

THE LADDER OF PERFECTION

Deus lux est (1 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*

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enim videntur, temporalia sunt, quae autem non videntur, aeterna sunt (1 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

own love for God, but the Love of God for a sinful soul incapable of loving Him rightly by itself. God Himself is both the means by which the soul attains this knowledge, and the love that derives from it. And I will now tell you more explicitly how this comes about.

In their writings the saints say, and with truth, that there are two kinds of spiritual love. One is termed uncreated Love and the other created. Uncreated Love is God Himself, the third Person of the Trinity, that is, the Holy Spirit. He is Love uncreated, as Saint John says: *Deus dilectio est* (1 John iv, 8). God is Love; that is, the Holy Spirit. Created love is the love implanted and aroused in a soul by the Holy Spirit when it sees and knows Truth, that is, God. This love is called created because it is brought into being by the Holy Spirit. It is not God Himself, since it is created, but it is the love felt by the soul when it beholds God and is moved to love Him alone. So you can see that created love is not the cause of a soul coming to the contemplation of God, for there are people who think that they can love God of their own accord with such ardour that they can merit the gift of contemplation; but this is not so. Love uncreated, that is God Himself, alone can infuse this knowledge. For because of its sinfulness and human weakness a poor unhappy soul is so far from this clear knowledge of God and the blessed experience of His love that it could never attain them were it not for the infinite greatness of God's love. But because He loves us so greatly, He gives up His Love, that is, the Holy Spirit. He is both the Giver and the Gift, and by that Gift He makes us know and love Him. This is the Divine Love which I said should be the sole object of your desire, the uncreated Love that is the Holy Spirit. Indeed, a lesser gift than that of Himself will not suffice to bring us to the blessed knowledge of God. We should therefore earnestly desire this gift of Love, and ask God for this alone, that in His infinite love He would flood our hearts with His ineffable light, so that we may know

Him, and bestow His blessed Love upon us, so that as He loves us, we may return His love. For as Saint John says: *Nos diligamus Deum, quoniam ipse prior dilexit nos* (1 John vi, 19). We now love God, because He has first loved us. He loved us greatly when He created us in His likeness, but He loved us yet more when He redeemed us from the power of the devil and the pains of hell by His Precious Blood when as Man He willingly endured death for us. But He loves us most when He gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit, that is, Divine Love, by which we know and love Him, and are assured that we are His sons, chosen for salvation. We are more indebted to Him for this Love than for any other love that He has ever shown us, either in our creation or our preservation. For although He had made us and redeemed us, what advantage would this have been to us had He not also saved us? Surely, none.

It appears to me that the greatest pledge of God's love given to us is this; that He gives Himself to our souls in His Divinity. He gave Himself first in His humanity as a ransom for us when He offered Himself to the Heavenly Father on the altar of the Cross. This was a splendid gift, and a great pledge of love. But when He gives Himself to our souls in His Divinity for our salvation, and makes us know and love Him, then He loves us completely, for then He gives Himself to us, and He could not give us more: yet less could not satisfy us. For this reason it is said that the justification of a sinful soul through the forgiveness of its sins is ascribed and appropriated chiefly to the work of the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is Love, and in the justification of a soul God shows it His Love most clearly, for He takes away its sin and unites it to Himself. This is the highest thing that God can do for a soul, and it is therefore appropriated to the Holy Spirit.

The creation of the soul is appropriated to the Father, because of the sovereign might and power that He displays in creating it. Its preservation is ascribed and appropriated to the Son,

because of the sovereign will and wisdom that He displayed in His human nature, for He overcame the devil chiefly through wisdom and not through strength. But the justification and full salvation of the soul through the forgiveness of sins is appropriated to the third Person, that is, to the Holy Spirit. For in this God most clearly displays His love for the souls of men, and it is for this that we should most love Him in return. All irrational creatures, in common with ourselves, are created by God, for He made them out of nothing as He did us. This, then, is the work of His greatest power, but not of His greatest love. In the same way, salvation is offered to all rational souls, both to Jews, Moslems, and bad Christians. For Christ died for all souls, and ransomed them if they are willing to profit by His sacrifice; His death was sufficient for the salvation of all men, even though they do not avail themselves of it. And this was the work of wisdom rather than of love. But the justification and sanctification of our souls comes through the gift of the Holy Spirit, and is the work of Love alone. It is not common to all men, but is a special gift to chosen souls alone. Indeed, it is the supreme work of love for us who are His chosen children.

This is the Love of God that I said you should long for and desire, for this Love is God the Holy Spirit Himself. When we are given this uncreated Love it produces all that is good in our souls, and all that makes for goodness. This Love of God is ours before we love Him, for it first of all cleanses us from our sins, makes us love Him, strengthens our wills to resist sin, and inspires us to obtain all virtues by means of various bodily and spiritual practices. It inspires us also to forsake all love of the world, while it destroys within us all sinful impulses, carnal desires and worldly preoccupations. It protects us from the malicious temptations of the devil, and causes us to avoid useless worldly occupations and the company of worldly-minded people. The uncreated Love of God does all these things when

He gives Himself to us. We ourselves do nothing more than allow Him to act as He wills, for the most that we can do is to yield ourselves readily to the working of His grace. Yet even this readiness does not originate in us, but in Him, so that all good that we do is due to Him, although we do not realize this. Not only does He do this, but in His love He does even more. He opens the eyes of the soul in a wonderful way, shows it the vision of God, and reveals to it the knowledge of Himself little by little as the soul is capable of bearing it. By this means He draws all the love of the soul towards Himself.

The soul then begins to know Him in a spiritual way, and to love Him ardently. It then perceives something of the divine nature, how God is All and does all things, and how all good deeds and holy thoughts proceed from Him alone. For He is sovereign Power, Truth, and Goodness: every good deed, therefore, is done through Him and by Him, and to Him alone are due the glory and thanks for all. For although sinful men usurp His glory here for a little while, nevertheless at the Last Day truth will show clearly that God did all, and that man achieved nothing by himself. Then those who have tried to usurp God's rightful place, and have not made their peace with Him for their evil-doing, will be condemned to eternal death, and God will be adored and thanked for the workings of His grace by all the creatures that He has saved.

As I have already said, and will enlarge upon later, this Love is nothing else but God Himself, who in His Love works all this in the soul of man, and reforms it in feeling to His own likeness. This Love produces the fullness of all virtues in the soul, making them pure and true, tranquil and congenial, and renders them desirable and pleasant to the soul. And I will presently tell you in what way God does this. This Love raises the soul from a worldly to a spiritual plane, from earthly interests to heavenly joys, and from vain concern with earthly matters to the contemplation of spiritual realities and the secrets of God.

CHAPTER 35: *How some souls, moved by grace and reason, love Jesus with fervent emotion and natural affection. And how some, inspired by the special grace of the Holy Spirit, love Him more quietly with a spiritual love alone*

ONE may say that the soul that attains the greatest love for God in this life is most pleasing to Him, and because of this will enjoy the clearest vision of Him in the bliss of heaven.

Love of this kind, however, cannot be attained simply by a man's own efforts, as some imagine. It is the free gift of God's grace, and is received only after great bodily and spiritual struggles. For there are lovers of God who try to compel themselves to love Him, as it were by very force of will. They strain themselves by the violence of their efforts, and desire it so intensely that they break into bodily fervour as though they would draw God down from heaven to them, saying in their hearts and with their mouth, 'Ah, Lord, I love Thee and I will love Thee. For Thy love I would suffer death.' As a result they feel great fervour and great grace. Indeed, this behaviour would appear to be good and praiseworthy, provided that it is well tempered with humility and discretion. Nevertheless, these souls do not possess the gift of love that I described, nor are they trying to obtain it. For anyone who possesses this gift as a result of grace and a personal experience of God – or one who does not possess it, but desires it – does not restrain himself almost by physical violence in order to enjoy sensible fervour and feel love for God in this way. He realizes that he is nothing and can do nothing of himself, but is as it were inanimate and entirely dependent on the support and mercy of God. He sees that God is All and does all things, and therefore asks for nothing but the gift of His love. And since the soul realizes that his own love is

nothing, he desires to have God's love, which is all-sufficient. So he prays and desires that God would touch him with His blessed light, so that he may experience something of His gracious presence, for then he would love Him indeed. This is the way that the gift of Love, that is, God, enters the soul.

The more fully that grace enables the soul to recognize its own nothingness in the light of God's truth – sometimes without any outward signs of fervour – and the less it is conscious of loving and knowing God, the nearer it approaches to perceiving the gift of God's Love. For it is then under the control of Love, which directs the soul, causing it to forget itself and be conscious only that God's Love is working within it. The soul is then more passive than active, and this is the work of pure Love. This is what Saint Paul meant when he said: *Quicumque Spiritu Dei aguntur, ii filii Dei sunt* (Rom. viii, 14). All who are moulded by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. In other words, souls that are so humble and obedient to God that they do nothing of themselves, but allow the Holy Spirit to guide them and to kindle feelings of love in them by His own working, are God's children in a special sense because they are most like Him.

Other souls cannot love in this way, but try to stimulate their affections and stir their imagination by meditation on God and by external discipline, so as to produce the feeling of love accompanied by bodily fervour and other outward phenomena; but these do not love God in a spiritual way. They mean well and deserve commendation, however, only in so far as they humbly recognize that their fervour is not Divine Love experienced by grace, but only the product of the soul's obedience to reason. Nevertheless, because the soul does all it can, the goodness of God transforms this natural aspiration to God into spiritual affection, and this is rewarded as though it had been spiritual from the beginning. Such is the great generosity of God to humble souls that He transforms these affections of

human origin into the meritorious spiritual affections of His own Love, as though they had come from Him alone. Affections so transformed may be called aspirations of spiritual love, but they are rendered so only by the generosity of God, and are not due to the direct action of the Holy Spirit within the soul. I do not say that a soul can produce even such natural affections by itself without grace, for I am well aware that Saint Paul says that we cannot do or think anything good of ourselves without grace. *Non enim quod sufficientes simus cogitare aliquid nobis, quasi ex nobis; sed sufficientia nostra ex Deo est* (11 Cor. iii, 5). That is: We who love God do not think that we are sufficient to love or to think anything good of ourselves alone, but our sufficiency is of God. For God works in us all, both to will and to do good. As Saint Paul says: *Deus est qui operatur in nobis et velle et perficere pro bona voluntate* (Phil. ii, 13). That is: It is God who brings about in us both the will to good and its fulfilment. But such aspirations, formed by the soul as a result of the general grace that God gives to all chosen souls, are all good. But they are not due to the special grace bestowed by the touch of God's presence in a soul that loves Him perfectly. For in those whose love of God is imperfect His love works indirectly through the natural affections; but in those whose love is perfect God works directly, implanting His own spiritual affections, and destroying all worldly and natural affections. This is how God's Love works directly in a soul. This divine Love may be possessed incompletely in this life by a pure soul through the contemplation of God, but it is perfected in the bliss of heaven by a clear vision of the Godhead, for then all the aspirations of the soul will be entirely Godward and spiritual.

CHAPTER 36: *How the gift of His Love is the most valuable and desirable of all God's gifts: how God, out of love alone, is the source of all good in those who love Him: and how divine Love makes the practice of all virtues and good works light and easy*

ASK nothing of God, then, but this gift of divine Love, that is, the Holy Spirit. For among all the gifts of God there is none so good and valuable, so noble or so excellent as this. For in no other gift of God save this gift of Love is the Giver Himself the Gift, so that it is the noblest and best of all. The gifts of prophecy, of working miracles, of knowledge and counsel, of enduring severe fasting and penance, and all other such are great gifts of the Holy Spirit: but they are not the Holy Spirit Himself, for a reprobate soul might possess all these gifts as readily as a chosen soul.

Therefore gifts of this kind are not greatly to be desired, and they should not be over-estimated. But the gift of divine Love is the Holy Spirit, God Himself, and no soul can possess Him and be lost, for this gift saves it from damnation; He makes it His own, and endows it with the heritage of heaven. And this Love, as I said earlier, is not the natural love that is created in a soul; it is the Holy Spirit Himself, Love uncreated, who saves a soul. For He first gives Himself to a soul before it loves Him, and He creates love in the soul, and makes the soul love Him for Himself alone. And not only this, for by this gift the soul loves itself and all its fellow-Christians as itself for the sake of God alone. It is this gift of divine Love which distinguishes the chosen souls from the reprobate. It makes true peace between God and the soul, and unites all the blessed in God. It is the bond of divine Love which unites God to us, and us to God, and causes us to love one another in Him.

Seek this gift of divine Love above all else, as I have said, for if God of His grace will give it you, it will open and enlighten your spiritual understanding to see truth, that is, God, and spiritual things. It will kindle your affection to love Him wholly and truly, and He will work within your soul entirely as He wills, so that you will contemplate Him with worship and love, and understand what He is doing within you. God tells us through His prophet what we must do, saying: *Vacate, et videte quoniam ego sum Deus* (Ps. xlvii, 10). Be still, and see that I am God. That is: you who are reformed in feeling and whose inward vision is clear to see the things of the spirit, cease from outward activity for a while and see that I am God. In other words, 'Look only at what I, Jesus, God and man, am doing; look at Me, for it is I who do everything. I am Love, and all that I do is done out of love. I will show you how this is true, for you can neither do nor think anything good except through Me, that is, through My power, wisdom, and love, for otherwise it is not wholly good. The truth is that I, Jesus, am both Might, Wisdom, and holy Love: you are nothing, and I am God. Recognize, therefore, that it is I who am responsible for all your good deeds, good thoughts, and holy desires, and that you do nothing of yourself. Notwithstanding, all these good deeds are called yours, not because you are primarily responsible for them, but because I make them over to you out of the love that I bear you. Therefore, since I am God and do all this for love, cease to think about yourself: look at Me, and see that I am God, for I do all this.' This is something of David's meaning in the verse that I have quoted.

See, then, what divine Love does within a chosen soul which He reforms in feeling to His likeness, when the understanding is partially enlightened to know Jesus and to experience His love. Love brings all the virtues into a soul, and renders them pleasing and congenial without any action by the soul itself. For the soul does not struggle painfully to acquire them as it

did formerly, but obtains them easily and enjoys them peacefully through the gift of divine Love alone, that is the Holy Spirit. This is supreme consolation and unspeakable joy when it suddenly discovers, without understanding how, that humility and patience, temperance and restraint, chastity and purity, brotherly love and all the other virtues that were formerly so burdensome, painful, and difficult to practise have now become attractive, pleasant, and wonderfully easy. So great is the change that the soul no longer finds any virtue exacting or difficult, but very pleasant. And all this is the work of divine Love.

Others, who have the common amount of charity and have not yet grown in grace to this extent, but are guided by their own reason, struggle and strive all day against their sins in order to acquire virtues. Like wrestlers, they are sometimes on top, and sometimes underneath. Such people are doing well. They acquire virtues through their own reason and will, but not because they love and delight in virtue, for they have to exert all their energy to overcome their natural instincts in order to possess them. Consequently they can never enjoy true peace or final victory. They will receive a great reward, but they are not yet sufficiently humble. They have not put themselves wholly into God's hands, because they do not yet see Him.

But a soul that has this inward vision of God is not greatly concerned with the struggle for virtue, and does not devote itself chiefly to this. Its whole purpose is to maintain such vision of God as it has. It desires to keep its mind on this, to ensure that its love never wavers, and as far as possible to set aside all else. When it does this, God subdues all sins in the soul, overthrows it with His blessed presence, and gives it all virtues. And the soul is so comforted and sustained by the wonderful feeling of love that derives from the vision of God that no outward tribulation can disturb it. In this way divine Love destroys all sin in the soul, and reforms it with a new awareness of virtues.

CHAPTER 37: *How, when the soul is granted the grace of contemplation, Divine Love overcomes all inclinations to pride, and renders the soul perfectly humble by removing all desire for worldly honours.*

I WILL now describe more fully how Divine Love overcomes sin and establishes virtues in the soul. First I will speak of pride, and of its opposite virtue humility. You should understand that there are two kinds of humility, one of which is acquired by reason, while the other is the especial gift of Divine Love. Both spring ultimately from Divine Love, but the former is due to Divine Love acting upon the soul through reason, while the latter comes from the direct action of Divine Love. The first is imperfect, but the second is perfect.

The first kind of humility is born in a man when he considers his own sin and wretched condition. The consciousness of this makes him realize his own unworthiness to receive any grace or reward from God. He thinks it more than enough that God in His mercy should grant him forgiveness for his sins. He thinks himself the worst sinner alive, and that everyone is better than himself. These considerations cause him to regard himself as the least of all men, and he struggles with all his might to resist all inclinations to pride, both worldly and spiritual. And since he despises himself, he does not assent to feelings of pride. And if he is sometimes overtaken by pride — by taking pleasure in his honours or knowledge, in praise or in any other things — directly he realizes it he despises himself and is truly sorry. So he asks God's forgiveness, humbly reveals his fault to his confessor, and accepts penance. This humility is good, but it is not perfect, for it is the degree of humility found in beginners and those who are growing in grace, and it springs from a realization of their sins. Divine Love fosters this humility through reason.

A soul comes to perfect humility through the contemplation and knowledge of God. For when the Holy Spirit illumines the soul's understanding to perceive the truth, how God is All in all and does all, the soul feels such love and joy at this experience that it forgets itself and devotes itself entirely to the contemplation of God with all the love that it possesses. It is no longer concerned with its own unworthiness or its former sins. It forgets itself, together with all its own sins and good works, as though nothing existed except God. David possessed this humility when he said: *Et substantia mea tanquam nihilum ante te* (Ps. xxxix, 5). That is, Lord, the contemplation of Your blessed uncreated substance and eternal Being shows me clearly that my own substance and being are nothing in comparison to You. Similarly in relation to his neighbour, he does not judge him or consider whether he is better or worse than himself, for he regards both himself and other men as equal, all alike as nothing in comparison to God. And this is the truth, for all goodness, whether in himself or others, comes from God alone, whom he acknowledges as All. He therefore regards all creatures, together with himself, as nothing. The prophet possessed this humility when he said: *Omnes gentes quasi non sint, sic sunt coram eo, et quasi nihilum et inane reputatae sunt ei* (Isa. xl, 17).

All nations are as nothing, as mere vanity before God, and are accounted as nothing to Him. That is, compared to the eternal and changeless Being of God, mankind is as nothing. For it was created out of nothing, and would return to nothing unless He who made it out of nothing maintained it in existence. This is the truth, and if grace enables the soul to see this truth, it should make it humble. Therefore when Divine Love opens the inward eyes of the soul to see this truth and all its implications, the soul begins to be truly humble. As a result of this vision of God it feels and sees itself as it is, so that it gives up considering or relying on itself, and devotes itself wholly to the contemplation of God. Once it does this, the soul thinks nothing of all

the pleasures and honours of the world; for worldly honour is so insignificant in comparison to the joy and love that it feels in the contemplation of God and in the knowledge of truth, that even if it were able to possess it without sin, it would have no desire to do so. Were men to honour him, praise him, favour him, or grant him high rank, it would not give him any pleasure. Neither would it please him to be a master of all the arts, of theology, or of all the crafts, or to have power to perform all kinds of miracles. He would find no more enjoyment or satisfaction in these things than in gnawing a dry stick. He would much rather forget all these things and be alone out of sight of the world, than to think of them and be honoured by all men. For the heart of the true lover of God is made so great by even a glimpse of Him and a little experience of His love, that all the pleasures and joys on earth would not be sufficient to fill a corner of it. He comes to realize that these unhappy lovers of the world who are so obsessed by a craving for personal honour, and who pursue it by every means in their power, have no desire for this humility, and are in fact very far from possessing it. But one who loves God retains this humility at all times, not with weariness and struggle, but with pleasure and gladness. And this gladness is his not because he has rejected worldly honours – for that would be the false type of humility possessed by a hypocrite – but because he has received a vision and knowledge of the truth and the splendour of God through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This worshipful contemplation and love of God fills the soul with wonderful comfort and upholds it so strongly and tenderly that it cannot find true pleasure and satisfaction in any earthly joys, and has no desire to do so. He is not concerned as to whether men blame or praise him, honour him or despise him. He is not even sufficiently moved to be glad if the scorn of men humiliates him still further, or to feel regret if they honour and praise him. He would prefer to forget both the one and the

other, to think of God alone, and to gain humility in that way; for this is the surest way for any who can follow it. This was David's way, when he said: *Oculi mei semper ad Dominum, quoniam ipse evellit de laqueo pedes meos* (Ps. xxv, 15). My eyes are always looking to the Lord, for He will keep my feet from the snares of sin. When a man does this, he completely forsakes himself, and entrusts himself wholly to God. He is then secure, for the shield of truth which he holds protects him so well that no stirrings of pride will hurt him so long as he remains behind it. As the prophet says: *Sauto circumdabit te veritas ejus; non timebis a timore nocturno* (Ps. xci, 5). Truth shall surround you as with a shield, if you set aside all else and look to God alone. For then you will not fear the terror of the night – that is, you will not fear the spirit of pride – whether it comes by night or by day. As the next verse says: *A sagitta volante in die*. Pride approaches by night to attack the soul when a person is despised and criticized by others, and is liable to fall into depression and sorrow. It comes as 'an arrow flying by day' when a person is honoured and praised by all, whether for worldly or spiritual achievements, and is liable to rest content in such transitory things. This arrow is sharp and dangerous; it flies swiftly, strikes suddenly, and deals a mortal wound. But one who loves God, seeking Him constantly in devout prayer and regular meditation, is so protected by the sure shield of truth that he has no fear, for this arrow cannot penetrate his soul. If it comes at him it cannot hurt him, but glances off and passes onward. And this, I think, is the way in which a soul is made humble by the action of the Holy Spirit, that is, the gift of Divine Love. He opens the eyes of the soul to see and love God, and keeps them quietly and securely fastened on Himself. He destroys all stirrings of pride imperceptibly and quietly, the soul knows not how, and along with truth and love He infuses the virtue of humility. Divine Love does all this, but not to the same extent in all His lovers alike. For some possess this grace for short periods and to a

limited extent; they possess, as it were, the beginnings of it and a little experience of it, for their consciences are not yet fully cleansed by grace. And some possess it in greater fullness, for they have a clearer vision of God, and feel more of His love. And some possess it fully, for they have the full gift of contemplation. But as I have said, one who has it even in the smallest degree has the gift of perfect humility since he possesses the gift of perfect love.

CHAPTER 38: *How Divine Love quietly destroys all stirrings of anger and envy in the soul, and restores the virtues of peace, patience, and perfect charity to its fellow-men, as it did in the Apostles*

DIVINE LOVE works within the soul as He wills, wisely and quietly. He destroys anger, envy, despair, and all such passions, and brings the virtues of patience, gentleness, peace, and kindness into the soul. For one whose behaviour is governed solely by his own reason, it is very hard to be patient, peaceable, gentle, and charitable to his neighbours when they vex him unreasonably or do him wrong, for he is inclined to retaliate with anger or resentment, either in word, or act, or both. Nevertheless, if although he is upset and troubled, he does not overstep the bounds of reason and restrains his hands and tongue, and is ready to forgive an offence when pardon is asked, he possesses the virtue of patience. It is as yet weak and unstable, but in so far as he desires to have it, and makes a real effort to control his irrational passions in order to acquire it, and is sorry that he does not possess it as fully as he should, his patience is genuine. But to one who truly loves God it requires no great effort to endure all this, because Divine Love fights for him and imperceptibly destroys these feelings of anger and resentment. His spiritual union with God and the experience of

His blessed love renders his soul so quiet and peaceful, so patient and devoted, that he is unaffected by the contempt and criticism, disgrace or villainy inflicted upon him by men. He is not greatly provoked by them, and refuses to be angered by them, for were he greatly provoked he would lose his peace of soul, and he does not wish to do this. It is easier for him to forget all the wrongs done to him than for another man to forgive even when pardon is asked. He would rather forget it than forgive it, for he finds this easier.

Divine Love does all these things, for Love opens the eyes of the soul to the vision of God, and strengthens it with the joys of love that it experiences in that vision. It brings such comfort to a man's soul that he has no cares, and is unaffected by anything that people may do or say against him. The greatest harm that he could suffer would be the loss of that spiritual vision of God, and he would suffer any harm rather than that. When a person's troubles are all external and do not affect the body - such as gossip, contempt, or material loss - he may do all this quite easily and without detriment to his spiritual life. These can be ignored. But when the body is affected and he feels pain, it affects him more deeply and becomes harder. Yet although it is difficult or impossible for the frail nature of man to endure physical suffering gladly and patiently, without bitterness, anger, or depression, it is not impossible for Divine Love, that is the Holy Spirit, to bring this about in a soul when He grants it the precious gift of Himself. To one in distress He grants the mighty experience of His love, and unites it to Himself in a wonderful manner. By His great power He withdraws it from the influence of the outward senses, and bestows such sweet comfort on the soul by His sacred presence that it is aware of little or no bodily pain. This is an especial grace granted to the holy Martyrs and Apostles, of whom Holy Scripture says: *Ibant Apostoli gaudentes a conspectu concilii, quoniam digni habitii sunt pro nomine Christi contumeliam pati* (Acts v, 41). The Apostles came

joyfully from the Council of the Jews when they were beaten with scourges, and they were glad to be held worthy to suffer bodily distress for the love of Jesus. They were not moved to anger and resentment, and had no wish to be revenged on the Jews who beat them, as a worldly man would be when he suffers even a small wrong from his neighbours. Nor were they stirred to pride and self-conceit so as to despise and condemn the Jews, as happens with hypocrites and heretics who will endure great bodily pain and are sometimes ready to suffer death with great joy and strength of purpose, as though in the name of Jesus and for love of Him. In fact this love and joy that they feel in bodily suffering is not to be identified with that implanted by the Holy Spirit; it does not come from the fire that burns on the high altar of heaven, but is simulated by the devil in the fires of hell. It is utterly corrupted by pride and presumption, contempt, censure, and hatred of those who punish them. They imagine that they are inspired by charity, and that they suffer everything for the love of God, but they are deluded by the devil that walks at noonday. But when one who loves God suffers hurt from his neighbours, he is so strengthened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and made so humble, patient, and peaceable, that he always maintains his humility whatever wrong he may suffer. He does not despise or denounce one who injures him, but prays for him in his heart, and has a deeper pity and compassion for him than for others who have never harmed him. Indeed, he loves him more, and desires his salvation more fervently because he knows that he himself will reap a great spiritual reward from the other's unkindness, although this was not his intention. But love and humility of this degree are beyond unaided human attainment; they become possible only by the working of the Holy Spirit in those whom He makes true lovers of God.

CHAPTER 39: *How Divine Love destroys covetousness, impurity, and gluttony, together with all enjoyment of sensual pleasures, doing so quietly and easily through the grace of contemplation*

COVETOUSNESS is destroyed in the soul by the working of Divine Love, for it stirs the soul to such an ardent desire for good and heavenly riches that it holds all earthly riches as worthless. It sets no greater value on a precious stone than on a lump of chalk, and is no more attracted by a hundred pounds of gold than by a pound of lead. It knows that all perishable things are of equal value, and does not esteem one more highly than another, since it is fully aware that all these earthly things that worldly men regard so highly and love so greatly will pass away and come to nothing, both the things themselves and the love which they inspire. Therefore in his mind such a person already sees these things as they will be hereafter, and accounts them as nothing. And while those who love this world struggle and intrigue for earthly goods, one against the other, the man who loves God strives against nobody. He possesses his soul in peace, and remains content with what he has, refusing to seek anything more. He wants no greater share of all the world's riches than will provide for his bare bodily needs for as long as God wills him to live. This he can easily obtain, and desires no more. He is well content when his bare needs are satisfied for the time being, so that he is spared the necessity of maintaining and administering property, and can devote his whole heart and energy to seeking God and finding Him in purity of spirit. And since only the 'pure in heart shall see God,' this is his sole desire. Consequently the love of father, mother, and friends does not influence him unduly, for the sword of spiritual love severs all earthly love from his heart, so that he feels no deeper

affection towards his father, mother, and friends than towards other people unless he sees greater virtue or grace in them than in others. On the other hand, he would prefer to see the same grace in his own father and mother than he sees in certain others; but if this is not so, then he loves others who possess more. And this is true charity.* Thus Divine Love destroys worldly covetousness, and brings poverty of spirit into the soul.

Divine Love effects this transformation not only in those who have no worldly possessions, but also in some who enjoy high rank and have great riches at their disposal. Love overcomes covetousness in some of these to such a degree that they value their riches no more than a straw. And if those who are entrusted with their care lose them by negligence, they take no account of it. The reason for this is that the heart of one who loves God is by the gift of the Holy Spirit so fully occupied with the consideration and love of that which is supremely precious and valuable that it finds no satisfaction in any other love that conflicts with this.

Divine Love also destroys inclinations to lust and bodily impurity, introduces true chastity into the soul, and causes it to love it. For the soul feels such joy at the vision of God that it takes pleasure in being chaste, and finds no difficulty in preserving chastity, for by so doing it is most at ease and most at peace.

In the same manner Divine Love uproots gluttony, and makes a man sober and temperate. It gives him such support that he has no craving for food and drink, but takes whatever best meets his needs if it is readily available. He does so not out of love for self, but love of God. One who loves God is well aware that he must sustain his bodily life with food and drink for as long as God wills. Therefore one in whom the love of God dwells must, I think, exercise discretion and take such bodily sustenance as will best enable him to preserve this grace and present fewest obstacles to its working within him. If pos-

sible, he will choose the kind of food that is least troublesome and maintains his bodily strength, whether meat and fish, or only bread and ale. For the whole purpose of such a man is to keep his mind fixed constantly on God, and, if possible, to do this without interruption. But since this is bound to suffer interruption at times, the less that food and drink intervene, the better it is. He would rather make use of the best and most costly of food if this interfered less with the custody of his heart, than to take only bread and water if it involved more disturbance, for he is not concerned to acquire great merit by fasting if this causes him to lose his peace of heart. His whole purpose is to keep his heart as steadfastly as possible in the sight of God and in the experience of His love. In fact, I think he might eat the richest fare with less pleasure than another man who, guided solely by reason and without this special gift of love, might eat the poorest fare. Rich dishes prepared solely to tempt the palate are not proper food for such a man; on the other hand, if simple food, such as bread and ale, help him best and keep his heart at peace, it will be best for him to use them, especially if his physical strength is sustained by the gift of Divine Love.

Yet Divine Love does even more than this. It cures spiritual inertia and bodily idleness, and makes the soul zealous and eager for the service of God. Indeed, it desires to be constantly occupied in godly activity, that is, in the contemplation of God. Through this the soul finds joy and delight in prayer and meditation, and, in the doing of all else that requires to be done without reluctance and bitterness, whether the person be a religious or a layman.

Divine Love also checks any foolish tendency to pamper the bodily senses. It controls the sense of sight, so that a person takes no pleasure in seeing worldly things; on the contrary, they disturb him, however beautiful, precious, or wonderful they may be. Those who love the world rush off to see new things, to wonder at them, and to satisfy their hearts with unprofitable

gazing at them. But one who loves God tries to withdraw and avoid the sight of such things, so that his spiritual vision may not be impaired. For in the spirit he sees what is far more beautiful, and he has no desire to lose this.

The same applies to speech and hearing. It is painful to the soul of one who loves God to discuss or listen to anything that might lessen his freedom to think of God alone. Any song or music that impairs his ability to pray or meditate upon God freely and peacefully is repugnant to him, and the more delightful it is to other people, the more distasteful it is to him. Similarly, to hear others speaking, unless it furthers the progress of his soul in the love of God, is of no pleasure to him. Indeed, it soon becomes irksome to him. He would rather be at peace, hearing nothing and saying nothing, than listen to the greatest scholar on earth advancing all the arguments known to the mind of man unless he were able to speak with sincerity and fervour of the love of God. For this is his own principal occupation, and he has no wish to discuss, hear, or see anything but what may help him and lead him to a deeper knowledge and closer experience of God. So he certainly has no desire to discuss or listen to worldly matters, nor has he any interest in worldly stories, news, or empty gossip of any kind.

It is the same with the senses of smell, taste, and touch; the more that his thoughts are distracted and his peace of soul disturbed by the sense of smell, taste, or any other physical sense, the more he avoids it. The less he is aware of them the better he is pleased, and were it possible to live in the body without being aware of any of them, he would gladly do so. For they often trouble the heart and disturb its peace, and they cannot be entirely avoided. Nevertheless, the love of God is sometimes so powerful in a soul that it overcomes and uproots all that obstructs it.

CHAPTER 40: *On the virtues and graces which a soul receives when its spiritual eyes are opened and it is given the grace of contemplation. How these cannot be won by its own unaided efforts, but only with the assistance of especial grace*

THESE are the ways through which Divine Love works in a soul, opening its spiritual eyes to see God by the infusion of an especial grace, and rendering it pure, refined, and capable of contemplation. Even the greatest theologian on earth could not conceive of or define the real nature of this opening of the spiritual eyes. For it cannot be attained by study, or by a person's own unaided efforts. It is made possible principally by the grace of the Holy Spirit; a person's own efforts are only secondary. I am reluctant to speak of it at all, for I do not think that I am capable of doing so. It is beyond my capacity, and my lips are not pure. However, since Divine Love seems to ask and demand it of me, I will attempt to say a little more on the matter, trusting in its guidance. This opening of the spiritual eyes is that glowing darkness and rich nothingness of which I spoke earlier. It may be called: *Purity of soul and spiritual rest, inward stillness and peace of conscience, refinement of thought and integrity of soul, a lively consciousness of grace and solitude of heart, the wakeful sleep of the spouse and the tasting of heavenly joys, the ardour of love and brightness of light, the entry into contemplation and reformation in feeling*. All these terms are employed by various writers in spiritual literature, for each of them spoke from his own experience of grace; and although they use different expressions, they are all speaking of the same truth.

If a soul through grace has any one of these experiences, it has all, for when a soul longs to see the face of God, and is touched by the especial grace of the Holy Spirit, it is suddenly changed and uplifted from its former condition to a different

level of experience. First of all, it is detached in a wonderful way from the love and desire for all earthly things and withdrawn into itself. And so great is this change that it has lost all desire for worldly things, and for everything save God alone. Then it is *cleansed from all the foulness of sin*. This cleansing is so complete that the memory of sin and all inordinate affection for any created thing is suddenly washed away and expunged, and nothing remains to separate the soul from God but the limitations of bodily existence. Then it is *in spiritual rest*, for all painful doubts and fears, and all other temptations of its spiritual enemies, are driven from the heart, so that they cease to trouble or vex it during this time. It is at rest from the pressure of worldly affairs and the troublesome assaults of sinful inclinations, but is free to engage in the activity of love. And the greater its activity in love, the more complete its rest.

This restful activity is very different to physical idleness and blind security. It is a state of intense spiritual activity, but it is called restful because grace removes the heavy burden of worldly love from the soul, and makes it strong and free through the gift of the Holy Spirit of love, so that it can undertake everything to which grace inspires it, with joy, ease, and delight. It is called a holy inactivity and a most active rest – and so it is – because the soul is *in stillness* from the horrid din of carnal desires and impure thoughts.

This stillness is brought about by the Holy Spirit in the contemplation of God, for His voice is so sweet and so powerful that it silences the clamour of all other voices in the soul. It is a mighty voice, sounding gently in a pure soul, of which the prophet says: *Vox Domini in virtute* (Ps. xxxix, 4). The voice of the Lord is a mighty voice. The word of this voice is living and powerful, as the Apostle says: *Vivus est sermo Domini et efficacius penetrabilior omni gladio* (Heb. iv, 12). The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any sword. Fleshly love is slain at the sound of His word, and the soul is guarded in silence

from all sinful inclinations. The Apocalypse says of this silence: *Factum est silentium in caelo, quasi media hora* (Rev. viii, 1). There was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. Heaven represents a pure soul raised by grace from earthly love to converse with heaven; such a soul is in silence. But since that silence cannot remain unbroken for ever because of the corruption of human nature, it is compared to an interval of half an hour. However long this interval may be, it appears short to the soul, and is therefore represented by half an hour. The soul meanwhile enjoys *peace of conscience*, for grace banishes the pain and remorse, the restlessness and strain caused by sin, and brings peace and reconciliation, uniting God and the soul in a single will. There is no harsh reproof of the soul for its sins and failures, for God and the soul have kissed and are friends. All its misdoings have been forgiven.

The soul now feels humble security and great joy, and this reconciliation gives it full assurance of salvation, for the Holy Spirit witnesses to its inmost conscience that it is a son chosen to receive his heritage in heaven. As Saint Paul says: *Ipse Spiritus testimonium perhibet spiritui nostro, quod filii Dei sumus* (Rom. viii, 16). The Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are the sons of God. This testimony which grace affords to our conscience is the true joy of the soul, as the Apostle says: *Gloria mea est testimonium conscientiae meae* (2 Cor. i, 12). My joy is witness to my conscience; that is, the joy that I feel bears witness to the peace and reconciliation, the true love and friendship between God and my soul. And when the soul is in this state of peace, it is also *refined in thought*.

When the soul is enslaved by love of the world, it falls lower than all other creatures, for all things hold it in their power and overmaster it, so that it cannot see or love God. For just as the love of the world is unprofitable and materialistic, so also the love and reliance on creatures is materialistic, and reduces the soul to slavery. But when the eyes of the soul are opened to see

God, this love is transfigured and the soul exalted to its own proper nature above all material things. It then considers and employs them in a spiritual way, for its love is spiritual. The soul will therefore utterly refuse to make itself the slave of material loves, for grace has raised it high above them. It sets no value on the world, because it will soon pass away and perish. While the soul is maintained in this exaltation of heart, no error or trick of the devil can influence it, for its gaze is fixed so closely on God that all things are beneath it. The prophet speaks of this state, saying: *Accedat homo ad cor alium; et exaltabitur Deus* (Ps. lxiv, 6). Let man come to exaltation of heart, and God Himself shall be glorified. That is, a man who by grace comes to be exalted in thought shall see that God alone is exalted above all creatures, and that the soul itself is exalted in Him.

The soul is then alone, for it is entirely estranged from the society of those who love the world, although it still remains among them bodily. It has entirely renounced all worldly love of creatures, and is not concerned if it never sees or speaks to a man, or receives comfort from one, so long as it may always continue in the same spiritual state. For it is so deeply conscious of the intimate and blessed presence of God, and so delights in Him, that for His love it can easily forgo all love of worldly creatures and even abandon the memory of them. I do not say that it will no longer love or think of other creatures, but rather that it will think of them at the right times, and will regard them and love them with a free and spiritual love, not with an anxious and carnal love as heretofore. The prophet speaks of this spiritual solitude, saying: *Ducam eam in solitudinem, et loquar ad cor ejus* (Hosea ii, 14). I will lead her into the wilderness, and speak to her heart. That is, the grace of God leads a soul from the distasteful company of carnal desires into solitude of mind, causes it to forget the pleasures of the world, and by its sweet influence breathes words of love into its heart. A soul is truly

solitary when it loves God and devotes itself wholly to Him, and has lost all taste for the consolations of the world. And the better to maintain this solitude, it retires from the company of men if it can, and seeks physical solitude, since this greatly promotes solitude of soul and the free working of Divine Love. And the less interference it suffers from empty chatter without or unprofitable thoughts within, the freer it is to contemplate God. In this way it attains *solitude of heart*.

While a soul is obsessed and blinded by love of the world, it is entirely earth-bound, and like a highway, is common ground for everything, because every impulse of the flesh or the devil enters and passes through it. Then grace draws it into an inner chamber and into the presence of God, where it hears His secret counsels and is wonderfully comforted by them. Of this the prophet says: *Secretum meum mihi; secretum meum mihi* (Isa. xxiv, 16). My secret is my own, my secret is my own. That is, one who loves God, whom grace has raised from the outward feelings of worldly love and caught up into the secrets of spiritual love, gives thanks to Him, saying: My secret is my own. Meaning, O Lord my God, Your secret is revealed to me and hidden from all lovers of the world, for it is called hidden manna, whose nature can be more easily enquired about than defined. And God makes this promise to one who loves Him: *Dabo ei manna absconditum, quod nemo novit, nisi qui accipit* (Rev. ii, 17). This manna is heavenly food and the bread of angels, as Holy Scripture says. For angels are fed and filled by the clear sight and burning love of God; and that is manna. For we may ask what it is, but we cannot fully understand. One who loves God is not filled with manna here, but while he remains in the body he receives a small taste of it.

This tasting of manna is a lively consciousness of grace, which is due to the quickening of the soul's spiritual vision. This grace is no different from that experienced by a chosen soul at the beginning of its conversion; it is the self-same grace experienced

and revealed in a different way, for grace increases with the soul, and the soul with grace. And the purer the soul and the more withdrawn from love of the world, the more powerful is grace, and the more inward and spiritual is the soul's experience of the presence of God. So the same grace which first turns a man from sin and enables him to begin and make progress by the exercise of virtues and good works, also makes him perfect. And this form of grace is called a *lively consciousness of grace*, for one who possesses it feels it strongly, and is fully conscious by experience that he is in grace. To him it is lively indeed, for it wonderfully refreshes the soul, and infuses such health into it that it does not feel the pain of bodily disease, although the body may be feeble and sickly. For the power of grace is such that both body and soul are brought to their fullest health and ease.

When this grace is withdrawn, the soul is plunged into sorrow, for it thinks that it will be able to retain it always, and that nothing can take it away. But this is not so, for it passes away very easily. Nevertheless, although the consciousness of grace in all its fullness passes away, its influence remains; it preserves the soul in tranquillity, and makes it desire the return of grace. This is also what is known as the *wakeful sleep of the spouse* of which Holy Scripture says: *Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat* (Song of Solomon v, 2). I sleep, and my heart keeps watch. That is: I am spiritually at rest, when the love of the world is destroyed within me by grace, and the sinful impulses of bodily desires are so deadened that I hardly feel them and they do not trouble me. My heart is set free, and then it keeps watch, for it is vigilant and ready to love and see God. The more deeply I am at rest from outward things, the more awake I am to the knowledge of God and of inward things. I cannot be awake to Jesus unless I am asleep to the world. So while the grace of God closes the bodily eyes, the soul is asleep to the vanities of the world: the eyes of the spirit are opened, and it wakes to the

sight of God's majesty hidden within the clouds of His precious humanity. As the Gospel says of the Apostles when they were with the Lord Jesus at His transfiguration, they first slept, and then *vigilantes viderunt maiestatem* (S. Luke ix, 32); they woke to see His majesty. This sleep of the Apostles represents the soul's death to worldly love through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and their awakening represents its contemplation of God. Through this sleep the soul is brought from the turmoil of worldly desires into peace, and through this awakening it is raised up to the sight of God and spiritual things. The closer that the eyes of the soul are shut to earthly things in this kind of sleep, the keener is its inward vision, which is enabled to see the beauty of heaven in loving contemplation. This sleep and this awakening are wrought by the light of grace in the soul of one who loves God.

CHAPTER 41: *How the special grace of the contemplation of God is sometimes withdrawn from a soul; how a soul should act in the absence or presence of God; and how a soul should constantly desire the gracious presence of God*

SHOW me a soul whose eyes have been opened by the action of grace to the contemplation of God, a soul so entirely detached and withdrawn from love of the world that it possesses *purity and poverty of spirit, spiritual rest, inward stillness and peace of conscience, refinement of thought, solitude and retirement of heart, and the wakeful sleep of the spouse*. Show me a soul that has lost all desire and love for the world, that is enraptured by the joys of heaven, and continually athirst for and quietly seeking the blessed presence of God. Then I can say with full conviction that this soul is burning with love and radiant with spiritual light. It is worthy to be called the spouse of Christ, for it is reformed in feeling, and ready to receive the grace of contem-