

nal praise ever sung by the angels to God. The Psalmist sang of this, *Man has eaten angels' food.*⁴ And so his nature is renewed, and will change into a divine glory and happiness. He will be sweet and godly and full of song because now he is feeling the delights of eternal love, singing unweariedly with the greatest sweetness. Then it is that there happens to such a lover what I have never found in any learned writing or have heard expounded, namely that this song will spring to his very lips, and he will sing his prayers in a spiritual symphony of celestial sweetness. It will make him slow of speech, because the abundance of his inner joy and the singular nature of his song impose delay, and what once occupied him not more than an hour he will now find difficult to complete in half a day. And while this is happening he will sit alone, mixing as little as possible with those who sing psalms, and deliberately not singing with the rest. I am not saying that all should try this, but let him to whom it is given do what he wishes, for he is being led by the Holy Spirit, and his way of life is not going to be diverted by what men say.

Moreover his heart will be living in splendour and fire, and marvellous music will exalt him. He will pay no particular respect to any one, even if he is thus thought to be an oaf or a bumpkin. In the depths of his being there is the praise of God and jubilant song, and his praise bursts out aloud; his most sweet voice rises up to heaven, and the Divine Majesty delights to hear it.

He whose beauty the King desires has a lovely face, because he holds within himself the uncreated wisdom. For his wisdom is drawn from the secret place, and her pleasures are for those who love eternity; she is not found by worldlings and their soft living. But she dwells in him of whom I have been speaking, because his whole being is absorbed in loving Christ, and all within him cries out for God. This cry is his love and his song, and he lifts a great shout to the ears of God. It is the longing of a good man, this eagerness for perfection. His is no worldly shout, for he

⁴ Psalms 78:25.

is craving Christ and none else. His inner being is ablaze with the fire of love; his very heart is alight and burning; he engages in no outward work which cannot be turned to good. He praises God in song – but his song is in silence. His lays are not meant for the ears of men; but in the sight of God he utters his praise in unspeakable sweetness.

CHAPTER 33

Spiritual song does not fit in with outward song; the reason for the error of those who deny this; knowledge infused and inspired, and how it differs from what has been acquired.

A MAN raised to holiness can know that he has the song of which I have been speaking in this way: he cannot abide the noise of psalmody unless his own inner song is mentally attuned to it; it is destroyed if he has to speak outwardly. Some indeed are distracted in their singing and psalmody, not because they are perfect, but because they are not yet settled in their own minds, and people's words interrupt and disturb their prayers; a thing which does not happen with the perfect. For those who are well founded cannot be distracted from prayer or meditation by noise or tumult or anything else: it is only from song that such things pluck them. For that sweet, spiritual song is very special, and given only to the most special! It is not an affair of those outward cadences which are used in church and elsewhere; nor does it blend much with those audible sounds made by the human voice and heard by physical ears; but among angel melodies it has its own acceptable harmony, and those who have known it speak of it with wonder and approval.

See and understand, you men, and do not be misled, because I have shown you, for the honour of God Almighty and our own blessing, why I used to escape these songsters, and why I was not anxious to mix with them, or wanting to hear organists play. As far as I am concerned they put an

obstacle in the way of sweet sound and oblige these splendid songs to cease. Do not be surprised then if I have fled from what would have been my undoing. I would have been at fault not to have left what I knew to be preventing me from this loveliest of songs. It would have been wrong to have acted otherwise. I know quite well from whom I received it, and I have striven to make myself do his will, lest he should take from graceless me what he had so graciously bestowed.

I used to delight indeed to sit alone, so that away from all the racket my song could flow more easily. With heartfelt fervour I would feel the sweetest joy, and undoubtedly I received this as a gift from him, him whom I have loved above all things and beyond description.

For it is not as though my heart has been seething with bodily lust, nor was it from any creature that I got these consoling songs which I delight to sing to Jesus. It is love that has been poured into me, not that I should live depressed like some outcast, but rather that I should be lifted up beyond the most exalted of things visible, and aflame and radiant, praise God from heaven: his praise is not seemly from a foul mouth!

Therefore it is to him that the window will be opened, that window which is opaque to all those who love any but the one thing needful. Not surprisingly such a man's nature is transformed into a nobility of immeasurable worth, free and splendid. This noble freedom they shall never know who know neither the love nor the sweetness which is in Christ here on earth.

Quite obviously I must not stop my devotion which has now been so thoroughly tested just because some detractors have been snarling maliciously against my innocence. Indeed I must fight all wickedness, and still love those who stir up even greater trouble for me. For grace will increase for the lover all the while he heeds not windy words, but reaches out with perfect heart to his Beloved, tireless in the pursuit of his purpose.

And so his love of vanity vanishes, for true love is unfold-

ing in his mind, for to him who loves there is no cooling down of soul, but a persistent strengthening of warmth, and a heart unwavering in its continual meditation on the Beloved. In this steadfastness, indeed, the true lover experiences the excellence of love, for it means that he will be taken up into the fiery heaven, and there set ablaze with unspeakable love, his whole being inwardly on fire more fully than can be expressed. There he will make his own the degrees of grace from which have come his wisdom and insight, so that now he knows how to speak among the wise, and to state boldly what he thinks needs saying, even though hitherto people have taken him for a fool and simpleton – as perhaps he was.

But those who have acquired their learning not directly but second-hand, and who are puffed up with their complicated arguments, say scornfully, 'Where did he learn all this? To which teacher has he been listening?' They do not believe that lovers of eternity can be taught by an inner Teacher, or speak more eloquently than those taught by men who have spent their whole life studying for empty honours.

But if the Holy Spirit inspired many people in days gone by, why should he not raise his lovers to contemplate the glory of God today? For some of our contemporaries are approved as being the equals of those of the past. Yet I am not calling what is only an opinion of men 'approval', because men are often wrong in what they approve, for they choose people that God has rejected, and reject those whom he has chosen. But those are 'approved' whom the love of eternity inflames through and through, whom the grace of the Holy Spirit inspires to all good. These are marked out because they are adorned with every kind of virtue; because they always rejoice in God's love; and because everything that belongs to vain and worldly pleasure, to the sham honours and the detestable pride of life, their affections tread underfoot. No doubt they are rejected by men – but in the sight of God and his holy angels they are thought magnificent. Their hearts are resolute to endure all

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opposition, nor will they let themselves be blown about by the wind of vanity. And in the end they are carried up to Christ, in sublime holiness, while those who were chosen and 'approved' by men are cast out into damnation, dragged into torment, and punished with the fiends for ever.

CHAPTER 34

The supreme excellence of jubilant song; it cannot be told or recorded; it has no peer; the love of those who sing, and the pride of those who have acquired knowledge.

IT is both understandable and right that the lover of God should be caught up to gaze mentally on things above, and to sing of the love that surges through his soul. There the fire of love blazes fierce and bright, filling him with sweet devotion. His whole being is a hymn, beautiful and fragrant with his Redeemer's sweetness. And as he sings he is led on to utter delight; and with the inner fount of fervour welling up he is taken into the sweet, warm caress of God. The lover is overwhelmed and enriched with the most intense ardour through this unique consolation, and carried on his glorious way. He shines whiter than snow, and glows redder than any rose, for he is alight with God's fire. Arrayed with a clean conscience, he walks in white. He has been taken up, almost as it were in secret, above all others because of the melody that is ever in his heart, and the sweet, persisting richness of his fervour. And not only does he offer in his own person a wholehearted sacrifice as he praises Christ in spiritual music, but he also encourages others to love, so that they hurry to give themselves wholly and devoutly to God. And this, to anyone who loves him and cleaves to him with all his heart, brings joy in their exile. For the delightful taste that the love of Jesus has brought him exceeds the bounds of experience, and I am not adequate to describe even slightly the smallest part of this joy. For who can describe ineffable fervour? Who lay

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bare infinite sweetness? Certainly if I were wanting to speak about this inexpressible joy I would seem to be trying to empty the sea drop by drop, and bit by bit to squeeze it all into a tiny hole in the earth!

Little wonder that I who have scarcely tasted a drop of that excellence am quite unable to find words to tell of the immensity of such eternal sweetness! Small wonder, too, that you with your dulled sensitivity and distracting carnal thoughts are incapable of receiving it, even though you might be wise and clever and always about God's business.

Yet if you really sought to acquire a taste for heavenly things, and studied to be kindled with love for God, there can be no doubt that the same delightful sweetness would flow abundantly into you, and impart its wonderful pleasure wherever it could find a place in your soul. The fuller you are of charity, the greater your capacity, you may reckon, for that joy. Certainly in eternity those will stand closer to God who have loved him more fervently and sweetly here. But they who have no love for God whatever are full of earthly corruption, and so they cling to empty fairy-tales, and look for satisfaction in the enjoyment of outward and visible possessions. They know nothing of those inner blessings whose upward reach is hidden from mortal eyes. Because they wholeheartedly give themselves over to passing comforts, in their pride they lose sight of any glorious future!

In the life to come it is clear that it will be greed that will be exiled, and charity that will reign – contrary to what is held by many today, indeed by nearly everyone. For greed has found its way even into the royal court, and charity, as if it were some sort of traitor, is imprisoned, or banished from the realm. Yet it finds a home in the hearts of the elect. It turns away from the proud; it stays with the humble.

Many pitiful creatures are deceived, thinking they are loving God when they are not. They imagine they can engage in worldly business, and at the same time really enjoy the love of Jesus Christ and his sweetness. They believe they can rush about the world and still be contempla-

tives – something which those who love God fervently and who have entered the contemplative life know to be impossible. But they in their folly and lack of heavenly wisdom, are puffed up with such knowledge as they have acquired, and have a wrong idea of themselves. They do not yet know how to hold on to God with love.

So I look up with longing and cry, '*Save me, God, for your saint is weak.*'¹ The hymn-singing fails, the voice of the songsters falls silent, the fervour of saintly lovers is missing. Everyone is going about his own evil way; the deceit each has conceived in his heart is not prevented from bearing fruit. *They spend their days with vanity, and their years with haste.*² Alas, the fire of lust has swallowed up youth and maid alike, baby and old man.

Good Jesus, how good it is to cleave to you!

*For my soul will not come into their counsels;*³

but I will sit in solitude, and sing to you in my joy.

Your sweetness increases with praising,

so to praise you continually is no hard matter, but rather sweet;

no bitter thing, but something more pleasant by far than any amount of physical and worldly delight.

It is at once delightful and desirable to live and praise you,

for all that exists has been fashioned with such love, and is redolent of such fragrance

– and who can wonder at it?

Once he has been purged of his obscenities and all those thoughts which are not directed to this one thing, the lover, ablaze through these same spiritual caresses, strains with all his might to gaze upon his Beloved. And his shout, excited and bursting out from the core of his longing love, goes up, of course, to his Maker, though to him it seems as if he were shouting from far off. He lifts up that inner voice, which only exists in those who love most fervently, to the utmost of his power...

1. Psalms 12:1.

2. Psalms 78:33.

3. cf. Psalms 1:1.

But here I have to 'give up' because of my inherent stupidity and dullness; I have not the wit to describe this shout or its magnitude, or even the pleasure it gives just to think of it, or feel it, or experience it. Neither now nor in the future will I be able to tell you, because I do not know how to overcome the limitations of my senses; all I want to say is that the shout is the song.

Then where is one who will sing me the music of my songs, the joys of my longing, the fervour of my love, the warmth of my youthful yearning, so that from this fellowship of love and song I might at least search out my inmost being? So that the measure of music for which I was thought worthy might be made known to me? So that I might find myself freed from unhappiness? What I cannot claim for myself, because I have not found what I hope for so eagerly, I might be able to enjoy in the sweet comfort of my friend.

If indeed I thought that that shout and song were always hidden from outward ears – which is actually what I am venturing to say – what would I give to find a man who was experienced in that melody? Having recorded that which was unspoken he could sing to me my joy, and produce those flowing notes and songs which in the Name above all others I have not been ashamed to set before my Beloved. I would love such a one above gold, and none of the precious things we have here in our exile would I deem his equal. For the beauty of virtue would dwell with him, and he would in truth search out the mysteries of love. In short, I would love him as I love my heart, nor would I dream of hiding anything from him. He would reveal to me the song I long to understand, and he would make plain and clear my joyous shout. The more I understood, the fuller would be my exultation, and surely the more fruitful my emulation of him. The fire of love would be shown me, and my joy and song would shine out for all to see. My confused thoughts would then lack no one to put them into praise, nor would I toil to no purpose.

Yet now the fatigues of this deplorable exile press heavily

upon me, and their burdens aggravate and nearly kill me. And though within I am glowing with uncreated warmth, outwardly I appear depressed, skulking in misery, with no light at all!

So, my God, to whom I offer my heartfelt devotion, will you not remember me in your mercy? I am wretched, and I need your mercy. Will you not bring up into your light the longing which so grips me, that in your own good time I may have what I crave? The toil by which I atone for my sin, you will transform into a dwelling of great sweetness, so that where sadness has dwelt melody may now live, and I see in the splendour of his beauty my Beloved and my Desire. Held in his clasp I would praise him for ever, for after him I long.

CHAPTER 35

The meditation of one who longs for his Beloved, and his lack of any companion; the orderly progress of him who comes to the fire of love.

Jesus, when I am in you, and on fire with joy,
and when the heat of love is surging in,
I want to embrace you, the most loving, with my whole
being.

Yet, my Beloved, I am held back from what I long for.
And, too, there are difficulties to be met,
for a vast wilderness bars the way
to stop the lovers' homes from being united.

If only you would send me a companion for my journey
so that the longing could be lightened by his
encouragement,
and the chain of my sighings loosed!
For if that lovely vision of yourself
does not come quickly and release me,
it will press so heavily on your lover
as to force him to leave this prison of flesh,

and by reason of the very greatness of his love
to throw himself down before your Majesty!
In the meantime I would indeed rejoice to hymn you,
and live in happiness with the one you had given me
with much positive and honest talk.
Our very eating, to be sure, would be enjoyed in love,
and in turn we would pour out our loving lays,
until we were released from our visible prison,
brought into our invisible home,
and allotted a place among heaven's folk,
who have loved Christ even as we have.

But, alas, what am I to do? How long have I to wait? To whom shall I flee to enjoy what I am longing for? For I am needy and famished, tortured and afflicted, wounded and wan because my Love is not here; for this immense love torments me, and the hope deferred afflicts my soul. And so the cry of my heart goes up, and in the midst of the heavenly choir there moves my music and my musing, eager to be raised to audience with the Most High. And when it gets there it proclaims its business, and says

'My love, my honey, my harp,
my psalter and song the whole day long!
When are you going to heal my grief?
You, the root of my heart,
when are you coming to receive my spirit
which is always looking for you?
I am wounded to the quick by your fair beauty.
My longing knows no respite,
but builds up more and more.
My present afflictions pierce and oppress me,
so I hasten to you,
for from you only can I hope for solace and healing.
But who meanwhile will show me
the end of my trials and troubles?
And who is going to tell me
about the fullness of my joy,
and the fulfilling of my song,

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so that I get comfort from these things,
and rejoice in my happiness?
And this, moreover, so that I might know
that my own perfecting
and the finish of my misery was at hand?

Then would I burst out with splendid song, and maybe
my voice would soften the severity of my Beloved did he
want to chastise me, or strike me down. He would not mock
the innocent's pain, as little by little he punished him.

And henceforth I could be called happy, and enjoy the
eternal, delightful refreshment of love, freed from all un-
cleanness. And rid of grief I would live in perfect holiness,
pouring out my joyful praise in harmony with the heavenly
symphony – even as I try to do now in my poverty and
hardship.

The warmth of this sweet-sounding love rejoices my
inmost being; the sweet, deep recollection of Jesus en-
trances my mind as it were with music, and much
cheered by this heavenly song I feel nothing of the sweet
poison of those worthless delights which they who flourish
in the flesh find so attractive. No troublesome earthiness
will get hold of me!

You who are the most lovely,
lovable, and beautiful,
remember that it is through you
that I am no longer afraid of any passing power;
and remember, too, that in order to cling closely to you
I have rejected the love
which seduces fools from loving you, my God.
Remember how quickly I fled those fleeting beauties
which captivate men,
and make women, poor things, so wicked.
I have never wanted to indulge
in those youthful, unclean follies
which subject souls freeborn to such foolish servitude.
More, I have never ceased to show you my heart
stricken with longing for yourself.

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And you have kept it safe,
lest it should drain away into lustful wastes,
and you have implanted it
with the remembrance of your Name,
and have opened to its eye
the window of contemplation.
And now at last I have run to you
with my song and devotion.
But not before my heart had kindled
with the fire of love,
and deep within me I had burst into songs of love.
And since these things are ever in your sight
your boundless mercy reminds you
not to leave your lovers in the cold too long,
and so I believe you will ease my misery,
and not turn your face from my longing.
Pain and misery are ever the lot of the body;
but my soul persists in its longing
until you give me what I have been wanting so intensely.
Because of this love my flesh has withered
and become of little worth,
in the midst of so much that is attractive in this life.
And in the same way my soul has languished
until she see you,
for she has been wanting you so vehemently,
longing to be seated in deepest heaven,
and to rest in the fellowship so much desired,
taken up where the angels sing,
to enjoy you in perfection and for ever.
See, my inmost being is in ferment,
and the flame of charity
has consumed the hateful confusion of my heart,
and eliminated the slimy happiness of unclean friend-
ships,
and wiped out the stupid thoughts
which were so odious when one honestly looked at them.
I have genuinely attained a real love,
I who once was asleep in my varied and devious errors,

enveloped in spiritual darkness.
And I have felt the delight of devotion sweetest
where now I most grieve that I once failed.

Listen to me, friends, I beg you lest you be led astray too! These words, and words which in the sight of our Creator are like them, flare up from my love. No one strange to this vast love should dare to handle such things, nor he who is disturbed by tempting, vain, and useless thoughts, nor he whose mind is not surely set on Christ, nor he who loves created things, whose heart does not go wholly out to God, because it feels itself bound by some earthly affection.

On the other hand he is supreme in charity whose heart has sung the love-songs of devotion. Preserved and nourished spiritually, he has no time for outward follies. Indeed, he is wonderfully cheered by these everlasting delights, and by them raises himself to contemplate heavenly things. There he glows with sweetest love, his thirst slaked on his heavenly way by most delightful refreshment. The radiance of his coming happiness is already surrounding and transforming him, so that he eschews all temptation, set as he is on the pinnacle of the contemplative life. And thereafter he triumphs in constant song to the praise of Christ.

CHAPTER 36

The different gifts of the elect; how the saints progressed towards love, by prayer, meditation, loving, enduring hardship, and by hating vice; love comes from God; remembrance of him by the lover is needful; the lover does not fall into carnal temptations as do the imperfect; he is not hurt by the spark of sin, though it persists.

THE chosen of God who have loved him beyond all measure, and whose minds are set on loving him more than anything else, show us in a remarkable way the secret of such love, for they have welcomed the fire of love with a fervour that is above telling and beyond nature, yearning

for their beloved Jesus with indescribable affection. For the lovers of God are endowed with a variety of gifts; some are chosen for action, some for teaching, some for loving. Yet all his saints care for this one thing, and hasten in the same direction, though by different paths. For in the providence of God each one goes on to the Kingdom by way of that virtue to which he is most accustomed. And if the virtue he excels in draws him to cleave more fervently to the sweetness of God's love – it is reckoned to be stronger where there is the greatest peace – assuredly he will come to God, and receive for his prize that eternal, glorious mansion and throne which has been ordained by Christ to be the everlasting possession of those who love most perfectly.

Those lovers who used to sing the glorious songs of love were accustomed to say that he who is chosen primarily to love cares above all that his heart shall never depart from his Beloved, and that the recollection of Jesus may be as music at a feast, sweeter to the taste than honey and the honeycomb.¹ And the longer he exercises himself in spiritual studies the sweeter does Jesus seem. So then he withdraws his mind from silly and sinful thoughts and puts it to wanting his Creator. Everything he brings into Christ to set it in him, the fount of love. To love him only, and find joy in him alone, is his unceasing prayer.

And now there come into his soul sweet desires and wonderful meditations directed to God alone. When he has brooded on them, and given his mind to develop them, they have an unutterable effect on him, and with great delight and spiritual sweetness lead him on to the contemplation of heavenly things, purging his mind from the hunger for worldly comfort. At this time the lover of God wants nothing so much as to be alone, to attend only to the wishes of his Maker. And when he has been well exercised in all this, and is given over to prayer and meditation in great quiet, and when all wickedness and uncleanness have been destroyed, and he takes up his arduous journey with prudence, he will make wonderful progress in the virtue of

1. cf. Ecclesiasticus 49:1.

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eternal love. His desires rise even higher, and with the eyes of his soul he enters into, and sees, the mysteries of heaven.

A fire which his soul had not felt previously now begins to inflame him, and while he is absorbed in these lovely things, begins to warm him, now more intensely, now less so, to the limit permitted the soul by her corruptible body, with its many burdens and troubles.² So the soul, anointed with the sweetness of heaven, and breathing its soft air, longs to set out heavenward, but feels frustrated because she must remain in this mortal flesh. Nonetheless she gladly endures whatever adversity comes her way, for she is resting sweetly in the joy of eternal love. Nothing can take away her happiness and her gladness in Jesus. Indeed the schemings of the devil stop, reduced to impotence, and the deceitful vanity of worldly honour is despised, and the enervating appeal of the flesh is neither looked for nor wanted. And it is these things that are the weapons they use against God's chosen ones, if that by using them without warning and all together at once they might stampede them into wrong – those who live in heaven!³

But they are powerless and rejected, because the holy lover of God in the name of the resolute Christ says, simply and joyfully, '*You are my defender,*⁴ so that those who oppose me, my enemies who attack me maliciously, do not disturb my peace. But *you, too, are my glory,* because I glory in you, not in my own strength, which would not exist if it did not come from you. Rightly indeed is everything referred to you, and nothing to me, for *you lift up my head,* that higher part of my soul, by which with your permission the lower parts are ruled. And you raise my soul to song and to the contemplation of heavenly things, and will not allow her to be cast down into those lower, vile pleasures of the world, or to get involved in them. This is what *head* means, because you have so increased it with the oil of spiritual gladness that it is now enlarged with charity. And *my cup overflows*⁵ signifies a draught of inner sweet-

2. cf. Wisdom 9:15.

4. Psalms 3:3.

3. cf. Philippians 3:20.

5. Psalms 23:5.

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ness, intoxicating my soul with love for my Maker, so that I rest secure, the love of passing things completely put behind me. And so with a sort of sweetness I am led on to glorious eternity, feeling neither earthly pleasure nor distress.'

For in this incomparable, loving sweetness our conscience becomes radiant, for there purity is lasting, and the heart grows delightfully warm. And the mind, amazed at all these gifts, gets more fervent; she does not pause to consider the attractions of our exile here, but embraces more gladly the bitter things of earth rather than the sweet. She is enjoying imperishable delights, and not for a single moment does she cease to cling to the love of Jesus. Her desire is so ardent that you might sooner and more easily turn the world upside down than call her mind away from the love of her Saviour.

She hates everything that is contrary to the love of God, and in her fervour is tireless in doing the things which she sees and knows will please him. Nor will she give this up for whatever pain or grief that seeks to hinder. Quite the reverse: it means that she hastens more earnestly than ever to do the will of God, if for his sake she can find some hardship to endure. She neither thinks nor wants anything save truly to love Christ, and in all things always to do whatever pleases him.

She has got this fiery will from her Beloved through the bounty of God, her mind rich with godly devotion indeed. For he chose her to be such, that she might ever be Christ's perfect lover; that she might be made a vessel of his choosing, filled with the most noble wine of a sweet and heavenly life; that his Name, chosen from the thousands that are, might continue an undying, everlasting memorial, kept ever by her in her inmost heart. By the help of God she will reject everything that hinders love, and will delight wholly in him. The darts of the enemy will not prevail against lovers of this sort.

But she will receive from her Beloved the blessed assurance and the indescribable radiance of her inner sweet-

ness as moment by moment she surrenders her spirit to him. Because there is deep down within her this crying after him, each day she is renewed by her burning, loving devotion, so that nothing that is spiritually foul or corrupt can live in her. All the while her thought continues to be God-directed every wicked suggestion put up by the malice of the enemy is rejected. The fire of love really does dwell in her mind, and it purges every sinful infection that unregenerate lust would put in her way.

And now, set in truth on the topmost height, the affection is so sure of itself that it is always on the look-out for the least carelessness, to cast it away as if it too were a pestilential enemy. While it lives it never lets go its vigilance and fear. For the better a man is, and the more acceptable to God, so much the more does he burn with charity. And so he is stirred by the same prompting of love to perform with ever greater urgency and vigour those things which are compatible with his state and life. Thus he is always keen not to lose even for a single moment the recollection of his Beloved and Sweetest, so that not only in theory but in fact he may possess him and think of him whom he knows he is bidden to love with all his heart. He is terribly afraid of being drawn into even the smallest things that offend him. For not only does he strain to fulfil what he has been bidden to do, to love Christ with all his mind – and he strives with all his longing! – but he is also seized with a great delight, so that he never forgets his Beloved, nor wants to be separated from his love by inclining to passing delights, even if it were possible for him to do what he wanted without penalty. He knows by experience that spiritual pleasures are sweeter than physical loves. It would be very surprising if he lapsed into such absurdity; if by spurning his spiritual gifts he prepared to enjoy what was false and fantastic; or if he chose to get engrossed in that carnal beauty hated by every saintly lover of God.

It is not surprising, however, that the 'lust of the flesh' has deceived some in its evil way. Beauty paraded and exposed has been known to draw even the wise and devout into her

illicit embrace. But this can only happen if they are not perfectly grounded in charity, or really cleaving to eternal love. So when they are attacked by temptation, though they have seemed to be making progress, before they reach the summit they collapse in ruins.

But there can be no doubt that the true lover of the everlasting never loses his peace in the midst of temptations. He gains his crown in this warfare, while others less stable are slain. The beloved of Christ never fail to cut down whatever stands in their way, even while they are pouring out their hearts to their Maker. They are not in the least like those who in the highway of love are unsteady on their feet, and who if they are cast down from their intended ascent just give up. They for their part prepare for eternal joys without faltering, and go unshakable from the first. Nourished and taught as they are by the sweetness of heaven's savour, they brighten those outside by the example of their sanctity, and among themselves they burn sweetly with the fire of love. The errors of carnal affection they will mortify by their passion for purity, though no one in this life can wholly quench unregenerate lust, or be so perfect as to live in the flesh without sinning. It is not in this life, through this means or that, that a man is healed and made perfect, but only in the fatherland. There glory strengthens his capacity to behold God, and everlasting peace conquers grief and pain. No corruption remains to worry over when eternal bliss crowns the triumph!

Meanwhile the mind remains alert, longing to keep its fire of love constant, and striving to escape the pleasures of visible vanity. And it will persist in this purpose until death. But in death both the urge to sin and the natural longing perish. So each elect soul will seek to develop his love, and strengthened and armed against this sinful urge by heavenly grace and self-control, will throw himself into the glorious struggle, and fight to the end against everything opposed to the lovers of God.

Hence it happens that while the fighter is overcoming – and is not being overcome – he is elated with a wonderful

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joy, which delights his whole being. He knows himself inspired by this mysterious love, and in its sweet warmth rises higher still, to contemplate with joy and to pour out sweet praise upon his Lover. Meantime his carnal urges hasten to their death and to complete extinction.

Some would add to this and say that there sounds in their heart something sweet and tuneful, by which the thirsty soul is ravished and gladdened. But they do not explain, as far as I can make out, how it is that their thought is changed into song, or how the melody remains in the mind, or with what joy it is that he sings his prayers.

CHAPTER 37

The true lover loves only his Beloved; two kinds of rapture; outside the body, and by raising the mind to God; the excellence of this second way.

THE fervour of the spirit whose longing is stimulated by the beauty of God, displays a pure love: he wants nothing but his Beloved, and every other affection has been completely extinguished. So now his mind is freely borne to his sweet love, and the bond between their two wills is strengthened and made firm. Nothing is able now to hinder the lover from his purpose, or to make him have second thoughts, so that, loving and supremely happy, he can at last achieve his desire, and with every obstacle gone, run as fast as he can into his Love's arms.

Among all the delights he is enjoying, he is now aware of a heavenly secret infused into his sweet love, and known only by himself. And he has about him that honeyed balm which so thrills the joyful lovers of Jesus and makes them in their happiness hurry ever faster to those heavenly seats where they are to enjoy the glory of their Creator for ever. Even as they gaze at the things of heaven they are pining for this. On fire within, their inmost being rejoices to be illumined with such delightful splendours. It feels as if they

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are being carried away with most pleasurable love, absorbed in wonderful joy and song.

In this way their thinking is made sweet as they serve him, because whether studying, or meditating on Scripture, or writing, or expounding, their thoughts are continually with their Beloved, yet it never lessens their normal measure of praise. What indeed might be thought remarkable is the fact that one mind can perform two things at once, and attend to each at one and the same time; when, for example, it offers and sings its loving praises to Jesus, mentally rejoicing, and while this is going on, can understand what is written in books – and neither conflicts with the other!

But this grace is not granted to all and sundry, but only to the holy soul filled with the utmost holiness, in whom shines love in all its splendour, and in whom hymns of love, inspired by Christ, spontaneously arise. She becomes, so to speak, an instrument of praise in the sight of her Maker, vibrant with unspeakable joy. The soul knows now the mystery of love, and rises up with a great shout and intense delight to her Beloved. Her insight is most acute, her awareness most sensitive; it is not dissipated in this worldly thing or that, but everything is integrated and secured in God, whom she serves with her pure conscience, and her splendid mind; her God whom she is pledged to love, and to whom surrender.

The purer the love of the lover, the closer is God's presence to him; the purer his rejoicing in God, the more abundant his experience of God's goodness, kindness, and sweetness. For God likes to infuse these very things into all who love him, and quietly to enter godly hearts to their incomparable delight. Love is truly pure when it is not diluted with a wish for anything else, however little; when there is not the least inclination to seek pleasure in the enjoyment of physical beauty. For the lover finds that his mind, already keen, is made clean as well, and completely fixed in its overruling passion for eternity. Free in the Spirit, he looks ever at *the things that are above*¹ with the in-

1. Colossians 3:1.

tensity of one rapt away from the beauty of all other things, to which he will not turn, and which he cannot love.

It is clear that 'enraptured' can be understood in two ways. One way is when a man is rapt out of all physical sensation, so that at the time of his rapture his body quite clearly feels nothing and does nothing. He is not dead, of course, but alive, because his soul is still vitalizing his body. Sometimes the saints and the elect have been enraptured in this fashion, for their own good, and for others' enlightenment. Thus Paul was rapt to the *third heaven*.² Even sinners sometimes experience raptures of this sort in visions, and see the joy of the good, or the punishment of the wicked; this is for their correction or for that of others. We have read this of many.

But 'rapture' in the other sense comes through the lifting up of the mind to God in contemplation; all perfect lovers of God go this way – and only those who love God. It is as accurate to call this 'rapture' as the other, because there is a definite seizure, a something outside nature. For surely it is supernatural that out of some vile sinner can be made a child of God, full of spiritual joy and borne up to God. This second way is most desirable and lovely. For Christ was always contemplating God, yet it never detracted from his self-possession.

So one way is to be rapt by love while retaining physical sensation, and the other is to be rapt out of the senses by some vision, terrifying or soothing. I think that the rapture of love is better, and more rewarding. For to have the privilege of seeing heavenly things is a matter of God's gift, not our merit.

'Rapt', too, can be used of those who are wholly and perfectly subservient to their Saviour's wishes; they deservedly rise up to the heights of contemplation. Their illumination is that of God's uncreated wisdom, and their desert is to feel the heat of that indescribable light with whose beauty they are enraptured.

This also happens when a devout soul has every thought

2. 2 Corinthians 12:2.

controlled by her love for God; when all the waywardness of her mind has been settled, and she no longer wavers or hesitates; when all her love has led to one thing, and with great ardour she yearns for Christ, reaching out to him and meaning him – for all the world as if there only existed these two, Christ and her loving soul. Bound indissolubly to him in love and in ecstasy of mind, she is off and away, surmounting every physical barrier to drink deep from the chalice of heaven, which is wonderful beyond belief. She could never have attained this had not the grace of God rapt her from her weak desires, and planted her on the spiritual heights where, not surprisingly, she receives the gifts of grace.

So when she consciously considers only those things that are divine and heavenly, with a heart now free and unshakable she finds her mind swept away and rapt to heaven, far above all material, visible things. Now she is genuinely on the point of receiving and feeling in herself the heat of love, and is about to dissolve into a song of honeyed sweetness. For this is the consequence when one is rapt and chosen. This is why rapture is such a great and marvellous thing, and, as it seems to me, superior to everything else we do in life: it is reckoned to be the certain foretaste of everlasting sweetness. It surpasses, unless I am mistaken, all other gifts in this earthly pilgrimage which God bestows on the saints by way of reward. In some respect they deserve their higher place in heaven, because in this life they have loved God with greater ardour and quietness. (The greatest quiet is necessary to procure and preserve such love, because if there is too much movement, unsettlement, or mental instability, it cannot be received or retained.) Therefore when one is chosen and raised up for this he lives full of great joy and virtue and he dies in sweet assurance. After this life he will be even more glorious, even nearer to God, in the midst of choirs of angels.

Meanwhile he has this delight, warmth, and song which I touched on at some length earlier, and through them he serves God, and loving God he clings close to him, so as

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never to be parted. But since this corruptible body bears heavily on the soul, and our earthly dwelling hinders the mind in its much thinking, he cannot always rejoice with the same ease, nor does he always sing with the same clarity and consistency. For sometimes his soul feels warmth and sweetness to be stronger, and then she finds it difficult to sing. Sometimes indeed when she would sing she is rapt with wonderful sweetness and fluency; yet when the warmth is felt to be less she will often fly off into song with the greatest pleasure, and, in ecstasy, she knows that the heat and sweetness are with her in truth. Yet there is never heat without delight, though sometimes it can be without song, for physical singing or noise can hinder it and drive it back into thought.

But in the solitude they meet more openly, for there the Beloved speaks to the heart. It is very much like the bashful lover who will not embrace his girl in public, or even greet her as a friend, but behaves as though she is like anybody else – even as if she were a stranger!

The devout soul who has definitely put away all distracting things, and whose heartfelt desire is only to enjoy the delights of Christ, and who yearns fervently for him, comes soon to the loveliest joy. Melody pours out from him, bringing wonderful pleasure to his soul, which she takes as a sign that from now on she will not be able normally to endure any worldly sound. For this music is spiritual music, unknown to those who are taken up with worldly affairs, lawful or otherwise. And no one has ever known it but he who has striven to have time only for God.

CHAPTER 38

The desire of the lover for God is explained; the love of the world is shown to be detestable by many examples; the remembrance of God does not last long in those who love the world.

No one can untie the knot
by which I bind your love to me, sweet Jesus.
I am seeking the treasure I long for,
but all I can find is longing,
because I never stop thirsting for you!
Yet like the wind my sorrow vanishes,
for my reward is this melody inaudible to human ear.
My inner being is turned into a song wonderfully sweet,
and because of this love I want to die.
Whenever this occurs, and these things
take hold of me and refresh me,
then the size of your gifts dazzles and delights me,
and love's approach tortures me with joy.

But still I lack those things which show the Beloved to the one who longs for him. And this wounds me, and fills me with longing, but gives no ease at all; rather it increases it, because with my growing love my longing increases too. *My life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing*¹ because I am parted from my Beloved, because my desire to die is not satisfied, because the remedy for my wretchedness is still not here. I rise up and cry, *Woe to me that my exile is prolonged*.² Love it is that tortures me, love that delights me. It tortures, because what is loved so much is not immediately granted me; yet it delights, because it refreshes me with hope, and infuses indescribable comfort through its very heat.

For a mighty longing develops when there is in the soul through its joy and love the song of songs, and the fierce

1. Psalms 31:10.

2. Psalms 120:5.