

not sent out on errands, but attend closely to God. Similarly the masters of contemplative love give themselves to the things of God, and not to lording it over people. Such matters are reserved for those more concerned for that kind of activity, but less interested in spiritual delight.

Each of God's chosen has his fore-appointed place. That one may have been chosen for advancement, while this is striving to surrender himself wholly to God; God within him is drawing him, and so everything outside is ignored. Such folk are holy indeed, though men in general rate them pretty low, since they rarely go out of their way to do miracles: they prefer rather to remain in interior solitude.

And there are those who quite properly give themselves to serve God in other people, and who control those under them with sensitivity.

Again to others who live lives of unsuspected discipline there are sometimes granted – and made known – 'signs', even before they die; or it may be after death when perhaps they themselves for some period are enduring the sharp afflictions of purgatory! Not every saint does, or has done, a miracle before his death or after; nor, on the other hand, does every reprobate lack one! The judgement of God is hidden indeed. Evil men become worse when they see miracles wrought by sinners; on the other hand, the goodness of those who hold lightly to the things which can be indifferently good or bad increases more and more in the love of their Maker. Admittedly some evil men have done works that are good, but from them they have looked for the praise of men, not of God. When they die, these things die too, for they have had what they were wanting here on earth. It often happens that those whose goodness is second-rate and less than perfect work miracles, but for the most part it is the outstanding ones who now rest wholly in the heavenly places before the Face of God, having their reward amongst the great angelic choirs. This lies behind the special dignity attaching to the Feast of St Michael who is not generally reckoned to belong to one of the top orders of

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angels. So there are certain people who, though they are converted to God and are penitent and have forsaken the affairs of the world, rejoice in the thought that after death their name may be honoured by those who follow them. A faithful servant of Christ, of course, pays no attention to such matters lest he lose all he is working for.

Things common to good and evil alike are not to be sought by God's holy ones, unless it means that charity and spiritual virtues are being planted in our hearts. For these not only keep the soul from the corruption of sin but, at the Judgement, will transform the body too into something for ever memorable. Things done here on earth soon perish, but there they persist for ever – in honour or in confusion! Men of action and rank, even if they are outstanding for their virtue or knowledge, should always put contemplatives before themselves, reckoning them to be their superiors before God, and admitting that they themselves are not capable of contemplation unless, maybe, God's grace should inspire them to it.

CHAPTER 4

The difference between God's lovers and the world's; their rewards.

A HUMAN soul cannot know the fire of eternal love unless first he has completely cut adrift from worldly vanity of every kind. There must be a serious intention to study heavenly things, to long continually for the love of God, and to give every creature its due meed of affection. For if it is for God's sake that we love everything, we love God in it rather than the thing itself. And so we rejoice, not in it but in God – in whom, indeed, we shall glory and rejoice for ever. But evil men are out to enjoy this present world, and they make it the object of their love; they are always seeking things to do with worldly pleasure. What greater folly, more pitiful and damning, can anyone show than to cling

to things which are by their very nature passing and decaying?

For God the Holy Trinity is to be loved for himself alone. To the triune God let us give our whole mind: let us strive to relate all our thinking to him as its term: that he may be glorified in us for ever and ever. Our very selves, and all those others whom we love, we love for him alone.

The sinner lies who says he loves God, and yet has no qualms about serving sin. For everyone who loves God is free, and in no servitude to sin. For such a man controls himself, and is steadfast in the serving of righteousness. It is when we love earthly things and earthly comforts for their own sake that we show clearly that we are not loving God. If in this way we make creatures our delight we are to be reckoned not as his servants but as his enemies. We are setting things above their Creator, and caring nothing for the desire and pursuit of things eternal. Surely it is a dreadful moment for the soul (and a sign of everlasting perdition!) when a man surrenders himself wholly to the world, and deliberately gives himself over to the lust of the flesh, and error of every kind. Small wonder that the poor wretch's destruction begins while he is living with his pleasures. While he is thinking about wallowing in his lusts, he is hurrying on to everlasting punishment in hell!

Let no one then dare presume, or boast about his prowess; further, let him not defend himself when contempt and insults and obloquy are heaped upon him. He must not return an evil word for evil, but accept everything with equanimity: praise and insult alike. If in fact we do behave like this we shall rejoice in Christ for ever – it being understood of course that we are loving him here all the time and ardently. Our love for him, rooted in our hearts and steadfast, changes us into his own likeness, and with its fiery love feeds into our minds a glory of another sort, one which is divine.

For his love is a fire which sets our hearts aflame so that they glow and burn; and it purges them from all the foulness of sin. This fire blazes in his chosen ones, and makes

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them (in mind at least) look heavenwards, and to long ceaselessly for the release of death. Meanwhile, so long as there exists a possibility of our sinning, let us set our minds to flee from worldly prosperity, and cheerfully put up with hardship. The evil mind is perishing even in the midst of its joys; it is destroying itself with attractive poison as it searches for happiness in created things. We must try to avoid this contagion by maintaining our appetite for the spiritual nourishment that is reserved in heaven for fiery lovers.

Thus, with Christ's consent, let us find consolation in the songs of love, and take our delight in the sweetness of devotion. In the meantime the wicked are slumbering in appalling darkness and, filled with their sins, are going down into punishment. It does not seem the least surprising that a mortal man should be seized with such love for God, because in his secret heart he feels no other consolation than that which heaven gives. Like the notes of an organ he rises up to achieve his high and manifest desire, to contemplate God. What others intend to his hurt, he turns to glory, so that his soul already seems quite impervious to suffering: not even the fear of death can disturb him, nor anything whatever shake him out of his poise. For now he is moved by pressing love, and because his mind is constantly on Jesus he quickly discerns his own weaknesses, corrects them, and avoids them. So he consistently practises righteousness until such time as he is led up to his God, to sit with the heaven-born on an everlasting throne. This is the reason why he stands with a clear conscience, unwavering, unaffected by worldly depression, and never carried away by vainglory.

But those who persistently practise uncleanness cannot know any love for Christ, for what fires them is carnal lust. They cannot display the devotion which is God's due: they are firmly earthbound by the very weight of their desires. Consequently they are not destined to enjoy the delights of Paradise, for they persist in their perverse ways till they die. Quite rightly there is no mitigation of their grief, nor any

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alleviation of the pain of damnation: of their own free will they made sensual pleasure their good, and for a love that deceived they wantonly lost the love of their eternal Lover. So in everlasting punishment they will assuredly repent of their ever having sinned; yet they will never be purged by such suffering, but will burn in everlasting fire with none to comfort them.

CHAPTER 5

Why one must heed divine love rather than knowledge or argument.

OUT of all the various things that clamour for our attention, let us make it our prime concern to love God rather than to acquire knowledge or to engage in dialogue. For it is love that delights the soul and sweetens the conscience, because it draws it away from lesser pleasures and from the pursuit of one's own glory. *Knowledge without love does not edify*¹ or contribute to our eternal salvation; it merely *puffs up* to our own dreadful loss. So our spirit must be strong to undertake hard tasks for God's sake, its wisdom spiced with heaven, not the world. It must long to be enlightened with the wisdom of eternity, and glow with that lovely heat which urges us to long for and love the Maker himself; a heat which empowers us to spurn with our whole being everything merely transient. With regard to such things let a man consider it his greatest consolation that they do not endure, whereas he is one who has no present dwelling-place, but is always *seeking one to come, not built with hands*.² So he cries, *To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*.³

Surely the man who refuses to yield to base pleasure is the man who loves God. A man's distance from the love of

1. 1 Corinthians 8:1.

2. cf. Hebrews 11:10, 16.

3. Philippians 1:21.

Chapter 5

Christ is proportionate to his love of the world. If you really love God your actions will show it, because by definition one can never love him, and at the same time toy with evil desires. Therefore I am quite prepared to say to all my fellow exiles, "Those who have never loved the Founder of the universe will be cast into unending darkness. The experience of the everlasting heat of hell-fire is reserved for those who do not want to love their Redeemer. What is more, they will be excluded from the company of those who praise the love of their Maker. Great their lament to find themselves expelled from those who know Jesus to be their joy and their jubilation! No splendour or coronation glory for these! They deliberately chose to linger in worldly luxury rather than to endure the penance and hardship which would purge their sins, and bring them, now completely righteous, into the presence of the Foundation of all good. But in this vale of tears (indeed, it is not so much a place of joy as of toil!) their joy was to tread the broad and slippery way; so now they languish in torments unbroken."

For sinners cannot but grieve when they see the poor borne up to unending peace, there to enjoy and to delight in God the life-giver, there to behold the face of Christ. Made beautiful through their virtues, these have blossomed into happy and spiritual fervour; yet they never knew much comfort in this world, nor shared in the pride of those intoxicated with their own wisdom! Rather the reverse; they have had to endure the opposition of the wicked, but every temptation has been overcome. Now they are safe beside the throne of the Trinity, at peace. The poison in their system has been truly eliminated, so now they praise the life of the spirit both sincerely and gladly. Their youthful antics and worldly folly they admit to merit stern rebuke. Their thoughts are ever rising in loving song to their Maker.

Therefore all those who are filled with love and joy, the seekers after inextinguishable heat, unite to sing in one glorious choir of rich melody; and now this company of friends has the shade of heaven to protect them against the

scorching of lustful flattery and ill will. The very fervour of their sweet love ravishes them with the sight of their Beloved. Flowering through this loving flame into all virtue they rejoice in their Maker. Their mind is changed and passes into lasting melody. From now on their meditations become song. Melancholy has been driven out of the mansion of their spirit, and it now resounds with wondrous melody. The one-time torment of their soul has vanished, and now in glowing health they dwell in the heights of harmony, in the wonderful rhythm of sweet and melodious meditation.

When the time comes for them to leave this irksome, sick world, without a shadow of doubt they are borne up to God. Grief is no more, and there they sit among the seraphim. And it is all because they were completely absorbed in supreme love, an indescribable love that blazed in their souls, and made them love God with such sweetness and devotion. Fundamentally they knew nothing within themselves but spiritual heat, heavenly song, divine sweetness.

It follows that such people die without regret, and thereafter rise with joyful steps to the highest stage of eternal glory, their life crowned with the open vision of their Maker. Their song is absorbed into the most splendid praise, and their longing for him who rules all things is even more intense. And since they now behold openly the Face of Truth and are saturated with the sweetness of deity, it will occasion no surprise if they experience still greater wonders. When the bodies of the saints, now for a while held in the grasp of the earth, are raised from their graves and join up with their souls for the Last Judgement, they will stand out among the people, and will judge those to be condemned, and will make clear that even those who were only averagely good have been blessed by following after blessedness. And when the General Judgement is done they will be borne away to everlasting praise, and ascend with Christ to the utmost glory, and enjoy the vision of God for ever. From which we gather that everlasting sweetness completely fills their minds, and binds them now and hereafter with the indissoluble claim of love.

Chapter 6

So it behoves us to make sure that the love of Christ is in us, and burning. This, rather than that we should indulge in futile discussion! For it is when our minds are giving way to unbridled curiosity that we lose the sweetness and delight of heaven. Nowadays too many are consumed with a desire for knowledge rather than for love, so that they scarcely know what love is or what is its delight. Yet all their study should have been directed to this end, so that they might be consumed with the love of God as well. Shame on them! An old woman can be more expert in the love of God – and less worldly too – than your theologian with his useless studying. He does it for vanity, to get a reputation, to obtain stipends and official positions. Such a fellow ought to be entitled not 'Doctor' but 'Fool'!

CHAPTER 6

About heretics, and faith in the Trinity.

TRUTH in plenty, whole and holy, reveals itself to those who look for it: 'closed books' are open to the sons of God. Then where does the treachery of the heretic spring from if not from his undisciplined and chaotic mind, blinded by its desire for its own reputation? For heretics never cease opposing God in their hearts by their insensate greed. Moreover when the Christian religion would cut away what is opposed to it, and make all agree in the unity of faith and love, they will openly resist truth by manifold argument. It is ever the way of the heretical and proud to ventilate new ideas and to question whatever the Church has asserted. Things that the faithful Christian holds dear they take pleasure in decrying.

We reject their errors, and assert the Son of God to be coeternal with the Father; this we must always believe and understand, for unless the Father had begotten him from all eternity, essentially he would not have been wholly God. For if there had been a time when God the Father had had

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no Son, we would not be overstating the case if we said that at such time God was less than he became afterwards when he had begotten him! And that no right thinking man can admit. The unchanging God begets unchanging God, and has begotten him from eternity: nor does he cease to beget him today. For neither can the substance of the Only Begotten sometimes be described as 'begotten', nor can the substance of the Begetter ever be known apart from the Only Begotten born of himself. Indeed the beginning of Deity cannot be discovered either by reason or intellect – because there was no beginning! Similarly the Son's Begetter abides unchangeably in his eternal deity. In fact when in infinity the wonder and the splendour of God Almighty shines out clearly, whatever is human silliness aspiring to when it asserts it knows the mystery inaudible to mortal ears? He knows God perfectly who recognizes that he is beyond our comprehension and capacity. For nothing can be known perfectly if we do not know its origin and its purpose. In this present life *we know in part and we understand in part*,¹ but in the future life we shall know perfectly and completely, as much as created beings can, and profitably may. But he who wants information about our everlasting Maker beyond what is useful undoubtedly falls short of perfect understanding like a silly fool. You ask, 'What is God?' and I answer briefly, 'He is such that no greater or better exists or can exist.' If you are wanting to know in the strict sense of the words what God is, my reply is that you will find no answer to your question. I do not know; the angels are ignorant; the archangels have not heard! How is it then that *you* would know what is basically unknowable and incommunicable? God himself, almighty as he is, is unable to teach you what he is. For if you knew what God is you would be as wise as God, which is something quite beyond you, a creature. Stay then where you are, and do not bother about going higher, because if you are wanting to know what God is you are wanting to be as God – and that is all wrong! Face the fact: only God can know

1. 1 Corinthians 13:12.

Chapter 7

himself. It is not weakness on God's part that he is unable to teach you what he is in himself, but is due to his incredible glory, because he cannot possibly be other than he is. If it were really possible for him to be fully known, he would not be incomprehensible. It is enough for you to know *that* God is; to want to know *what* he is will only hinder.

It is a praiseworthy thing to be perfectly acquainted with God, that is, to recognize that he is incomprehensible; and recognizing him thus, to love him; and loving him, to rejoice in him; and rejoicing, to rest in him; and in inner quiet to arrive at eternal rest. Do not worry if I have said that you should be perfectly acquainted with God, and yet have said that you cannot know God. You may object that the Psalmist says, *Continue your loving kindness unto them that know you*.² But if you are not to err you must understand the words, 'unto them that know you' in this way: they mean 'unto those who know that you are a God who is to be loved, praised, adored, glorified; the sole Creator of everything, above all, through all, and in all, blessed for ever and ever. Amen.'

CHAPTER 7

In matters of divinity we ought not to talk of three Lords or three Natures, because we speak of three Persons; a man is great or small according to his love.

IF people were to say, mistakenly, that there were three beings, because they speak of three Persons in the Trinity, why should they not go on to call them three Gods, since each is with God, is God, and has the nature of God? We say the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. In the same way, the Father has the nature of God, and so has the Son, and so has the Holy Spirit. Yet we are not speaking of three Gods or three natures, but of one God who is three Persons and one nature, and this we be-

2. Psalms 36:10.

by all the other trials of this world, in soul he is being cleansed from earthly filth and dirt. The poor, to be sure, will not find their future and eternal rest any less sweet for having had to put up with their present hardship. It will be said of them, *We have been glad of the days in which you have plagued us, and for the years in which we have seen evil.*³ So welcome joyfully the bearing of poverty, and set your mind to endure cheerfully all the other trials. Patience in tribulation will make you worthy to attain eternal peace and glory.

CHAPTER 8

A perfect lover of God would rather incur great punishment than offend God by a single sin; why God afflicts the righteous with the ungodly.

OUT of this vast fire of love such beauty and virtue is developed in the soul that the righteous man would choose to face the utmost punishment rather than for one moment offend God – though he would also know that by penitence he might rise again, and subsequently be more pleasing to God, and more holy too. Because the perfect man, whoever he is, knows this: nothing is dearer to God than innocence, nothing more pleasing than good will. And if we are really to love God, we ought to be willing to lose the great reward of heaven rather than to commit a single sin however venial. Supreme righteousness asks no reward for being righteous, but only for the friendship of God, and that because he is what he is. It is always better to endure hardship, than even for a moment to be consciously and deliberately enticed away from righteousness.

It is clear that those who love Christ with such fervour as never to want to sin again, not only will be free from punishment, but will rejoice for ever with the angel hosts.

3. Psalms 90:15.

Chapter 8

But those who give themselves up to evil doing, who depend on filth and carnal pleasure for their enjoyment – they consider them important and desirable, and pretend they are essential – in one fell swoop will both lose the good (*sic*) they love, and gain the evil they did not bargain for!

But almost certainly someone is going to ask why does God Almighty chastise the righteous and the ungodly alike? You will have noticed that when men are threshing, they flail chaff as well as grain. When they are winnowing they throw the chaff out, but the grain is carefully collected for human consumption. If we were all to live good lives, no doubt we should all live in peace and quiet without discord or war. But because evil folk are many, and the good are few, many evil things result; and evil has to be punished. Evil things happen to good men of course because they are involved with evil till they die. The righteous, in order to prevent this sinful tendency coming to a head, are 'instructed' by the rod of their loving Father to accept their present easy discipline, and thereby escape future tribulation. So if you yourself are going through persecution or wretchedness or misery, you are experiencing what is exactly right for your present circumstances. For are you not in fact in a 'vale of tribulation'? How can you then be wanting to rejoice in what after all is a prison, to flourish greatly in what is our exile, to travel trouble-free throughout the whole length of our journey? Let us remember that Christ and his apostles suffered, and you are wanting to go from one joy to another. It just cannot be done! For either the fire of divine love will burn up the canker of our sins in this life here, purifying our souls to be fit to fly up to God, or after this life the flames of purgatory will torment these same souls. If they are to escape hell, or if, indeed, there is not love strong enough to burn us up wholly, it will be essential for us to be cleansed by tribulation, sickness, and grief.

Further, we know this – and there is no doubt about it – that no young man who is surrounded by feminine beauty and flattery and sweet nothings and enervating luxury can possibly be holy, unless it is through grace, great and ex-

ceptional. So many and such like things are asking for trouble, and all too often bring a holy man down. I reckon it a major miracle when a man through God's grace and a love for Christ spurns these allurements completely, and out of the midst of them all (which war against his soul, however pleasant they be to his flesh), rises like a man to the utmost heights of heavenly contemplation. There is no doubt that he is more holy as a result of all this, and inwardly much richer through the comfort brought him by his love of God. If he was thrown into the fire of hell he would not burn! For he has completely extinguished the seductions and delights of life which come to him from outside. It is not surprising, even if it is unusual, that Christ works thus in some of his beloved. It is said of such *He has spread a cloud*¹ (obviously a cloud of divine grace) *for a covering* (from carnal lust, by the fire of everlasting love) *and fire to give light* (within their mind) *in the night* (of this life); and all this lest they should be taken captive by the attraction of empty beauty. But Christ's love burns in them with such sweetness that they deem every carnal, illicit pleasure the most appalling filth, and trample it down.

Therefore you are not to touch these slippery things which are unlawful for you either to want or to have. Remember that you are to discipline your hands, your tongue, your appetite, and not be enticed by women. Maybe incitement to soft living is wrapped up with being a man or a woman – and hot food and drink by their very warmth inflame the flesh unduly! Men are ever fashioning comfort for their bodies, and destruction for their souls. These must be eschewed by the chaste.

1. Psalms 105:39.

CHAPTER 9

In adversity God is to be praised and loved; good men are pleasant and humble.

IF temporal honour can be destroyed by shame, and earthly glory finished by confusion, it seems to be undoubted that an insult is better than honour, confusion than success, grief than glory. It is by these latter things that a man often enough lapses into vainglory. Yet if he habitually faced the former with patience he would learn humility in this life here, and escape punishment in the life to come, because God does not punish the just twice. More, he would be crowned in splendour because the patience of the poor will not ultimately perish.

These are the things that belong to holiness: first, never to think, say, or do what displeases God and, then, to think, say, and do what does please him! Do this as well as you know how, so as not to cause offence, and do not pretend to a holiness that is not yours. A man is a fool if he is always wanting to appear holy, just as a good man would be abnormal if he wanted to seem bad. There are some things which looked at by themselves are neither good nor bad; which in their natural state are worth neither praise nor blame. The doing of such things does not displease God any more than does their omission. We can see, hear, smell, feel or touch them, and be no better off – or worse either. All sin, however, shows a contempt of God, or is done to hurt one's neighbour, or to harm oneself. But many human matters are none of these things. All the same, to be despised or to be made a fool of in front of others helps a man rise to the joy of the angels!

Good Jesus, scourge me, wound me, slay me, burn me;
do with me here and now whatever in your goodness
you decide;