

from all interference by other people, and try to forget the world entirely. He must follow Jesus with constant desire, seeking Him in prayer and meditation. For I know that the light that succeeds this darkness is sure and true. It shines from the true Sun in the city of Jerusalem to light the way for a soul struggling in darkness and calling for light, and gives it comfort in its trouble. For I do not think that a false light ever succeeds true darkness. In other words, if a man sincerely and wholeheartedly sets himself to forsake the love of the world, and by grace comes to feel and know himself as he is, and continues humbly in this realization, he will not be deceived by any errors, heresies, or delusions. For all these enter by the gate of pride, and if pride is locked out, they will find no foothold in the soul. And although they may come and seek admission, they will not be able to enter. For the grace experienced by a soul in this darkness of humility will teach it the truth, and show it that all such approaches are moves of the devil.

CHAPTER 27: *How a soul led by grace into this glowing darkness receives great benefits, and how one should prepare oneself to enter it*

THERE are many devout souls who by grace enter this darkness and attain self-knowledge, but who do not yet fully understand this process. This ignorance tends to hinder their progress. They often feel their thoughts and affections withdrawn from earthly things, and they are brought into a state of deep peace, untroubled by unprofitable thoughts or bodily sensations. They enjoy such freedom of spirit that they can think of Jesus in peace, and offer Him their prayers and palms with great joy and sweetness for as long as the frailty of human nature will permit. They are quite certain that this experience is good, but they are not sure what it is. So I would say to all such souls

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that although such an experience may only be short and seldom had, it seems to be a genuine phase of this darkness which we have been discussing: For it consists firstly of self-knowledge, and then of self-transcendence through a burning desire to see Jesus; or more accurately, the experience is itself a spiritual perception of Jesus. And if they can remain in this peace, or by grace make it such a part of themselves that they can readily and freely re-possess or retain it as they will, they will never be overcome by the temptations of the devil, nor be subject to errors and heresies. They are now standing at the threshold of contemplation, able and ready to receive the perfect love of Jesus. Therefore whoever has this gift should acknowledge it with humility, preserve it with care, and cultivate it with zeal, so that nothing in existence can prevent his entry into contemplation whenever he can. Provided that he is a free agent and can do whatever he wishes without causing scandal or distress to his neighbours, he should forget and ignore everything that might prevent contemplation. For I do not think that he can readily attain this peace unless he receives great grace and submits himself entirely to its guidance. And this is just what he should do, for grace must always be free to work – free from obstacles caused by sin and worldliness, and free from all things which, although not sinful, nevertheless impede its action.

But if one who has not yet received this fullness of grace desires to attain this spiritual knowledge of Jesus, he must do his utmost to dispose himself to it, and to remove all obstacles to grace. He must learn to die to the world, and wholeheartedly renounce all love of it. First of all he must renounce pride, both worldly and spiritual, desiring neither honour nor recognition from the world, renown nor fame, position nor rank, authority nor power, worldly knowledge nor skill, estates nor riches, fine clothing nor outward display – nothing, indeed, which might cause him to be respected above other men. He must desire none of these things, and if they are given him let him accept

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them with fear, so that if he cannot be poor both outwardly and inwardly, he can at least be so inwardly. He should wish to be forgotten by the world, so that however rich or clever he may be, he receives no more attention than the poorest man alive.

He must not foster self-satisfaction by recalling his own good deeds or virtues, thinking that he is doing better than others because he has renounced the world while others have not done so. This makes him imagine that all is well with him. He must also subdue all feelings of anger, ill-will, and envy towards his neighbour, and avoid causing any unnecessary distress or annoyance by word or act, or giving anyone reasonable cause for anger or complaint. In this way he will be free, owing no obligation to anyone, nor anyone to him. He must also renounce greed, requiring no more than is necessary for bodily sustenance, and considering himself amply rewarded when God moves others to give him anything. He must not rely on worldly possessions, nor on the help and favour of any worldly friends. Let him put his whole trust in God, for if he does otherwise he makes himself dependent on the world, and restricts his freedom to think of God.

He must utterly abandon gluttony and all other sins of the body, and must not indulge in familiarity with women. For there is no doubt that the blind love that sometimes exists between a man and a woman, and which seems good and honest when they have no intention of committing any sin, is impure and sinful in the sight of God. For it is a grave sin for anyone deliberately to set his heart in worldly love on any creature whatsoever when it ought to be set on Jesus, on virtue, and on purity of spirit, particularly if this love is so strong that it fills his mind with restlessness and deprives it of all delight in God. I think that such a choice is sinful even when the person who makes it denies that it is sinful, or when he is so blinded that he will not recognize it as such. He must not indulge his bodily

appetites with rich food and drink, but be content with such food as is readily obtainable; for if he is healthy, any simple food will satisfy hunger and maintain the body in normal strength for the service of God. And let him not complain, argue, or be angry about his food, even though he sometimes does not get what he would like.

A man must wholly renounce these and all other sins in will, and when necessary in act, as well as anything else that prevents him giving his mind freely to Jesus. For so long as such obstacles remain, he cannot die to the world nor can he enter the darkness and attain self-knowledge. If he wishes to do so he must do all this as Saint Paul did, who said: *Mihi mundus crucifixus est, and ego mundo* (Gal. vi, 14). The world is slain and crucified to me, and I to the world. Meaning that one who renounces the love of the world, its honours, riches, and all pleasures for the love of God, and who neither loves nor seeks the world, but is content to possess nothing in it – nor would if he could – is indeed dead to the world because it holds no pleasure or attraction for him. If the world passes by and ignores him, pays him no respect, and has no use for him, but forgets him as it would a dead man, then he is dead to the world. Saint Paul was exactly in this position, which must also be that of anyone who wishes to follow him and attain the perfect love of God, for it is impossible to live wholly to God until one first dies to the world.

This death to the world is this darkness; it is the gateway to contemplation and reformation in feeling. There is no other way. There may be many different ways leading souls to contemplation, just as there are different forms of activity to suit man of varying dispositions and ways of life, such as the religious and secular lives. But there is only one gateway to contemplation, for whatever form a man's activity takes, unless it leads him to self-knowledge and humility, and mortifies all love of the world so that he can sometimes feel himself deep in this peaceful darkness where he is hidden from the vanity of

the world and can see himself as he is, then he has not yet achieved reformation in feeling; nor can he yet enter contemplation. Indeed, he is far from it. And if he tries to enter by any other gate, he is a thief and a house-breaker, who will be ejected as unworthy. But one who by grace can humble himself to nothing and die in this way is at the very door, because he is dead to the world and lives to God. Of such souls Saint Paul says: *Mortui enim estis, et vita vestra abscondita est cum Christo in Deo* (Col. iii. 3). You are dead—that is, you who for the love of God renounce all love of the world are dead to the world—but your life is hidden from worldly men, just as the life of Christ is hidden in the Godhead from the eyes of those who love the flesh.

Our Lord Himself showed us this gateway in the Gospel when He said: *Omnis qui reliquerit patrem aut matrem, fratrem aut sororem propter me, centuplum accipiet, et vitam aeternam possidebit* (Matt. xix. 29). Everyone who for love of Me leaves father or mother, sister or brother, or any earthly possessions, shall have a hundred-fold in this life, and afterwards the bliss of heaven. This hundred-fold that a soul will possess if it forsakes the world is nothing else than the blessing of this glowing darkness which I call the gateway to contemplation. For one who is in this darkness and is hidden by grace from worldly vanities has no desire for worldly possessions and does not look for them; he is not worried by them, is not interested in them, and does not want them, so that he is a hundred times richer than a king or other person who strives after great wealth. For one who seeks nothing but Jesus possesses a hundred-fold, for he enjoys more rest, more peace of heart, more true love and delight in his soul in a single day than the most covetous man in the world, who has all its wealth at his disposal, enjoys in his entire lifetime.

This, then, is a darkness full of blessing, a rich nothingness, which brings to the soul great spiritual freedom and tranquility. I think that David was alluding to this night or nothing-

ness when he said: *Ad nihilum reductus sum, et nescivi* (Ps. lxxiii, 12). I was brought to nothing; and I did not know it. That is, the grace that our Lord Jesus sent into my heart has slain and annihilated all love of the world, and I do not know how, for it was by no effort and will of my own, but by the grace of our Lord Jesus alone. Therefore I am certain that one who wishes to have the light of grace and to feel a deep love of Jesus in his soul must leave the false light of worldly love and remain in this darkness. And if at first he is afraid to live in darkness, he should not return to the love of the world, but endure it awhile and put all his hope and trust in Jesus; he will not remain long without spiritual light of some kind. The prophet exhorts: *Qui ambulavit in tenebris, et non est lumen ei, speret in Domino, et imitatur super Deum suum* (Isa. i. 10). Whoever is walking in darkness and has no light—that is, whoever wishes to hide himself from the love of the world and cannot easily feel the light of spiritual love—should not despair or turn again to the world. Let him hope in our Lord and lean on Him, that is, trust in God; let him hold fast to God by desire and stand firm awhile, and he shall have light. For his condition is like that of a man who has been a long time in the sun, and then comes suddenly into a dark house. At first he is like a blind man and sees nothing, but if he waits a little he will soon be able to see about him, at first large objects, then small, and then everything that is in the house. It is the same in the spiritual world. To one who renounces the love of the world and attains self-knowledge by examination of conscience everything at first seems dark and obscure. But if he stands firm and prays earnestly, constantly directing his will to the love of Jesus, he will later be able to see many things, both great and small, of which he previously knew nothing. This seems to be what the prophet promised when he said: *Orietur in tenebris lux tua, et tenebrae tuae erunt sicut merdites. Et requiem dabit tibi Dominus Deus tuus, et implebit animam tuam splendoribus* (Isa. lviii, 10). Light shall spring up

for you in the darkness. That is, for you who sincerely abandon the light of all worldly love and plunge yourselves mentally into this darkness there will arise the light of the blessed love and spiritual knowledge of God. 'And your darkness shall become like noonday.' That is, the darkness through which at first your desire and blind faith in God persist will turn into clear knowledge and sure love. 'And the Lord God will give you rest': that is, your bodily desires, your tormenting fears and doubts, and the evil spirits that have hitherto harassed you continually, will all weaken, and their influence will largely cease. You will be made so strong that they will not harm you, because you will be hidden from them and at peace. 'And then our Lord Jesus will fill your soul with light': that is, when you have been brought to this peace of soul you will be able to turn to God more readily, and your sole activity will be to love Him. He will fill all the powers of your soul with rays of heavenly light. So do not be surprised if I call the abandonment of worldly love darkness, for the prophet called it so, saying to a soul: *intra in tenebras tuas, filia Chaldaeorum* (Isa. xlvii, 5). Enter into your darkness, daughter of Chaldaea. That is: Soul, whose love of the world makes you a daughter of Chaldaea, leave it and enter into your darkness.

CHAPTER 28: *How our Lord Jesus leads a soul to be reformed by four different stages: He calls, justifies, honours, and glorifies it*

I HAVE now told you a little about the dispositions necessary for progress towards reformation in feeling. However, I do not suggest that you can achieve this in your own strength, for I know very well that our Lord Jesus alone brings this to completion in whatever way He wishes. For it is He alone who sits a soul with His grace and brings it first into this darkness and

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then into light. As the prophet says: *Sicut tenebrae ejus, ita et lumen ejus* (Ps. cxxxix, 12). Just as the light of knowledge and the experience of spiritual love came from God, so also the darkness which is the forsaking of worldly love comes from Him. For He does all things; He creates and re-creates. He creates by Himself alone, but gives us a share in our own re-creation, for He gives us grace, and it is our willing cooperation that effects it. Saint Paul indeed describes the way in which He does this: *Quos Deus praeservit fieri conformes imaginis Filii ejus, hoc vocavit; et quos magnificavit, hos et glorificavit* (Rom. viii, 29). Those whom God predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son He called, justified, honoured, and glorified.

Although these words may be applied to all chosen souls that are in the lowest degree of charity and are reformed in faith alone, they apply more particularly to those souls that are reformed in feeling, to whom our Lord God has given grace in abundance and showed especial favour. For these are His own especial sons, who are fully restored to the likeness of His Son Jesus. In these words Saint Paul divides God's work in the soul into four stages. The first stage is that during which the soul is called from worldly vanity, and this is often easy and agreeable. For at the beginning of his conversion a person who is disposed to receive great grace is so suddenly moved in spirit, feels such delight in devotion, and sheds so many tears of compunction that he is inclined to think himself already half in heaven. But this pleasant stage passes away after a time, and is succeeded by the second stage, which is that of justification. This is arduous, for when he begins to make good progress on the road of righteousness, to set his will resolutely against all sin both inward and outward, and to aspire to virtues and the love of Jesus, he encounters many obstacles, both inwardly from the perverseness and obstinacy of his own will, and outwardly from temptations of the devil. As a result he is often greatly tormented, and this is not surprising, for he has so long been

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twisted by the false love of the world that he cannot be straightened without great heat and pressure, just as a twisted bar cannot be straightened without being plunged into the fire and heated. Therefore our Lord Jesus, seeing what is necessary for a perverse soul, allows it to be tried by various temptations and well tested by spiritual difficulties until all the rust of impurities is burned out of it. Inward fears, doubts and perplexities will almost reduce the soul to despair. It will seem to be forsaken by God and abandoned into the hands of the devil, but it will retain a small secret trust in the goodness and mercy of God. For our Lord Jesus leaves this secret trust in such a soul, however far away He seems to go, and this keeps the soul from despair and preserves it from spiritual harm. It will also be mortified outwardly, and suffer pain in its senses. This may happen through illness, or through bodily torments caused by the devil. Or by the secret will of God the poor soul may have to suffer such pain through the wretched body that it would not know how to endure the body any longer were it not that our Lord Jesus sustains it. And yet the soul would rather endure all this pain than be blinded by the false love of this world. For this would be hell to such a soul, but the suffering of this kind of pain is nothing but purgatory; therefore the soul suffers it gladly and would not avoid it even if it could, because it is of great profit to it. Our Lord does all these things to help the soul, in order to prevent its being absorbed in worldly things and to detach it from love of the senses, so that it can receive spiritual enlightenment.

After this, when the soul has been mortified in this manner and led from love of the world into this darkness, so that it no longer takes the slightest interest or pleasure in the world, but finds it bitter as wormwood, then comes the third stage, that of honour. This is when the soul is partially reformed in feeling, and receives the gift of perfection and the grace of contemplation: it is a time of great peace. It is followed by the fourth

stage, that of glorification, when a soul is fully reformed in the bliss of heaven. For there are souls who have been called from sin and justified by passing through various trials by fire and water; these are afterwards brought to honour and later to glory. For our Lord will grant all that they desired here on earth, and more. He will raise them above all other chosen souls to the glory of the cherubim and seraphim, because in this life they surpassed all others in the knowledge and love of God.

Therefore whoever wishes to attain this glory must not be afraid of this justification, for it is the only way to attain it. Through His prophet God spoke words of great comfort to all souls who are tested in the fires of tribulation: *Puer meus non timere, si transieris per ignem, flamma non nocet tibi* (Isa. xliii, 2). My son, if you pass through the fire, do not be afraid, for the flame shall not hurt you. It will cleanse you from all the corruptions of the flesh, and enable you to receive the spiritual fire of the love of God. And, as I said earlier, this purification must be completed first, because the soul cannot otherwise be reformed in feeling.

CHAPTER 29: *How beginners and those who are growing in grace sometimes show greater outward signs of love than those who are perfect; but outward appearances are misleading*

But you may now say, 'How can this be so?' For there are many souls now turning to God who experience many spiritual graces. Some have a deeper sorrow for sin, while others find increased devotion and fervour in prayer, and frequently receive spiritual enlightenment. Others, too, experience feelings of great warmth and sweetness. Yet these souls never really enter this peaceful darkness of which I have spoken with a fervent desire and a mind constantly absorbed in God. You may ask whether these souls are reformed in feeling or

not. It seems that they are, inasmuch as they have these profound spiritual experiences which other people who are reformed only in faith do not have.

On this matter I think that these spiritual experiences, whether they consist of compunction, or devotion, or mental visions, are not the same as those given to a soul by the grace of contemplation. I do not deny that they are genuine, and are given by the grace of God. But the souls that have these experiences are not yet reformed in feeling; they have neither attained perfection nor the burning love of Jesus that may one day be theirs. But it often appears otherwise when such souls feel the love of God more strongly than those who have attained perfection, inasmuch as their emotion is much more evident outwardly, and appears in tears and prayers, prostrations, and ecstatic utterances, and in other physical signs. Indeed, to those who see them they appear to be constantly transported by love. And although I do not think that this is so, I am quite sure that these experiences, and the fervour of devotion and compunction that they feel, are gracious gifts of God given to chosen souls to detach them from the worldly love and bodily desires that have long been established in their hearts. It is only by such perceptible experiences of great fervour that these souls can be detached from these things.

However, the fervour that outwardly appears so intense does not spring solely from the intensity of their love; it also indicates the immaturity and weakness of their souls, which cannot bear God's highest touch. Such souls are still, as it were, carnal and subservient to the flesh, and have not yet been released from it by mortification. Consequently the least touch of love and the smallest spark of spiritual light sent from heaven into such a soul is so great and comforting, so sweet and delightful, so far above all worldly pleasures that it ever enjoyed, that it is prostrated by it. Furthermore, it is so new, so sudden, and so strange that the soul is unable to endure it, but bursts out and

betrays itself in tears, sobbing, and other visible signs of emotion. For when an old cask receives new wine that is working and potent, the cask swells and is nearly at bursting point until the wine has fermented and discharged all impurities. But directly the wine is pure and clear, it matures quietly and the cask remains intact. It is the same with a soul grown old in sin, for when it receives even a little of the love of God, this proves so invigorating and potent that the body would be liable to collapse were it not that God preserves it intact. Even so, the eyes break into tears and the mouth into words; but this is due to the weakness of the soul rather than to the greatness of its love. Afterwards, when all the impurities of the soul have been removed by this ferment, its love is left pure and peaceful. Then both soul and body enjoy greater peace, and the soul has much more love than before although this is less apparent outwardly. For inwardly it is now wholly at peace, and there is little outward indication of fervour. I say therefore of these souls who experience great bodily fervour that, while they have received great grace, they are not yet reformed in feeling, although they have made great progress towards it. For I consider that a man who has been deeply corrupted by sin will not be reformed in feeling unless he is first cauterized and cleansed by deep compunction. Another soul who has never been much corrupted by the love of the world, but has remained innocent of grave sins, may reach this reformation more easily and quietly, and without outward signs of great fervour.

I think the truth is that any consolation and fervour that a soul may experience in the beginning and early days of the spiritual life are as it were food sent from heaven to strengthen it in its struggle. Just as a pilgrim who travels all day without food and drink is nearly overcome by weariness, at last comes upon a good inn where he finds food and drink and is well refreshed for the time; so in the spiritual life a devout soul who wishes to renounce the love of the world and love God, and

arranges his affairs accordingly, sometimes prays and labours in body and soul all day long without feeling any comfort or joy in his devotions. Then our Lord, who has pity on all His creatures, sends it spiritual food and comforts it with devotion as He sees fit lest it should perish, lose heart, or fall into depression and complaint. And when the soul experiences any spiritual comfort, and when grace has brought it successfully to the close of another day, it considers itself well rewarded for all its previous trouble and distress.

The same experience befalls other souls who are making progress and are well developed in grace. They often feel the touch of the Holy Spirit in their souls, giving them both an understanding and insight into spiritual things, and a real love for them. But they are not yet reformed in feeling, and are still imperfect. The reason is that these experiences come to them as it were unawares; they come and go before they realize, and they cannot recapture them. They do not know where to seek them nor where to find them, for they are not yet accustomed to these transient experiences. They have not yet mastered themselves by stability of mind and a constant desire for Jesus, and their spiritual eyes are not yet opened to the sight of heavenly things, although they are swiftly nearing this state. Therefore they are not yet reformed in feeling, and they do not yet possess the full gift of contemplation.

#### CHAPTER 30: *How to attain self-knowledge*

**A** SOUL that desires to attain knowledge of spiritual things must first know itself, for it cannot acquire knowledge of a higher kind until it first knows itself. The soul does this when it is so recollected and detached from all earthly preoccupations and from the influence of the senses that it understands itself as it is in its own nature, taking no account of the body. So if you

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desire to know and see your soul as it is, do not look for it within your body as though it were hidden in your heart in the same way that the heart is hidden within the body. If you look for it in this way you will never find it. The more you search for it as for a material object, the further you are from it, for your soul is not tangible, but a living and invisible spirit. It is not hidden and enclosed in your body in the way that a lesser object is hidden and enclosed within a greater; on the contrary, it is the soul that sustains and gives life to the body, and is possessed of much greater strength and virtue.

Therefore if you desire to discover your soul, withdraw your thoughts from outward and material things, forgetting if possible your own body and its five senses, and consider the nature of a rational soul in the same way as you would consider any virtue, such as truth or humility. Similarly, consider how the soul is a living spirit, immortal and invisible, with power in itself to see and know supreme Truth and to love supreme Good, which is God. Once you have grasped this, you have some understanding of yourself. Do not seek this knowledge in any other way, for the more clearly and fully you can study the nature and dignity of a rational soul – what it is, and how it functions – the better you will understand yourself. It is very difficult for an untutored soul, pent in the body, to have a true knowledge of itself, or of an angel, or of God, because it pictures them all in a physical form, and expects in some way to see itself, and so God and spiritual things. But this is impossible, for all spiritual things are perceived and made known to the soul by reason, and not by imagination. And just as reason enables a soul to know that the virtue of justice requires that every man receive his due reward, it can in the same way enable the soul to understand itself.

I do not say, however, that the soul should rest content with this knowledge, but that it should employ it to seek a higher knowledge above itself, that is, of the nature of God. For your

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soul is a spiritual mirror in which you may see the likeness of God. First, then, find your mirror, and keep it bright and clean from the corruption of the flesh and worldly vanity. Hold it well up above the earth so that you can see it, and our Lord reflected in it. In this life all chosen souls direct their effort and intention to this end although they may not be fully conscious of it. It is for this reason, as I said earlier, that at the beginning and early stages of their spiritual life many souls enjoy great fervour and sweetness of devotion, and seem all afire with love; but this is not the perfect love or spiritual knowledge of God. You can be certain that however intense the fervour felt by a soul — even if it is so intense that the body appears unable to bear it or melts into tears — so long as its conception and experience of God is largely or wholly dependent on imagination rather than on knowledge, it has not yet attained perfect love or contemplation.

Understand, then, that the love of God has three degrees, all of which are good, but each succeeding degree is better than the other. The first degree is reached by faith alone, when no knowledge of God is conveyed by grace through the imagination or understanding. This love is common to every soul that is reformed in faith, however small a degree of charity it has attained; and it is good, for it is sufficient for salvation. The second degree of love is attained when the soul knows God by faith and Jesus in His manhood through the imagination. This love, where imagination is stimulated by grace, is better than the first, because the spiritual perceptions are awakened to contemplate our Lord's human nature. In the third degree the soul, as far as it may in this life, contemplates the Godhead united to manhood in Christ. This is the best, highest, and most perfect degree of love, and it is not attained by the soul until it is reformed in feeling. Those at the beginning and early stages of the spiritual life do not possess this degree of love, for they cannot think of Jesus or love Him as God, but always think of Him

as a man living under earthly conditions. All their thoughts and affections are shaped by this limitation. They honour Him as man, and they worship and love Him principally in His human aspect, and go no further. For instance, if they have done wrong and offended against God, they think that God is angry with them as a man would be had they offended him. So they fall down as if were at the feet of our Lord with heartfelt sorrow and ask for mercy, trusting that our Lord will mercifully pardon their offence. And although this practice is commendable, it is not as spiritual as it might be. Similarly, when they wish to worship God they imagine our Lord in a bodily form aglow with wondrous light; then they proceed to honour, worship, and revere Him, throwing themselves on His mercy and begging Him to do with them what He wills. In the same way, when they wish to love God, they think of Him, worship Him, and reverence Him as man, recalling the Passion of Christ or some other event in His earthly life. Nevertheless, when they do this they are deeply stirred to the love of God.

Such devotion is good and inspired by grace, but it is much inferior to the exercise of the understanding, when grace moves the soul to contemplate God in Man. For there are two natures in our Lord, that of God and that of Man. And as the divine nature is higher and nobler than the human, so the soul's contemplation of the Godhead in the manhood of Jesus is more exalted, more spiritual, and more valuable than the contemplation of His manhood alone, whether the soul is thinking of His manhood as possible or glorified. For the same reason the love felt by a soul when grace enables it to contemplate God in man is more exalted, more spiritual, and more valuable than the fervour of devotion aroused by the contemplation of Jesus' manhood alone, however strong the outward signs of this love. For this latter love is a natural love, and the former a spiritual love; and our Lord does not reveal Himself to the imagination as He



is, for the frailty of man's nature is such that the soul could not endure His glory.

Nevertheless, in order that the devotion of those souls that are incapable of such elevated contemplation of the Godhead should not be misdirected, but be comforted and strengthened by some form of interior contemplation of Jesus to forsake sin and the love of the world, God tempers the ineffable light of His divinity and cloaks it in the bodily form of Jesus' humanity. He reveals it in this way to the inward vision of the soul, and sustains it spiritually through the love of His precious manhood. This love is so potent that it destroys all love of evil in the soul, and gives it strength to endure bodily penance and other physical hardships whenever necessary for the love of Jesus. This is the way in which the Lord Jesus watches over a chosen soul and shields it from the flames of worldly love. For just as a shadow is formed by light falling on a solid object, so this spiritual shadow is cast over a devout soul by the blessed and ineffable light of God's Being and the human nature united to It. Of this shadow the prophet says: *Spiritus ante factum nostram Christus Dominus: sub umbra eius vivemus inter gentes* (Lam. iv, 20). That is, our Lord Jesus in His divine nature is a spirit that cannot be seen by us while we live in the flesh; we must therefore live under the shadow of His human nature as long as we are here. But although it is true that this love which depends upon the imagination is good, nevertheless a soul should desire to have a spiritual love and understanding of His divine nature, and all other bodily contemplations are but means of leading a soul to this. I do not say that we should separate the divine nature of Christ from the human, but that we should love Jesus both as God and man, for in Him God is united to man, and man to God; but this love must be spiritual, not carnal.

Our Lord taught this lesson to Mary Magdalen, who was called to be a contemplative, when He said: *Noli me tangere, nondum enim ascendi ad Patrem meum* (S. John xx, 17). Do not

touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father. That is to say, Mary Magdalen had an ardent love for our Lord before His Passion, but her love was more carnal than spiritual. She truly believed that He was God, but she did not love Him primarily as God, for she was not capable of doing so at that time; so that she allowed all her affection and thought to dwell on Him as man. And our Lord did not blame her for this at the time, but greatly commended her. But when He had risen from the dead and appeared to her, she would have honoured Him with the same kind of love as she did before, had not our Lord forbidden her, saying, 'Do not touch Me.' That is, Do not allow the love of your heart to dwell only on My human nature which you see with your bodily eyes, for in that form I am not yet ascended to My Father. That is, I am not equal to the Father, for in My human nature I am less than He. Do not touch Me in My present state, but set your mind and love on that state in which I am equal to the Father, that is, in My divinity. Love Me, know Me, and worship Me as God and man, and not as man only. In this way you shall touch Me, for I am both God and man, and the whole reason why I am to be loved and worshipped is that I am God who took the nature of man. So adore Me in your heart and give Me your love as God. Let your mind worship Me as Jesus, God in man, supreme Truth, supreme Goodness, and blessed Life, for so I am. This, I think, is what our Lord taught her, and this is what He teaches all other souls that are disposed and ready for contemplation.

Nevertheless, some people are not spiritually gifted by nature: for these and others who have not yet been refined by grace it is good for them to foster human love through the imagination in their own way until greater grace is given them. For it is not wise for a person to abandon a good thing until he can discover and use something better. The same may be said of other experiences of a physical nature, such as hearing sweet music, sensations of pleasant bodily warmth, seeing light, or enjoying

EXPERIENCES. These are not spiritual experiences, for spiritual experiences are felt in the powers of the soul, chiefly in the understanding and will, and very little in the imagination. But such experiences are in the imagination, and therefore are not spiritual. Even when good and genuine they are only outward manifestations of the inward grace experienced in the powers of the soul. This can be clearly proved in holy Scripture, where it is said: *Apparuerunt apostolis dispartite lingue tanquam ignis, sed tunc supra singulos eorum Spiritus Sanctus* (Acts ii, 3). The Holy Spirit appeared to the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost in the form of tongues of fire, and inflamed their hearts, resting upon each of them. Now it is evident that the Holy Spirit, who is the invisible God Himself, was not to be identified with the tongues of fire nor the sensation of bodily heat; but He was invisibly felt in the powers of their souls, for He enlightened their understanding and kindled their affection by His blessed presence so clearly and ardently that they suddenly possessed the spiritual knowledge of truth and the perfection of love, as our Lord had promised them when He said: *Spiritus sanctus docebit vos omnem veritatem* (S. John xvi, 13). The Holy Spirit shall teach you all truth. The fire and the heat, therefore, were no more than material signs and evidences of the grace inwardly experienced. And as it was with the Apostles, so it is with other souls that are visited and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and enjoy sensible feelings of consolation as a pledge of interior grace. I do not think that this favour is granted to all perfect souls, but only to those to whom our Lord wills to give it. Other souls as yet imperfect may experience these sensations without having received the interior grace, but it is not good for them to depend overmuch on these sensations. Let them rather make use of them in so far as they help the soul to a more constant recollection of God and to a deeper love of Him. For, as I have already said, these sensations may sometimes be genuine and sometimes illusory.

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CHAPTER 31: *The means by which a soul is reformed in feeling, and the spiritual gifts that it receives*

I HAVE now said a little about reform in faith, and have also touched briefly on the soul's progress from that stage to the higher reform in feeling. In so doing I do not intend to limit the ways in which God works to any laws of my own making, nor to imply that God works in a soul in one particular way and no other. This is not my meaning: I say only that I am sure that God does work in this way in some of His creatures. I am certain that He also works in other ways outside my own knowledge and experience. Nevertheless, whether God works in this way or in others, in several ways, over a longer or shorter period, or whether He works powerfully or peacefully in a soul, if all tends to the same end, which is the perfect love of Him, then that way is good. For if God wills to give a particular soul the full grace of contemplation in a single day and without any effort of its own — as well He may — then that soul receives as much grace as it might have received after twenty years of trial and suffering, mortification, and purification. Therefore take my words in their proper sense, and as I intend them to be understood. For now, with God's help, I will speak in greater detail about reform in feeling; its nature, how it takes place, and its spiritual effects in the soul.

Firstly, however, lest you should imagine that this reformation of soul is a mere figure of speech or figment of imagination, I will support what I say by the words of Saint Paul: *Nonne conformamini huic seculo, sed reformamini in novitate sensus vestri* (Rom. xii, 2). That is: You are reformed in faith by grace; henceforward, therefore, do not conform to the ways of the world in pride, covetousness, and other sins, but be reformed in newness of feeling. Here you can see that Saint Paul speaks of

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renewed in feeling, and in another passage he explains what this new feeling consists of: *Ut impleremini in agnitione voluntatis eius, in omni intellectu et sapientia spiritali* (Col. i, 9). We pray God that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will, with full understanding and with every kind of spiritual wisdom. This is what reform in feeling implies. For you should understand that the soul becomes aware of things in two ways: outwardly through the five bodily senses, and inwardly through the spiritual senses, which are properly the powers of the soul, memory, understanding, and will. When these powers are led by grace to a full understanding of the will and wisdom of God, the soul then attains a new level of spiritual experience. Saint Paul demonstrates the truth of this in another place: *Renovamini spiritu mentis vestrae, et induite novum hominem, qui secundum Deum creatus est in justitia, sanctitate, et veritate* (Eph. iv, 23). Be renewed in soul; that is, be reformed, not in your outward senses, nor in your imagination, but in the higher faculties of the understanding. And put on the new man, which is re-shaped to the likeness of God in righteousness. That is, your reason, which should rightly reflect God's likeness, is to be clothed by the grace of the Holy Spirit in a new light of truth, holiness, and righteousness; it is then reformed in feeling. For when the soul attains a perfect knowledge of God, it is then reformed. Saint Paul says: *Exspoliantes veterem hominem cum actibus suis; induite novum, qui renovatur in agnitione Dei, secundum imaginem eius qui creavit eum* (Col. iii, 9). Put off the old man with all his doings; that is, put away from you the love of the world and all worldly behaviour, and put on the new man; that is, be renewed in the knowledge of God after the likeness of Him who made you.

From these statements you can see that Saint Paul wishes men's souls to be reformed by the perfect knowledge of God, for this is the new experience of which he is speaking. So with his words as my authority I will deal more fully with this re-

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formation as God gives me grace. For there are two ways of knowing God. One depends principally upon the imagination, and little upon reason; it is the degree of knowledge granted to chosen souls in the early stages of their spiritual life and progress. These souls know and love God in a human and not in a spiritual way, and think of Him, as I have already said, as though He possessed human attributes. This degree of knowledge is good, and is a kind of milk which nourishes them in their spiritual infancy until they are able to come to their Father's table and receive solid food from His hand. The other way to knowledge depends principally upon reason, strengthened and illumined by the Holy Spirit. Here imagination has little place. For reason is the lady, and imagination is her maid, serving her as occasion requires. This knowledge is solid food, nourishment for souls made perfect, and it is reformation in feeling.

CHAPTER 32: *How God opens the eyes of the soul to perceive Him, not all at once, but gradually. An example showing the three stages in a soul's reformation*

WHEN a soul has been called to abandon the love of the world, and has been corrected and tested, mortified and purified as I have described, our Lord Jesus in His goodness and mercy reforms it in feeling as He sees best. He opens the eyes of the soul to see and know Him, bathing it in His own blessed light. He does not do this fully at once, but little by little as the soul becomes able to bear it. The soul does not know God as He is, for no creature in heaven or earth can do this, nor can it see Him as He is, for that vision is granted only in the bliss of heaven. But it recognizes Him as a changeless Being, as sovereign Power, sovereign Truth, and sovereign Goodness, and as the source of blessing, life, and eternal bliss. The soul perceives

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these truths and many others, but not as a bare, abstract, savourless theory, as a learned man may know Him solely by the exercise of his reason. For its understanding is uplifted and illumined by the grace of the Holy Spirit to see Him as He is more clearly and fully than can be expressed, with wondering reverence, ardent love, spiritual delight, and heavenly joy.

Although such an experience of God is brief and incomplete, it is so exalted and stupendous that it transports the soul and withdraws all its affections and thoughts from worldly things, so that were it possible it would wish to enjoy it for ever. On this experience and knowledge of God the soul establishes all its interior life, for henceforward it venerates God in man as Truth, reveres Him as Power, and loves Him as Goodness. This experience and knowledge of Jesus, and the sacred love that springs from it, may be called the soul's reforming in faith and love of which I have been speaking. It is reform in faith because it is still obscure in comparison to the full knowledge that it will possess in heaven, for then we shall not only know that God is, but we shall see Him as He is. As Saint John says: *Tunc videbimus eum sicuti est* (1 John iii, 2). That is: We shall see Him as He is. Nevertheless, this reform is also in feeling, in contrast to the blind knowledge that a soul possesses by faith alone. For as a result of this experience and grace the soul knows something of the divine nature of Jesus, but without this experience the soul believes only in the truth of His divinity.

To illustrate better what I mean, I will describe these three stages in the reform of a soul with an example. Three men are standing in sunlight: one of them is blind, the other can see but has his eyes closed, while the third has his eyes open. The blind man has no means of knowing that he is in sunlight, but believes it if a truthful person tells him so. He represents a soul reformed in faith alone, who believes what the Church teaches about God, but does not fully understand it. This degree of knowledge is sufficient for salvation.

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The next man is aware of the sunlight, but does not see it clearly or fully because his eyelids obscure his vision. But he sees a glimmer of bright light through them, and he represents a soul reformed in faith and feeling, and is therefore a contemplative. For by grace he sees something of the divinity of Jesus, although not clearly or fully, because his eyelids – that is, his bodily nature – act as a curtain between him and the divine nature of Jesus, and prevents him from seeing Jesus clearly. But when he is visited by grace he can see through this curtain, and knows that Jesus is God, sovereign Good, sovereign Being, and Source of Life, and that all blessings come from Him. Notwithstanding the limitations of bodily nature, the soul perceives all this by grace, and the purer and finer the soul becomes, and the less it is influenced by the body, the keener its spiritual sight and the stronger its love for the divinity of Jesus. So profound is the effect of this experience of Jesus upon the soul that, even were no other living person to believe in Jesus or love Him, its own faith and love would never lessen, for its own certainty is so absolute that it cannot help but believe.

The third man, who sees the sun clearly, has no need of faith because his vision is clear. He represents a blessed soul who sees the face of Jesus openly in the bliss of heaven, unobscured by the limitations of the body or by sin. Faith is no longer required, and he is therefore fully reformed in feeling.

The soul cannot progress beyond the second stage of reforming in this life, for this is the state of perfection and the road to heaven. Nevertheless, souls who have attained this state are not all alike. For some reach this state only to a limited extent, briefly and infrequently; some remain in it longer and more frequently, and attain a higher level; while some attain a high level and remain in it for long periods when they have received abundant grace. For the soul does not know Jesus perfectly all at once, but little by little. It makes gradual progress, its knowledge of Him grows, and so long as it remains in this life it may

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increase this knowledge and love of Jesus. Indeed, for a soul that has experienced a little of this union with Jesus, I think that nothing remains but to abandon and ignore everything else, and devote itself entirely to obtaining a clearer knowledge and a deeper love of Jesus, and in Him of all the Blessed Trinity.

As I understand it, this knowledge of Jesus is the opening of heaven to the eyes of a pure soul of which the saints speak in their writings. But this opening of heaven does not imply, as some imagine, that the soul can see in imagination our Lord Jesus sitting in His majesty in a visible light as brilliant as that of a hundred suns. This is not so, for however high man's vision may penetrate, he cannot see the heaven of heavens. Indeed, the higher he aspires beyond the sun in his imagination, the lower he falls beneath it. Notwithstanding, thinking of our Lord in this way is permissible for simple souls, who know no better way of seeking Him who is invisible.

CHAPTER 33: *How Jesus is heaven to the soul, and why He is called Fire*

WHAT is heaven to a reasoning soul? Surely, nothing other than Jesus, our God. For if heaven is that which is above all things, then God alone is heaven to a man's soul, for He alone is superior to the nature of the soul. Therefore if grace enables a soul to perceive the divine nature of Jesus, it sees heaven itself, for it sees God.

Many people misunderstand certain sayings about God because they do not interpret them in a spiritual sense. Holy Scripture says that a soul that seeks God must lift up its eyes and seek God above itself. Some who wish to follow this injunction understand the words 'above itself' as meaning a higher or nobler level in a worldly sense, in the same way that one element or planet is regarded as superior to another. But

this does not apply to spiritual matters, for the soul is superior to all material things, not because of its position in the world but because of the dignity of its nature. Similarly, God is superior to all created things, both spiritual and material, not because of His lofty place in the universe, but because of the spiritual dignity of His Being, blessed and unchanging. Therefore, anyone who desires to seek God wisely and to find Him must not allow his thoughts to soar above the sun and circle the firmament, picturing the majesty of God as the light of a hundred suns. Instead, let him forget the sun and all the firmament, regarding them as inferior to himself, and think both of God and himself on a spiritual plane. If the soul can do this, it then looks beyond itself and sees heaven.

The word 'within' must be understood in the same way. It is commonly said that a soul shall see God in all things and within itself. It is true that God is in all created things, but not in the way that a kernel is hidden within the shell of a nut, or as a small object is contained within a greater. He is within all things, maintaining and preserving them in being, but He is present in a spiritual way, exercising the power of His Own blessed nature and invisible purity. For just as an object that is very precious and pure is laid in a secure place, so by the same analogy the nature of God, which is supremely precious, pure, and spiritual, utterly unlike any physical nature, is hidden within all things. Anyone who desires to seek God within must therefore forget all material things, for these are exterior; he must cease to consider his own body or even his own soul, and consider the uncreated nature of God who made him, endowed him with life, upholds him, and gives him reason, memory, and love. All these gifts come to him through the power and sovereign grace of God. This must be the soul's course of action when it is touched by grace; otherwise it will be of little use to seek God within itself or in His creation.

In Holy Scripture God is described as Light. Saint John says:

*Lux est* (I John i, 5). God is Light. This Light is not to be understood as physical light, but in this way. God is Light; that is, God is Truth itself, since Truth is spiritual light. Therefore the soul that by grace possesses the fullest knowledge of truth has the clearest vision of God. But it may be compared with physical light in this sense: for as the sun reveals itself and all material things to the eye by its own light, so God, who is also Truth, reveals Himself first to the understanding of the soul, and by this means bestows all the spiritual knowledge that the soul requires. For the prophet says: *Domine, in lumine tuo videbimus lumen* (Ps. xxxvi, 9). Lord, in Your light we shall see all light. That is: we shall see that You are Truth by the light of Yourself.

In the same way, God is described as Fire: *Deus noster ignis consumens est*. Our God is a consuming fire. This does not mean that God is the element of fire which heats and consumes physical objects, but that God is Love and Charity. For just as fire consumes all material objects that can be destroyed by it, so the love of God burns and consumes all sin out of the soul and makes it clean, as fire purifies all kinds of metal. These descriptions and all other material comparisons applied to God in Holy Scripture must be understood in a spiritual sense, for otherwise they are meaningless. But the reason why such words are employed to describe God is that we are so worldly in our outlook that we cannot speak of God without at first using such expressions. However, when the eyes of the soul are opened by grace, and we are enabled to catch a glimpse of God, then our souls can quite easily interpret these material descriptions in a spiritual sense.

This opening of the eyes of the soul to the knowledge of the Godhead I call reform in faith and feeling. For the soul then has some experience of what it once knew by faith alone. This is the beginning of contemplation, of which Saint Paul said: *Non contemplantibus nobis quae videntur, sed quae non videntur, quae*

*enim videntur, temporalia sunt, quae autem non videntur, aeterna sunt* (II Cor. iv, 18). We do not contemplate the things that are seen, but those that are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal, but those that are not seen are eternal. It is these things that the soul should aspire to gain, partially indeed in this present life, but fully in the bliss of heaven. For the full bliss and eternal life of the rational soul consist in this vision and knowledge of God. *Haec est autem vita aeterna: ut cognoscant te unum Deum, et quem misisti, Jesum Christum* (S. John xvii, 3). Father, this is eternal life, that Your chosen souls should know You, and Jesus Christ: Your Son whom You have sent, to be the one true God.

CHAPTER 34: *How we are to realize that it is not created love which brings the soul to the spiritual vision of God, but Love uncreated, that is, God Himself, who bestows this knowledge*

But since the ultimate joy and end of the soul depends upon this knowledge of God, you may perhaps wonder why I said earlier that the soul should desire nothing but the love of God, yet said nothing about the nature of the soul's desire for this knowledge. My answer is that the knowledge of God brings perfect happiness to the soul, and that this happiness derives not only from the knowledge, but from the blessed love which springs from it. Nevertheless, love derives from knowledge, and not knowledge from love; consequently the happiness of the soul is said to derive chiefly from this knowledge and experience of God, to which is conjoined the love of God. And the better God is known the more He is loved. But inasmuch as the soul cannot attain this knowledge, or the love that derives from it, without God who is Love, I said that you should desire Love alone. For God's love alone guides the soul to this vision and knowledge; and that Love is not the soul's