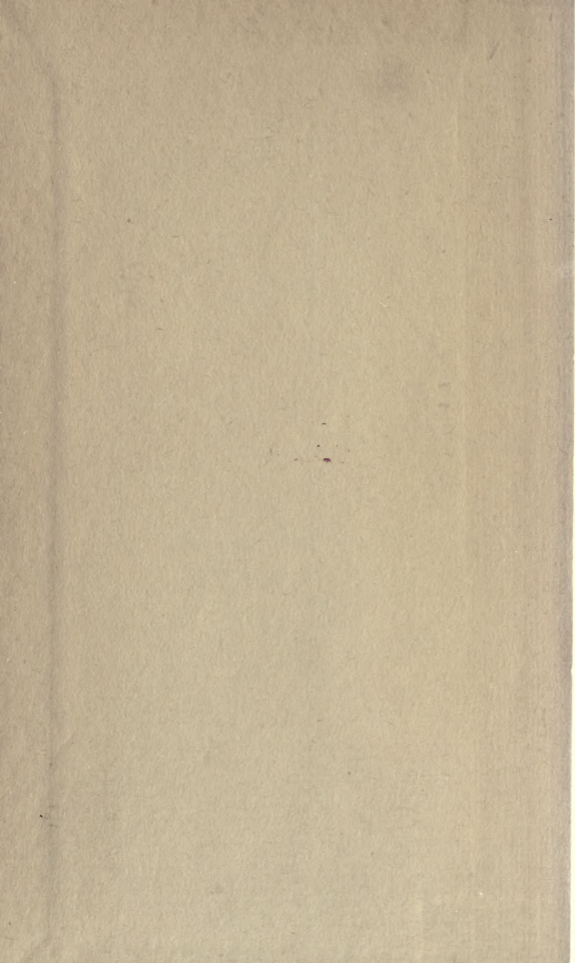


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LOVE'S GRADATORY

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**F. THOMAS BERGH, O.S.B.  
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**Imprimatur.**

**EDM. CAN. SURMONT,  
VICARIUS GENERALIS.**

**WESTMONASTERII,**

*Die 30 Decembris, 1914.*

The Angelus Series

LOVE'S  
GRADATORY

BY  
BLESSED JOHN RUYSBROECK

TRANSLATED, WITH PREFACE  
BY  
MOTHER ST. JERÔME

JESUIT  
BIBL. MAJ.  
SEMINARY

R. & T. WASHBOURNE, LTD.

PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

AND AT MANCHESTER, BIRMINGHAM, AND GLASGOW

BV  
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R89  
1914

46751

THE NEW YORK

LOVE'S

GRADUATION

THE NEW YORK

MOTHERS OF

WOMEN

BILL MAI

REMINISCENCES

THE NEW YORK



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## PREFACE

THE life of Blessed John Ruysbroeck is known to us by the writings of Henry Pomerius, a Prior of the monastery of the Canons Regular at Groenendael, where Blessed John Ruysbroeck had passed his Religious life, and where Pomerius became acquainted with two famous disciples of the holy man—John de Hoelaere and John de Scoonhoven. This latter was especially celebrated for the spirited defence which, later on, he made of the doctrines of his great master against the attacks of Gerson.

## Preface

The text of Pomerius was edited by the Bollandists (vol. iv., 1885) from a manuscript in the Royal Library at Brussels, and other Lives of Blessed John Ruysbroeck are but reproductions of this. Another precious document now at Brussels is a Prologue inserted at the beginning of a complete manuscript of the works of Blessed John Ruysbroeck, bearing the date 1461. The writer of this declares himself: "I, a successor of that enlightened man, John van Ruysbroeck, who with the Provost founded his cloister of Groenendael. . . ."

It is unnecessary to insist on the interest and worth possessed by the works of the Brabant mystic, both for students of

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medieval mysticism and of Flemish letters. The motto of his biographer, *Lucerna ardens et lucens*, paints in one stroke the great master of mysticism in the Netherlands.

But little is really known of Blessed John Ruysbroeck's early life. Like so many of his time he kept the name of the village where he was born, in 1293, and there is no mention to be found of any other patronymic. Situated on the Senne between Brussels and Hal, the place formerly bore the name of Ruusbroec, afterwards modified to Ruysbroeck, and the more modern orthography is that under which Blessed John is best known. His father is not mentioned, and he, possibly, died



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during John's childhood, since his mother seems to have been at liberty to follow him to Brussels, whither he went at the age of eleven. Like many another great servant of God, he was blessed with a virtuous and pious mother, who, for all that, may have opposed the boy's desire for perfection, for he took the matter into his own hands and ran away to Brussels to an uncle, John Hinckaert, major canon of St. Gudule's. The latter's father had been a well-to-do magistrate of the city, and Hinckaert, possessed of a handsome benefice, had led a somewhat worldly life, until one day, when listening to a sermon, he was so touched by grace that from that time forth he changed

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altogether, and led an exemplary life of mortification and strictness. His example was followed by one of his fellow-canons, Francis van Coudenberg, who like his friend was a man of easy means, and much loved by the people. They agreed to live together in common, reducing their personal expenditure to mere necessities, so as to have more to give to the poor.

With these two the lad breathed an atmosphere of prayer, and found surroundings in accordance with his own aspirations. He followed the usual course of studies in the public schools without giving proof of any taste for the liberal arts, while his uncle's influence

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led him to make theology his principal study. From this science he drew the precision of language and elevation of doctrine which are admired in his writings. At the age of twenty-four he was ordained priest, and became a chaplain of St. Gudule. He relates that on the day of his ordination he had a vision by which he understood that the soul of his pious mother was delivered from purgatory. From this epoch probably date his first writings, wherein we frequently meet with allusions to the pernicious theories then spread about by false mystics.

The Middle Ages were full of contradictions and extremes—on the one hand splendid virtues

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and remarkable saints, on the other enormous crimes and absurd vagaries in doctrine. Fanatics, who revolted against authority on pretence of reforming existing abuses, fell themselves into error and excesses of every kind. Among those best known were the *Beguards*, the *Flagellants* and *Brethren of the Free Spirit* in different parts of Europe; the Lollards in England, and their propositions were condemned by Clement V. and in the Council of Vienne, A.D. 1311-1312. A prominent leader of the heretics of the *Free Spirit* in Brussels, contemporary with Blessed John Ruysbroeck, was a woman named Bloemardinne, a type of many such teachers at that period and in

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our own time. Her extravagances were only equalled by her reputation, and apparently her following was enormous. Blessed John Ruysbroeck confuted her publications too ably not to incur a measure of hostility and opposition in certain quarters, but he did not cease on that account to fight for the Faith and true spirituality. This persistent heresy of the *Brethren of the Free Spirit* was still being combated by the Canons Regular of Groenendael thirty years after Blessed John Ruysbroeck's death.

A story relating to this period of the holy Canon's life gives us in a word an impression of his exterior and of his reputation for sanctity. One day in the streets



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of the city he met two laymen, one of whom on seeing him exclaimed: "Would to God I were as holy as that priest!" But the other mocked, and declared that he loved his worldly pleasures better.

Blessed John lived and worked as a secular priest for twenty-six years, and it was perhaps the opposition he and his companions met with on account of his active refutation of the errors then in vogue, that decided them to act on the suggestion of Coudenberg, and retire into the forest of Soignes. The Duke of Brabant surrendered to them the Hermitage of Groenendael (*viridis vallis*), a place hallowed by the holy lives of three successive anchorites — John de

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Busch, of the Ducal house of Brabant, Arnold de Diest, and finally Lambert, who ceded the place to the three friends, removing to a cell in the deserted valley of Boetendael, near Uccle.

On Wednesday in Easter Week, 1343, Blessed John Ruysbroeck and his companions took over the property, and at once constructed a monastery where many soon asked for admission, and still larger numbers came to consult them on spiritual matters. The building and cemetery were consecrated the following year by the Vicar of the Bishop of Cambrai, who appointed Dom Francis van Coudenberg, Provost. Blessed John Ruysbroeck held the office

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of Prior, but it was only in 1350 that the community took the habit of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine, and adopted his Rule, which was observed henceforth at Groenendael and in the Pories dependent on it. One of the first to join them was John van Leuwen, or John d'Affligham, as he was called after his birthplace, soon to be better known as the "Holy Cook," so distinguished a reputation for sanctity did he acquire. Devoted to the Prior, he received a revelation of Blessed John Ruysbroeck's sublime virtues which helped to deepen the veneration felt for him. John d'Affligham died in 1377, and the inscription on his tomb refers to the *Boni Coci viri a Deo illuminati*.

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Blessed John Ruysbroeck would have preferred complete retirement and solitude, but it was difficult to escape from the pious visits of penitents, the arrival of neophytes seeking admission to the monastery, and above all from the frequent disturbance caused by the household of the Duke-patron. The forest of Soignes being a favourite hunting-ground of the Ducal party, the monastery of Groenedael made a convenient *pied à terre* for the friends and retainers of the Duke, and the Community, not yet being regularly established, could not put forward the plea of cloister. This irregularity was pointed out to them by Pierre de Saulx, Prior of the Canons Regular of St. Victor

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in Paris, when he wrote to them that the want of the vows and enclosure made the Community somewhat suspect, at a time when so many societies of false mystics disturbed the peace of the Church by defying lawful authority. This remonstrance brought about an application from Groenendael to the Bishop of Cambrai for authorization to adopt the habit and Rule of the Canons Regular. The only one of the Community not to take the habit and vows, was Blessed John Ruysbroeck's uncle and master, John Hinckaert, who on account of his great age and failing health remained near his old friends in his former capacity.

Gerard Groote, a disciple and warm admirer of Blessed John



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Ruysbroeck, was destined to become the link between the monastery of Groenendael and the future Congregation of the Canons Regular of Windesheim. Groote was an ardent book-lover, and employed a number of copyists to transcribe, among others, the writings of the Prior of Groenendael. With the help of Florent Radewijns of Leerdem, the director of Thomas à Kempis, Groote formed from among these copyists the Society of the Brothers of the Common Life, which included both laymen and clerics. After Blessed John Ruysbroeck's death, a like suspicion fell on this Society as had overshadowed Groenendael, and Groote desired to place it under the obedience of a precise Rule,

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but did not live to see this project fulfilled. Radewijns, however, carried out the wish of his master, and by the foundation of Windesheim in 1387 created a centre of veritable religious reform. In less than a century the Congregation counted as many as eighty-two houses connected, either by origin or tradition, with Blessed John Ruysbroeck. The wise changes in the Liturgy due to Raoul de Rive, Provost of Tongres, were rapidly diffused by means of the Congregation, and the spirit of Blessed John Ruysbroeck that permeated it instilled a love of the interior life and retirement from the world, which produced a school of mystical writers such as

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Scoonhoven, Maade, Peters, Harpius the Franciscan, and Denis the Carthusian.

Pomerius says that Blessed John Ruysbroeck began writing when still a secular, and continued it in the cloister up to a ripe old age. When he was under the influence of the Spirit of God he would plunge into the forest and there transcribe on a wax tablet the inspirations that came to him. Most of his works were composed in this way, and although long intervals often elapsed between the writing of different passages, the treatise was none the less consecutive and flowing. In his old age, when the taking of notes became too great a labour on account of fatigue and failing sight, one of

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the other Canons accompanied him and wrote from his dictation. Once when he had remained out alone longer than usual, the Brethren, anxious at his prolonged absence, went in search of him, and found the holy Prior in an ecstasy, seated beneath a tree that appeared to be on fire. This episode is commemorated by the traditional representation of Blessed John Ruysbroeck, the tree and the Prior wrapped in flames.

His works began to be known in Brabant, the Flanders, and in the neighbouring countries. Groote multiplied copies of them, and often asked for elucidation of the more difficult passages. In one instance, rather than explain what was already

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written, Blessed John Ruysbroeck composed an entirely new treatise. His biographer gives a list of twelve books, which he accompanies by a summary of the contents of each one. It is difficult to fix the dates of the compositions, but the author's greatest literary activity seems to have been between 1350-59. Another list, given by an unnamed disciple who entered at Groenendael soon after the master's death, and could therefore know the living tradition of those who had been with him, differs slightly from that of Pomerius—the divergence consisting chiefly in the order of the compositions and their titles.

The language used by Blessed



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John Ruysbroeck is the dialect of Brabant, nor does he appear ever to have written in Latin, which fact gave rise to the supposition that he was ignorant of that tongue. But this idea is untenable. As a priest and Canon Regular he had certainly studied theology, as his writings and the witness of history attest, and Latin being the language of theology it is unlikely that he was ignorant of it. The object of his works sufficiently explains why he preferred the Flemish, which was understood by those about him. He wrote for the general good, but especially for his brethren and sisters in Religion, such as the Poor Clares of Brussels to whom at least three of his works are addressed. He

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may have felt more at ease in his native tongue, and he sometimes coins words or takes them barely disguised from the Latin, when he does not find any precise enough to express his thought.

What Pomerius says of Blessed John Ruysbroeck's limited learning must not be exaggerated. His books have no pretension to be theological treatises, and the scholastic method is not followed in them, but the terminology he makes use of shows that he was familiar with philosophy and theology, and attests a soundness of doctrine beyond dispute. His primary Master was the Holy Ghost, through Whose influence he received experience in the spiritual life with the

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faculty to express it in human language, but his works betray a solid theological foundation, a knowledge of Scripture, the Fathers and apologetics, as well as inspiration; and it is this which places him beyond comparison with the mystical writers of his day. His imagery is vivid and various, and here and there, in the midst of his prose writing, he breaks out into verse of uneven rhythm which is peculiarly characteristic.

Blessed John Ruysbroeck, like many other mystical writers, has been accused of heterodoxy, especially Pantheism. Twenty years after his death, Gerson, Chancellor of Paris University, complained that his doctrines

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were infected by the errors of the Beguards, which, as a matter of fact, he had so vigorously combated all his life. Scoonhoven took up his defence, and demonstrated the purity of the teaching of the great master by elucidating the expressions in question, showing that Blessed John Ruysbroeck's doctrine was not an innovation, but was conformable in every point with the most renowned theologians. He also wrote a eulogy of his master, calling him a "priest most agreeable to God"; and goes on to explain that in using Flemish as a vehicle of expression Blessed John Ruysbroeck refuted more easily the errors of the time, embodied in the famous sect of "Freethinkers," pointing out,

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too, that it was in the Latin translation that Gerson had met with the supposed errors.

Blessed John Ruysbroeck's contemporary biographers strive to show how he excelled in all the virtues, and relate edifying stories to illustrate their assertion that he practised first in his own person the virtues he most commends. An instance of his humble obedience to Superiors is shown in the following episode. Being once seriously ill and burnt up with fever, he requested a drink of water to ease his parched lips and throat. The Provost, thinking it would be bad for him, forbade it, and Blessed John Ruysbroeck acquiesced, although he believed himself to be dying of nothing

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but thirst. But reflecting on the sorrow his death would cause his Superior he renewed his request, meekly adding that he knew that without that simple assistance his death was inevitable.

The concourse of persons of all grades of society who came to him for spiritual advice must sometimes have been a heavy burden to one who loved and desired solitude, but none ever left him dissatisfied and unaided. On one occasion, however, it seemed at first that he had failed to satisfy. Two French clerics came to visit the holy man, asking a word of advice on their spiritual state.

"You are," he replied, "as holy as you wish to be."

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The visitors, thinking he was mocking them, withdrew in some displeasure, and made known their disillusion to his Brethren, who begged them to return and ask an explanation from the Prior. This was at once given, Blessed John Ruysbroeck pointing out that goodwill being the measure of personal holiness, they only had to compare the one with the other to see clearly the condition of their souls. In the spiritual conferences he gave to his Community after Compline he spoke to them without preparation, and often held them for hours under the spell of his eloquence and fervour ; but occasionally it happened that, asked for a discourse before strangers, he



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would simply declare that he had nothing to say.

One of his penitents—a lady of high rank—who held him in special veneration, was used to make the journey from Louvain to Groenendael barefoot. Another, when seriously ill, was afflicted at the same time by great distress of mind and prayed the Prior to come to her, that she might expose to him her spiritual state and physical sufferings. The good old man, in simple words, bade her submit herself wholly to the will of God and thank Him for everything, and such was the force and unction of his exhortation that her pains became a subject of peace and joy to her.

At the great age of eighty-

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eight, Blessed John Ruysbroeck received a warning of his approaching dissolution vouchsafed to him in the form of a vision of his mother. He lingered a fortnight longer, suffering with exemplary patience, and died peacefully on December 2, 1381. The Dean of Diest who had come to him in his last illness, watched by the saintly dead, and afterwards affirmed that he saw the good Prior vested as if for Mass, and bright with glory. His passing was also revealed to his friend and disciple, Gerard Groote, as à Kempis attests. The brethren buried him in the chapel at Groenendael which he had actually assisted in building ; but five years afterwards, on the death of the Provost Francis van

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Coudenberg, the body was exhumed, being found entire and incorrupt, and reburied beside the Provost in the church which had taken the place of the original little chapel. In 1622 another translation was effected, and the relics deposited in a splendid sarcophagus in a chapel erected by the Infanta of Spain, near to what was known as Ruysbroeck Tree, where the general public could revere the tomb of the holy Prior. At the end of the eighteenth century, when the monastery was suppressed by the Emperor Joseph II., the relics were transferred to Brussels and enshrined in a chapel in St. Gudule.

From the beginning of the seventeenth century to our own

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day the cause of the beatification of Blessed John Ruysbroeck remained stationary. Introduced by the Archbishop of Malines in 1614, it was suspended on account of the wars and disorders afflicting the Low Countries, and a second attempt was interrupted by the French Revolution, when St. Gudule was sacked and desecrated. The relics have since been lost. Cardinal Goosens reintroduced the cause in 1885, and in 1909 the Sacred Congregation approved and granted an Office and Mass of Blessed John Ruysbroeck to the diocese of Malines and the Canons Regular of the Lateran, inheritors of Groenendael and Windesheim.

The Proper of the Mass em-

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phasizes the teaching of the holy Prior and bears witness to his eminent virtues.

### COLLECT.

O God, Who didst vouchsafe to adorn Blessed John, Thy Confessor, with sublime holiness of life and with heavenly gifts, grant us, through his merits, and after his example, to despise the fleeting things of the world, and to desire only the joys of Heaven.

---

### TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THE translator begs to acknowledge her indebtedness, among others, to Dom V. Scully, C.R.L., and the Rev. Benedictine Fathers of St. Paul (Wisques).

# LOVE'S GRADATORY

## INTRODUCTION

THIS book touches the culminating point of the trilogy formed by the three treatises addressed by the author to the same person. Certain indications prove this to have been Margaret of Meerbeke, Precentor in the Convent of the Poor Clares at Brussels. The manuscripts do not contain any precise affirmation on this point, it is true, but the title of chapter xii., "Of Celestial Melodies," seems to allude to the charge filled by the Religious in her Convent. Besides, the whole of the treatise sufficiently shows that the writer is address-

## Love's Gradatory

ing one person in particular, and the counsels that he gives her, although applicable to any soul aspiring to perfection, belong more particularly to the Religious state.

The form and name of the book is by no means new in mystical literature. The mysterious ladder which appeared to Jacob, flying from the anger of his brother Esau, has often served to illustrate the way to be travelled by the soul from earth to Heaven. This illustration is found in use from times of primitive Christianity—witness the Acts of St. Perpetua and St. Felicity. St. Benedict makes use of it in his Rule where he speaks of twelve degrees of Humility, and St. John Climacus



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at a later date develops the same thought in his book entitled the *Ladder of Holiness*. But it was, perhaps, principally from St. Bonaventura that Blessed John Ruysbroeck borrowed the idea of spiritual steps. His object, like that of the Seraphic Doctor, is to raise a ladder of Sanctity, of which the seven rungs, or degrees, lead up to God, and to a love so elevated as to be called transformation and quietude. At such a height Divine Love resembles Eternity, and it is sometimes difficult to decide if Blessed John Ruysbroeck is speaking of Eternity, or if he is still among things of time.

The different halting-places from which the soul climbs to these extreme heights are those

## Love's Gradatory

of Goodwill, Voluntary Poverty, Purity, Humility, and Nobility of Virtue. At this Fifth step Blessed John Ruysbroeck stops, and in the next seven chapters studies the different ways of exercising this love, with the aid of the Angelic Hierarchy, attentively lending their help thereto. He explains two ways that lead to God, adding warnings against the illusions of a false Mysticism, and finally describes the Four Modes of Celestial Song.

The Sixth step is called by the author the "Return to the Primitive Purity of the Intellect." One of the thoughts recurring most frequently in Blessed John Ruysbroeck's writings is that the Soul is never wholly created, but that as the Son of God is spiritually

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conceived and brought forth at every instant, so, too, the Soul is created each moment, without ceasing to be in contact with its Origin, ceaselessly receiving of His Essence, and formed by Him to the uncreated image and example, ever in the Eternal Mind, of each one of us. Perfection and Beatitude consist in returning absolutely to this uncreated Ideal; not by a confusion of our created Being with the Divinity, nor by a transformation of Essence, which would partake of the errors of Pantheism. It is not a question of abdicating our created Being and transforming it essentially into the uncreated and Super-essential, in which, in the Divine Mind, we have been from all

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Eternity, for this would lead to Quietism by Pantheism; but, what is quite another matter, it means a return and transformation by Knowledge and by Love of all our Being to that Ideal which God has of us.

In other words, it means to realize that Ideal and arrive by Grace at that state where the Soul takes no more thought of self, nor of what is personal, but only is attentive to God present within it. Every thought, every wish, every affection, each look and intention, all action, has returned to God definitely. And this entire return, according to Blessed John Ruysbroeck, is something quite possible; it is the summit of the Supernatural Life, the imitation of

## Love's Gradatory

the Incarnation in us, the confiscation to the profit of God of all our Being. And in order that this return of our created Being, this transformation, this jurisdiction of God over us and our personal purity, may become actual, the Uncreated Purity forms continually, and touches constantly, the Soul that belongs to Him: "*Erat lux vera qua illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum.*"<sup>1</sup> "*Manus tuæ fecerunt me et plasmaverunt me.*"<sup>2</sup>

In this way Uncreated Purity draws the Soul so that it turns ceaselessly towards Him and Him only. Of this turning Blessed John Ruysbroeck says: "The Purity here mentioned is the Eternal . . . ever present and

<sup>1</sup> St. John i. 9.      <sup>2</sup> Ps. cxviii. 73.

## Love's Gradatory

ready to reveal Himself to pure intelligences once they are able to rise to Him. . . ." Meaning, in fact, God Himself, ever near us in an Eternal present. But to reach such heights the Soul must enter into absolute Purity, disfranchised from personality, from things of sense and things created. Then only is the return to the Primitive Purity of the Intellect possible—that is to say, the transformation into the uncreated and infinitely pure Ideal that Souls possess in the mind of God.

Thus the Soul climbs to the Seventh degree of Love, called by Blessed John Ruysbroeck the Unknowable and the Repose of Eternity. Union with God, one in Nature and three in Person,

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is brought about by the double method of Repose in enjoyment and Labour of Love ; in other terms, by Contemplation and Action. Thus the Soul acquires a more perfect resemblance with God, eternally in action according to Persons, eternally in Repose according to Essence. The characteristic influence of the Three Divine Persons is here manifested in the highest form, even to the transformation of the Soul into a state that is near to Eternal Beatitude. In these passages especially Blessed John Ruysbroeck's language rises to heights of doctrine particularly delicate to treat, and it is more than ever of importance not to make a travesty of his thought by an improper translation.



## PROLOGUE

THE Grace and Holy Fear of the Lord be with us all.

“Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world,” saith St. John.<sup>1</sup>

All true Holiness is born of God. Every Supernatural Life is a ladder of Love of Seven steps by which the Soul climbs to the Kingdom of God.

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I John v. 4.

<sup>2</sup> I Thess. iv. 3.

## CHAPTER I

### THIS IS THE FIRST STEP

WHEN we have the same will and the same mind as God, we are at the First Rung of the Ladder of Holiness. Goodwill is, in fact, the foundation of all the virtues, according to the Prophet David :

“O Lord, to Thee have I fled : teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God. Thy good Spirit shall lead me into the right land”<sup>1</sup>—the land of Truth and Virtue.

Goodwill, united to the will of God, triumphs over the devil

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxlii. 9, 10.

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and all sin, for it is full of the Grace of God, and is the first offering due to Him if we desire to live for Him. A man of Goodwill has God ever in view, desiring to love and serve Him, now and in Eternity. In this consists his inner life and occupation, keeping him at peace with God, with himself, and all things else. Therefore at the birth of the Christ the Angels sang: "Glory to God on high, and on earth peace to men of goodwill."<sup>1</sup> But Goodwill cannot be sterile in good works, for "A good tree brings forth good fruit,"<sup>2</sup> says our Lord.

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke ii. 14.    <sup>2</sup> St. Matt. vii. 17.

# Love's Gradatory

## CHAPTER II

### THIS IS THE SECOND STEP

THE first fruit of Goodwill is voluntary Poverty, in which consists the Second step by which we mount the Ladder of the Life of Love.

The voluntarily Poor lead a free life, stripped of all care of terrestrial goods, whatever be their necessities. Like a wise merchant, they exchange earth for Heaven, as our Lord teaches: "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."<sup>1</sup> For this reason, abandoning all likely to attach them to earth, they choose Poverty of their own free will. Such is the field in which is found that Pearl of great price, the Kingdom of

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. vi. 24.

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God: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God."<sup>1</sup>

This Kingdom of God is Love and Charity, while at the same time bringing forth good works; prodigal of self, merciful, clement and serviceable; truthful and a good counsellor to all who appeal for help; so that at God's Judgment Seat, side by side with rich spiritual gifts, may stand the works of Mercy. Of terrestrial goods the Poor in spirit keeps nothing entirely for himself, all he has is in common for God and God's great family. Happy he who possesses nothing perishable; he walks in the steps of the Christ, and receives as recompense a hundredfold in

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. v. 3.

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virtue; he lives in expectation of the Glory of God and Eternal Life.

On the contrary, the miser is really mad, he gives away Heaven for Earth, although he must lose that as well.

The poor in spirit to Heaven climbs  
up,

But to Hell the miser shall surely  
drop.

Through the needle's eye can the  
camel win?

Then the miser to Heaven may enter  
in.

And even should he be denuded of earthly goods, if he reject God and die avaricious, he is lost for ever.

For although in Poverty he may live,  
Of the little he hath if he grudge to  
give,

He yet dies a miser and goes to Hell.  
For the avaricious prefers the shell

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To the egg's good meat, or the nut's  
sweet core.

To possess great goods, or a golden  
store,

Is to take a poison that deathward tends,  
And to drink a sorrow that never ends.

After drinking, the greater his thirst will  
be ;

Having more, for ever yet more craves  
he.

Having much, he never is satisfied :

What he sees he lacks ; to his swelling  
pride

All he owns appeareth as nought be-  
side.

Not oft is he loved by his kind on  
earth,

For of love the miser is little worth.

He may well be likened to demon's  
claw,

What he grips he loosens not from his  
paw.

Death alone can rifle the things that he  
By his fraud has gained, or by treachery.

At the last, however, ill-gotten gains

He must lose, to suffer Hell's bitter pains,  
And the evil likeness alone remains.

For in spite of glut Hell is never shut,

And he is no better for having much :



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All he holds he seizes with greedy clutch.  
Then, refrain from avarice ; 'tis the root  
Of all sin and melancholy to boot.

### CHAPTER III

#### THIS IS THE THIRD STEP

NEXT comes the third degree of the Ladder of Love, which is Purity of Soul and Chastity of Body.

Understand well what I am about to say. To keep the Soul pure, you must, for love of God, hate and despise every inordinate affection and attachment to yourself, to father and mother, and to every creature ; so that you may love self and all creatures only for the service of God, and not otherwise. Then will you be able to say with the Christ :

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“Whosoever shall do the will of My Father, he is My brother and sister and mother.”<sup>1</sup> Then you will love your neighbour as yourself: thus are you pure. Do not let yourself be enticed or drawn away by anyone, either by words or actions, by gifts or baits, by courtesies or apparent sanctity. Under cover of the spiritual, such things may become altogether carnal; it is fatal to place confidence in them. Do not seek to cultivate acquaintance with any, nor allow another to grow intimate with you.

'Neath appearance fair  
Evil lurketh there,  
As a poison hidden ;  
Let thy soul beware,  
Holy Prudence share ;  
Be not over-ridden.

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. xii. 30.

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Feelest thou the charm,  
There lies hid the harm,  
    To the soul's deceiving ;  
Let all such things be :  
Take good heed to thee,  
    Jesus never leaving.

Fly a stranger's house ;  
Seek the spirit's Spouse,  
    With Him ever biding.  
Look within and mark  
His sole Love, and hark  
    Virtue gently chiding.

He shall nourish thee,  
Counsel, teach, and be  
    Thy support for ever ;  
He thy soul shall raise,  
To the Father's praise,  
    O'er all things whatever.  
Till in endless bliss,  
Where all comfort is,  
    He is thine for ever.

Thus is the life of a pure soul.

Then, next, as to Chastity of  
Body : you know that God gave  
man a double nature, body and  
soul, spirit and flesh ; and these

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two elements are united in one single person, forming human nature, conceived and born in sin. For although God created the Soul pure and spotless, by union with the flesh it becomes soiled by original sin. Thus we are all brought forth in a state of sin, for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."<sup>1</sup> But although the spirit adheres to the flesh by the fact of natural birth, by a second birth coming from the Spirit of God, spirit and flesh become enemies and strive one against the other. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, for these are contrary one to another."<sup>2</sup> If, then, we live ac-

<sup>1</sup> St. John iii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. v. 17.

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According to the lust of the flesh, we are dead in sin; if, on the contrary, by the Spirit we triumph over the works of the flesh, we live in virtue. Thus we must at one and the same time hate and despise the Body in so far as it is a mortal enemy who would detach us from God and deliver us up to sin, and yet love and esteem the Body of our sensible life as an instrument for God's service.

It is evident that without the Body we cannot render to God those exterior works which are due to Him from us, such as fasts, vigils, prayers, and other good works. For this reason we bestow on the Body such care, food, and nourishment as it requires, since it helps us to

## Love's Gradatory

serve God, our neighbour, and ourselves. But we must guard with care against three sorts of sin that reign in the Body: idleness, greediness, and impurity, since these three vices have caused many, even when of Goodwill, to fall into great sin.

To keep from the fault of greediness we should prefer and love the just measure of sobriety, in cutting off superfluities, in taking rather less than we may desire, and contenting ourselves with a strict sufficiency.

Against idleness we must seek to possess inward loyalty and kindness, as well as mercy for those in need; and outwardly be prompt and assiduous, ever at the disposition of any who

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ask our help, according to our power and with discretion.

Finally, as safeguard against impurity, fear and avoid all exterior disorderly conduct or manner, and interiorly every dishonest imagination or thought, never dwelling upon any such thing with pleasure, so as to be spotless and free from base imaginations. Turn, instead, to our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ, contemplate His Passion and Death, the generous outpouring of His Blood for love of us. In repeating this frequently His Image and resemblance will be formed in our hearts, senses, soul, body, and all our being, as a seal is printed and formed in wax. The Christ will then introduce us with Him into that



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high life of union with God, where the pure Soul, by means of love, clings to and inhabits in the Holy Ghost. There flow torrents of honey, celestial dew and every Grace, which, when the Soul has once tasted, it finds no more attraction in flesh and blood, nor anything that is in the world.

As long as our sensitive life remains uplifted and united to that Spirit which draws us to God, to seek and to love Him, Purity and Chastity of soul and body are assured; but when we descend from that height to satisfy the necessities of human existence, we must guard the palate against greediness, Soul and Body against idleness, and the whole nature against impure

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tendencies. Avoid bad companions, fly from those who delight in lies, evil words, blasphemies and backbiting, who are impure in word and act. They should be feared and shunned as the very devil. Frequent the Church and employ the hands in good works; hate sloth, fly inordinate comfort, and give no place to self-love. Love all that is life and truth, and even if you believe you are pure, nevertheless avoid every occasion of sin. Love penitence and industry. Look at St. John the Baptist; he was sanctified before birth, and yet from his earliest years he left father and mother, honours and pleasures of the world; and the better to fly all occasion of sin, he

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went into the desert. He was innocent, and his purity equal to that of the Angels; he lived for the Truth, and taught it to others; he was at length put to death for the sake of Justice, and his holiness praised above all others.

Again, consider the ancient Fathers who lived in the deserts of Egypt. They left the world and crucified the flesh and every tendency of corrupt nature, combating sin by penance, fasting, hunger, thirst, and the privation of everything they could do without. Then think of the sentence pronounced by the Christ against the rich man clothed in purple and fine linen, who fared sumptuously every day, and gave nothing to anyone. He dies, and is buried by

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the demons in Hell; there he suffers and burns in infernal flames, desiring one drop of water to cool his tongue, but no one can give it to him. On the other hand, the beggar who lay at his door, starving and burnt with thirst, covered with sores, desired but the crumbs from the table of the rich, but no one gave them to him. He dies, in his turn, and is carried by the Angels into Abraham's bosom :

Where is delight forever with the Blest,  
Life without end and everlasting rest.

### CHAPTER IV

THIS IS THE FOURTH STEP

THE fourth degree of the Celestial Ladder is true Humility, that is

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to say, an intimate consciousness of our own baseness. By this virtue we live with God and He with us in veritable peace, and in it is found the living foundation of all Holiness. It may be compared to a spring from whence flow four rivers of virtue unto Life eternal. The first is Obedience, the second is Meekness, the third is Patience, the fourth Abandonment of self-will.

The first river which springs from really humble soil is Obedience, by which we humble and abase self before God, submitting to His Commandments and placing ourselves below every creature. By it we make choice of the last place in Heaven and on earth, abstaining from comparison with others in virtue

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and holiness, our unique desire consisting in being as a footstool beneath the feet of the Divine Majesty. It is only then that the ear becomes humbly attentive to hear the words of Truth and Life coming from the Wisdom of God, and the hands are always ready to accomplish His most dear and Holy Will.

Now, this Divine Will urges us to despise the wisdom of the world and to follow the Christ, Who is the Wisdom of God, Who became poor to make us rich, a servant to enable us to reign, dying at last to give us life. It is He, again, Who teaches us how to live when He says: "If any will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow

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Me."<sup>1</sup> Then, that we may know how to follow and serve Him, He adds: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart."<sup>2</sup>

Meekness, or gentleness, is the second river of virtue that springs from the soil of Humility. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."<sup>3</sup> That is to say, they shall possess soul and body in peace. For the Spirit of God reposes on the meek and humble; and when our mind is elevated and united to the Spirit of God, we bear the yoke of Christ, which is agreeable and sweet, and are laden with His light burden; for we carry Love, and it lifts us above the Heavens to Him Whom

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. xvi. 24.      <sup>2</sup> St. Matt. xi. 29.

<sup>3</sup> St. Matt. v. 5.



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we love. He who loves and gives himself to Love, actually goes where he will; Heaven is open to him; he carries his soul in his hand, as it were, and places it as he will. He has found within that treasure of the Soul, the Christ, his one Beloved.

If, then, the Christ lives in you and you in Him, you should imitate Him in your life, words, works, and sufferings. Be gentle and kind, pitiful and generous, indulgent to all who ask aid; know neither hate nor envy, afflict and despise no one by hard words, but use forgiveness to all; neither mock, nor show disdain of others in word or act, nor even by gesture or attitude. Avoid rudeness and harshness, but cultivate gravity with a

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joyous exterior. Listen and learn willingly from all that which you ought to know, without distrust, and abstain from passing judgment on what you do not understand. Never enter into dispute with another to prove that you know best :

But as a lamb be meek,  
That cannot wail nor speak,  
E'en though it must be slain.  
So lend thyself all still  
Unto another's will,  
No matter what the pain.

From this inner meekness springs another river, that of inexhaustible Patience. To be patient is to suffer gladly and without repugnance. Tribulations and pains are the messengers of the Lord; by them He visits us. If we receive these

## Love's Gradatory

envoys with a glad heart, He comes to us Himself, as He has said by His Prophet: "I am with him in tribulation, I will deliver him and glorify him."<sup>1</sup>

Patience under suffering was the nuptial garment of the Christ when He espoused Holy Church on the altar of the Holy Cross. He has since clothed in it all His own, that is, those who have followed Him from the beginning; those who have seen that the Christ, the Wisdom of God, chose a humble life, despised and painful; and on this foundation are grounded all states and Orders in Religion.

But there are, in these days, some few who despise the

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xc. 15.

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humble life of the Christ and His nuptial garment, for, as far as they can, they don again the garment of the world, seeking after ambition, pleasure, avarice, jealousy, and other kinds of malice, as the spirit of the world teaches . . . the world that lives in mortal sin. Blush for shame, you who have left God, and forgotten your Rule and your vows, you who, turning aside from the end and object of your Vocation, serve the devil. Beware! he will give you a wage like that which he receives for his own sin. The disciple is not better than the master, and the devil knows his own. They shall dwell with him in everlasting burnings, where there is weeping and gnashing of

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teeth, eternal misery without end.<sup>1</sup>

Now, patient be, and douce ; I trow  
That this you owe  
To the dear Saviour's pain and ruth,  
If you would climb  
To heights sublime,  
Suffer, and He will teach you Truth.

After this flows the fourth stream of the humble life which is the total abandonment of all self-will and all that touches self. This stream takes its rise in suffering patiently endured. The humble, touched interiorly by the Spirit of God, perfected and transported into Him, renounces

<sup>1</sup> The new edition by Muller has a sentence here which 'is not in Groote's translation, nor in the text edited by David : " But those whom the Christ has clothed with Himself and with His gifts shall dwell with Him in the glory of the Father throughout eternity."

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self and voluntarily abandons all to the care of God. He thus acquires one and the same will with the Divine Will, so that it is no longer possible nor lawful to desire and will anything but that which God wills: this is essentially the ground of Humility. When, under the action of the Grace of God, we renounce everything and abandon self-will to the most dear Will of God, His Will becomes ours. The Will of God, which is free—indeed, freedom itself—takes from us the spirit of fear and makes us free, disengaged from and emptied of self, and of every fear that might oppress us in time or eternity.

God bestows upon us, then, the spirit of the Elect, by which

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we cry with the Son: "Abba, Father."<sup>1</sup> And the spirit of the Son renders testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God, and, with the Son, heirs of the Kingdom of the Father. Risen to this sublime height, yet more humble in ourselves, we are filled with grace and gifts by this union with God. This is the highest liberty and the deepest humility united in one and the same person, and the acts that are born of this lowliness joined to this elevation, are incomprehensible to those who are strangers to humility. The truly humble soul is a vessel of election of God, full to overflowing with all gifts and graces. Those who approach Him with

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 15.



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confidence receive all they wish and need; but beware of hypocrites and those who fancy they are something, whereas they are nothing.

They are as a leather bottle filled with wind: when it is pressed and squeezed it gives out sounds that are anything but pleasant to the ear. Thus with the proud hypocrite who believes himself a saint: when pressed and pierced he cannot bear it, but breaks out into passion; he will neither be corrected nor taught; he is bad, bitter, and haughty. In his own esteem he is above everyone, and exalts himself over all who approach him. By these signs you will know such as are hypocrites and utterly false,

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being not yet stripped of self-will.

Be humble then, obedient, gentle, detached from self, and thus you will win in the game of Divine Love. Remark, however, with care what you may yet need, even after you have, by the Grace of God, triumphed over sin by the virtues that are in you—Nature and Sense still remain alive with their propensities to sin. You must struggle against and fight them, as long as you are still in a mortal and not a glorified body.

### CHAPTER V

#### THIS IS THE FIFTH STEP

Now comes the fifth step on the Ladder of Heavenly Love. It is

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entitled the Nobility of Virtue and Good Works and consists in desiring the praise of God above all else. It is this that first of all was practised by the Angels of Heaven, and this was the first homage paid by the Soul of the Christ at the instant of the Incarnation. If we, too, wish to please God, it is the first Virtue to offer Him, since therein is found the ground and origin of all Holiness ; where it is lacking, there is nothing good. To desire God's Glory, to seek after and love it, is actually eternal life, and, at the same time, what God requires of us as the first and highest sacrifice. He who, on the contrary, honouring himself, seeks and follows after his own glory, cannot please God. When

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He bestows on us His gifts, God honours Himself, for He exercises His own goodness; and when we respond to His gifts by the practice of Virtue to His honour, then we are pleasing to Him, because we enter into His views. Any other conduct that we hold, to whatsoever height of spiritual life and good works we appear to attain, if we are seeking self, and not the Glory of God, we are in error, for we lack Charity; while if we seek and humbly desire His Glory with all our soul, with all our being and all our strength, we possess that Charity which is the root and foundation of every virtue and all sanctity. But whosoever has no care for the Glory of God, seeking only his own, is pos-

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sessed by Pride, the root of all sin and malice.

When the Spirit of God touches a humble heart, He pours out on him Divine Grace, and claims in return a likeness in Virtue, and, above all, that he is one with Him in Love. A living soul and loving heart rejoice in this exigency without well knowing how to satisfy it, or pay the debt taught and claimed by Love. The loving soul will understand, however, that in honour and reverence towards God consists the noblest virtue and at the same time the shortest way to go to Him. Consequently the soul prefers, above all good works and virtues, a constant, unending exercise of Praise and Reverence to

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the Divine Majesty. It is a Celestial Life pleasing to God; and this demand on His part, as well as the response given by the living soul, uplifts all the powers, the heart and affections, and all that is in man, and exalts at the same time the vital forces: the veins swell, the blood boils with vehement desire to procure the greater Glory of God.

The Christian faith reveals that God, our all-powerful Father, created and established Heaven and Earth and all that are therein for His eternal Glory; that, through His Son, Who is Eternal Wisdom, He created us by Nature, and recreated us by Grace; that, lastly, all is finished and perfected by the Holy Spirit, the Will and Love of the Father

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and the Son, for the eternal Glory of God. Thus, Trinity of Persons in Unity of Nature, and Unity of Nature in Trinity of Persons, one God Almighty, to Whom we owe Praise, Honour, Adoration.

The same Honour and Adoration are due to our Lord Jesus Christ, God and Man in one Person: for His Sacred Humanity, forming but one with ours, is honoured, blessed, uplifted above every creature by God with Whom it is united. And by reason of this high union with God, the Soul and Body of the Christ are filled with all gifts and graces, even unto plenitude. Of this plenitude all His disciples receive who follow in His footsteps, graces and countless



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assistance and all that is necessary to them for holy living. In return, the Sacred Humanity of our Lord, with all the immense family united to Him, give Honour, Thanksgiving, Praise, and Reverence eternally to the Father, in the power of the Christ and all who are His.

Thus God the Father honours the Son, and with Him all who walk in His following and are one with Him. For whoso honours God is honoured of God. To honour and to be honoured is but exercising the same Love: not that God has need of the honour that we render Him, for He is Himself His own honour, His veritable Glory, and infinite Felicity; but He wills that we both honour

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and love Him, to the end that being one with Him, we enter into His Beatitude. Now, see in what way we can honour and love God. When He reveals Himself to the eyes of the mind by light bestowed, He gives us power to recognize Him athwart similitudes, as in a mirror, where we see shadows, images, likenesses of God. But the Substance, God Himself, we cannot see except through Himself, and this is above and beyond every exercise of Virtue.

We must, therefore, love to look at God, to seek Him under these forms, images, and Divine resemblances, so as to be lifted by Him above self even unto that union with Him which passes all likeness. For the

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present, as in a glass darkly, by means of images and resemblances, we already see that He is Greatness, Power, Strength, Wisdom and Truth, Justice and Mercy, Riches and Liberality, Goodness and Pity, Fidelity and Love without bounds, Life, Reward, Joy without end, and Eternal Felicity. He has many other Names still, far more than we can understand or enumerate. Human reason and intelligence are overwhelmed in astonishment, and Love, full of Desire, wishes to Praise and Honour God in a manner worthy of Him.

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## CHAPTER VI

### THREE WAYS OF HONOURING GOD

THE fervent desire of which we have just spoken invites the Holy Spirit to teach us three Methods that make us capable of giving to God all the Honour in our power. The first unites us to God without any intermediary; the second unites us to His Will by means of Grace and Good Works; the third keeps us so united to Him as to make us grow and progress in Grace, Virtue, and every form of Holiness. In the first Method there are three ways of union with God, consisting of Adoration, Honour, and Love. The second Method also contains three,

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Desire, Prayer, and Petition. Lastly, the third includes three others, Thanksgiving, Praise, and Blessing.

To adore God is to exalt Him, with great Reverence in the mind, by means of Faith, above Reason, as Eternal Power, Creator, and Lord of Heaven and Earth and all that therein is. To honour God is to abandon and forget self and all other creatures in order to follow Him faithfully without ever looking back, with everlasting Veneration. Finally, the third way consists in the possession of God alone, to seek Him and love Him, not by personal interest for our own glory or salvation, nor for anything that He can give us; but

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loving Him only for Himself and His greater Glory. Such is perfect Charity that unites us to God and by which we live in Him and He in us.

### CHAPTER VII

#### OF THE SECOND METHOD

FROM Charity, such as has been described, springs the second manner of spiritual exercise, comprising also three operations, which are Desire, Prayer, and Petition, to desire with the heart, pray with the lips, and supplicate with the spirit. We should first of all desire with fervent devotion the Grace of God and His aid, for His Honour and because of the need in which we stand of it to be

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able to serve Him. This desire inflames the Soul to accomplish with Love and Zeal the most dear Will of God according to our ability. This brings into being another sort of exercise, that of praying with both mind and lips. We must implore our Heavenly Father, the Source of every excellent Grace and perfect Gift, to communicate to us the Spirit of Filial Fear, which fills us with reverence towards Him and with care not to offend Him by sin. We must beg for the Spirit of Piety to make us, in His name and also by Virtue, gentle, clement, humble, pitiful to all who address us; also for the Spirit of Knowledge, which will enable us to walk before Him and in the sight of men, in

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honesty and sincerity of word and work, in commission and omission. Then shall we be able to endure suffering, to regulate our life in such a way as to give scandal to none, but, on the contrary, to incite others to a better life.

We must pray our Heavenly Father also for the gift of Fortitude to make us capable of overcoming every enemy, the devil, the world, and the flesh; since that is the only way to live in peace with God.

We must beseech the Father of Light and Truth to grant to us the Spirit of Counsel to help us to walk as a follower of the Christ, even to the Heaven of Heavens, despising the world and all that appertains to it.



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We must desire, too, and pray God to obtain the Spirit of true Intelligence to enlighten the Reason so as to understand all necessary truths in Heaven and Earth.

Lastly, we must ask the Almighty Father and Jesus Christ, His Well - belovèd Son, to bestow upon us the Spirit of Heavenly Wisdom, which will inspire us with disgust and scorn for all things that pass. Then only shall we be capable of seeing, tasting, and feeling that Abyss of Delight, the sweetness of God, calling to us in all confidence the Holy Spirit, Lord of Grace and Glory, from Whom descends every good gift and all Holiness in Heaven and Earth.

Such is the second Method, or

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exercise, by which our prayers, desires, and supplications rise to our Heavenly Father, that He may make us like unto Him and assist us to follow His Divine Son, and finally possess, with Him, the Glory belonging to them in the unity of the Holy Spirit through all Eternity.

### CHAPTER VIII

#### OF THE THIRD METHOD

THERE is a third method that perfects us in Virtue and adorns us with the attire of a holy life. It comprises three ways of exercising the Soul: to Thank, to Praise, and to Bless God. Certainly we ought to thank, praise, and bless God, first because He has created Heaven

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and Earth and all that in them is for His Glory and our happiness, and He has made man in His image and likeness, setting him over all that is in the world.

Then, when our first father according to Nature fell into sin by disobedience, dragging us down with him, our Eternal and Almighty Father willed to efface our sin by His Grace, and gave us His own Son, Who has borne our burden, humbly placing Himself at our service, teaching us the way of Truth by the example of His own life, obedient unto Death, in order that we may live with Him everlastingly in Eternal Glory. It is therefore but just to thank, praise, and bless our Heavenly Father and His glorious Son

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with the Holy Spirit, for having brought about these wonders through love of us. We should, furthermore, praise and bless our most dear Lord Jesus Christ in the Glory of the Father for having given us His Sacred Flesh and Blood and glorified Life in the Most Holy Sacrament. There we find most truly nourishment, beverage, eternal Life, and all that we can desire, in greater abundance than we can ever wish. In return, we can offer to the Father His Son, wounded, martyred, and put to death for love of us; and that in union with all sacrifices ever offered in His Name by holy priests, at the same time doing homage to the Divine Majesty, of all works accomplished for

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His service by the Just and the Faithful from the first day to the last.

We can thank and praise our Lord Jesus Christ yet more for the greatness of Mary, His most dear Mother, whom He chose as such from the entire earth. He deigned, indeed, to be conceived of her by the Holy Ghost, to be born of her without stain or suffering, Mother and Virgin both together, and to be nourished at her chaste breasts. The Angels sang, "Glory in Heaven" while He wept in the crib, before His Mother adoring Him as her God and as her Son. She tended Him with great respect, and He on His part treated her as a tender child His most dear Mother.

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She could pray to Him as God, and yet command Him as her Son. Never was such a wonder known.

As to the greatness of Mary in Virtue and Holiness of life, none can describe or express it; of profound Humility, high Purity, large and abundant Charity, she is still full of Mercy for sinners who invoke her; she is the Mother of every Grace and all Favours, our advocate and mediatrix with her Son. He can refuse her nothing that she asks, because she is His Mother, sitting at His right hand, crowned as Queen with Him, sovereign Lady of Heaven and earth, highest of all creatures and nearest to Him, and so we thank and praise Him for the

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honour He has done His Mother and all of us in His human nature, since ingratitude dries the source of Graces from God.

To thank, praise, and honour God is the very first work practised by creatures, and thus it will be for ever. It began in Heaven when the Archangel St. Michael fought with his Angels against Lucifer and his Angels for possession of Paradise, and Lucifer, vanquished with all his host, fell from the heights like lightning as a burning flame; for whoso exalts himself shall be humbled. Then rejoiced all the Choirs, Orders, and powerful Dominions of Heaven; the highest Angel amid the Seraphim sang the eternal Praise of God, joined by

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all the celestial choir, giving thanks to God for the victory, adoring and praising Him because He is their God, loving and rejoicing in Him everlastingly, to His great Glory.

### CHAPTER IX

#### WHAT THE FIRST THREE CELESTIAL HIERARCHIES DO FOR MEN

THE blessed Spirits of the highest Hierarchy, the Thrones, the Cherubim, and the Seraphim, do not descend with us into the struggle undertaken by us for the overcoming of sin, but they live with us only in that state where, lifted above the fight, we rise toward God by Peace, Contemplation, and Eternal Love.



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The three middle Orders of the Angelic Hierarchy are the Principalities, the Powers, and the Dominions. They are intended to fight with us against the devil, the world, and all vices—in fact, against everything that constitutes an obstacle in the service of our Lord. They order and govern us and help us to lead to the end the interior life, ornamented with all Virtue. Indeed, when by the Grace of God and the help of His Angels we have vanquished the world and all that belongs to it, we become as Kings and Princes over all in this world, and the Kingdom of Heaven is ours. Then it is that the fourth Choir of Angels, the Principalities, come to our aid for God's

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honour. Further, when we abase self by humiliation and self-scorn from the ground of the heart, placing ourselves below every creature the more to honour God, we vanquish the devil and all his power. The fifth Choir of Angels, the Powers, accompany us and lend us their succour in the practice of the inner life, so as to assure us the victory for the Glory of God.

But there is something further, as when one acquires such contempt of self that he places himself lower than any, unworthy in his own estimation to be compared in Virtue, judging no one, but condemning only himself. All his acts of Virtue appear of little value, as nothing at all, for the sentiment of God's Justice

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and his own lowliness keep him from resting on them. Night and day he hears in his heart a voice that eats into his reins and heart, penetrating to the marrow of his bones : " Thou shalt praise the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." His hunger and ardour to serve God are so great that all the good he can do seems perfected in an instant, it leaves him no rest, so that he is irritated and indignant with himself, feeling how powerless he is to do the good that he would. He has no more carnal affection for self or any other creature ; it is dead in him and has disappeared ; he knows and feels but one need only, to praise and serve God ; and seeing that he cannot attain to it as he would,

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he hates and despises himself, for the Spirit of God fills him ceaselessly with desire of new tasks in His service and praise, even far more than he can fulfil. Give as he may, he is ever pressed to give more, which is the cause of desire without end. Then, when this humble Soul understands that he cannot accomplish what God asks of him, he falls at the wounded Feet of our Lord, crying: "Lord, I cannot acquit my debt to Thee, I surrender and deliver myself into Thy Hands; do with me as Thou wilt." To his humble abandonment our Lord replies: "Thy submission and confidence are pleasing to Me; I bestow on thee My Spirit of Liberty and Truth, so that thou mayst put thy

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complaisance in Me above every good work and virtuous act."

Now, this mutual complaisance between God and the truly humble Soul, freed by Humility, is the root of Charity and Holiness in the interior life. Those who attain to it cannot be tempted of sin, for all enemies fly from them as a serpent from a flowering vine.<sup>1</sup> This same mutual complaisance is the highest and most noble work in the inner life, all virtues and all good works end and are perfected there; for God gives the Grace, and the interior Soul offers to Him in return every work.

Thus grow and renew with-

<sup>1</sup> St. Bonaventura, "Vitis Mystica," ch. xlv., ed. Quaracchi, t. viii., p. 222, No. 356.

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out ceasing both Grace and Works, for God speaks intimately to the Soul, saying: "I give thee My grace, give thou Me thy works." Then, appealing to Goodwill and liberty of desire, He adds: "Give Me thyself, as I give Myself to thee. Wilt thou be Mine? I will be thine." Such invitations and replies are said interiorly in the spirit, not exteriorly in words. The loving Soul responds: "Lord, Thou livest in me by Thy Grace, and I delight in Thee above all things. I must love, thank, and praise Thee, I may not keep from doing thus, since for me it is eternal Life."

Thou art my very meat and drink ;  
Eating I famish still ;  
I quench my thirst to thirst again ;  
Starve, while I take my fill.

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Thou'rt sweeter than the honeycomb ;  
O'er all I can attain ;

Since inexhaustible Thou art  
Hungry I yet remain.

Art Thou consumed, or I? Who  
knows ?

Both in my soul I feel.

Thou will'st that I be one with Thee—

This is my woe and weal,  
For in Thy arms I cannot lie  
Quit of all human strife,  
Thy Praise, Thy Love, Thy Ser-  
vice, are

My very breath of life.

Impatience seizes on my heart—

Could I attain to Thee,  
Nor leave my exercise of Praise  
How joyful I should be !  
Thou know'st, dear Lord, my every  
need,

Do as Thou wilt with me ;

All power Thine, submission mine  
To dree or die for Thee.

To this the Spirit of the Lord  
replies in the intimacy of the  
Soul without exterior words,  
but in the depth of the con-

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sciousness: "Beloved, I am thine, and thou art Mine; I give Myself to thee above all gifts, and in return I claim thee, I draw thee to Me above all thy good works."

When in the inmost Being the Soul follows the Divine drawing and gives itself up freely to the Spirit of God, it tastes infinite happiness impossible to comprehend, in which the whole being dissolves, caught and embraced between immense Love and unending Happiness, under the regard of Love Himself; but the hour is short, for Love cannot remain inactive, it cries aloud in the intimacy of the Soul: "Thanksgiving, Praise, Honour, be to God; this is



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Love's Counsel and Commandment."

This, then, is the noblest and highest exercise of the interior life, the nearest to the Contemplative existence. The Soul resembles the Angels of the sixth Choir, the Dominions, who rule the five other Choirs, or Orders, below them. In the same way this method here spoken of is lifted above all others in the practice of the interior life.

### CHAPTER X

#### OF TWO WAYS THAT THE CHRIST TAUGHT

THE Christ, the Son of the living God, taught us and practised in His own life two ways which

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lead to eternal Life, if we will but follow Him. The first is the way of the Commandments, the second that of the Counsels.

The Saviour said: "If thou wilt be perfect and become My disciple, leave all that is dear to you, father and mother, brother and sister, wife and children, houses and lands, and everything in the world that may be an obstacle or drawback to intimacy with God; leave and despise all that, if thou wilt be like unto Me."<sup>1</sup> "Behold, I send you as My Father hath sent Me;<sup>2</sup> and I had nowhere to lay My head."<sup>3</sup> Thus you may keep no attachment nor inordinate affection for the world, but leave all,

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. xix. 29.    <sup>2</sup> St. John xx. 23.

<sup>3</sup> St. Luke ix. 58.

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if you will grow in interior life. If you are capable of this, you can become a disciple of the Christ and poor in spirit, dominating the entire world which you have overcome; and although you have nothing of your own, you possess all things in God, Who gave you power to conquer.

Moreover, the Christ said: "Leave all thou hast and follow Me,"<sup>1</sup> that is, to honour God and forgo all complacency in self. This is, in fact, what the Christ did, as He says: "I seek to honour My Father Who sent Me; if I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing."<sup>2</sup> In this manner man resembles the Son of God Who gave us the Wisdom of Humility. Again, the Christ said: "Whoso

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. xix. 21.    <sup>2</sup> St. John viii. 54.

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will come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me." <sup>1</sup> Of this He has given the example, renouncing Himself even to the delivering of His Body to death at the hands of His enemies, and committing His Soul to the will of the Father; and having given all that He was and of which He was capable, He cried with a loud voice, "It is consummated," <sup>2</sup> bowed His head, and gave up the ghost And so should we do likewise.

Consequently, if we will, in our turn, be perfected in Charity and in the interior life, we must abandon ourselves entirely to the most dear Will of God, being disposed and ready to die for His honour, or for our neigh-

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke ix. 23.      <sup>2</sup> St. John xix. 30.

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bour, if so we can assure to him Eternal Life. Then only is our Charity perfect toward God and our neighbour, and thereby we become like unto the Holy Spirit Who operates all works of love, perfecting them unto Life Eternal. The sincere practice, as before God, of these three kinds of renunciation constitute the Counsels of our Lord and a hidden way to go to God, found by but few, for exterior Poverty only, without interior and other virtues, is not sufficient to find it; on the contrary, riches, wisely used and liberally distributed to the poor for the love of God, reach to this way, hidden to unwilling and insincere Poverty.

But the common road to go to

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God is by way of the Commandments. The Christ said truly: "If you will enter into life, keep the Commandments."<sup>1</sup> And again: "If you keep My Commandments you abide in My love, as I also have kept My Father's Commandments and abide in His love."<sup>2</sup> For to love is the first and greatest of the Commandments, and none can love if they live not in the Christian Faith. To one who believes, all is possible; but the unbeliever is a brand of hell-fire. To keep the Commandments, Faith is necessary, confidence in God, purification from sin according to Christian law and the Precepts of Holy Church, and also willing obedience to

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. xix. 17.    <sup>2</sup> St. John xv. 10.

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God and superiors ; conforming to customs and practices generally in use in Holy Church ; each according to our power and with a wise discretion, after the ordinary conduct of Prudence and the customs of the country. Your life should be regulated by the knowledge of the Ten Commandments, the seven deadly sins feared and shunned, that God be not offended and eternal Punishment merited. Observe the Fasts of Holy Church ; be zealous and assiduous in good works as far as may be ; be faithful to God and self in all good, as behoves a good servitor toward his Master, waiting until He calls you to Him. Such is a life conformable to the Commandments of God,

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to which we are all bounden. Therefore the Angels of God, who belong to the lowest Choir, assist us every day of our life so as to be able at last to present us, pure and without stain of sin, before the Face of the Lord.

Next, there is the second stage, a more elevated way in the active life—innocent Patience. Innocence is born of Charity, and Patience is its sister. From these three virtues, with the Grace of God, spring all good works, because they refrain the evil tendencies of Nature, and all distinction among the virtues may be reduced to the unity of this innocent Patience; for who-so possesses that, lives in fear of the Lord and at peace with God,



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is humble, gentle, obedient, kind, affable, courteous, simple, without dissimulation, bearing all, easily influenced to good, being docile and willingly instructed by the Spirit, thus receiving continually from God the discipline of veritable Peace. When you possess the whole of these virtues, you are at the second stage, and resemble the Archangels, who constitute the second Choir, commanding and presiding over all the Angels of inferior order in the first Hierarchy; and in this way you surpass all those who live in the inferior stage of good works, where, however, they attain Salvation.

Lastly, there is a third stage, where all active life pleasing to God comes to full perfection.

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Consider: when a simple Christian observes the Law and the Commandments of God because He so orders and wills, and not by custom or constraint, he is just and pleasing to God in the inferior degree of the spiritual life. Then, when he rises to a higher stage and interiorly acquires numerous virtues, which ornament the Soul so as to make it like God, His Angels and Saints, and all the Just, by esteem for Virtue and hate of vice, and also in view of eternal Life and peace of Conscience, as for the joy and well-being he tastes in the sincerity of his life, then he is far more agreeable to God than the common run of those in the inferior Choir. But when, lifted

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above all exterior good works and all interior virtues, he fixes his inner regard on God with great confidence and Christian Faith, loving and seeking Him above all things, attaching himself to Him above all else, then he reaches the third stage, where all active life is consummated. Truly the Soul there resembles the Angels of the third Choir in the inferior Hierarchy, who bear the name of Virtues, for the virtues are perfected when thus offered to God, loving and desiring Him beyond them all.

Such is the perfection of the active life, composed of three stages leading to Eternal Life, from higher to higher, as we profit by the grace bestowed and according to our merits, as

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before God. If you have any experience of this inner life, strive to keep it and dwell in it; self must be emptied out, and detachment from creatures obtained; more than all must the Soul rest in God, seek and love Him, desiring His Glory far above all else. In this way the Soul remains established before the Face of God in Eternal Reverence.

### CHAPTER XI

THAT MANY THINK THEY ARE HOLY  
AND ARE DECEIVED

ONE meets many persons full of self-complacency, imagining they lead a holy life and are great before God, yet who deceive themselves in many

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ways ; for those who are neither detached from self-will, nor mortified in their natural life, can have no experience in the life of Grace, nor be tested before the Divine Majesty. They may be endowed with intelligence and of a subtile reason, but self-complacency and seeking to please men are a turning away from God, and at the same time the principal root of all sin. Such men strive to be above others, above everyone, if possible. They will never submit sincerely to another, but desire, on the contrary, that all give way before what appears to them to be right. They are disagreeable, full of self, and will always prove their case against those who disagree with

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them. They are easily put out, discontented, irascible, susceptible, bad, hard and haughty, in word, act, and manner; it is impossible to live in peace with them—indeed, they have no peace in themselves, since they think only of spying upon and passing judgment on everyone except themselves.

Always full of suspicions and malicious thoughts, with nothing but displeasure, interior spite and rancour for those who do not please them, they are ceaselessly tortured and restless, believing they know and do better than all the world. Full of zeal to instruct others, to teach, correct, reprove, they will not endure to be taught or reproved by anyone, since they

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believe they are the wisest of all. Tyrannical and contemptuous towards inferiors and equals when they do not receive what they consider their due, they are, besides, quarrelsome and imperious, often scoffing with bitter harshness, for they are without the unction of the Spirit. They willingly put themselves forward among honest folk, believing they are authorized to speak before any, so wise are they in their own eyes. Beneath a humble exterior they hide Pride and cover Hate by the appearance of Justice; they show great affability and respect to those who flatter and give way to them; they cannot show too much solicitude, attention, and care for their own

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concerns, rejoicing or mourning, as is the way of the world, according as good or ill overtakes their temporal interests. Praise or blame them to the face, and you soon see of what sort they are, having neither care nor anxiety but for what touches them: sickness, death, hell, purgatory, the judgments of God and His Justice; entirely preoccupied with themselves, with the fear and dread of all that can happen to them, loving self as they do in such an inordinate way, instead of for God and in God. Consequently they are restless and constrained, confused before the Face of God, full of solicitude and fear for worldly interests, under the feet of unbelievers for fear that



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life and riches be taken from them, that their goods be stolen or confiscated, or that they are not paid. They dread to become poor, miserable, despised, old and ill, without consolation, comforts, and friends; such inordinate and foolish cares nourish a state of avarice, and lead sometimes to actual madness.

Even in the sacerdotal Orders and the Religious state persons of this kind are to be met with, still full of self-will and absolutely immortified; always dreading that a Superior or Prelate should interfere with their way of living, or disturb them without sufficient consideration, as they know well that they could not endure such a thing. All sorts

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of imaginations run in their heads about those whom they believe to be hostile ; such as : " If such a one became my Superior, how could I ever submit to and obey him? He dislikes me, he would oppress and despise me in every way, and all his friends would take his part against me." These sort of anxieties sour the blood, cause irritation and murmuring : " It is quite impossible—I should lose my senses, or have to leave the Cloister."

Such are the silly fears, immoderate prudence and foresight, coming from a depth of Pride. Should they become Superior, they would surely oppress and despise all who opposed their opinion, or did

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not yield to their good pleasure, for they fancy they govern and order things far better and more wisely than any other. Frequently they criticize interiorly their Superiors and others set over them, and do the same in word to any disposed to listen. Praise of others is painful to them, for they imagine they are therefore less esteemed, nor will they admit of superiority in others who know and profess less than they do. Such, in fact, are those who esteem themselves wiser and more prudent than any about them, while they are really inapt and incapable of attaining true Holiness.

Let each prove himself, examining his mind and natural inclinations, to see if there is

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nothing found in him that should be eliminated and overcome in order to acquire true Holiness. To die to sin is to live to God, to be emptied of self and detached from all that pleases or displeases, leads to the Kingdom of God; heart and desire must close to things of earth to open to God and things eternal, if we desire to taste and see that the Lord is sweet.

If we would God discern,  
The world we must despise,  
His love and hate must learn,  
See all things with His eyes.  
And we must self forgo  
If God we would attain,  
His grace must in us grow  
And ease us from all pain.  
So shall we sing His praise  
And be at one with Him,  
In peace our voices raise  
In the celestial hymn,

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That with quadruple harmony  
And all mellifluous melody,  
In Heaven resounds eternally.

## CHAPTER XII

### OF CELESTIAL MELODIES

OUR Heavenly Father called us from all eternity, elected us in His Beloved Son, and wrote our names with the finger of His Love in the living book of eternal Wisdom, therefore we should respond with all our power in constant Reverence and Veneration. Thus commences every song of Angels and men, never to cease.

The first method of Celestial Song is love of God and men, the which to teach us God sent His Son. Whoso knows not

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this method cannot enter the heavenly Choir, since having neither knowledge nor the vestment of Grace he must remain everlastingly without.

Jesus Christ, the Soul's Lover, at the moment of His Conception in the chaste womb of His Virgin Mother, chanted in spirit the Glory and Honour of His Heavenly Father, peace and rest to men of goodwill; and on that night in which He was born of the Virgin Mother the Angels sang the same sweet refrain. The Church recalls it when she, in her turn, sings it, especially on these two Festivals. Love of God and love of man for God and in God, what can be hymned of more sublime or more joyous in Heaven or on earth, since the

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form and meaning of this song are infused by the Holy Spirit ?

The Christ, our Choir Master and Precentor, intoned it from the beginning, and will intone eternally for us this hymn of love and endless felicity. Then, in our turn, with all our might, we shall sing with Him, both here below and in the midst of the Choir of the Glory of God. Thus Love, pure and without pretence, is the common song we must all learn in order to take part in the Choir of Angels and Saints in the Kingdom of God ; for Love is the root and cause of all interior virtues, the true ornament and adornment of all exterior good work. Love lives of itself, and is its own recompense ; in its action it can-

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not be deceived, for there the Christ has gone before Who taught us to love, and lives in love with all who are His, for us to imitate Him, if we wish to be happy with Him, and attain Salvation. Such is the first method of Celestial Song that the Wisdom of God teaches His obedient disciples by the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

Next comes the second method of Celestial Song, which is unpretentious Humility, that none can raise or abase. In this really consists the root and sure foundation of all virtue and the whole spiritual edifice; this, too, constitutes the measure, key, and finale of all heavenly Song, for it is the mantle and ornament of Love, the sweetest voice that



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can sing before the face of God. The chords are so graceful and attractive that they draw the Wisdom of God even into our human nature, as when Mary said: "Behold the servant of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word."<sup>1</sup> God was so completely won that He willed the Eternal Wisdom to take flesh in the womb of the Virgin.

Thus the highest height became lowliness, since the Son of God humbled Himself and took upon Him the form of a slave, so as to raise us to the image of the Godhead. He humiliated Himself, placing Himself lower than all, despising Himself through desire to serve us even unto death.

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke i. 38.

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If you wish to resemble and follow Him there where is sung the hymn of sincere Humility, you must also deny and despise self, love and desire contempt, disdain, and neglect from others, for true Humility is insensible to what flatters or pains, to honour or shame, to all that is not itself. It is the highest gift and the loveliest jewel that God can bestow on the loving Soul, outside of Himself, the plentitude of every Grace and gift; whoso dwells with it becomes one with it, and finds everlasting Peace.

The third method of Celestial Song consists in renouncing self-will and everything belonging to self, abandoning all to the most dear Will of God and

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bearing submissively all He sees fit to impose. And though Nature, bowed under the cross, following our Lord even unto death, suffers pain, the spirit that willingly makes such an offering is joyous. Nature weeps and complains of the heavy burden it bears, but hereafter there will be joy in the Glory of God, when Jesus shall wipe away all tears, showing us how by His Precious Blood He bought us of His Father by paying the price of death. Then shall we sing with Him this sweet melody, merited by voluntary suffering, and belonging to men, not to Angels. The greater the martyrdom, labour, and suffering, so much greater, too, will be the Glory, recom-

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pense, and honour. The Christ, our Precentor, constrains us to sing this hymn, for He is King and Prince of all suffering willingly endured for the love and honour of God, and His voice is so rich, so sonorous, it is the perfection of science in heavenly Song, its tones, keys, and varied harmonies. With Him we shall all sing, thanking and praising His Heavenly Father Who sent Him to us.

As it behoved the Christ to suffer and thus to enter into His Glory, so it behoves us, too, to suffer gladly, so as to be like unto Him, and to follow Him into the glory of the Father, with Whom He is one in the fruition of the Holy Ghost, there to sing His praise in the Name

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of our Lord Jesus Christ, each one personally, in spirit, according to our merits and dignity before God.

Finally, the fourth method of celestial Song, the most interior, noble, and highest, consists in deliquescence in the Praise of God.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Above the love of God and our neighbour, true Humility and complete renouncement of self-will, Blessed John Ruysbroeck places the confession of absolute powerlessness to praise God as He deserves. This he calls a mystical fainting in the Praise of God. This acknowledgement of powerlessness comes from the Divine exigency claiming more than we are capable of giving. Under the influence of Grace our supernatural activity can well lead us to the union with God, which the author names *intermedium*, but the union *without intervention of a medium*, goes beyond our force and is the work of God alone. The first kind of union has a *likeness with God*, but the second is

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Our heavenly Father is at the same time covetous and liberal. On His beloved who walk before His Face and are elevated in the Spirit, He bestows liberally His gifts and blessings, but expects in return that each render thanks, praise, and good works in the measure in which He has endowed him, both exteriorly and interiorly. For Divine Grace is not given uselessly, nor in vain; if we make use of it the flow is ceaseless, giving all that we need, claiming in return from us all that we can give, and

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the very image of God, graven in the substance of the Soul and constitutes the *living Unity* with God. In one, the Soul operates continually with the help of the Holy Spirit; in the other, the Soul enjoys and reposes in Him.

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from these reciprocal gifts springs the practice of every virtue, without fear of error.

But that which goes beyond all works and the exercise of all Virtues, our heavenly Father teaches to those who are especially dear to Him; thus in His gifts and in His exigency He shows Himself not only liberal and covetous, but covetousness and liberality itself. He wills to give Himself to us entirely, Himself and all that He is, but in return He claims the full donation of ourselves to Him, with all that we are or can be. His will and intention is that we should be entirely His, as He is altogether ours; each, however, remaining what they are, for we cannot become Divine, but can

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be united to God both by an intermedium and without an intermedium. We are united to Him by means of His Grace and our good works, and this mutual Love, thus constituted, results in His being in us and we in Him, submissive to His influence even to the point of having but one only will with Him for all good. For His Spirit and Grace operate in every good work far more than our own action ; and the Grace He bestows, with the love we render Him, elaborates a work in which He and we cooperate together of common accord. Our love for God is, indeed, the highest and noblest work of which we can conceive between God and self. The Divine Spirit, on His side, re-



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quires of our spirit that we should love and thank God and sing the praises due to His supreme dignity and majesty; it is in this that all loving Souls in Heaven as on earth fall short. They are consumed with this desire and fall powerless before the infinite Majesty of God; His Grace is there perfected with every virtue. But it is possible to be united to God without an intermedium, above Grace and beyond all Virtue, for independently of any medium, we have received the image of God in the living substance of the Soul, and thus established union with God without an intermedium; not by becoming God, but by remaining always like Him, He living in us and

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we in Him, through Grace and good works.

We are then united to God without medium and beyond all Virtue, bearing His image impressed on the very summit of our created nature; nevertheless, we remain like Him and united to Him by means of His Grace and our good works; being like unto Him in Grace and Glory, one with Him in our eternal image or ideal. Living union with God is in our very essence; we cannot understand nor attain to it, nor seize it. It baffles our strength and requires us to be one with God without an intermediary, although this cannot be accomplished alone. We can, indeed, follow after God so far as to attain to the state of

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emptiness of self; once in this state the Holy Spirit makes His dwelling in the Soul, reposing there with all His gifts. He bestows His graces and gifts on all our powers, asking in return love, thanksgiving, and praise. He inhabits in our essence, claiming from us freedom from self, love and union with Him above all Virtue. Consequently we cannot remain in self with our good works, nor above self with God, in a state of vacuum, in which consists the most intimate action of Love. The Spirit of the Lord within is an eternal operation of God, Who wills that we correspond continually in order to become like unto Him. But He is also repose and fruition of the Father and

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the Son and all His beloved, in everlasting inaction. This fruition is above works and we cannot comprehend it; works remaining always below fruition we cannot introduce them into that condition. When we act, we always lack something, not being able to love God sufficiently, but in enjoying, we attain satisfaction; we are then all that we desire. Such is the fourth method of celestial Song, the noblest that can be chanted in Heaven or on earth.

You should know, however, that neither God, nor the Angels, nor Souls, sing with a corporeal voice, since they are spirits, having neither ears, nor mouth, nor tongue, nor throat, to form a note. The Holy Scriptures

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say well that God spoke to Abraham and Moses, to the Patriarchs and Prophets in many ways with sensible words, before He took upon Himself human nature. Holy Church, in her turn, attests that the Angels sing everlastingly and ceaselessly, "*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus.*" Again, the Angel Gabriel brought to Our Lady the message that she should conceive the Son of God, by virtue of the Holy Spirit; Angels sang while bearing the soul of St. Martin to Heaven, and Angels daily delighted Mary Magdalen by their singing. It would seem, then, that good and bad spirits and disembodied Souls can appear to men in what form they like, as far as it pleases

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God to allow ; but in the next life this is unnecessary, for then we shall contemplate with the eyes of the intelligent the Glory of God and of all Angels and Saints in general, at the same time as the special Glory and recompense of each in particular, in every delectable way.

But at the last day, at the Judgement of God, when we rise again with glorious bodies, in the power of the Lord, these bodies will be white and resplendent as the snow, more brilliant than the sun, more transparent than crystal, and each one will have a special mark of honour and glory, according to the support and endurance of torments and sufferings, willingly and freely

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borne to the honour of God. For all things shall be regulated and recompensed according to the Wisdom of God and the nobility of our works; and the Christ, our Precentor and Choir-Master, shall sing with His sweet triumphant voice an eternal canticle to the Praise and Glory of the Heavenly Father. We also shall sing the same hymn, with joyous spirit and clear voice, eternally without end. The happiness and glory of the Soul shall be reflected in our senses and members, as we contemplate one the other with glorified vision, hearing, speaking, and chanting the Praise of our Lord with unfailing voice. The Christ will serve us and show us His illuminated Visage

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and glorious Body bearing the marks of love and fidelity printed on them.

We shall, too, contemplate the glorified bodies of the Just, clothed in numberless marks of love, spent in the service of God since the beginning of the world; and our sensitive life shall be filled, exteriorly and interiorly, with the Glory of God; the heart full of life burning with ardent love of God, the powers of the Soul resplendent with Glory, ornamented with the gifts of God and the practice of all virtue on earth.

Finally, and beyond all else, ravished out of self into the Glory of God, without limit, incomprehensible, immense, we are to enjoy Him for ever and ever.



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The Christ in His human nature shall lead the Choir on the right, for He is the highest and most sublime creation of God, and to this Choir belong all who live in Him and He in them. The other Choir is the angelic, for although they are by Nature the more noble, we have been dowered in a more sublime fashion in Jesus Christ, with Whom we are one. He shall be the supreme Pontiff in the midst of the Choir of Angels and men before the throne of the sovereign Majesty of God, and will offer and renew before His heavenly Father, God Almighty, all offerings that were ever presented by Angels and men, fixed in the Glory of God for ever and ever.

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Thus, then, shall our bodies and senses by which we serve God now be glorified and beatified, like unto the glorious Body of the Christ; that Body in which He served God and man. Our Souls, by which we now and always love, thank, and praise God, will then be blessed and glorious spirits, like to the blessed and glorious Soul of the Christ, the Angels and all spirits who love, praise, and bless God; and through the Christ we shall be ravished in God to be with Him in fruition and eternal Beatitude. And thus I end the fifth step of the celestial Ladder.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### THIS IS THE SIXTH STEP

THE sixth degree or step in Love, consists in a clear intuition, Purity of spirit and intelligence. These three qualities of the contemplative Soul spring from a living source, where we are united to God above reason and the ordinary exercise of Virtue.<sup>1</sup> Whosoever desires to experience it must offer God both virtues and good works without looking for any reward, and above all offer self, abandoning every-

<sup>1</sup> The true contemplative life which is here spoken of is but the development of the fourth method of celestial Song described in the last chapter, in other words, the *return to the Purity of Intelligence*.

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thing to the free disposal of God ; always going forward without looking back, in a lively Reverence for God. Thus the Soul must prepare with the Grace of God, to attain to the contemplative life. The exterior and sensitive life must be ruled and given to good works before all men. The interior life must be filled with grace and charity, without dissimulation, of direct intention, rich in virtue, the memory exempt from cares and solicitude, freed and detached, entirely delivered of every image ; the heart set free, open and uplifted above the Heavens ; the intelligence empty and stripped of all consideration but God.

Such is the citadel of loving Souls where all pure intellects

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are united, in one simple Purity. This is the habitation of God in us, where none can operate but God alone ; its Purity is eternal, there is neither time nor space, past nor future, always present and ready to be revealed to those pure intelligences raised to it. The air is pure and serene, lit by a light Divine, and by it we shall discover, fix, and contemplate the eternal Truth, with purified and illuminated eyes. There, too, all things are transformed, are one only Truth, one only image in the mirror of the Wisdom of God ; and God created us that we might find, know, and possess this image in our essence and the Purity of our intelligence. Contemplating, applying our minds to this in

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the Divine Light, with simple and spiritual eyes, we attain to contemplative life.

But yet another thing is necessary, Purity of spirit; for an intelligence in repose without images, an intuition in the light of God, and a spirit elevated in Purity to the Face of God, these three qualities united constitute the true contemplative life, where none can err; for the pure spirit expands ceaselessly and follows rapidly in purified love, the enlightened intelligence towards its Cause.

Now, our heavenly Father is the Cause and End of all that is; in Him we begin all good, with an intelligence stripped of sense in a prospect without images. In His Son we contemplate all

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Truth with an intelligence enlightened by the Light Divine ; and in the Holy Spirit we perfect our works. Then are we ravished out of self by purified Love, even to the Face of God, freed and emptied of every event and illusion. This is the contemplative life of highest price. To begin and finish each moment is Love's counsel. And such is the sixth step of the heavenly Ladder.

### CHAPTER XIV

#### THIS IS THE SEVENTH STEP

NEXT follows the seventh step, the noblest and most elevated that it is possible to realize in the life of time or eternity. It is attained when, above all

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knowledge and science, we find within us a limitless ignorance; when, passing beyond every name given to God or creatures we expire and pass to an eternal Unnameable where we are lost; when, further than any practice of Virtue, we contemplate and discover within us everlasting Repose, or immeasurable Beatitude where none can act; when we contemplate above all blessed Spirits an essential Beatitude where all are one, melted, lost, in their Super-essence in the bosom of a darkness defying all determination or knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This seventh degree of Love may be compared with what St. Denis calls the Divine Obscurity in the first and following chapters of his "Mystical Theology."



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We shall also contemplate the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, triune in Person, one only God in Nature ; by Whom was created Heaven and earth and all that exists ; Whom we shall love, thank, and praise for ever and ever, for that we are made in His image and likeness is the great happiness of those who are noble and pure. The Divinity does not operate, being simple essence, always in repose. Had we part in this repose with Him, we should, with Him, be merely Repose and lifted even to His altitude, and thus be above all the steps of the heavenly Ladder, with God in His Divinity, one essence of Repose and eternal Beatitude. The Divine Persons in the fecundity of their

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Nature, are one God eternally active; and in the simplicity of their Essence, eternally in repose, and thus, according to the Persons God is everlasting activity; according to Essence eternal Repose.

Between Labour and Repose live Love and Possession. Love will always act, for it is everlasting operation in God. To possess always requires Repose, for it is above will and desire, the embrace of the Beloved by the Beloved, in a pure love without images; the Father conjointly with the Son takes possession of His beloved in the possessive Unity of the Spirit, above the fecundity of Nature; the Father saying to each spirit in eternal contentment: "I am

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thine, and thou art Mine ; I have chosen thee from all eternity." Such joy and mutual complaisance so unite God and His beloved that they are ravished out of self, melting, liquefying, becoming in enjoyment one spirit with God, tending ever toward the infinite Beatitude of His Essence. This sort of happiness belongs to the contemplative life.

Another kind leads to the enjoyment of God those of interior life who are perfected in Charity after the most dear will of God. It belongs to those who renounce and abandon self, leaving every creature to which they might be attached, every creation of God which could become a care and obstacle in this intimate

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life of the service of God. Then they rise towards God by affective love flowing from the depth of the living Soul, the affections lifted above the heavens and the powers on fire with burning Charity, while the spirit is raised to an intelligence without images.

Here the law of Love attains the summit, and every virtue becomes perfect. Emptied of all, God, our heavenly Father, dwells in the Soul in the fulness of Grace, and we in Him above all works, in a state of possession. The Christ lives in us and we in Him, and in His life we conquer the world and sin. With Him we are uplifted in Love even to the heavenly Father. The Holy Spirit oper-

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God. Between love and possession there is a distinction as between God and His grace. When we cleave to Him by love, then are we spiritual, but when the Spirit ravishes us and transforms us, we are carried on into Possession. The Spirit of God exhales us in acts of love and virtue, and inhales us, drawing us back to repose and possession of Him, which is eternal Life; just as we exhale the air in us and inhale anew, for mortal and natural life. And although the spirit be ravished out of us and our works fail in Possession and Beatitude, they are always renewed by Grace in Charity and Virtue.

Thus, then, to enter into a repose of possession, to go out

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by good works and yet remain always united to the Spirit of God, is what I wish to express. Just as we open the eyes of the flesh to see, and close them so rapidly that we do not even observe it, so we expire in God, live in God, and remain always with God. We must go out in the works of the sensitive life, to return by love, attaching ourselves to God, to remain always one with Him without change. This exhalation and respiration of the Soul is the noblest sentiment we can discover and understand; nevertheless, we must always go up and down the steps of the spiritual Ladder in interior virtue and exterior works, according to the Commandments of God and the Pre-

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ates in us and with us in all our works, crying in us loudly without words: "Love the Love Who loves you with everlasting love." His clamour is an intimate touch on our spirit, and His voice more terrible than the tempest. The lightnings accompanying it open Heaven to us and show us the light of eternal Truth. The ardour of this secret touch and of His love is such that it would entirely consume us; and His voice cries ceaselessly in our spirit: "Pay thy debt; love the Love Who has loved thee with an everlasting love." Hence dawns a great interior impatience and in external conduct a variety of contradictory ways and manners. For the more we love the more

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we desire to love, and the more we pay that which Love requires of us, the more we remain in debt. Love is never silent; He constrains us continually without a truce, crying: "Give love to Love." Those who do not understand these things cannot know this combat of love. To love is to possess, is to act and suffer action. God, living in us by His Grace, teaches, counsels, commands us to love; but we, living in Him above Grace and beyond works, endure His action in possessing Him.

In us, then, are loving, knowing, contemplating, desiring, and above all possessing. Our action consists in loving God, and our possession in allowing ourselves to be embraced by the love of



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cepts of the Church, as has been already said. By the likeness with God that comes from good works, we are united to Him in His fecund Nature, which acts continually in the Trinity of Persons, perfecting all good in the Unity of the Spirit. Dead to sin and made one with God, we are born anew of the Spirit, elect sons of God, caught out of self, the Father and the Son holding us embraced in eternal love and everlasting felicity; this action is always commencing anew, continuing and consummating; and thus are we blessed in knowing, loving, and possessing God.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> According to the doctrine already expounded, it may be seen that supernatural labour of the active life, or

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In enjoying God we are inactive, for He alone operates when He ravishes loving spirits out of themselves and perfects them in the Unity of His Spirit, where we become as one single fire of love, greater than anything which God has ever created. Each separate spirit is as a burning coal ignited by God at the fire of His infinite Love, and all together are as a flaming

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practice of the virtues, tends always towards the repose of the contemplative life. Labour likens one to God, Who works without ceasing in the fecundity of His Nature. The Repose of Possession unites the Soul to Him in simple Beatitude, where Blessed John Ruysbroeck looks on God in the tranquillity of His Unity. The terms here employed by him must be weighed with great care in order not to be confounded with Quietism or Pantheism.

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furnace which can never again be extinguished, with the Father and the Son in the Unity of the Holy Spirit, where the Divine Persons are ravished in unity of Essence in the midst of that limitless abyss of simple Beatitude. There is neither Father nor Son, nor Holy Spirit, nor any creature, according to Nature, but one sole Essence, the very Substance of the Divine Persons. There are we all united, even before Creation, in our super-essence; there all enjoyment is consummated and perfected in essential Beatitude; there God is in His simple Essence, without operation; eternal Repose, darkness without method, Being without name, super-essence of every creature,

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simple and infinite Beatitude of God and the Saints.

But in fecund Nature, the Father is God Almighty, Creator and Author of Heaven and earth and all creatures. Of His own Substance He engendered the Son, His eternal Wisdom, one with Him in Nature, distinct in Person, God of Gods, by Whom were all things; and from the Father and the Son proceeds, in Unity of Nature, the Holy Spirit, the third Person, Who is infinite Love, embracing them eternally in love and possession, and we all with them, forming one life, one love, one happiness.

God is thus Unity in Nature, Trinity in fecundity of Nature, three Persons really distinct. And these three Persons are

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Unity according to Nature, Trinity according to the qualities they possess in the fecund Nature of the Divinity. These three qualities constitute three Persons distinct in Name and fact, yet one in Unity of Nature and Operation, each Person having the Divine Nature entire. Each is God, all-powerful by Nature and not in virtue of the personal distinction. The three Persons are thus one Divine indivisible Nature, consequently one only God by Nature, and not three Gods after the distinction of Persons. Three, according to Names and Persons, God remains One by Nature; Trinity in His fecund Nature according to the qualities of the Persons, but Unity by Nature.

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And this one God is for us a Father Who is in Heaven, Almighty Creator of Heaven and earth and all beings. He lives in us and governs us, Unity in Trinity, Trinity in Unity, God all-powerful, in the summit of our created essence. We must seek, find, and possess Him by means of His Grace and the aid of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the Christian Faith, with direct intention and sincere Charity; and by means of our virtuous life and His Grace we live in Him and He in us with all the Just. Thus are we all united in one with Him in love; and the Father and the Son take, embrace, and transform us in the unity of the Spirit. Then are we one in love and enjoy-

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ment with the Divine Persons, and that Possession is consummated in the Essence of the Divinity, a simple and essential Beatitude, which we enjoy with God and where is neither God nor creature, according to the mode of personality, all being with Him indistinctly simple, infinite Beatitude; lost, engulfed, poured into one unknown darkness.

This is the highest degree of life and death, of love and possession in eternal Beatitude; and any who conceives it otherwise errs.

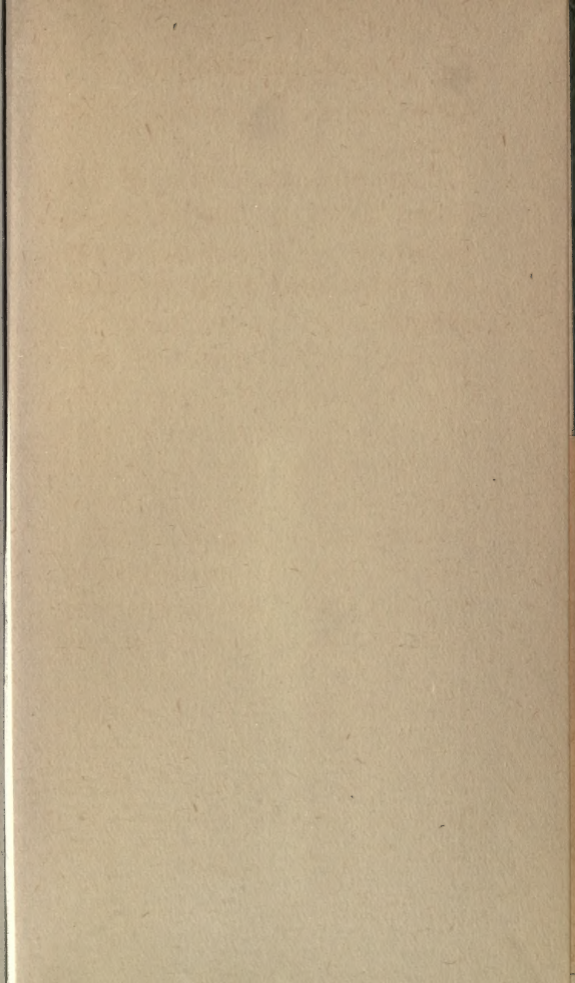
Pray for him who, with the Grace of God, composed and wrote these matters, and for all those who listen and read, that God may bestow Himself

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upon us in everlasting Life.  
Amen.

Here ends the Book of the  
Seven Steps of Divine Love,  
composed by Master John van  
Ruysbroeck, first Prior of Groen-  
endael.







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✓

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see: Jan van Ruysbroeck,

