In principle, and in the sight of God, everything was summed up in that one act; and we can well understand how, at the moment when this first great Subject of God appeared in the world, all Heaven, breaking forth with joy, sang this song: "Glory to God in the highest: peace henceforth on earth."

This obedience, then, is not only the chief characteristic of the life of Jesus; but it is the source of its repairing and quickening virtue, because by paying debts it rebuilds ruins; and what the rebellion of the old Adam had worked towards death, this the submission of the new Adam worked

¹ Philipp. ii. 8.

towards life. Further, it is the great example that Jesus gives us, the grand secret that He revealed to us, the royal road that He opens to us, and the supreme duty that He prescribes—so much so, that in evangelical morality we may say with truth that everything is comprised in the virtue of obedience, because love itself, which is so completely the supreme law that it appears to be the only one, is only held for true love, and accounted of value for Heaven, when obedience has placed its mark upon it and thus filled it with the sap of life. This is why Our Lord requires obedience of all men, and everywhere inculcates its rigorous observance. At the very moment of His farewell to His Apostles He comes back to this subject, as though there were nothing of more importance to the welfare of those whom He was leaving, or which He would henceforth have more at heart. “As the Father hath loved Me, I also have loved you: abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love; as I also have kept my Father’s commandments, and do abide in His love.”¹

Thus, there is involved here the very friendship of Jesus, and, consequently, both grace and salvation. The law is therefore universal and admits of no dispensation. To obey, and to be a Christian; to obey, and to live before God, is one and the same thing. Heaven must cease to exist before it would open the door to a rebel.

¹ John xv. 9, 10.

But, here as elsewhere, there is the necessary and elementary virtue which answers to the precept, and lays the foundation of that justice common to all Christians; and, beyond this, that higher virtue which, surpassing strict duty, leads those who embrace and practise it, towards perfection, and ends by sanctifying those who become perfect in it. It would have been impossible that the members should not be called upon to practise, in an excellent manner, that obedience in which the Head had so excelled. The example of Jesus Himself, indeed, more than sufficed for this call. The sight of the many holy and touching bonds which He had voluntarily assumed, to live and die in them, could not but attract the elect among human souls, and irresistibly captivate some of them. From being first an object of devotion, these bonds naturally became afterwards an object of zeal and imitation; and it was a sort of necessity that the Crib, the Cross, the Eucharist, should enkindle in certain hearts the passion for self-immolation. Still, the Saviour deigned to add His word even to so impressive an example; and just as He had counselled the renunciation of temporal riches and of the joys of the flesh, for His love, so He again counselled the sacrifice to Him of our independence, and of that power which nature gives us all of directing our own ways according to our reasonable wills and legitimate inclinations.

The Church well knows that this counsel was

hidden in the last word He said to that young Jew, of whom the Gospel tells us that "looking upon him, He loved him," and who, because he was cowardly in the face of sacrifice, deserved not to correspond with the Divine Love. "Go, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor," said the Master, thus calling him to holy poverty. Then, further: "Come, follow Me!"¹ by which He called him to the practice of holy obedience. To "follow" Jesus here did not mean only, as St. Jerome says, to imitate Him and walk in His footsteps, but also, as Suarez says, to be entirely bound to Him as His disciple, to enlist in His service, and to give up to Him for ever the government of both life and soul, so as to be taught, formed, and sanctified by Him alone.

From this word, full of grace, and illustrated by the whole life of Our Saviour, has emanated the theory of that sublime obedience which, practised in substance by the Apostles of Jesus, has never ceased for one day to be highly honoured in Holy Church, and has remained the immortal foundation of that magnificent and imperishable State called the "Religious State." We say "its foundation," because, according to the unanimous opinion of Catholic Doctors, no one is a Religious merely by virtue of having vowed poverty, or even chastity; but becomes such by the mere fact of having vowed obedience.

We have now to discuss this noble virtue. Since

¹ Mark x. 21.

it is commanded to all men, we must speak of it with reference to all; but, as in the case of the other virtues, we more especially address those souls who have had the grace of making this vow, and who are therefore bound to practise the virtue in a far wider measure, and with more exquisite perfection. With the help of God, this doctrine will be sufficiently set forth, if, having laid down the principles which support, enlighten, and regulate holy obedience, we show the graces that it contains, and the Divine rewards that it insures; and if, finally, we clearly explain the duties imposed by it—duties which are numerous, varied, and perhaps difficult, but, at the same time, so clear to the eyes of Faith that they cannot fail to be most sweet to the hearts of those who love.

PART I

THE PRINCIPLES ON WHICH OBEDIENCE IS FOUNDED AND REGULATED

DOMINION has two forms, two manifestations, two actions; the first called authority, the second, law; and under each of these forms it lays claim to our obedience. Obedience is due to legitimate authority, and it is likewise due to the law legitimately ordained by this authority.

God alone has independent existence. "I am Who am,"¹ He says. He is truly the only Being, for all things besides Himself receive their being from Him, can only hold it from Him, and preserve it by Him. He might remain alone throughout eternity, because He alone is necessary to Himself, and He fully suffices for Himself: even after the act of creation He still remains, in one sense, alone, creatures being by comparison so insignificant; for notwithstanding the resemblance He gives them to Himself, and the nearness to Himself that He allows them, yet they are before Him as nothing, as the Spirit of Truth makes them confess in the Holy Scriptures. Thence we see that God, having existed

¹ Exod. iii. 14.

simply as He is before He called the world out of nothing, has been from every point of view its superior from the moment He created it. His power over it is infinite, He surrounds it on every side, He penetrates it to its centre, He possesses it in each of its parts, sustaining them distinct, equal, and each in its own place; by every title He is its omnipotent Master, and this constitutes His sovereign power considered in itself.

Now, this God Who alone is all Being, is also alone all Good; and because He is all Good, therefore He is Goodness itself. Goodness is His essence, His characteristic, His life, His natural and eternal act, all these things which in Him are one and the same thing, that is to say, according to the Fourth Council of Lateran, that *Thing* above all name, and beyond all conception, which is God Himself. And by an unfathomable mystery this Goodness, so perfectly and so necessarily happy, nevertheless overflows from God, as if it were seeking some other object besides God; and as outside of Him it can find only nothingness, it lays hold of this nothingness and draws from it a multitude of beings. This is not all; for first bestowing on these beings each its own nature, which is His first benefit, God draws them immediately towards Himself, every one according to the destiny He assigns it and the capabilities which He bestows upon it; and the highest rank of these beings, viz. the chosen multitudes of angels and men, He attracts more and more strongly and

irresistibly, until they not only draw near to Him, but become transformed and perfected in Him.

Again, this Goodness, which thus brings creatures to the Divine likeness, and as far as they are capable of it, to union with God; this Wisdom, which at a single glance infallibly discovers all the means leading to this end; this Power, which controls all the means discovered by Wisdom and, in union with her, employs them to carry out the designs of love; these three together constitute the sovereignty of God in its proper acts and functions, that is, His sovereignty as it is manifested to us, to control us, to regulate our relations with Him, and morally speaking to determine our interior dispositions, our free-will, and all our works.

Such is, in its Supreme Reality, as seen in God, in its Principle and in its Source, that august, holy, serene, beneficent force which we name dominion, authority, or power.

But this magnificent and generous design of love, willed and accomplished by God, is not destined to remain hidden from the beings whom it concerns. From the infinite heights of the Wisdom of God where it always dwells resplendent; from the infinite depths of the Heart of God where it is eternally conceived, it escapes at a certain given point, coming like a ray of light upon the creature; and while it fills his intellect with brightness, it inundates his heart with strength, grace, hope, and joy.

This authentic declaration of the designs of God

in our regard, inasmuch as it fixes our ideas, and is the foundation of our belief, is called *dogma* or doctrine; and inasmuch as it imposes precepts, commands our will, and regulates our lives, is also called *law*. Besides, all dogma is already a law, for it obliges those whom it enlightens; and all law is also a dogma, for it enlightens those whom it binds. However, while God imposes obligations on men only to sanctify and save them, so He enlightens them only in order to bind them; while, again, the work of salvation beginning with Faith, which is the homage of the Understanding, only completes itself through Obedience, which is the homage of the Will; this mutual connection between God and the human race which we call religion receives more frequently and more truly the general name of Law, instead of that of Dogma or doctrine. It is thus that, when we wish to designate the religious institutions of the Jews, we speak of the Old Law, or the law of Fear, as we speak of the New Law, or the law of Grace and Love, in alluding to the religion founded by Jesus Christ. The law then is the form, or the outward token, of dominion. Under this name it contains what it expresses, and communicates what it contains; that is to say, that everything which forms a constituent part of the act of dominion—the goodness which wills our existence, the wisdom which condescends to us, the power which upholds us—all these are contained in the Law, and come to us by its means; all these are offered to us together with it,

and are fulfilled in us when we accomplish it. "He who seeketh the law," says the Holy Scriptures, "shall be filled by the law."¹ And with what will the law fill him, except with the threefold divine virtue which is truly its substance?

It is clear that the Law takes root in love, drawing thence all its vivifying powers, and consequently the fruits of the Law must be filled with love. It may be likened to the first advances and invitation of love—its pledge, proposing the conditions of the union it so much desires, and in case of their acceptance, becoming itself the contract. Not without reason did St. Paul extol its goodness. "Wherefore the law indeed is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good."² The Law is also light; reason tells us this, the Holy Ghost confirms it. "My son," we read in the book of Proverbs, "be faithful to the precepts of thy father, and never forget the law of thy mother." And why? "Because the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light."³ And as this is simply an expression and irradiation of the Divine thought, it could not be otherwise than a light in itself; the "form of science and truth,"⁴ according to St. Paul, or, according to St. Thomas, "the decree and oracle of the Absolute Reason." And how, being light in itself, should it not be light for us, as its only aim is to enlighten our souls and, through our souls, our lives, so as to make the road clear wherein

¹ Ecclus. xxxii. 19.

² Rom. vii. 12.

³ Prov. vi. 20, 23.

⁴ Rom. ii. 20.

we should walk as "children of light"?¹ On the first day of the world God said, "Let there be light; and there was light."² This was without doubt a subtle and diffused light, which on account of its very subtlety was out of proportion with our terrestrial atmosphere, and so could not correspond to our wants. This is why, on the fourth day, God created in the firmament that wonderful luminary called by us the Sun, which seems to concentrate for us that general and higher light previously existing, and which was commanded by God to enlighten our globe, and to regulate the succession of our days. This is an exact image of the Law—the sun of the moral world. The Law is the expression for us of the infinite and eternal Reason of God, which is the essential Rule of creation, giving it substance, and accommodating itself to our needs.

Again, the Law being an emanation of the Divine Omnipotence, as well as of the Divine Wisdom and Goodness, cannot fail, besides being a light and a token for us, to be also a power. Without speaking of the grace which necessarily accompanies all the works of God, without calling to mind that God acts all alone when He works, only treating with man, that he may gain entire possession of him; that He never gives any commandment without at the same time granting him help to understand it, to appreciate it, and to submit to it—this law, we say, by the very virtue of its divine origin, possesses

¹ 1 Thess. v. 5.

² Gen. i. 3.

a power of attraction. Not only does it persuade the understanding, but it delights the heart and subjugates the will—not always the lower, animal will, called by the Holy Scriptures the “carnal will” (which is more an instinctive appetite than a real will), but the *superior* will, which grace renders supernatural, after nature has made it reasonable. St. Paul, when he speaks so eloquently though sincerely on the opposition made by inferior nature to the law of God, yet acknowledges “that in this law he finds his delight.”¹ He does not only acquiesce in it, he does not only avow that it is right and holy, but he clings to it, taking delight in it, and tasting therein unspeakable joys.

Still this is not enough. To the power of this first attraction—which, although it ought to be decisive to all, yet is hardly sufficient for the greater number—God, in his indulgent Goodness and wise mercy, has joined another, external, indirect, but singularly efficacious, holding the same relation to the law as does the weapon of defence to the vigorous arm which brandishes it; this power is the threat of the punishment awaiting disobedience. This decree is the resource of Love against perversity or sloth. It causes both fear and self-interest to unite in the designs of this blessed Love; it causes the law to press, as it were, on man on every side, and it finishes by taking possession of him as far as possible, only leaving to him his indispensable

¹ Rom. vii. 22.

and inviolable liberty; and, further, making the good use of this liberty easy to him. The divine Psalmist exclaims both admirably and truly, "The law of the Lord is unspotted, converting souls: the testimony of the Lord is faithful, giving wisdom to little ones."¹

What we have said is to be understood of power and law in general, yet first and principally of the sovereign power of God and of the divine law; whether, that is, of the law that is called "natural," because divinely imprinted on our souls by the mere fact of our reasonable nature, or of the law divinely revealed and called "supernatural," because, being founded on Almighty God's free and gratuitous design of ennobling our race, it imposes His own glorious Will upon us as a command, and gives us at the same time the very means of bringing about its fulfilment.

But God, without lowering these divine and sublime realities, power and law, bends them; without dividing, He extends them; without diminishing, He communicates them. The expression "God is jealous"² may be explained by the inviolability and inflexibility of His rights, by the omnipotence and cogency of His will, above all by the demands of His merciful love; yet nothing is exclusive in Him, and even the shadow of egotism can have no place in a Being who is all charity.³ So, not content with deifying His creatures, He deigns to employ them as co-operators in the work of this

¹ Ps. xviii. 8.

² Exod. xxxiv. 14.

³ 1 John iv. 16.

deification, in such a manner that, from being, to begin with, the subjects of this work, they rise to being, under Him, its instruments and authors. "Among all the gifts of God," says the great St. Denys the Areopagite, "there is none more divine."¹

In the natural order, God disposes, between Himself, the first and universal Principle, and the most lowly of His creatures, a multitude of secondary causes, into which overflow something of His divine expansiveness, so that what they have received they again transmit to others, and to the honour of their own lives they add the glory and happiness of fruitfulness. In the same way in the moral order, between Himself, the Supreme Power, and the special ordinances given to the most humble of His subjects to enable them to regulate their lives and bring them to their end, He establishes different grades of authority, which, invested by Him with a portion of His power, derive their strength from Him, associate themselves to His actions, and contribute as far as possible to the success of His undertakings. Between God and the flower of the field, there is the stalk which supports the flower, and the root which produces the stalk; the seed from which springs the root, and the earth into which this seed had at first been cast. Between

¹ "Etenim cujuslibet eorum qui sacrum ordinem sortiti sunt, in hoc sita perfectio est, ut ad divinam, pro captu quisque suo, promoveatur imitationem; quodque divinius est omnium, ipsius etiam Dei, ut Eloquia loquuntur, cooperatores existat."—*De celest. hierarch.*, cap. iii. § 2.

God and the new-born child there exist the father and mother from whom it receives life. Again, between God and the body, there stands the soul which controls, animates, and governs it. So in the same manner, between God, the Sovereign Ruler, and ourselves—the lowest members of that intelligent creation the whole of which is subject to Him—there are degrees of authority, grades of power, and varied beings; some invisible and purely spiritual, as are the Angels; some visible and human, as prelates, kings, princes, magistrates—in short, superiors of every rank and title. In a word, between Himself and us He places the Hierarchy; that is to say, as St. Denys admirably explains it, “a sacred and divine system, where order, wisdom, and energy, which exist pre-eminently in God, assume by His will a created existence and form; whereby they propagate, sweetly and by rule throughout the universe, that luminous, sanctifying, and beautifying movement which, under the influence of love, eternally proceeds from the bosom of the Father in order to bring back His creatures—purified, enlightened, and made perfect—to Him, and to fix them for ever in His embrace.”¹

¹ “*Est hierarchia . . . sacer ordo et scientia et actio quæ ad deiformitatem, quantum fas est, accedit atque insitis sibi divinitus illustrationibus proportionem quadam ad Dei subvehitur imitationem . . . Scopus igitur hierarchiæ est Dei, quanta fieri potest, assimilatio conjunctioque; quem cum habeat omnis sacræ et scientiæ et operationis ducem, ad divinissimum ejus decorem constanter intuendo, eundem, quoad potest, exprimit nec non divinos sui consortes sacra quædam perficit simulacra speculaque clarissima*”

This was the grand doctrine announced by St. Paul, when, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he declared to all Christians the duty of obedience. "Let every soul be subject to higher powers: for there is no power but from God: and those that are, are ordained of God."¹ We see from this that authority as such is divine, in whatever it may consist, or whatever decrees it may enact. It does not mount from a lower level, or spring from any human will, nor from a fact, or a compact; neither from a pretended right of the people, nor from the choice of the multitude. Even when these reasons exteriorly contribute, as has often been the case, to the historic birth and formation of power, the most they do is to furnish the material cause for it, by giving it an object; but they never confer it, and are incapable of bestowing upon it a form, that is to say, that vivifying, truthful, holy, and stable principle which gives one man the right to command others, by legitimatising the acts of his government. Authority is not, again we repeat, something taking its origin from below, but like light, like grace, like all that earth receives from heaven, and from heaven alone, it is something which descends to us from on high.

et immaculata quæ primitivæ lucis summæque deitatis radium excipiant: cujus indito splendore sacro plena, denuò eundem ex divinis legibus, in ea quæ sequuntur sine invidiâ transfundunt."—*De celest. hierarch.*, cap. iii. 1, 2. "Hierarchia nostra Deo insitæ ac divinæ deificæque scientiæ nec non afflationis et perfectionis est functio."—*Id. de ecclesiast. hierarch.*, cap. i. 1.

¹ Rom. xiii. 1.

God never abdicates, neither does He allow Himself to be eclipsed. The mandates that He entrusts to the care of others, are not exemptions from His own interventions. If He commands another to work in His name, it is not that He may meanwhile repose, contenting Himself with watching His deputy. He has many ministers, but no one to take His place; and the disguises that He assumes, far from giving us any reason to believe Him absent, on the contrary denote His presence; while the means that He employs oblige us to believe in His co-operation. It is of necessity that the first cause should act in all the secondary causes, and that it should be, in fact, the chief agent.¹ It is likewise of equal necessity that the Supreme Power should rule really or principally through intermediate authority over all those who are naturally subject to Him. Created power is like a mirror placed above a certain number of creatures to reflect on them the superior light which it first receives itself. It is only a representation, or a kind of sacred seal which imprints the divine image on all those to whom it is applied; therefore must it in every possible way resemble its prototype, and bear its stamp most perfectly.

So we see that God, the Principle, the End, the Model of all authority, is also its indispensable, enduring, efficacious cause: whence it follows that He remains the first and principal Author of all its works, of the goods bestowed by it, and of the good

¹ St. Thom. 1 p. Quæst. civ.

promoted through it. From the same reason it ensues that created power is so true and so holy, claiming both religious respect and faithful obedience; and again, that, according to the express declaration of the Holy Spirit, it cannot be resisted without resisting the order of God and incurring reprobation. "He that resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God."¹ If this be the nature of hierarchical powers, it is clear that, like the divine dominion from which they proceed, and of which they are a representation, they have, each one according to its measure, all the essential attributes of power. The right, then, belongs to them of establishing true laws. Every being clothed with power is a Father, and like Him "from whom all Paternity takes rise,"² he possesses a word of his own, and this word that he utters is the law that he promulgates. Again, every being clothed with power is a Prince—the word having the same derivation as principle: a principle of light, of life, of unity, of progress, of holiness, and of happiness. And like the first Principle, Which has no beginning, but of Which another Principle equal to Itself is eternally begotten, so every ruler is gifted with the power of putting forth a principle also equal to himself, and this principle is the law that he formulates. In short, the place held by God the Son in the adorable Trinity, named by St. Denys "Thearchia," is exactly that of the law in the created hierarchy: as the

¹ Rom. xiii. 2.

² Ephes. iii. 15.

Uncreated Son is begotten by the Father, so does dominion generate law ; which, like the Divine Prototype, forms the splendour, the character, and the image of the source from which it emanates.

And now, we may inquire, what are the laws which proceed from this hierarchy ? It is evident that in the first place the hierarchy adores, acknowledges, promulgates, propagates, and interprets the divine Law. It is on this law that it is founded ; in this law that it has existence ; and by its power that it works. Before being " God's minister for good,"¹ all dominion is necessarily His subject and servant. It is said, " To serve God is to reign "—yes ; but also to reign truly is to serve God. The human hierarchy therefore first assimilates itself to the divine law, and as far as possible identifies itself with it. This is its highest duty and office. Next, as we have already said, it promulgates and interprets the law of God ; and this is the special mission of that sovereign and infallible power called the Church. Again, it applies this law, watches over its execution, and procures its perfect accomplishment by every legitimate means in its power.

And, lastly, this human power itself establishes laws, which, although they may be secondary, accidental, or relative, are none the less true laws, and as such binding on the conscience of their subjects. Basing itself on divine, or even human reasons, considered from an elevated and general point of view,

¹ Rom. xiii, 4.

it imposes on those whom it governs certain clear duties. Like a prism, which, by dividing the sun's rays, renders their different colours clear to our eyes; like bread, which the mother crumbles, to render it more fit for the nourishment of her child; or, again, as when in teaching him to read she spells the syllables, thereby to make him understand the sound of the words, and through the words the meaning of the thoughts which they express: in the same manner, by these divisions and special applications of the only and eternal law, by these practical formulas, the true legislator causes the truth, the beauty, the goodness—even the divinity—of the adorable and primary Law to penetrate into the thoughts of men, and to animate their wills and their actions.

Such are human laws, whether ecclesiastical or civil; an expression of the power communicated by God to man, and the active form of the right of control inherent in this power; whence it is clear that law and power stand on the same basis, and, as we have said before that they are two realities, equally divine in their origin, and both possessing the same rights, and giving birth to the same duties. The divine Law, as we have seen, is to souls like the sun in the firmament; and human laws may be likened to the stars; the former illumine the day, but the latter enlighten the night, enabling us to see clearly and walk safely, when the shadows of our ignorance and the darkness of our passions would naturally prevent us from finding our way.

Is it necessary to add that these secondary laws, however perfect they may be, yet remain far below the divine law, possessing neither its perfection nor its stability; consequently they continue entirely subordinate to it, and are to be completely ruled and controlled by it. So that if, in the exercise of his power, the ruler oversteps his limits—above all, if he makes use of this very power to betray and wrong Him from whom he has derived it—it ceases from that moment to be power, and becomes instead tyranny, losing all claim to obedience. In like manner when human laws contradict divine laws, especially when they attempt either to weaken the rights of God, or to fetter his freedom of action, they are no longer laws but oppression; and although sometimes forced to submit, we may never consent to them in our conscience. Therefore we may draw a glorious and consoling conclusion from all this divine theory: that there is for us but one power, one law; and that, whilst we have here below earthly fathers and masters, yet, after all, we have truly but one Father, God; one Master, Christ; so that while submitting willingly to so many human superiors, we are after all fulfilling God's will alone; "the supreme Ruler of our actions," as St. Thomas says, being by His power also their principle and their end and aim through His love.

It is thus, under the veil, and by the action of the hierarchy, as under the form, and by the medium of power and law, that God, according to the teaching

of St. Denys, holds all under His dominion, governs all, and yet forms no part of anything; it is thus that as the infinite perfection of all beauty and loveliness, and the centre of all our desires, He imposes on all His creatures noble obligations, voluntary subjection, bringing them under the influence of the fertilising warmth of that divine, all-powerful, incorruptible Goodness, by Which it is their privilege to be eternally loved.

Such is the Christian theory—and therefore the exclusively true theory—of power; consequently this is the foundation of all obedience, whether Christian or religious; these are the principles which should enlighten and invariably govern its practice.

It would be worse than useless to examine whether God could have constituted another method of governing His creatures. Who shall dare to limit His omnipotence? Yet this is the order it has pleased Him to establish, and no one can study it without being carried away by astonishment and admiration at its beauty and perfection. We are unable even to form a conception of any other which could be a more magnificent revelation of the attributes of God, more honourable in every respect to ourselves, more in conformity with our nature, more according to our requirements, even to our weakness; in a word, more advantageous. We shall understand this better as we study in detail the rich treasures hidden under the virtue of obedience; and yet, under whatever aspect this wise and beneficent economy estab-

lished by Almighty God is considered, we cannot fail to be filled with reverence and admiration. The mystery of grace has not more power to stir the depths of a soul divinely illuminated than has this mystery of heavenly dominion, sanctifying and saving us by its hierarchical action. The forms of these two mysteries are doubtless different, but their substance is the same, and that substance is the goodness and love of God. This is so true, that when love arrives at the height where the human will is identified and indissolubly united with the divine will, "the law penetrates then," as the inspired Psalmist says, "to the very midst of the heart,"¹ becoming its centre. Then the soul, according to St. Paul, "is no longer under the law, but under grace," the law not being made, and having no need to exist at all for a perfect man, who is a law unto himself; as to live, and to live perfectly, is one and the same thing to him.

David saw and understood this, when, inspired by God, he gave utterance to the 118th Psalm, that wonderful song in praise of the divine Law, so replete with wisdom and love, which the Church, equally inspired, has placed on the lips of her ministers each morning in the recitation of the Office, so that they may consecrate by prayer the early hours of the day, and draw thence the first daily repast of their souls. The whole spirit of this psalm, and even its daily use, shows us the idea which the

¹ Ps. xxxix. 9.

Holy Spirit would have us form concerning authority, and consequently the esteem and affection with which we should look upon obedience.

There is nothing more important, indeed nothing more necessary or more sacred than authority. It is this which unites heaven to earth. It is the strength which bears up the world, the ark of safety of the human race, the soul of society and family life, as well as of the individual life of each and all. To interfere with it, to rise in rebellion against it, to contest it, to deny it, above all, to attempt to destroy it, is great impiety, because this cannot be done without denying practically and, as the evil makes progress, also theoretically, the mystery of that divine paternity which is the principle of piety, and which piety alone acknowledges and adores. Therefore we see that there is no crime more severely punished than rebellion and the authors of rebellion. The Bible teaches us that Core, Dathan, and Abiron, who had openly revolted against Moses, were swallowed up alive by the earth, and that flames springing up from the open gulf destroyed their partisans in an instant.

And, passing on from this world to the next, St. Peter declares¹ that among the lost souls that hell claims as its own, there are none who are damned more hopelessly, or tormented more fearfully, than the contemners of authority, the lawless, the seditious, and, to employ the most just term, revo-

¹ 2 Peter ii. 9.

lutionists. This disdainful and violent spirit of rebellion is one of the most ordinary signs of reprobation which the wicked bear upon themselves. One of the names of their chief is Belial; and the word Belial means "one without a yoke"—a fitting name for the unsubdued, wandering, ferocious being, who may be said to leap rather than to walk, who wanders everywhere except by beaten paths, who holds order in abhorrence, who denies all obligations, who never yields even to love, and who can only be overcome by force. Such is Satan, such are his sons, who cry out like him, "I will not serve," and who, because they have refused to be servants, shall be, like him, slaves, and slaves for all eternity. On the contrary, the sign of the good, of the just, of the holy, of those whom the Holy Scriptures call "the sons of wisdom," or "the sons of light," or again, "the sons of God"—the very token of their origin, their inborn spirit, the essential character of their soul and of their life—is docility and love. St. Peter tells us their true name, "children of obedience." And such as these are real Christians.

Now, as we have said before in another place, even among Christians, there are some to be found who, from the clearer understanding they possess of these mysteries, feel in themselves a more intense desire of perfection, and seeing that the perfection or justice of mankind consists in submission, it is for this obedience that they thirst. These divine forms of power and law fill them with delight,

through which they see shining the glory and omnipotence of God, that God Whom they would serve even without any benefit resulting to themselves. The sight of the world even acts as an incentive to them; so many mad rebellions of which they hear, often without witnessing them, enkindle in their hearts a zeal for holy reparation; and obedience, to the point of sacrifice, becomes to them a relief. Above all, they consider that Jesus, when on earth, was not obedient only to God: He likewise vouchsafed to have human superiors; He was subject to Mary and to Joseph. Later on, although truly King, He submitted to the rulers who, with more or less right, governed His chosen nation. Wicked as they were, and notwithstanding the abuse they made of their power, Annas, Caiphas, and Pilate all held their authority by divine dispensation; and far from forgetting this, Jesus Himself reminded them of it, as the reason why He refused them neither respect nor submission. Besides, He had all His life practised the Jewish law, so rigorous because it was intended for sinners, so minute because it was framed for the purpose of upholding and sustaining a people of singular weakness of character. From the time of His Circumcision until His last Pasch, when the rites of the old Law yielded to the new, as the Church sings, He never ceased to accomplish it perfectly—as He Himself tells us, to “every jot and tittle.” With such an example before them, these more

noble souls of whom we were speaking can no longer rest content with ordinary obedience or general laws; they aspire to more perfect subjection even in the least details of their actions; they long for precepts which shall confine their lives within the narrow limits which the Holy Scriptures call "a healthful binding."¹ They therefore make choice of a Rule—most generally this Rule has been written by a saint—at least it must have the approbation of the Holy See; and they constitute this Rule their guide, which, under the authority and direction of a Superior, they solemnly bind themselves to observe until death. This is what makes a true Religious, and it is undoubtedly the height of detachment to which an independent being can raise himself; as also the most perfect sacrifice which can be offered to God by a creature who, having already consecrated to Him his goods by the vow of Poverty, and his body by the vow of perpetual Chastity, now, by the surrender of his will, gives up his entire soul, of which the will is the crown, which he naturally holds as his principal right and possession. Such is Religious obedience, the outcome and perfection of Christian obedience. We have studied its principles and its character, and already its beauty dawns upon us. Before explaining the numerous obligations it imposes, we must speak of the divine graces it contains, and of the incomparable benefits it ensures for us.

¹ Ecclus. vi. 31.

PART II

THE GRACES CONTAINED IN OBEDIENCE, AND THE ADVANTAGES IT ENSURES TO THE SOUL

THE dogma of the divine origin of power, and the use made of it by Almighty God for the purpose of deifying His creatures, is the star which enlightens all that vast moral region where obedience reigns as queen. It is, then, by the light of its holy teaching that we ought to seek for the extraordinary graces and wonderful blessings that we are certain to discover in this virtue—blessings, in their essential qualities, the same for both Christians and Religious; but which, raising and extending themselves in the same degree as the obedience itself, become more and more elevated and perfect, and, on the whole, far greater and more exalted for Religious than for simple Christians.

The first of these heavenly prerogatives is that, on account of the obedience rendered to it, rightly constituted authority draws God very much nearer to the creature; consequently establishing between the creature and God communications which are most free, secure, enlightened, and of infinite value. We have already touched on this subject, and indeed we cannot conceive a true idea of power without

being struck with it, yet we must now examine it more deeply.

The Jews took delight in celebrating by their canticles all the privileges with which God had honoured them. Evidently the greatest, and the source of all, was the special dwelling of God in their midst, which He had promised should always continue, and which was the foundation between Him and them of most intimate relations. We read everywhere in Holy Scripture the assurance of this divine favour. The tabernacle, and, later on, the temple, were each in their turn the "dwelling" of Almighty God. "I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel."¹ The mountain of Sion is His resting-place, the habitation of His choice, there He takes His delights, and declares that He finds His repose.² It is from there that He reigns over His people, and shows how He is indeed their God. Most truly He is the God of all nations,³ but none belong to Him by the same title as Juda; none are dear to Him as Israel, to whom God reveals His secrets, unfolds His plans, confides His mysteries, and entrusts the sacred seed from which in future times shall spring the Messiah. He directly intimates His commands to this chosen people; He regulates even the minutest details, not only of its religious worship, but of its daily life, domestic, civil, and political. He observes its progress in the

¹ Exod. xxix. 45.

² Ps. lxxvii. 17; cxxxv. 13.

³ Wisd. xii. 13; Rom. iii. 29.

way He Himself has traced out for it. He forms it, reproveth it, corrects it, chastises it; He encourages and sustains it, consoles and rewards it, often revealing the future for the sake of more efficaciously assisting it in the present. In short, He is its King as well as its God, its Lawgiver, its Teacher, its Guardian, and most truly its Father. Therefore, with a heart penetrated by the thought of this tender and special solicitude, the Prophet exclaims in a transport of gratitude, "He hath not done in like manner to every nation; and His judgments He hath not made manifest to them."¹ Moses had already said, "There is no other nation so great, that hath gods so nigh them as our God is present to all our petitions."²

Now, if the Jews had the right of thus glorying in the Lord, how much greater right have Christians! If the Law drew together God and man, how much more perfect is the attraction of the Gospel! Compared to the intimate presence of Himself with which God favours us, His presence among the Jews almost seems to us like absence. And, truly, how often did not the just under the old Law cry unto Him, with many tears, to descend, to come, to appear, as he had so long promised?

We need not enter into the human life of God, become one of ourselves, and taking His place in our human history. This life of Jesus, narrated by the Evangelists in their inspired words, which has

¹ Ps. cxlvii. 20.

² Deut. iv. 7.

been familiar to us from infancy, which is unceasingly brought before us by the Church, and illuminated by the revelations of the saints, and every circumstance of which is imprinted in our memory—this life seems to bring God within our reach, even as it were intimately. For it lets us see Him without disguise, and allows us to draw nigh unto Him, and hold sweet converse with him.

But who will dare to say how far the most Blessed Eucharist makes God our very own, and the communications which it renders possible, real, easy, nay, more, necessary between Himself and us? Here God has done more than draw nigh to man; He has delivered Himself into the hands of man, and the intercourse that such a gift authorises, the intimacy that it permits, or rather calls for, can only be surpassed by that clear sight and perfect possession which we term the beatific vision; and which is the crown of our hopes and of our virtues. Thus the Blessed Eucharist is the highest glory of Christians. It is to them the unfailing source of light, of holiness, of delight, the burning and unquenchable centre of the life of the Church.

Now, when we come to reflect, we shall easily prove to ourselves that the practice of obedience, especially as it is implied in the Religious vow, establishes between God and the soul a communication which, if not more intimate than the Eucharistic union, is perhaps both more easily understood and more frequent.

On the day when, according to the form pre-

scribed in your Constitutions, the superior was formally invested with his office, in the name of God, the Source of all power; and in the name of the Sovereign Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth, the source of all jurisdiction, and the chief superior of all religious orders; on that day there passed in your monastery something analogous to what takes place on the altar in the moment of consecration: that is to say, that, as in the very moment of the Consecration, Jesus Christ, the Man-God, takes the place of the bread in the hands of the priest, and becomes truly and substantially present under the sacramental species, so, from the time that all the canonical conditions concerning the election or nomination were fulfilled, God became truly present in your midst in the person of your superior. In this case, as in the former, there is a mystery of faith to our human understanding; but, in both cases, the thing itself is a divine reality.

We read that God said to Solomon on the day when he celebrated the dedication of the Temple: "I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, which thou hast made before Me: I have sanctified this house, which thou hast built, to put My Name there for ever, and My Eyes and My Heart shall be there always."¹ Every Religious Superior is, as it were, a temple, and the day of his installation is the dedication of this temple. God then entrusts the Superior with His own power, His own

¹ 3 Kings ix. 3.

reason, His own strength. He fixes on him His Eyes and His Heart; His Eyes, to enable him to watch over all the souls confided to his care; His Heart, that he may be drawn towards them; His Eyes, that he may safely lead them; His Heart, that he may truly love them. In this manner, every Superior thus becomes a kind of human sacrament, whose outward appearances remain, as in the case of the Holy Eucharist, weak, poor, and insignificant, but which truly contain God in order to transmit Him to men. God is present in the waters of Baptism, to regenerate the soul, and to communicate to it its supernatural life: He is in the holy Chrism to quicken the growth of the soul, and to bestow upon it heavenly strength: He is in the words of the priest to forgive the sins of those who confess them with the necessary dispositions. He is substantially present under the appearances of bread and wine to uphold this life of grace, given to us in baptism and repaired by penance, after having been destroyed by sin. We believe all this on the word of Christ; believe then also, from the same divine words, that through the power of Him, to whom nothing is impossible, God is really present in this creature invested with authority; and those, above all, who have entered into Religion must understand that the end of this spiritual presence is to fashion them to holiness, and to lead them safely along the road of perfection to which they are obliged by their holy state.

It is not difficult to understand that God speaks

to us more clearly, more practically, more on a level with our human understanding, through the medium of Superiors, than He does in the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharist is the bread of life, but authority is the bread of light; the Eucharist sustains us on the road, yet it is authority which points out this road to us; the Eucharist is the Manna, the Bread of Angels, which descends from heaven to become the nourishment of man; on the other hand, authority is the Angel of God, or rather God Himself, Who, in the likeness of an angel, leads man by the hand to conduct him to his end. The human race has two essential wants with regard to God: the need of knowing and contemplating the Almighty Being, called God, in a sphere of life, and in a condition, infinitely superior to anything revealed by its own experience, so as to be capable of admiring, adoring, and loving Him infinitely; and again, an equally vehement need of possessing this God as its own, of having Him near to it, of being able to have recourse to Him when it wills, and as it wills. Man has always needed God under two forms: as supreme in excellence and power, and also, and not less, as familiar and approachable: on the one side a God in heaven, on the other, a God on earth. Authority corresponds to this last need of the soul, and satisfies it as soon as we consent to yield obedience.

Let us suppose the case of one in trouble: his conscience is uneasy, he cannot see his way clearly,

he is uncertain concerning his duty or the will of God in his regard. Such a one will do well to kneel before the tabernacle in earnest prayer, or, better still, to communicate, if possible; he will receive a thousand graces, as he receives Jesus Himself. But if such a one has no definite help in solving his doubts, save the sacramental presence of Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist, does it not happen in nine cases out of ten that he leaves the Church in the same state of uncertainty as when he entered it; and that if he even thinks he has come to any practical decision, there is always the risk of delusion? In truth, Jesus is not in the tabernacle for the purpose of solving doubts and enlightening consciences, but to be the divine life and nourishment of souls. For this very reason, knowing our necessities and desirous of providing for them, He has given us in each of our Superiors a kind of speaking Eucharist; and when, like Saul on the road to Damascus, we address to Him the great, the only question of life, or we are forced to repeat it almost at every step, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" He replies to us as to St. Paul: "Go and find the man that is called Ananias," My priest, My prophet, My human voice, and he will tell you what you must do. Arise, then, O doubtful and inquiring soul! go and seek your father or your mother,¹ lay your difficulty before them, they will

¹ See Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. December 19, 1890.

enlighten you; confide to them your desire, they will examine it; give them an account of your temptations, they will put them to flight; in a word, they will make known to you how you must think, act, and desire in order to be pleasing to Me. "He who hears them hears Me;"¹ he who obeys them obeys Me, so that in doing their will you are sure of doing Mine.

Again, although you possessed the purity of St. John, or the fervour of St. Mary Magdalen, you could not approach Holy Communion more than once in the day, and do you even do this? But, thanks to My Presence in the power which governs you, you may approach Me a hundred times in the day, have recourse to Me, converse with Me, listen to Me, and thus receive the light you seek. By this means there is nothing in your life about which you cannot consult Me, and decide by Me; or that I cannot, on My part, rule according to My good pleasure, imprint with My character, penetrate with My divine unction, and render the everlasting object of My complacency. By this faith, which discovers Me under the exterior of your superiors, and by the obedience you render to Me in their persons—you are preserved from being ever left alone.

If, in the days of My life on earth, I could say, "The Father who hath sent Me has not left me alone, but He who abideth in Me truly doth My works," so does the obedience under which you live extend

¹ Luke x. 16.

to you also the mystery and benefit of this divine companionship. It realises in its perfection My promise in the Gospel that I will abide "with you all days, even to the consummation of the world";¹ and it is also in allusion to this that I have said of the Good Shepherd, that "He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out: and when He hath let out His own sheep, He goeth before them; and the sheep follow Him, because they know His voice."²

This first fruit of obedience alone is an inappreciable good; yet it is capable of reaching yet greater heights than that of imprinting on all our actions a supernatural character, by opening and submitting our souls to the divine Will, declared to them in an explicit manner by the voice of authority: it also unites us to God, and this is the second benefit conferred by obedience on those who practise it.

David gives expression to a universal law when he says that "life is in the good-will of God."³ It is from this good-will that creatures derive their existence, it is from this they draw the life which Eternal Wisdom has allotted to them. The secret of life in the physical world consists in its complete dependence on its Creator; "it exists, it perseveres in its regularity, in its beauty, in its splendour," sings the Prophet King, "because all in it serves God, and obeys His ordinances."⁴ Nowhere in it can be

¹ Matt. xxviii. 20.

³ Ps. xxix. 6.

² John x. 3.

⁴ From Ps. cxviii. 91.

found even the slightest indication of what is called by ascetics, self-will—understanding by this term, an independence which tends to insubordination, and isolates the creature by causing him to fall back on himself. The Holy Spirit curses the solitary, that is to say, one who lives for himself alone, who binds himself to nothing, and depends on no one. It is clear that the inevitable end of such a being must be sterility and death. Isolate the body, under pretext of giving it freedom, from the controlling, life-giving influence of the soul, and only an inanimate corpse will remain. This would be the result, if the world separated itself from God and refused to obey Him. But let it take good heed of the consequences were it to do so; for if it should come to pass, through the tyranny of man or the devil, that those creatures which are naturally subject to us should be diverted from their end, forced away from their laws, and employed for evil, it would be so directly against the essence of their nature, and consequently cause them to suffer such great violence, that, as St. Paul writes, they would give vent to sighs and groans; thus testifying to their intense longing for that complete deliverance of every creature suffering unjustly which will mark the coming of the kingdom of God.¹

Now, just as this unreasoning submission on the part of irrational creatures to the will of their Creator is the cause of their very existence, so

¹ Rom. viii. 19, 23.

obedience in intelligent beings is the indispensable condition attached to the nobler life destined for them by the munificence of God. St. Thomas tells us, that natural necessity gives way here to the necessity of justice, and the motive-power to divine authority. But in reality the law remains the same, and none can evade it and live.

From this it ensues that sin is positively suicide. The punishment does not follow immediately, as it does in the judgments of earthly tribunals; yet the guilty act bears its own penalty, and the suffering and punishment it entails are its inevitable consequences. Obedience, on the contrary, opens the whole soul to life. Holy Scripture teaches us this everywhere. "Keep My laws and My judgments, which, if a man do, he shall live in them."¹ Again, "Wait on God with patience . . . and endure, that thy life may be increased at the latter end."² These words are not spoken of the natural life of the soul, for "the commandment of God," says Our Lord, "is eternal life";³ equally its revelation and the road which leads to it. This "commandment" both teaches how to gain eternal life, and opens that life to all who submit to its teaching. And this is why we have termed obedience a perpetual communion or union.

The life of God, as far as He thinks well to bestow it upon us, consists for us in His will; and this divine life flows into the soul that executes it, and

¹ Levit. xviii. 5.

² Ecclus. ii. 3.

³ John xii. 50.

abides there. Obedience holds the same relation to the life God sets before us that faith does to the mysteries which He teaches us. Christ said to the Jews, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life."¹ "Your fathers did eat manna in the desert," and although it was a heavenly food, "they died." What is then this better nourishment, which, putting death to flight, brings eternal life? Without doubt, continues Our divine Lord, it is this new Bread, this super-angelic Bread, namely My Flesh, immolated for the salvation of the world; but it is likewise the will of My heavenly Father. I have said that "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me."² I have lived on this food; it has been My sustenance throughout the whole course of My mortal life; it was the cause of My death, and of My resurrection on the third day—and being unable to die again "I have become the cause of eternal salvation"³ to all those who, in their turn, shall obey by following My example. We also partake of this divine food, by meditating on the Holy Scriptures, for this is the word "which proceedeth from the mouth of God,"⁴ enlightening the hearts of men. But we are nourished with it in a still more heavenly manner when we obey its laws; for the truly blessed, says Our Lord Jesus Christ (meaning by this those who truly possess life) are not those who only hear the Word of God, but those who "hear it and keep

¹ John vi.² John iv. 34.³ Heb. v. 9.⁴ Matt. iv. 4.

it.”¹ In the same sense the Prophet declares that the commandments of God are a banquet and that those who observe them “shall feast” on them.² Earthly festivities are short; while this may be unceasing, for a Christian—much more a Religious—may never discontinue his practice of obedience. The great St. Vincent de Paul understood this when he taught the Fathers of the mission that “God is a perpetual Communion to the soul that does His Will.”

Doubtless, as we have already said, this sovereign will, and consequently the life contained in it, is hidden from us under a veil, God always acting thus in His sacramental operations. This second Eucharist also possesses its species, and these consist in human will and speech, in a derived authority, in a creature who is by nature our equal. In themselves, these are of higher importance, and less far removed from God than is the Eucharistic substance; but this is not the real question, since in comparison with the interior reality, which alone is essential, it is in both cases a mere form, an accident, or a kind of exterior appearance.

And that our superior should fill this place, even if this were all, would be simply adorable, and one of the most touching proofs of that unspeakable love which God bears towards us—towards those especially who have left all things for Him. Oh, how anxious He is for our perfection? for it seems as if there was

¹ Luke xi. 28.

² Ecclus. xxxix. 37.

no effort too great for Him to make in order to obtain it. We have been comparing the canonical institution of superiors to the Eucharistic consecration, yet the analogy goes still further. For as, after the consecration, the whole substance of the bread is changed into the body of the Lord, Who in an inexplicable manner transforms it into His own substance without using it as nourishment; so in the same manner, after their nomination, time, health, strength, life, intellect, heart, all that may be comprehended under the term of the substance of superiors, is in a manner completely absorbed by the commission they have received, by the power conferred on them, and by the charge entrusted to their keeping. "The burden of the Lord," as the Prophets often used to repeat, "the burden of the Lord."¹ Oh, how it presses on those in authority! And do they not further experience how, in the same degree that the Almighty presses, He also burns; and that it is not without reason that He has called Himself a "consuming fire"?² "Who suffers, and I do not suffer?" exclaims St. Paul, "who is scandalised, and I am not on fire?" And how often do not they cry secretly to God, like Moses bending under the weight of his office, "Have I conceived all this multitude, or begotten them, that thou shouldst say to me: Carry them in thy bosom as the nurse is wont to carry the little infant, and bear them into the land, for which thou hast sworn to their fathers?"³

¹ Zach. ix.² Heb. xii. 18.³ Numb. xi. 12.

Yes, truly, this is God's way of treating those souls loved by Him equally with their superiors; nay, perhaps even more. It is even to this point that He sacrifices those in authority, who must well understand that they are victims, and the victims of God.

But He who for the love of man first set the example of self-oblation and sacrifice; He, who has not shrunk from evangelising the world and bringing all nations to the faith, at the price of the blood of thousands of martyrs; He has also willed that, for the sanctification and salvation of those consecrated to Him, there should always be in each community one devoted being, whom He considers as His own special victim, and who in this state of sacrifice should be the medium of His communications to the rest. It is thus at their own cost, yet not without great merit to themselves, that our superiors are amongst us, like a sacrament giving us God for our nourishment. Therefore let us often consider how, through their instrumentality, and owing to their authority, the divine substance—that substance which is light, truth, wisdom, justice, goodness, stability, perfect happiness, and eternal life—is truly given to us under the form of created accidents which are frail and weak both in their commands and in themselves. This divine Substance enters into the obedient soul, penetrating it, and assimilating it to Itself, and consequently, by rendering this soul more and more conformable

to Christ, its divine Type, deifying it as far as possible, which is the aim and fruit of all true communion. St. Ignatius, the illustrious founder of the Society of Jesus, the great saint of obedience, has most clearly grasped and explained this truth. "The obedient man," he writes, "rising above the level of human nature, advances with giant strides to the highest degree of glory and dignity, for by freeing himself from the fetters of his own nature, he unites himself by the closest ties and in the most intimate manner to God, the sovereign good, thus clothing himself with the divine nature. And as God fills the heart of man in the same measure that He finds it empty of all self-will (the only impediment to His reign therein), it follows that whoever arrives at this perfect obedience can truly make use of those words of the Apostle which may be called the formula of perfection: 'I live, no, not I, but Christ liveth in me.'" This is the second most wonderful profit that the soul reaps from obedience.

Now, if obedience thus draw together God and man so that man is enabled to unite himself to God, of what blessings is it not the source? May we not call it the heavenly Wisdom of which Solomon said, "All good things have come to me together with her"?¹ And in fact, besides the special blessings which God granted to him on account of the singular love He bore to his father

¹ Wisd. vii. 11.

David, what was the reason of the many graces which overflowed on this prince? Simply the humble prayer made by him at the beginning of his reign, when, God having said to him, "Ask me what thou wilt, that I should give thee," he immediately replied: "O Lord God, Thou hast placed me on a throne: I am but a child, and know not how to go out and come in. Give therefore to thy servant an understanding heart."¹ Now, this prayer "was pleasing to the Lord," says the Holy Scripture, and from that day dated those astounding gifts which made Solomon wise, learned, and illustrious among all the monarchs of the East.

First, it is clear that by obedience we accomplish the fulness of Christian justice. It places the soul in safety from sin. We can only sin through disobedience, while obedience is the exact opposite to evil. A will docile to Almighty God is necessarily a will in right order, and the soul possessing such a will must be pure and innocent. In hell there is no obedience, because the will of each soul is externally fixed in a radical opposition to God. In heaven, on the contrary, there is unceasing obedience, because God there reigns without dispute and without limits; and love, now unchangeably perfect, creates an indissoluble union between the divine will and the will of the saints. In this life a soul can choose between obedience and disobedience; but if it makes choice of obedience

¹ 3 Kings iii. 9.

with full deliberation, above all by vow, it places itself, even here below, in the same state as that of the blessed in heaven.

Again, not only does the obedient soul avoid the occasions of sin, but, as far as compatible with our fallen nature, it almost precludes the possibility of sinning by removing its cause. "Oh blessed liberty of obedience," cries out St. Jerome, "which renders sin impossible to those who possess you." And in reality, by the total surrender of our will to God, we at the same time raise it above the lower impulses which often surprise and hold it captive; we free it from evil passions, from the perverse influence of our human nature, from our inordinate appetites, from false pleasures, from illusions, passion, caprice, weakness, vain fear, and pride; and, moreover, from the united strength of the world and the devil. How can evil penetrate into a soul thus guarded from all that might war against her? Self-will is declared to be the cause of all our faults, leading to damnation. Obedience puts self-will to death. "The vow of obedience," says St. Gregory, "is like a sacrificing priest"; and St. John Climacus adds, "It does more than sacrifice, it also buries self-will, so that by nothing less than perjury can it rise again."

These thoughts lead us to understand the unanimous teaching of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, namely, that obedience is in a certain way the mother and guardian of all the other virtues.

It alone possesses the secret of implanting them in the soul, that they may increase and bear fruit. It implies and perfects the whole order of what may be termed the negative virtues, because their object and tendency is to renounce and destroy nature and all that can oppose the reign of God within us. Therefore obedience is the seal of renunciation, the summit of mortification, the indispensable sign of humility, the flower of holy fear, the proof of true patience, the safeguard and lustre of poverty, the perfection of temperance, and consequently of chastity. And as regards the positive virtues, whose aim is not the avoidance of sin or the destruction of evil inclinations, but the practice of virtue and the service of God, obedience is so completely and indispensably bound up with each of them as to be in one way or another their very life.

First, as St. Thomas remarks, by the fact that God has commanded them, all other virtues are united with this one; so that, in order to do well in all things and at all times, it suffices to obey. Moreover—and every one can prove it by experience—obedience is the true fulfilment of justice, the chief exercise of fortitude, and the perfect practice of prudence. It constitutes an eminent act of religion, for it is written, "Obedience is better than sacrifice";¹ and again, "He that keepeth the law multiplieth offerings."²

¹ 1 Kings xv. 22.

² Ecclus. xxxv. 1.

What can we add to these words? Obedience is truly the choicest fruit of faith, as we see by the example of Abraham, whose faith, so firm and elevated that God proposes it as our model, was put to the final test by the heroic submission which made him without hesitation raise his hand to sacrifice his son.

Again, it is the nourishment which sustains hope, and supports us "while we are absent from the Lord, for we walk by faith and not by sight."¹ Nothing so satisfies the craving of the soul for God as obedience, nothing so sweetens for us the burden of this present life, and nothing gives us so much patience to await its ending. Again, nothing makes us more firm in our hope, as each merit gained for us by our obedience is another title to reward.

With regard to charity, the bond of union between it and obedience is so intimate that it is difficult to distinguish them. "He who sayeth he knoweth God," says St. John, "and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But he who keepeth His word (that is to say, who obeys), in him in very deed the charity of God is perfected."² And why? "Because," answers St. Thomas, "it is the property of love to form between those who love one will, and the same likes and dislikes." Long ago the Wise Man spoke thus: "The care of discipline is

¹ 2 Cor. v. 6.

² 1 John ii. 4, 5.

love: and love is the keeping of her laws: and the keeping of her laws is the firm foundation of incorruption: and incorruption bringeth near to God.”¹ Christ Himself teaches us that “Greater love than this can no man have, that a man lay down his life for his friend,”² whence it follows that martyrdom would seem to be for us the perfection of love. Yet to constitute martyrdom it is necessary to be conscious of doing the will of God, and of following the inspiration of grace, and of acting with the intention of pleasing Him; for, as it has sometimes happened, if any one should rashly expose himself to danger—not out of vain-glory or fanaticism, but only through a want of prudence, or from presumption—such a one would run the risk of yielding through weakness, and of losing in the next world all the reward of his action. It is therefore indispensable that, in a certain manner, martyrdom should be consecrated by obedience. And St. Ignatius goes further, when he affirms that in some ways obedience is more perfect than martyrdom; and he grounds his reasoning on the fact that, while one who thus offers up his life immolates the natural and vehement desire inherent in man of preserving life, on the other hand, he who vows obedience sacrifices with one blow every desire of nature, cutting them away by the very root.

How this virtue simplifies our whole life! For

¹ Wisd. vi. 19, 20.

² John xv. 13.

it sets before it only one point of view, one duty, one act; through which act every obligation is satisfied, and, as far as possible, every duty to others accomplished. It is an act which never wearies, for it is the occupation of the blessed, and those who pursue it here already taste the happiness of heaven.

Again, not only does obedience create for us this perfect simplicity of life, but it is at the same time our straight and secure road. David speaks of entering "into the powers of the Lord."¹ This appears to have been his favourite thought, and formed his most cherished desire. Obedience introduces us, even in this life, into this heavenly sanctuary, for it makes us practically share in the divine infallibility. A superior may be mistaken, and even err in commanding, teaches St. John Climacus, yet the inferior can never mistake or sin in obeying. "You have committed such and such imprudent actions; you have omitted something universally judged necessary." "But, O Lord, I have obeyed." "Most true, good and faithful servant; therefore recompence is your due, not punishment, and you will surely receive it." To live under regular authority is to live under the rays of the divine Model; to be obedient to this authority is to make life even on earth a perfect mirror of eternal reality.

What profound, unspeakable, unchangeable peace

¹ Ps. lxx. 16.

ensues! A heavenly pilot watches over me; he will be responsible for my soul, for my perfection, for my perseverance, even for my salvation, on condition that I abide steadfast in his vessel; with the exception of this one care, I need have no anxieties. O blessed repose! O vanished cares! O troubles so remote that they seem impossibilities! O good and sweet leisure which leaves human nature free in God! Yet this pilot is a creature, and what guarantee can a creature offer me? how can such a guide suffice me? By reading your wants in his own, by drawing from the experience of his own misery the treasures of indulgence towards you, which you yourself could not surpass, and by compassionating the evils to which he has himself been subject. Your pilot is a creature: true, and the fact is good and favourable for you; yet it is not the whole truth, for although the exterior, the accidents, may be those of a creature, yet the principle of power in itself is not a created thing, for it is truly God Who guides your vessel.

Divine Providence, St. Ignatius tells us, is here bound by a contract. "The Almighty is no longer free; He must perseveringly show patience and love towards souls who, by the vow of obedience, have confided themselves to His keeping, and thrown themselves into His arms." So that it belongs by right to the obedient to abandon themselves, or, as David says, "to sleep in the self-same peace." "Yes,"

adds St. John Climacus, "in the road of obedience we advance while reposing." And if such is our security in life, what sweetness and consolation will not be our portion at the hour of death! "With him who feareth the Lord," says the inspired writer (that is, with him who fears to offend God, and consequently to disobey Him), "it shall go well in the latter end, and in the day of his death he shall be blessed."¹ For such a one death is truly a sleep, the repose of an infant in the arms of its mother. His death is like that of the truly obedient One, Who did the will of His Father to the end, and then seeing His task accomplished, sweetly bowed His sacred Head and said, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit."²

The whole of life is simplified and rendered peaceful and secure by obedience, which also makes it fruitful to a marvellous degree. It possesses the secret of rendering every action of which man is capable, holy, spiritual, agreeable to God, and meritorious. It deifies our smallest actions, forming them according to the mind of God, and marking them with His own character. It is obedience which bears the fruit, which, as St. John says, "abides."³ The exterior, the interior, all that is touched by obedience, puts on life, and life eternal. Self-will corrupts all, and produces only withered fruit. All that is best in us is spoilt by its touch. If God finds self-will in a fast, that fast is rejected: if

¹ Ecclus. i. 13.

² Luke xxiii. 46.

³ John xv. 5.

in a sacrifice, that sacrifice becomes a lie and an abomination in His sight. On the contrary, all that is little, lowly, ordinary, insignificant, even easy and agreeable, is rendered through obedience sublime and worthy of God. So that eating, sleeping, amusement, may thus be made very meritorious for heaven; far more so than an action in itself holy, such as hearing Mass or receiving Holy Communion, but which has been done by us through self-will and a spirit of independence. If, as Holy Scripture teaches, the "obedient man speaketh victories,"¹ we see also that he is possessed of wonderful riches; he amasses them at every step, and his life may be likened to that fertile field whose smell rejoiced Isaac as he blessed Jacob; Isaac being here a type of the heavenly Father granting blessings to His docile and obedient children.

Every one talks of liberty: it is the great question of the day, and is often made the ground of violent attacks against the Church, above all against Religious Orders. It is asserted, and often in perfect good faith, so much has the habit of repudiating and forgetting Christian teaching destroyed our right notions, that obedience destroys liberty. Without doubt, between her free-will and the evil that she might of her own nature choose and effect, the Religious who vows obedience places a great abyss. Acting as a sovereign, and by this very act showing how completely God allows him this power, he boldly

¹ Prov. xxi. 28.

forces his free-will to protect itself against all the errors and weaknesses of which he knows it to be capable. But is this to destroy, or even to enslave it? Who cannot understand that, on the contrary, it is to heal it and save it? If we have found, and made use of, the secret of never again faltering on our road, have we thus destroyed or lessened our natural power of walking? Have we not rather ensured its perfection and free exercise? It is a primary principle and a universal rule that everything which lives according to its own laws, and fulfils the purpose of its existence, thereby grows, ripens, strengthens, and becomes perfect. Free-will is not given to man, St. Thomas says, to allow him to follow all his fancies and satisfy all his caprices; it is bestowed on him that, unlike irrational animals, he may not act under the impulse of natural inclination, but from the effect of a free choice arising from the rightful exercise of his own powers; so that man, becoming in this manner the author of his actions, may make them meritorious, and worthy of a just reward from God. Thus the great and final end of free-will is to procure for man, under the leading influence of grace, the glory and beatitude which God has promised as the recompence of our virtues. Thence it follows that its immediate end is to establish and preserve us in such a state of liberty that as far as possible we may neither be detained nor hindered on our way to our eternal destiny; but above all to free us from all slavery

and from every influence which could retard our progress. What is it to be free? To be able to advance in virtue without contradiction or difficulty, gently, spontaneously, fully, and constantly; to increase in justice; to dilate the heart through love; to develop in holiness; to approach at last to our divine ideal, by a resemblance growing continually more and more exact, and by the perfect joy which is the fruit of this resemblance when consummated—this is true freedom, and those who understand liberty in any other sense, or who dream of it under other forms, or seek it under other conditions, deceive themselves to their own misery, both in this world and the next. Does man procure his own freedom by sinning? Above all, is he free after having sinned? It is true, this senseless action done by him supposes and proves a state of freedom; as the act of one who kills himself supposes and proves the possession of life. Yes, suicide is the act of a living person, but it is one which strikes him with death: in the same manner sin is the act of a free being, but it is an act which precipitates this being into a frightful and, in itself, irremediable state of slavery. “Whoever committeth sin,” says Jesus Christ, “is the servant of sin.”¹ While this present life lasts, this chain can doubtless be broken by grace and sorrow; but if the sinner does not repent, if he continues obstinate in his sin, his chain becomes tighter and

¹ John viii. 34.

heavier; and if he should die in this state, it would then completely encircle him, without the possibility of ever being again broken; for it is a chain of darkness, ignominy, and sorrow, and it is never-ending.

On the contrary, the just, the humble, the obedient, because they have freely renounced evil, escape from this law, which St. Paul calls "the law of sin and death,"¹ which is the principle of the slavery of the soul. They are free with the liberty merited and given by Christ, with that holy, radiant, and joyful liberty which is like the aurora of heaven, and which the Scripture calls the "liberty of the glory of the children of God."²

And the Religious, who goes further and does more; the Religious, who not only breaks with evil, but with that great occasion of evil, the world; the Religious, who practically denies all that in its nature could draw him to sin, above all, that proprietorship of himself which is the germ of all evil—this Religious is far more free than a Christian in the world. If the latter has feet, he has wings; if the one walks and runs in straight and beaten ways, the other wings his flight through an immense, unresisting, and dazzling atmosphere. No other can, like him, approach always alone and entirely, by every movement and action, to God, the term of his desires, and the centre of his repose. None other can have the right to say, as he can,

¹ Rom. viii. 2.

² Ibid, 21.

“O God, Thou hast broken my bonds: I will sacrifice to Thee the sacrifice of praise.”¹ I left Egypt by renouncing sin; in leaving the world, I crossed the sea, wherein I saw all the host of my enemies swallowed up: I can now feed on my manna, sing my hymns, offer my sacrifices; I can fix my tent wherever I shall be led to rest by the cloud and the column of fire in which the angel of God guides me. I am not yet, it is true, established in the promised land; but between this land and myself there is only distance and time, the distance short, the time but a few days. I can already catch a glimpse on the horizon of this land of my hopes, and at times already distantly enjoy its sweet breezes. I am, then, free; free as a being can be who is still travelling on earth. “Truth has made me free.”² “The Son of God has delivered me.”³ I enjoy the liberty of Jesus, because I partake fully in the life of Jesus; for, in reality, I live the life of Jesus: I imitate Him by my poverty, I imitate Him by my chastity, but I imitate Him far more closely by becoming obedient; as I thus intimately partake of His state of Sonship, the essence of that blessed state consisting in this, that “the Son cannot do anything of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doth, these the Son also doth in like manner.”⁴ As to His nature and condition as God, that is understood of

¹ Ps. cxv. 17.

³ Ibid. 36.

² John viii. 32.

⁴ John v. 19.

the mystery of His eternal generation, by which He holds all that He does, as well as all that He is, from the Father who generates Him; while speaking of His human nature and life, it is understood to refer to His obedience, which is the expression of His filial piety.

Such are, in brief, the advantages of obedience. A quotation from St. Catherine of Siena admirably sums up all that we have endeavoured to say, and we cannot resist the pleasure of giving it. The saint is speaking in the person of God, and it is easy to feel that God in reality speaks through her words. "O sweet Obedience," she says, "loveable and dear Obedience! O most resplendent Obedience, how glorious art thou, as the other virtues only exist through thee! Thou art a magnificent queen. He who espouses thee is rich in every good, and experiences no evils. His days are full of peace, and flow by in repose; the waves of an angry sea can never harm him with their tempests. The centre of his soul is inaccessible to hatred, and no injury disturbs it. O sweet Obedience! how like thou art to the Word, my well-beloved Son. Therefore, thou art pleasing to all, thy countenance is always serene; thou exhalst the perfume of a sincere humility, and thou desirest nothing from thy neighbour contrary to my will. Thou art truthful and guileless, because thou makest the heart charitable. Thou art as the aurora announcing divine grace. Like the sun, thou warmest him who possesses thee,

because the ardour of charity never abandons thee. Each day thou enrichest the earth by causing both soul and body to produce a most life-giving fruit. Thou art a precious, although hidden, pearl, that many are ignorant of, and that the earth treads under foot; but by despising thyself, and making thyself vile at every opportunity, thou exaltest the creatures who are influenced by thee. Thy power is so great that none can resist thee, because thou art emancipated from the deadly slavery of sensuality, which destroys all greatness, and reduces the soul to a state of bondage." And to prove her words, the saint goes on to show how this virtue is triumphant even over the elements, and forces nature to serve her by miracles. This is, as we have already remarked, the privilege of poverty; it is also by many higher titles that of obedience.

It now remains to treat of the duties incumbent on those who make the vow.

PART III

DUTIES IMPOSED BY OBEDIENCE

THE divine blessings that obedience obtains for us, and the duties it imposes, alike have their groundwork and principle in the Christian doctrine of authority. Thus, just as it is enough to know what authority is, for us to realise the profit we may gain by submitting to it, so by considering it carefully we may get a full idea of the kinds of submission it demands of us, especially in the Religious life.

First of all, provided that it is God who commands through our superiors, we must obey them as we should God, and ordinary Christians are required to do this. "Servants, be obedient to them that are your lords according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the simplicity of your heart, as to Christ." "With a good will serving, as to the Lord, and not to men."¹

Again, if God commands us through our superiors, we must hold ourselves in readiness to obey them to the full extent of the authority conferred on them by God, and to obey all their legitimate orders. Thus did the Israelites understand it when,

¹ St. Paul, Eph. vi. 7.

after reading the Law, they cried out unanimously, "All things that the Lord hath spoken we will do; we will be obedient."¹ Lastly, when it is God who commands, His dominion extends over the whole of creation, and no part of creation is exempt from His laws. For obedience to be perfect, therefore, the soul as well as the body must bend under authority, and, moreover, the soul with all its powers. First, the heart and the will, which inspire and decide our actions; and then the mind itself, which is the source of our judgments. The Apostle implied this when he wrote to the Hebrews, "Obey your superiors, and be entirely subject to them."²

Let obedience, then, be divine, universal, and entire: divine in intention, universal in extent, and entire in subjection. These are the three qualities which will give it due proportion to that holy Authority which is both its Rule and the Cause of its existence.

These three points must be made clear. Obedience, we say, must be divine in intention; that is, in obeying our superiors we must intend to obey God. From the text just cited from St. Paul, we may conclude that this view of God in superiors is an undoubted duty. The doctrine of the saints on this point is formal and unanimous. St. Ignatius sums it up when he writes to his subjects, "Revere the divine majesty in those who command you, and render them your obedience in a perfectly

¹ Exod. xxiv. 7.

² Heb. xiii. 5, 17.

religious spirit." Understand, moreover, that there is no question here of a mere supererogatory practice, conducing to the perfection of the act that it accompanies, but not concerned with its essence. This turning towards God is essential to the act; take it away, and our obedience remains not even Christian, still less Religious, in its nature. What is the real meaning of "religion"? "Something," replies St. Thomas, "which implies a relation of the creature to God—a power, a virtue, which binds us to Him, as to our eternal principle and our last end, towards which our liberty ought to tend entirely." How, then, can an act be called "religious" which has only a human goal? This duty, therefore, is both certain and indispensable.

Where, alas! is its practice? How often are superiors obeyed merely because of their wisdom, goodness, or pleasantness; because their blame or praise is dreaded or desired; or even from more or less thinly disguised motives of self-interest! We sometimes want to gain from them, if not such special favour as we know conscience would forbid them to show us, at least an inward feeling of esteem and preference for ourselves which it would please us secretly to guess at. But putting aside all motives obviously springing from self-love or policy, and which must necessarily spoil all we do, let us consider only such as may be acknowledged, as allowable affection or the natural desire to please. Doubtless if these feelings help obedience, there

is no harm in being influenced by them; but if, before that Eye of God which sees with sevenfold clearness, they are the only impelling motives, or even the chief ones, what are those doing who have vowed obedience? Once more we repeat, nothing good or conformable to their state. What does St. Francis de Sales say about it? and we know him to be both sound and gentle in his teaching. "You obey your superiors," he says to his dear daughters of the Visitation, "because you feel liking and respect for their persons. Alas! in this you do only as the world does; for there people not only obey the orders of those they love, but would not feel their love satisfied unless they had tried hard to gratify even all their tastes and desires."

This being the case, in what loss of merit and what failings in virtue must such motives result! Virtues are habits; and habits, at least in as far as they are acquired ones, can only be formed by reiterated acts: according to the nature of an action will be the nature of a habit formed by it. If, then, we follow human attraction in obeying; if, instead of submitting to God because He is God, we simply yield to man from human reasons, how can such acts, not being religious ones, help to produce in the soul a religious habit or virtue? Those who perform them may not scandalise their community, they may even edify it, for it is the outside alone that can edify or scandalise; they may also attain the object, good in itself, of being pleasing

to superiors and gaining their affection; but they will not have really practised obedience; and as this is a fundamental principle of their state, their edifice will have no foundation. This, again, the holy Bishop of Geneva teaches in the Instruction already cited: "I say that if the Religious does not obey he will not attain to any virtue, because it is chiefly obedience which makes him a Religious, as being the proper and special virtue of Religion."

This point, then, is of consequence, and demands our closest attention. We must see God in our superiors, not always—for this is unnecessary, and hardly possible—immediately and actually, but habitually and with an often-renewed intention. God wills that we should act thus on faith; He undoubtedly gives the grace for it, and takes wonderful pleasure in seeing it corresponded with. Why does He so often leave defects unremoved in those who have authority? Certainly these are exaggerated; if people so easily see "motes in their brothers' eyes,"¹ how much more are not inferiors tempted to see them in the eyes of superiors, who, having the office of guiding them, are thereby compelled to correct them, which cannot be done without reproof and, in case of necessity, punishing! Nevertheless, it must be granted that superiors have defects. Why does God allow this? First, because to appoint a superior is not to work a miracle. Next, because such defects are for the most part profitable to those

¹ Matt. vii. 3.

who have them. "Virtue," as God Himself bears witness,¹ "is made perfect in infirmity:" virtue lives by humility, and every one knows that humility can hardly live in us except through experience of our own misery. It is clear, considerable imperfections, visible to all, and especially lasting ones, form a fortunate and often necessary counteraction to that inward exaltation which high office may produce. But there is yet another chief reason for these persistent defects, namely, that they are most powerful means of perfection for inferiors. To obey a person whose mind is out of sympathy with our own, whose character displeases us, whose manners grate against our taste, does not this imply higher virtue than obeying one who is altogether loveable? If a community possessed an Archangel for superior, would it be, as to this particular point of obedience, in the way of becoming as perfect as one which, like so many, was ruled only by a man of humble origin?

Hence it is a common rule among superiors, while always keeping in their hearts that gentle, tender, and compassionate indulgence owed by parents to their children, and even generally preserving such a winning and gracious manner as shall soften the yoke and invite to submission, yet nevertheless sometimes to prove, by a somewhat unpleasantly given order, whether the obedience of their subjects is divine or human, natural or religious. Discretion

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

is of course needed here, as in other cases; but the practice is excellent. We read in the lives of the Fathers of the Desert to what trials of this kind the ancient solitaries used to put their disciples. These men of God imitated God. He, willing to abide continually with us, and unable to do so suitably in His natural form, might at least have hidden Himself under attractive appearances; for instance, He might have shown Himself enveloped in brilliant light, revealed His presence by some sweet perfume, or, as He especially gave Himself to be our nourishment, have taken the taste of some delicious food or drink. But, because Faith gains by what sense loses, Jesus chose the commonest appearances and the most insipid of tastes.

What is our position with regard to all this nowadays? Faith is so feeble, and the love of independence so strong, even in monasteries, that trials formerly practised would now be rash, and prudent superiors judge them to be almost impossible. For fear of giving scandal, authority is forced to be timid; and it is now necessary to work on souls with just such precaution, care, and fears as one observes in workmen who are trying to prop up a house that threatens to fall into ruin. Is not such a state of things a great misfortune and a lamentable falling off? "If the salt itself lose its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?"¹

It is well, therefore, that Religious should renew

¹ Matt. v. 13.

in themselves the spirit of faith as to God's presence in all their superiors. Some Rules order that the latter should only be spoken to kneeling, at least when they are chief superiors. If a Rule does not enjoin this, and if it is not sanctioned by the custom of a monastery, we do not say that it should be done, but we should at least have the will to do it, and when we approach those who govern us, we should speak to them with such reverence and humility that they may feel us to be inwardly at their feet. Such a spirit constitutes the very sinews of obedience. God Himself revealed to St. Catherine of Siena that the first principle of that super-excellent obedience, which was given by Jesus to His Father, was the constant sight of the Divinity possessed by His most holy Soul. Now, what Jesus saw in clear vision, we know with certainty; and the same divine object that the light of interior glory discovered to Him, our faith, which is also a light, makes present to our spirit. Ah! if we kept this lamp always burning within us, and walked only by its radiance, how enlightened would be our way, how firm our steps, how rapid our progress, and how perfect and fruitful would our obedience soon become! Behold two souls who in turn come to their superior: why does one leave enlightened, satisfied, pleased? Why has he understood and relished his order or advice? Why, with this light, has he also carried away unction, grace, and courage, while the other one

returns empty, discontented, upset, perhaps even irritated? Simply because one of them came, full of faith, to interrogate God, and to receive an answer from Him; whilst the other came from a purely human motive, to hold intercourse with a human creature. "If you go to your superiors as to God," said the Blessed Magdalen of St. Joseph, "you will receive from them as from God, however imperfect they may be; if you seek the creature in them, you will receive from them only as creatures, no matter how holy they may be."

No doubt superiors themselves ought to be the first to believe with a firm and practical faith in their own authority. If they are not convinced that, though nothing in themselves, they are nevertheless made divine in authority, how can they do the divine work? Many fail in this duty, and hence often comes the uncertainty, weakness, and inefficacy of their rule. The faith of the preacher calls forth the faith of the hearer; and in the same way that of the superior incites, makes easy, and strengthens that of the subject. But this should be said to subjects: "If even those who guide you do not sufficiently take upon themselves the character of God, if they appear doubtful of their own rights, and are more human than they should be in commanding you, it is not your business to judge them; your duty, in all cases, is to feel no contempt for their position, but to look, beyond and in spite of everything, at their divine character, and conse-

quently to see Jesus in them, and to obey them as *Him.*"

Besides being divine in intention, obedience must be universal in extent. That is, the Religious must submit to every person invested with legitimate authority, and to all the things which these persons may legitimately order, in whatever manner they may order them to be done.

First, then, every one with legitimate authority must be obeyed. Understand—every one; no matter of what age (by nature or in Religion), of what character, of how much experience, or even of how much virtue. No one can be better cited as to this whole matter than St. Ignatius. "Just," he writes, "as a superior is not to be obeyed because he is prudent, good, possessed of fine qualities, or enriched with divine gifts; so, if a superior has but little judgment, and moderate prudence, this is no reason for yielding him less perfect obedience; for, whatever he may be, he represents Him whose wisdom is infallible; and God will not fail to supply towards you whatever may be wanting in His minister." It was in this same spirit that St. Peter said to all the faithful, "Be ye subject to your masters with all fear: not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward."¹

For those who are in Religion, this last case is at least rare. Superiors regularly bear the name of

¹ 1 Peter ii. 18.

Father or Mother, and such they generally are, even more in heart than by name. But even should it happen that power was exercised by a cold, ungracious, or exacting person, a Religious should nevertheless recognise, adore, and kiss the hand of God, in the hard but consecrated hand of that superior.

The Latin Church, as we know, consecrates the Eucharist with unleavened bread; the Greek Church uses leavened. Leavened bread is less white than the other, and rougher to the touch; but, once consecrated, what do these different appearances matter? Jesus is upon the Greek altar as on the Latin; East and West pay Him the same homage.

Further, in monasteries, and still more in Congregations, it is never one person only who is charged with government. As the chief superiors are regularly appointed by the Sovereign Pontiff, or sometimes by the Bishop, so they themselves appoint subordinates. Whether these coadjutors are chosen for them by election, or immediately by themselves, matters not, so long as all is done according to Rule. The power that resides in the highest superiors passes on to others without leaving those from whom it emanates; and these others possess it in just the proportion required for the dignities or offices delegated to them. Here we have individual hierarchies, imitating the one great hierarchy already spoken of, by which they are inspired and to whose work they contribute.

Now, no matter in what degree a person may

participate in authority, such person is to be respected from as divine a motive as the one who possesses full power, in exact proportion to the degree of participation. The crucifix we wear is not nearly so large as the one surmounting the Church Tabernacle; but we rightly give no less honour to one than to the other, as both alike represent the same Jesus. Thus, we owe in proportion exactly the same obedience to the lowest delegate as to the one who delegates; and, in fact, the same as to God Himself, the principle of all delegation.

This is a point in which it is easy to forget one's self; but why? Always from want of faith. How often is not a transmitted order less well received than a direct one? or, when some one entrusted with an office, using a right and fulfilling a duty, makes some regulations about it, how often does it not happen that the regulation is either not accepted, or accepted grudgingly? To obey the superior seems simple enough; but people appear to think it a dishonour to yield to any other power, especially if they happen to have been longer in Religion than the one who exercises it! But this spirit is really the same thing that it would be to show less respect to the Holy Eucharist, if it should be carried by a Deacon instead of a Priest, which may happen on extraordinary occasions; or even by a lay person, as was sometimes the case in times of persecution.

Besides extending to every person legitimately authorised, true obedience must also extend to everything legitimately commanded by these persons. We say *legitimately* because this is not a question, as St. Francis de Sales says, of obeying "at random"; while St. Thomas teaches that "as obedience is sufficient when we submit in all things necessary, and becomes perfect when we submit in all things allowed, so it would be indiscreet if it led the Soul so far as to submit in unlawful things." It is therefore clear that, if we must never obey any human authority whatever in opposition to a law or a command of God, neither ought we to obey a subordinate power whose orders were contrary to the declared will of even a human ruler of superior degree in a constituted hierarchy. Except in this case, which in Religion does not often occur, obedience should extend to everything; to temporal, spiritual, external, and internal matters; to community and private acts; to what is to be done, and what omitted; to what pleases, and what displeases. We include spiritual and interior acts, such as certain prayers, certain practices of devotion, certain exercises of the intellect and will. "Indeed," says Suarez, "the superior has always the right to expect such acts when he judges them useful to the progress of the Soul he is governing. If this Soul has given itself to him, this must have been in order that he might form it to perfection, to which interior acts are necessary. And," con-

tinues the great theologian, "it is above all in this that the vow of obedience is superior to the other two vows of Religion; for the latter sacrifice to God only the outside, while the former makes Him complete Master of the inner man."

But, amongst many sacrifices that obedience may impose upon us, there are two which often appear less tolerable and less necessary than others: these are orders concerning employments and dispensations. Many souls, good, but not clear-sighted, easily make themselves fancy that an office imposed, even by obedience, is hurtful to their perfection. We would rather not have this or that responsibility; we hunger for more leisure; we cannot be occupied so much with our neighbour except by losing sight of ourselves, which is obviously a spiritual loss; and much more to the same purpose. Reasons swarm, and the mind is besieged by them. Then, as to dispensations: we profess to feel well, and in fact better than any one else; we have tested our own strength, and have no need of alleviations. Or, again, the doctor does not understand the importance of the Rule; the infirmarian is too easily frightened; the superior is too fatherly or motherly. If a law of the Church is in question, it is worse still: did we come into a monastery to do less penance than in the world? Besides, the exceeding annoyance of not keeping the Rule would make us more ill than keeping it fully could do, so what would be the good of a dispensation? All this is illusion.

We may except certain humble and discreet remarks which may, and sometimes even ought to be made, and which shall be referred to again; but, saving these, it is certain that the truly obedient Religious will both fulfil his office in peace, and esteem the most rigid regularity as nothing compared with an appointed dispensation, when once the clear and decided will of a superior is made known. Whoever obeys is sufficiently prayerful; whoever obeys does enough penance; to do nothing, when inaction is commanded, is to do one's whole duty; whilst to do much, by one's own choice—to fast, sing office, spend the night in prayer, shed one's blood, do great charities, even to convert the world were it possible—is to do simply nothing, at least as regards one's own progress. Remember Esther. Admitted amongst the number of those maidens from whom Assuerus was to choose a wife, she left her companions to choose their own adornments. For herself, modest, indifferent, and docile, she took the ornaments that were given her. What came of this? "The king," says Holy Scripture, "loved her more than the rest, and placed on her head the diadem which made her his queen."¹ Let all Religious keep this simplicity of obedience; it is the way that leads to the throne: not the throne of a mortal sovereign, but that of the King of Kings. Beyond the will of God, as declared by superiors, all is delusive as a mist, and dangerous as a precipice.

¹ Esther ii. 17.

And, conversely, whatever that blessed voice of authority says is to be listened to and obeyed. Every prescribed action is like a sacred meeting-place which God has deigned to make with us. There He will be found, just as the Samaritan woman found Jesus at the well of Jacob. He is there with His grace, with His strength, with His gentle love, with that "living water" which quenches thirst, and becomes to those who drink it "a fountain springing up into life everlasting";¹ in short, He is there, which is everything. We shall certainly find Him nowhere else in the same way: shall we even find Him at all anywhere else?

Besides doing all that is regularly ordered, we must likewise do it in the manner that is ordered. This must be understood of the place, the time, the degree, in short, of all the circumstances concerned in the act prescribed. Oh, how dear are details to love, and how full of value! Are they not, too, the threads with which the tissue of life is woven? Take away its details, and what is left of our everyday life? Let us, then, have a religious care for detail. A human spirit may always whisper that they are mere minutiae: we must boldly reply that they are delicacies; and we know that delicacy is worth, between friends, a hundred times more than great services: it is the flower of the heart and the perfume of the affections. Let this perfume and this flower be given to God, or, rather, returned to Him;

¹ St. John iv. 14.

for, besides our having necessarily nothing but what He has first given us, consider what delicacy he Has manifested, and is daily manifesting afresh, in His relations with us! The care of God, His small attentions, His observation, the marvellous seasonableness of His help, the exquisite perfection of His kindness, in a word, His delicacy, is something that the heart feels when it is pure and enlightened; but what lips may describe it? We, too, should put care into all our acts, but specially into those of obedience. Did not Jesus Himself do this? Look at Him, follow Him through His life! He neither delayed, hastened, added to, cut off, nor neglected anything. He would not leave this world till he had gone over, in His sacred memory, all the types which He had to realise, all the prophecies He had to fulfil, all the laws He had to observe, all the graces He had to merit for us, all the examples He had to give, all the services He had to perform; in short, every single portion of the immense work which His Father's adorable will had entrusted to Him; so that, before He left, He might give testimony to Himself that His obedience had been universal, and might cry, "It is consummated."¹

And, lastly, giving obedience to all, and in all things, we must also give it, no matter what form the commandment takes, or to what degree it extends. No doubt, if the order is not formal, submission to it may be avoided without actual breach

¹ John xix. 30.

of vow ; no doubt, if a superior, in declaring his will, does not intend to compel the conscience, we may refuse submission without thereby incurring the blame of disobedience, properly so called. But, putting aside the facts that even where there is no sin against the vow, there may be one against the virtue, and that even where one has not formally sinned against a virtue, one is not sure of not having failed in some other duty ; still, it is surely clear that merely not to offend God is insufficient. Is it not understood that by the very fact of belonging to the Religious state we are bound to tend towards perfection ; and that no one tends towards perfection who does not habitually abound in justice ? Let us then always consider a wish which we may prudently take for granted as a wish declared ; let us be decided by a counsel as quickly as by an order, and look upon a simple desire as a commandment whenever our superiors are concerned. This brings us to the last point we have to consider, namely, to that entireness of submission which, if well practised, brings obedience to the height of perfection.

David said to himself : " Shall not my soul be subject to God, for from Him is my salvation ? " ¹ He might have spoken of the Creator's rights ; and we have seen what these are, and how far they extend. But, in the moral life, it is the heart which is chiefly concerned ; and the heart is gained

¹ Ps. lxi. 2.

much more completely by the goodness of a benefactor than by the majesty of a sovereign. Moreover, we know David's weakness and our own; and also the supreme importance of the submission which he preaches to us by preaching it to himself. Hence, we feel sure that the holy king is giving himself, in these words, the most triumphant reasons he can find for practising the subjection he speaks of. My salvation, he says, comes from Him: that is, Jesus comes forth from the bosom of that God with whom I am treating; it is love which promulgates the right, and accepts the burden, of authority. All that I could desire or conceive of good has its source in Him Who commands me, and Who makes my obedience the very condition of my happiness. Shall I not then be subject to Him, without reserve and for ever? Shall I keep, to use in spite of Him, any part whatever either of my will, my judgment, or, still more, of my bodily powers? For by nature the soul is Queen in me; if the Queen obeys, how much more should not the servants do so? O my God! my Saviour! shall there be anything in me which is not perfectly subject to Thee?

This is what, especially in Religion, every one should say to himself; and to go from the least to the greatest, should one not, to begin with, be faithful, exact, punctual, and fervent in exterior obedience: that is, in the execution of the act commanded? The question is not, should we ever

resist? but, should we even give cause for an order to be repeated? Oh! how little love has he who, hearing his friend knock at the threshold of his house, does not open to him at once, but makes him wait! What is a superior who gives an order, or even expresses a wish, but the heavenly Friend Who says to us: "I stand here at the door and knock; my sister, my friend, my spouse, open to me. I have said of My Heart, 'Knock, and it shall be opened to you.' Shall it be said of yours that when I, in my turn, knock, you will refuse to open to me?" Let us, then, have none of this argumentative and ill-tempered obedience, which must, as it were, be carried off by assault through formal commands, or at least purchased by innumerable words and endless exhortations. "When you sound a single blast of the trumpet," said God to Moses, "the princes and chiefs of the people shall hasten to you. If you will move the crowd, then sound prolonged blasts."¹ Would the elect of Jesus, Religious souls, Virgins consecrated to God, Princesses of the heavenly court, be guided after the manner of a profane crowd? Let a single sound, a single word suffice: let us then obey at the first sign, "without fear, without delay, without tepidity," as St. Benedict admirably says. Let it be "without fear," because God is with the docile soul, and one who obeys, strengthened by such companionship, can have nothing but victory; "without delay,"

¹ Num. x. 4.

because, says St. Bernard, the word of God is rapid in its course, and wishes to see all those who propose to follow it run also; lastly, "without tepidity," because to obey God is to give to Him, and "God loves a cheerful giver."¹ Let there be no questioning, no examination; "to allow one's self such things in these cases," says Peter Blossius, "is presumptuously to taste the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil," and the human race well knows the cost of this. "Have you seen a man swift in his works?" says the wise man: "he shall stand before kings, and shall not be obscure."² Never, then, let any one object that they have this or that to do; if the bell rings, the Rule speaks, or the superior makes only a sign, it is always Jesus Who says, "I wish it." When Jesus says "I wish it," what have we to do but to obey? Listen once more to the teaching of St. Benedict. "Leave unfinished," he says, that which you are about, and with hands disengaged, and the speedy foot of obedience, follow by deeds the voice of him who commands."³ Our old Masters loved to compare Religious to birds; even when on the ground, birds are merely poised; at the slightest noise they fly away. So should a Religious, wherever he is or whatever he may be doing, be only poised, and should take root nowhere. To take root means to have an inordinate attachment to whatever is our occupation; the root itself

¹ 2 Cor. ix. 7.

² Prov. xxii. 29.

³ Reg. S. Ben. cv.

is inattention, immortification, dwelling on one's self, indolence. How easily we should obey if our heart was always on high! Look at the saints; behold Abraham, Samuel, Joseph. They are as ready by night as by day; while their eyes sleep their hearts watch. God speaks, and they are instantly on their feet; by the time He has done speaking they are on the way to execute His orders. It was with them in his mind that St. Bernard wrote: "The real lover of obedience knows no delay; he has a horror of to-morrow, and does not understand obstacles; he anticipates commands. He keeps his eyes open, his ears attentive, his tongue ready to speak, his hands prepared to act, his feet free to start off; his whole person is braced up so as to take in as quickly as possible the will of him who rules."

And then, when he once understands this blessed will, he not only executes it, but he does not forget it: every direction, every decision, every intention becomes indelibly engraved on his memory, and he never dreams of thinking that because a rule is not perpetually laid down afresh, it has therefore fallen into disuse. In short, what can we say more than the saints? And as the saints have said it, why not repeat it? The truly obedient soul, the true and good Religious, is a tool in the hands of the workman, a staff in that of the traveller; he no more resists than would a corpse.

First, then, let there be fidelity, punctuality, and

promptitude in exterior obedience; but next, and above all things, sincere submission of the will; full and hearty concurrence with the will that commands. In this lies the soul of obedience, and consequently its life; and God takes no pleasure in dead holocausts. If the inside of the cup is not pure, what matters the outside? When we bend the knee, if the soul remains unbent, what homage have we paid? "All the glory of the King's daughter is within."¹ When we speak of being "docile as a tool," this does not mean mere mechanical docility, but an obedience whose source lies in the will. The chief instrument here is our soul; and it is by our own free-will that we must subdue this. "Obey with the heart,"² says St. Paul. No other sort of obedience is worthy of being called virtue; and, as we should never offer by vow any goods below a certain degree of excellence, how could the mere submission of the body be made the matter of a vow, especially of that vow which surpasses all the rest?

Therefore, when we do any work that has been ordered, we should do our very best, even constrain ourselves, to wish it, love it, and do it, precisely because it has been so ordered. The will of the subject should be under that of the superior exactly as a horse is under the rider who sits and guides it; the heart should be attached to the precept given, as is the small craft to the vessel

¹ Psalm xlv. 14.

² "Ex animo"; Ephes. vi.

that has it in tow; in short, the dependence should be loyal, deep, and entire: every movement directed by authority, just as Jesus Himself was directed by His Father.

If the work we are given to do happens to be pleasant, then, says St. Gregory the Great, we must take care not to be carried away by the attraction: we must act from virtue, not from either passion or routine. Whoever pleases himself by obeying nullifies his obedience. If, on the contrary, a work commanded is disagreeable, we must give ourselves up to it energetically; so that whenever there is a question of suffering, obedience may have the glory of actually coming to love the pain which it seemed at first enough merely to accept; and that where God enjoins something that might flatter nature, voluntary indifference may make us master the pleasure, and so leave our obedience all its merit and all its purity. Further, we must here dread an easy and only too common delusion, that into which we fall when we induce superiors to order or advise just what we wish for, by skilful representations, more or less coloured sophistries, complaints, entreaties, or some other means. To do this is to upset all order, to falsify obedience and make it, at least, sterile. Listen to St. Bernard: "If, desiring something," he says, "you aim, either secretly or openly, at getting it ordered for you by your spiritual Father, don't flatter yourself that in such a case you are obeying: if you do, you are deceiving your-

self. The person who is then governing is you, not your superior."

And now we come to the last point we have to consider concerning this virtue. When God formulated His great Precept, the Alpha and Omega of the law, its perfection and plenitude, He said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength."¹ Now, as we know, to love God practically means to obey Him. Love is a fire, of which obedience is the flame: there cannot be one without the other. Hence, the above command is equivalent to: "Thou shalt obey with thy whole heart, thy whole soul, and thy whole mind." To obey with our whole soul, or, as it is expressed elsewhere, with all our strength, means to execute orders promptly, valiantly, and faithfully; to obey with our whole heart means to submit our will to the will of him who commands; whilst to obey with our whole mind means clearly to yield our judgment to that of our superior. This, in fact, is the very culminating point of obedience. Every one in Religion is bound to obey to this point; and the obligation is essential. "Where the obedience of the judgment is wanting," says St. Ignatius, "good-bye to perfect obedience; good-bye to simplicity, to humility, to courage, and to strength; good-bye, in short, to all the vigour, efficaciousness, and dignity of this great

¹ Deut. vi. 5.

virtue." A Religious either gives the lie to his profession, or he is truly a holocaust. "Now, whoever pretends to sacrifice himself entirely to God," continues this great Saint, "must necessarily give up to Him, not only his will, but his understanding; and this in such a manner that he has but one and the same judgment as his superiors, just as he has but one and the same will with them;" and, again, hear St. Francis de Sales: "We must approve all that superiors do or say, allow or forbid. Inferiors should always believe, and make their own judgment acknowledge that the actions of superiors are well done, and that they have good reasons for them." In the persons of these two Saints we hear all the Doctors of the Church on this subject.

It must be remembered, however, that we are not here concerned with that first appreciation of things which the mind forms at the moment of perceiving them; this is rather an impression than a mental act, and in any case the act is not free enough to fall under the law. What we are concerned with is a well-considered appreciation, voluntary and decisive; in one word, with a judgment. Now, except in the somewhat chimerical case of a manifest error, or an immoral order, the inferior should always judge that the superior is in the right, and that the thing he orders is good.

"But," some one may say, "is this reasonable conduct? Putting aside a case where I merely cannot understand my superior's reason, supposing

I actually see that he is in the wrong, surely to yield to him only outwardly is very meritorious; but if you ask me further to approve of him inwardly, is not this exacting a sort of mental suicide? and is not this suicide absurd, immoral, and impossible?" Many answers may be given to this; let us first take St. Augustin's: "Are you Christians? And if you are, what name do you bear? The name of reasonable beings, or of 'the faithful'? You call yourselves 'the faithful'! Reason, therefore, is not the final appeal for you."

Then, again, this other answer, which comes from a higher source, and is bolder, more radical, and, to sum up, divine, since it is divinely inspired; "If any one among you seems wise according to the world," says St. Paul, "let him first become foolish, and then he may hope to be wise."¹ Shall we blush for the Gospel? Shall we suppress, in Christianity, the folly of the Cross? Shall we be cowards, and cease to scandalise human wisdom?

Still, if we must condescend, and speak in a human sense, as St. Paul has so often done,² why then, Yes; what you are here commanded is eminently reasonable.

First, if you are living in the *truth*, which is only if you are humble, you will greatly distrust your own judgment. It is weak and limited, and a thousand little ill-regulated passions often, unknown to yourself, cast shadows over your mind,

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 18.

² Rom. vi. 19.

however clear-seeing it may be by nature. "Do not lean on your own prudence,"¹ says the Sage; and this lesson is for every one. Further, even were your view of things as certain as it seems to you, the fact remains that, being in a subordinate position, you are badly placed for judging; for it is only from a height, and by taking combined circumstances together, that things can be properly weighed; and thus your superiors judge them. They may have twenty reasons affecting general interests for taking such and such a course, which are necessarily hidden from you. Add to this fact the further one that, usually, they have more wisdom and experience than you, for it is not the custom to choose the least capable or the least worthy to govern. And if the Apostle would have every Christian esteem his brethren as his superiors, to what point should not this duty be carried in this case of superiors by office? Lastly, consider the *special graces* that God gives them for governing—graces which are, before all things, *lights*, and which must be wanting to you, because they are attached to special offices, and you have an accumulation of reasons to show that your superiors are really in the right; and hence to oblige you, in case of dissentient opinions, to put their judgment before your own. Let us beware of what the Holy Spirit declares in such absolute terms—"Do not judge against the judge, for he judges according to justice."²

¹ Prov. iii. 5.

² Ecclus. viii. 17.

“But, at least,” this person may continue, “the law does not pronounce superiors to be infallible. Granted that they deceive themselves rarely, even very rarely, yet so long as they can deceive themselves at all, I may see that they do so; and if I really see it, how can I compel my mind to discover good sense in a senseless order?”

Where are the little children, the simple, lowly souls, the disciples of the Crib, the solitaries of olden days, the first Religious of St. Francis of Assisi? Where are the perfectly obedient men? May it please Our Lord that in this matter all Religious may become blind! Is there a single holy doctor who has not preached blind obedience to them? Happy blindness this! happy night of Faith and Humility! a night which shines in God’s eyes with the splendour of noon-day! Still, we must condescend to such arguers, and once more speak merely humanly.

In spite of your good-will, in spite of your efforts, you cannot prevent yourself from seeing that such or such an order is not reasonable. Very well; execute it all the same; every one is master of his own body. Next, conform your will to your superiors; this also you can do; because, whatever the mind may say, we can distinctly will what we choose. Lastly, as your mind cannot refrain from judging something, leave the order, as it is, alone, and judge instead what is the best and only reasonable course for you to take; is not the sole course

conformable to the spirit and engagements of your holy profession that of obeying, even when the commandment is unreasonable? "For the superior, discernment," say the Saints; "for the subject, obedience." God will ask the one how he has governed, and the other how he has let himself be guided. This practical judgment being once formed, keep to it absolutely; and, for fear of forming another, forbid yourself to think of the nature of the act commanded. If the thought of it comes back to you, solicits you, lays siege to you, which will happen to you the more the younger you may be in virtue, treat it as you would any other useless, dangerous, or even forbidden thought; strive against it as you would strive against any temptation, courageously and patiently, and do not lay down your arms till you have completely conquered. Is this impossible? Is it difficult? Is it outrageous? You see "black"; no one says to you "See white"; they only say "Don't look." A child could do this. Therefore follow this rule without deviation, and you will be practising obedience of the judgment, your mind being sacrificed to God like your heart; and then nothing essential will be wanting to your submission.

Nevertheless (ah! how sweet is the yoke of Jesus Christ, and how free are his servants!), if you feel your spirit rise and your heart sink in face of a superior's wish, not yet finally pronounced; if, even, having begun to obey, the undertaking seems to you

positively beyond your strength, or likely to involve you in some serious inconvenience, do not then fear to represent the case to your superior. If your Father or Mother in Religion share in the authority of God, they have certainly some share in His Wisdom and His Goodness. Go, then, and lay open your trouble to them: far from injuring the perfection of your obedience, this simplicity may increase its value; and thus practising several virtues at one stroke, you will please God more. However, before acting, pray, reflect, test yourself; wait, if possible, for a time, so as to be sure that you are not acting from caprice, imagination, or sloth. When once prudently decided on speaking, do so very humbly, discreetly, and quietly, saying just what is in your mind, but keeping your will perfectly indifferent. Be just as ready for the failure as for the success of your proceeding; accept with the same countenance refusal or consent; and if your superior does not consider your observations admissible, but persists in his first design, then do not doubt that this is the most suitable course for you, and unhesitatingly see the Will of God in it. Confident in His grace, concern yourself no further about anything but obeying.

To conclude: we are greatly mistaken if the Spirit innate in every Christian has not constantly borne witness throughout this treatise to all the Truths set forth and to the large number of rules herein estab-

blished. They are so clear, simple, wise, and beneficent, above all, so well founded, that no objection can certainly be found to them; and if the intellect makes no objection, how can the heart resist? No one should make a schism between love and light. What we see to be true, let us love; the good that we love, let us do. Obedience is the necessary homage of the creature to the Creator; it includes and puts its mark on his whole religion; it constitutes his true justice, and causes him to love individually and socially; it makes him good, wise, free, holy, and happy; and, by a short and infallible way, guides him to perfection and salvation. Let us then give to God this glory, to Jesus Christ this proof of love, to the Church this joy, to our Communities this brightness and strength, and to our own souls this inestimable advantage of a perfect, unanimous, and lasting obedience!

The incomparable St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote to the people of Ephesus: "Hasten to obey the Bishop. United and agreeing with him, your priests, so illustrious and so really worthy of God, are like the strings of a lyre. Do you all join in this harmony, so that being bound up and fixed up in that unity which is the music of God, you may have but one voice with which to sing to the Heavenly Father that celestial hymn whose Leader and Composer is Jesus." If all the faithful souls to whom we have here spoken are truly in accordance with their Rule, by a lasting habit founded on the light of Faith and

on an unshaken resolution, then they are become like to those holy priests of Ephesus. God must undoubtedly take His pleasure in them, for they cause Him to hear on earth the same harmony that He hears in heaven, that harmony which is the created echo of the eternal and absolute Harmony; no other than that made by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, in the unchangeable order of their mutual relations, and in the unity of their essence.

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HOLY POVERTY

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ON CHASTITY

INTRODUCTION

The importance in morality of questions concerning the body—The intimate and necessary relations between soul and body—The place of the body and its life in human beings—Christianity teaches the science of the body, forms its moral law, relates its history, explains its condition, and reveals its destiny—The word Chastity sums up the relations between soul and body prescribed by the moral law—Chastity is allied to temperance—What chastity is in itself : it is austere, strong, manly, jealous, difficult, and full of delights—The chastity of precept—The more excellent chastity of counsel—What the vow adds to the virtue—Spiritual chastity—Chastity is the respect paid by the soul to the body, a respect rising from the love of God, to increase her union with Him—Spiritual chastity extends this respect to the whole being—Technical developments unnecessary here.

PART I

Of the respect man owes to himself. This respect lies in the observance of chastity.

Man the property of God—Excellence of this divine proprietorship—The characteristics which it confers on man : it gives him a claim to respect and chastity—Man divinely loved as well as divinely possessed—This love a further ground for his treating himself and being treated with respect and deference—Nathan's parable—Every love consecrates its object : how much more the

love of God must consecrate His creatures—God's love for man is both active and fruitful—The destiny He has provided for each of us, and whose fulfilment He is preparing every moment of our lives—How we should esteem a being destined to be so great: whose greatness God Himself both forms and expects—God takes supernatural possession of man by means of Baptism, and thus sows the seed of future glory—Every baptized man carries God in his heart—Divine culture of this seed—The Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, are the food of this divine life—The outcome of this union of grace with God as regards the duty of chastity—Grace renders us not only God's property, but also members of Jesus Christ—Reality and depth of this incorporation with Jesus: the awful responsibilities created by it between the Head and the members—Under such conditions every impure act is a sacrilege: these conditions bind all Christians—As Jesus has taken our sins upon Himself in virtue of this supernatural union, so we share His graces and His relations and His triumphs—Like Him we are the dwelling-places of God, and hence true temples—According to Tertullian, chastity is the priestess of this temple—A Christian, in Christ and like Christ, is a son of God—Every child of God should be a child of light—Obligations created by such a sonship—As children of the Father, we become spouses of His Son—How Christ is the Spouse—Every soul in a state of grace is at once His sister and His spouse—Degrees and differences in this conjugal union with Jesus—Eminent place held by those who make religious vows—Double aspect and type of this union with Christ—Chastity here assumes the character of fidelity, whence it follows that for all Christians, but especially for all consecrated by vow, a sin against this virtue is nothing less than adultery—The consciousness of being a spouse of Christ ought to cause the perfection of purity in a faithful soul—The dowry given by the Bridegroom to the Bride, in this union of the Word with our human nature, is the Holy Spirit—Doctrine of the Fathers—The same gift of the Holy Spirit is bestowed in the union of Jesus with us by grace: but in due proportion—Possessing this Spirit and possessed by Him, we become His agents and His organs—He is the permanent and interior principle of all our supernatural works—This possession enables us and makes us watchful to do all things in God—This is perfect chastity.

PART II

Study of the divine perfections which, by gaining and retaining our love, confirm our chastity.

Every violation of chastity is occasioned by a digression of the heart—Why chastity is also called continence—Its office is to restrain our love and thus regulate our whole soul—That which carries away the heart from true order is either (1) seductive beauty, (2) wounded love, or (3) the actual feeling or expectation of a joy which intoxicates it—If the soul is convinced that God is perfect beauty, infinite love, and absolute joy, its chastity can neither fail nor perish—Charity is the life of chastity—God is Beauty—Man has a natural passion for beauty—This love of the beautiful a characteristic of human nature, and a means of raising us to God—His beauty seen in creatures, but veiled—In them also we see His goodness—Beauty only the natural form of goodness—The means often the obstacle : and created beauty becomes the successful rival of divine—This fact is a disorder—Nature a revelation of God—Reason, and still more, faith, should lead us to see Him in His works—The beauty of God is to be sought for in the visible world which bears His traces : and in the spiritual world where His image shines forth—Angels—Souls—We must seek the Beauty of God in itself—The beauty of His understanding : of His character—On this point not only nature but also the Bible must be consulted—Study of the Divine Perfections—Each one a fresh aspect of divine beauty—This beauty not only moral, but also physical : in what sense—It has a consubstantial form, which is the form of absolute good—If this contemplation is too high, consider the Divine Beauty as incarnate in Jesus—In this beauty nature and art are surpassed—The holiness of our Lord's Beauty—Necessary conditions for seeing this—Having carefully purified our hearts, we may behold the Beauty of Christ—His interior Beauty—Exterior—The Spouse of the Canticles—St. Agnes' cry of love. II. Beauty can only securely attract and possess the heart when the love it calls forth is accepted and shared—Beauty must be good—This goodness, in particularising and applying itself, becomes love—This is the case with Divine Beauty—God loves us with every kind of love, but especially and definitely with the love of a

Spouse—How this dogma shows us the greatness, power, and sovereignty of love—It implies the particularising of the universal—Canticle of Canticles—The Eucharist—Necessary effect of Divine love carried to this degree—The soul thus taken hold of is more than chaste : she is a virgin on the road to perfection. III. Beauty the outer court of love—Joy its sanctuary—Joy the end we necessarily desire—The soul seeks it in everything—God is joy in Himself—His joy communicable—Revelation teaches us that God wills to communicate it—With regard to joy, is everything postponed to another world?—Joy remains on earth even since sin appeared—Joy in the natural order : in the supernatural order of grace—Christianity nothing but joy—The Church only labours to spread joy on earth—Her life a perpetual festival, whence it comes that she is always singing—What other society does or could do this?—God counsels and even commands us to rejoice—Joys of the children of God : countless : varied : keen : pure : and in a sense unchangeable—Christian joy is such that it overpowers sorrow, and is even produced by it—God by His nature being joy, the more we share in His nature by the likeness of grace and sanctity, the more do we necessarily share His joy—How far we may experience Divine joy in this life—Even in its highest degree, this experience can only be a shadow of the joy that awaits us in heaven.

O B E D I E N C E

INTRODUCTION

What passed in Our Lord's soul at the first moment of His existence, when He was united with the Word—Union of Will and of Love resembling as nearly as possible the Hypostatic Union—This act of love must have been pre-eminently an act of adoration—Primal and fundamental attitude that must have been taken by the soul of Jesus with regard to the divinity—Jesus the first subject and servant of God—As He was made flesh, so He was made obedient—This obedience of Jesus concerns not only the essential sovereignty of God, as the object of His worship, but also this sovereignty as exercised over Himself—He surrenders Himself freely to all the rights, all the wishes, and all the designs of His Father—What is added to

our Saviour's obedience by the sight of the violation of these Divine rights by sin—He not only makes Himself obedient, but obedient even unto the death of the Cross—The whole life of Jesus is only the subsequent development of that first act of religious obedience offered by Him to God on His entry into this world—Virtue and value of Christ's obedience—The great model of Christian life—For us everything may be reduced to obedience—Precept given us by Jesus—The counsel that He adds to it—The passage in the Holy Gospel where this counsel is given—How this obedience, counselled by Jesus, has never ceased to be practised in the Church, where it forms the foundation of the Religious state.

PART I

The principles on which obedience is founded and regulated.

There are two forms of sovereignty, Authority and Law—Under both forms it claims obedience—Sovereignty of God considered in itself: in its exercise—How God's goodness, wisdom, and power are united in the exercise of His sovereignty—The act of sovereignty is intended to lead all creatures to God, their last end—God makes no mystery of His eternal design of perfecting all His creatures in Himself—He calls this design Dogma, inasmuch as it is the foundation of our belief and the enlightenment of our ideas—He also calls it Law, because it controls our will and rules our life—Why the name of Law is more especially given to the principal and successive forms of religion in the world—Law is defined to be the expression and outward token of sovereignty—It contains and communicates that which enters as an essential element into this sovereignty—It is for us the means of participating in the goodness, the wisdom, and power of God—Law is good in itself and renders those good who fulfil it—It is light, and like the sun condenses and concentrates for us the moral light—It is the oracle of infinite Wisdom, and the formula of infinite Understanding—It is likewise a force—Attractions possessed by God's law for man's superior will: called by scholastics our "rational and free appetite"—Secondary force of law its sanction—Its beneficent empire over man—Testimony of the Holy Scriptures—All this is to be understood principally and above all of God's sovereign dominion and of

the Divine Law, whether natural or positive—God extends and propagates beyond Himself both power and law—Not only does He raise His creatures to Himself, but He associates them with Himself in the work of their deification—Throughout the universe secondary causes act, moved and controlled by a primary cause—In the same way, there are secondary authorities, and delegated powers between ourselves and the sovereign authority of God—Hierarchy according to St. Denys—Essential divinity of power—That the human element which may intervene in no way alters this divinity—God delegates but never abdicates His power—He employs ministers, not substitutes—The Divine functions of instituted power—God always remains the first and indispensable Author of all that is executed in His name and by His power—Every power instituted by God has, like God, a word equivalent to itself—This word of human power is human law—Every man invested with power is a father : every prince a principle—This is an image of God reproducing the hidden mystery of His being—Above all the hierarchy confesses, adores, promulgates, intimates, interprets, and applies the Divine Law—To rule over men is first to serve God—Theory of human law : its subordination to Divine Law—Consequent limits of human laws—There is in reality but one power and one law—God's sovereignty absolute, and His will the supreme rule of our actions—St. Denys' explanation of God's deifying action by means of the hierarchy—It is idle to inquire whether another order of things might have been, since God has pleased to establish it thus—We cannot conceive one more worthy of God, or more conformable to our human nature—Law and grace have their origin in the same mystery—This mystery is Divine goodness and love—The law which proceeds from love and produces love, finishes by identifying itself with and consummating itself in love—The 118th Psalm praises the Divine Law—Reason why the Church inserts it in the Divine Office—Importance of preserving the true idea of authority in order to uphold obedience : its necessity and grandeur—To rebel against it is impious : and still more so to destroy it—Crime of revolutionists and their chastisements : their connection with Satan : whence arises their diabolical character—How a passion for obedience is enkindled in certain souls by these considerations and the truths of faith—Ordinary authority and

laws made for the generality of men do not suffice them : they crave for a more intimate, active, and forcible subjection, and for tighter bonds—Hence the sacrifice these souls make in binding themselves by vow to religious obedience, which is the perfection of Christian obedience.

PART II

The graces contained in obedience, and the advantages it procures for the soul.

The first prerogative of religious or even Christian obedience, is that it draws man nearer to God, and establishes between God and man most intimate and secure communications of infinite value—The legitimate pride felt by the Jews on account of their near communication with God—How much more intimate this union has become since the establishment of Christianity—Human life of Jesus—Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist—His divine gift—Obedience establishes between God and the soul a relation if not more intimate, at least more intelligible than the Eucharist, and one which can be used more frequently—Analogy between the mystery of the Eucharistic consecration and the canonical investiture of power—God descends upon the superior and dwells within him to govern the souls over whom He has placed him—The outward appearance remains unchanged, but the true reality is no longer the same—Comparison between the Eucharist and authority—The twofold need of humanity with regard to God—Man needs an accessible God—Authority supplies this need—The Divine Word so often required is thereby rendered more human and accessible to our understanding than in the Eucharist—Recourse to authority easier, and may be more frequent than sacramental communion—Second advantage of obedience : it makes us participate in God drawing us nearer to Him—Life consists in the will of God—The secret of the life of nature lies in its dependence on the Divine Will—No trace of self-will in the physical world—As the unreasoning obedience of irrational beings makes them live the life of which they are capable, so does obedience form the life of rational beings—Sin is nothing less than suicide : the commandments of God eternal life—The observance of the commandments both life and the nourishment of life—My meat is

to do the will of My Father—God a perpetual communion to those who do His will—By obeying delegated power the Divine Will is hidden under species as it is in the Holy Eucharist—The human element termed the “accidents”—Touching proof of God’s goodness in giving us superiors devoted to our spiritual interests—Every superior a victim—They are for their inferiors organs of Divine life : being victims of God—They transmit God, and those who obey receive God as food and assimilate Him to themselves—St. Ignatius on this subject—Inestimable gain springing from obedience—It causes us perfectly to fulfil all Christian justice—It secures the soul from sin—Words of St. Jerome—St. Gregory the Great and St. John Climacus—It is the mother and guardian of all virtues—It includes and crowns the *negative* virtues, which destroy in us the “old” man : it is the foundation of the *positive*, which all tend to form the “new” man—Obedience the summary of all virtues : it simplifies our whole life : it smooths our road and renders it easy—Obedience the foundation of peace : it also renders our lives fruitful—As self-will corrupts all, so obedience sanctifies all : it brings liberty—The false ideas of liberty so common nowadays—How obedience is true liberty—Final end of liberty—Its immediate and proximate end—True idea of liberty—Sin the exact contrary to liberty : hence every sinner is a slave—A Religious not only breaks with the slavery of evil, but by separation from the world, the great occasion of sin, he renders himself as free as possible in this world to go straight and quickly to his end—St. Catherine of Sienna’s admirable eulogium.

PART III

Duties imposed by obedience

The Catholic doctrine on Authority and Law is the ground of obedience, and hence also its rule—Obedience ought to be : (1) Divine in intention ; (2) Universal in extent ; (3) Entire as to submission—1. Obedience must be *Divine* in intention ; that is, in obeying superiors we must intend to obey God—This is essential even to Christian obedience—How often we fail in this duty—St. Francis de Sales’ doctrine on this point—Losses resulting from failure in this respect—Reason why God often leaves defects in superiors—How enlightened and prudent superiors act—Example of our Saviour—Weakness of our faith

—We should renew our faith in God's presence in all superiors
 —Principle of Christ's obedience—Faith puts us into possession of the same principle—Fidelity of superiors to this spirit of faith makes the practice of it easy to inferiors—2. Obedience must be *universal* in its extent: that is, it must apply to every person invested with legitimate authority, and to all things legitimately commanded by such persons—Practical exposition of this doctrine—Diversity and change in persons who command delegates and subdelegates—In their own measure and rank these are still *authorities*, and have the right to be obeyed—Obedience extends to all things legitimately ordered—Is there ever a question of obeying at random?—Rules given, and theology on this point—Orders of superiors concerning employments and dispensations—Difficulties raised against such orders—Conduct that should be pursued in these matters—We should do all that is ordered in the way it is ordered—Importance of details and the care we must take about them—Example of Jesus Christ—Obedience must be practised, no matter what the form or degree of the command may be—² Lastly, obedience must be entire as to submission—What David said with regard to submission—When a superior commands, it is Jesus knocking at the door—Directions given by God to Moses as related in the Book of Numbers—Application of this text to obedience—Doctrine of the saints: especially of St. Benedict—Religious compared to birds—Quotation from St. Bernard—Fidelity, punctuality, and promptness in exterior obedience—Adhesion of the will the soul of obedience—Precious advice of St. Gregory the Great—Delusion to be feared—Obedience in spirit and submission of the judgment—What St. Ignatius and St. Francis de Sales say of this—Objection and reply—Comments on the practice of this indispensable duty—How reasonable are the motives on which it is founded, and how easy it is to practise—Representations which subjects may make to superiors in the matter of obedience—Summary of this treatise—Exhortation of St. Ignatius the martyr to the faithful at Ephesus.

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