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On Abbatial Ministry

What Kind of Man the Abbot ought to be. *An abbot who is worthy to rule over the monastery ought always to remember what he is called, and correspond to his name by his works. For he is believed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery, since he is called by His name, as the Apostle says, "You have received the spirit of the adoption of sons, in which we cry: Abba, Father."*

-If it is true, according to Aristotle, that "those who dwell in the State take after their rulers," it is also true of those who dwell in the monastery. If the monks are to re-live Christ, they must have someone at their head who will re-present Him.

-The abbot's whole duty is that of reproducing Christ's attitude towards His disciples, and therefore of exercising authority in Christ's name. St. Benedict does not say that the abbot is required to be outstandingly clever, able, strong-minded, or even experienced in the direction of souls. The first requirement is a lively sense of his responsibility before God.

-Insight into the characters of his monks, and gentleness in handling of them, can be counted upon to the extent that the abbot relies upon Christ whose place he takes. So long as he does not rule in his own right, but only as one who has to render an account of the power that has been entrusted to him, he can have the fullest confidence in the support of grace.

-The first degree of humility is not for subjects only but is also applicable for the abbot. The abbot has to "keep the fear of God always before his eyes, avoiding all forgetfulness; and that he be ever mindful of all that God has commanded and that those who despise God will be consumed in hell...keeping himself at all times from sin and vice, whether of the thoughts, the tongue, the eyes, the hands, the feet, or his own will; let him thus hasten to cut off the desires of the flesh."

-Though the power to govern comes as the result of election, it does not come from those who have elected. It is vested in an individual, but it does not originate in an individual. To look at an abbot's authority in terms either of a majority vote or of personal gift for rule would be to miss the essential quality of religious obedience. The essential quality is faith.

-For the abbot's position to be understood, both by himself and by his subjects, there must be faith in the dependent authority of man as related

to the independent authority of God. Thus the abbot must know that his acts are to be referred beyond the chapter that elected him, and his monks must know that the terms of their obedience have not been dictated by themselves.

-Without such a supernatural view of monastic authority you may get government by natural leadership, but you will get neither spiritual responsibility on the part of the superior nor spiritual submission on the part of the subjects.

-That in his own life St. Benedict acted on this principle, and demanded its recognition from the monks whom he ruled, is seen from an incident recorded by St. Gregory the Great in the *Dialogues*. A monk who in the world had belonged to a family of rank was serving his turn in waiting upon the abbot. In the course of performing this duty, which involved holding a light while St. Benedict was eating his evening meal, he began "secretly to indulge such thought as these: Who is this man whom I am waiting on...who am I to be doing such service?" St. Benedict, supernaturally made aware of the monk's state of mind, severely warned the brother of his danger and further used the occasion to drive home to the community the necessity of seeing one's abbot the vicegerent of Christ. Whatever the social status of one's family in the world, considerations of class must lose themselves in the supernatural status of one's family in religion.

-Precisely because the community is a family and not merely an organization, it must be ruled by one who is a father and not merely a president. In the course of the Rule the abbot is variously called father, shepherd, physician, teacher, master, steward. To choose such names is as much to describe the character of the office. The term "father" and "shepherd" occur more often than the rest, so if the monks are to think of themselves as belonging to a household and a flock, they are at least meant to be spared the fear inspired by an autocrat and the coldness occasioned by the figurehead.

-If parenthood is to have any real meaning, the father must not only concern himself with the affairs of the household but concern himself in a spirit of sympathy and solicitude. For the running of the house there are the prior, the cellarer or bursar, the deans, the guestmaster, and the other officials. If the abbot's time is wholly taken up with the work of administration, he will, in putting material needs before spiritual, lose touch with the most significant element in the lives of those whom he rules.

-A religious superior may explain his ignorance of his subject's interior lives by saying that he is constantly having to care for their exterior lives. It is an explanation but not an excuse. St. Benedict makes it abundantly clear that an abbot's first charge before God is the care of souls. Again the principle find support in the analogy of the family: the parent may not neglect the moral welfare of the children on the grounds that less important matters have to be settled first, and that these less important matters excuse from the obligation.

-It is the responsibility of the father to secure the harmony of the household entrusted to his care by the Father of all. There can be harmony where there is a lack of due balance. Where material concerns are given more weight than spiritual concerns there is unbalance. Disproportion between the spiritual and the material leads quicker to decay in religious life than in any other. The reason for this is obvious, since it is the spiritual in the religious life that gives meaning to the material.

-Especially must the abbot shows himself a "loving father" when dealing with his more difficult subjects. In the same way he is urged to show paternal solicitude towards the sick, the aged, and the very young.

Any lack of profit which the father of the household may find in his sheep, shall be imputed to the fault of the shepherd. Only then shall he be acquitted, if he shall have bestowed all pastoral diligence on his unquiet and disobedient flock, and employed all his care to amend their corrupt manner of life: then shall he be absolved in the judgment of the Lord, and may say to the Lord with the prophet: 'I have not hidden Thy justice in my heart, I have declared Thy truth and Thy salvation, but they contemned and despised me.'

-Certainly St. Benedict himself did not err by default in the matter of correcting refractory monks. We read in the *Dialogues* how St. Benedict, miraculously informed of a lapse on the part of some brethren who had been absent on business from the monastery, "demanded 'where did you dine?' 'Nowhere,' they answered. To whom he said: 'Why do you lie? Did you not go into such a one's house, eat such and such meats, drink such a number of cups?'" On another occasion St. Benedict "very sharply rebuked a monk who had hidden some napkins which were apparently a personal gift from a community of nuns. WE read also how the disobedience of the cellarer "much displeased" St. Benedict.

-But in avoiding the temptation to buy peace at any price, the abbot is warned by St. Benedict against small-mindedness and fault-finding. The abbot who is over-demanding in the minutiae of the religious life will

create a nervous atmosphere in the community. A fussy superior, spreading furtiveness and suspicion among the brethren, is the last thing St. Benedict wants. And wherever sharp correction has been administered, complete forgiveness must follow the monk's acknowledgment of guilt. "But he straightway pardoned them, persuading himself that they would never afterward attempt the like."

Let him show by his own actions that those things ought not to be done which he has taught his disciples to be the law of God; lest, while preaching to others, he should himself become a castaway.

-Communities are not molded only by the conferences which they hear in the chapter room. One human being responds to the person rather than to the word of another human being, and persons express their true selves by what they do rather than by what they say. The abbot forms and informs his community by his behavior, by his example.

-But example does not act *ex opere operato* (this means that the sacrament is valid on the ground of the action done. The Sacrament belong not to the ministry but to Christ): the subject has to be ready to receive it. In the case of St. Benedict, the subjects at Vicovaro were not ready to receive the example which he gave them, and the experiment was a failure. Acting on the principle of take-it-or-leave it, St. Benedict decided that the way of life which he had outlined for the monks of Vicovaro might well find response from other communities. "Did I not tell you that my ways and yours would never agree?" was St. Benedict's reproach as he parted from the brethren of Vicovaro. It was his ways, not his words that the monks had found insupportable. So it would be his ways, even more than his words, which would be the dominant influence in his subsequent monastic ventures.

-It is not surprising that when he comes to write his Rule, then, St. Benedict counsels the abbot to preach chiefly by good example. Not only has his own experience taught him its value, but the two authorities to whom, apart from the Scriptures, he owes most, namely St. Basil and John Cassian, are emphatic on this subject.

-“How presumptuous should I not be,” Abbot Chaeremon is recorded saying, “to teach others what I do not practice myself. How can I exhort others to walk courageously and fervently in those exercises in which I myself become careless and lukewarm? This is the reason why I have never allowed any young religious to dwell with me, lest the example of my degeneracy should cool the ardor and austerity of others. For the

words of him who instructs have no force or authority, unless his example impresses upon the hearts of his hearers what he teaches."

-The history of monasticism shows, even if nothing else were to show it, that personal holiness in the head is the surest way to secure personal holiness in the members. The classical instance of this is seen in the story of Cluny, where for two centuries the house flourished under four successive saints and then immediately declined under a man who was far from being a saint. Only under the fifth of its abbot-saints, Peter the Venerable, did Cluny recover its early spirit.

-“For them do I sanctify myself” might well be the beacon-text for any religious superior. Personal sanctification not only shows the way to others but mediates on behalf of others. As Abraham’s merits interceded before God, and as Moses fought the battles of the children of Israel by his prayers, so the holiness of the abbot obtains graces from God for his community and turns away the punishment to which it is liable.

Let him make no distinction of persons in the monastery. Let not one be loved more than another unless he is found to excel in good works or in obedience. Let not one of noble birth be put before him who was formerly a slave unless some other reasonable cause exist for it...we are all one in Christ.

-Of all the abbot's responsibilities, impartiality in dealing with his monks is probably the hardest to handle. Evidently St. Benedict felt it to be one of the most important qualities in the government of the monastery: he comes back to the idea in several places. In winning souls to God the balance must be kept between extending too much gentleness to the sensitive and too much severity to the tough, between excessive variation in the cause of personal need and excessive uniformity in the cause of the general good.

-It is charity, not equity that must be the rule of this impartial attitude on the abbot's part. The abbot must rise above personal preferences not only for the sake of fairness but much more for the sake of charity – for the sake of Christ.

-It can be a temptation for the abbot, sheltering behind St. Benedict's injunction “to accommodate himself to the diversity of characters,” to let himself be dominated by the personalities of his monks. With the best intentions in the world, and imagining that he is acting in accordance with St. Benedict's mind, he can virtually surrender his authority in the monastery.

-It is all too easy for one in office to associate almost exclusively with those whose views he shares, whose support he can count upon, or for whom he has a natural affinity. Instinctively we gravitate towards men whose interests, tastes, and backgrounds are the same as our own.

-It is possible for a superior who has experienced difficulties with a subject, or to whom the subject's very presence is a source of irritation, virtually to dismiss the man's need from his mind. For weeks, without perhaps consciously avoiding one another, the two may not meet. One of the things most to be avoided in the family life of the monastery is the estrangement of father and son.

-It is not enough for the abbot to know what the majority want, what the minority want, what the individual monk wants: he must also know what he wants, and lay it down to the community.

The abbot ought always to remember what he is and what he is called, and to know that to whom more is committed, from him more is required; and he must consider how difficult and arduous a task he has undertaken, of ruling souls and adapting himself to many dispositions. Let him so accommodate himself to the character and intelligence of each, winning some by kindness, others by reproof, others by persuasion, that he may not only suffer no loss in the flock committed to him but may even rejoice in their virtuous increase.

-St. Benedict is saying frankly that the abbot's function is to win souls to God by any legitimate means he can devise. For one man to gain the confidence of many, different approaches have to be tried and different manners adopted.

-The abbot will have to show confidence if he is to receive a return of it. He will have to expect much from his subjects if he is to extract much. This will mean the exercise of understanding. It will mean taking an interest in the interests of the brethren. It will mean not being shocked, disappointed, disillusioned, or despairing. A man does not have to be a born leader in order to practice these things; he has merely to be patient and to possess an invincible belief in humanity that no matter how muddy it might be God can make it clean in the end.

-By the superior no less than by the subject the fact must be faced that abbatial state does not assume miraculous insight, inspired direction, an illumined practical judgment in decisions to be made. The grace of abbatial state is like any other grace: it guides and strengthens, but does not compel or guarantee supernatural intervention.

On We are not accident, We are made to last forever,

-Our birth was no mistake or mishap, and our life is not a stroke of luck of nature. Our parents may not have planned us, but God did. He was not at all surprised by our birth. In fact, He expected it.

-Long before we were conceived by our parents, we were conceived in the mind of God. He thought of us first. It is not fate, nor chance, nor luck, nor coincidence that we are breathing at this very moment. In the language of Pope John Paul II: "In the designs of Providence there are no mere coincidences." We are alive because God wanted to create us! The Scripture says: "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me" (Ps. 138 [137]:8).

-God prescribed every single detail of our body. He deliberately chose our race, the color of our skin, our hair, and every other feature. He custom-made our body just the way He wanted it. He also determined the natural talents we would possess and the uniqueness of our personality. The Scripture says, "You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something: (Ps. 139 [138]:15). We are unrepeatable.

-Because God made us for a reason, He also decided when we would be born and how long we would live. He planned the days of our life in advance, choosing the exact time of our birth and death. We are like His only begotten Son who was born during the census when the Emperor Caesar Augustus issued a decree that all the world should be enrolled. He lived only for 33 years on earth. The Scripture says, "You saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in your Book" (Ps. 139[138]:16).

-God also planned where we would be born and where we would live for His purpose, again like His only begotten Son who was born in Bethlehem and lived in Nazareth. Our race and nationality are not accident. God left no detail to chance. He planned it for His purpose. The Scripture says, "From one man He made every nation to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation..." [that is, the exact places where they should live] (Acts 17:26). Nothing in our life is arbitrary. It's all for a purpose.

-Most amazing, God decided how we would be born. Regardless of the circumstances of our birth or who our parents are, God had a plan in creating us. It does not matter whether our parents were good, bad, dysfunctional, or indifferent. God knew that those two individuals possessed exactly the right genetic makeup to create us as He had in mind. Our parents had the DNA God wanted to make us.

-While there are illegitimate parents, there are no illegitimate children. Many children are unplanned by their parents, but they are not unplanned by God. God's purpose took into account human error, and even sin.

-God never does anything accidentally, and He never makes mistakes. He has reason for everything He creates. Every plant and every animal was planned by God, and every person was designed with a purpose in mind. We are destined to be like Him. What God is by nature we will be by grace.

-God's motive for creating us was His love. The Scripture says, "Long before He laid down earth's foundation, He had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of His love" (Ephesians 1:4).

-God was thinking of us even before He made the world. In fact, that is why He created it. God designed this planet's environment just so we could live in it. We are the focus of His love and the most valuable of His creation. The Scripture says, "God decided to give us life through the word of truth so we might be the most important of all the things He made" (James 1:18). God loves and values us.

-God is not haphazard; He planned it all with great precision. The more physicists, biologists, and other scientists learn about the universe, the better we understand how it is uniquely suited for our existence, custom-made with the exact specifications that make human life possible.

-A scientist at the University of Otago in New Zealand who is the senior research fellow in human molecular genetics, has concluded, "All the evidence available in the biological sciences supports the core proposition...that the cosmos is a specially designed whole with life and mankind as its fundamental goal and purpose, a whole in which all facets of reality have their meaning and explanation in this central fact."

-The Scripture said the same thing thousands of years earlier, "God formed the earth....He did not create it to be empty [a chaos] but formed it to be inhabited" (Isaiah 45: 8).

-Why did God do all this? Why did He bother to go to all the trouble of creating a universe for us? Because He is a God of love. This kind of love is difficult to fathom, but is fundamentally reliable. We are created as a special object of God's love. God made us so He could love us. This is a truth to build our life on. It's like building on a solid rock, who is Christ Himself, the Truth and the Life.

-The Scripture says, "God is love." It does not say God has love. He is love. Love is the essence of God's character. This is perfect love in the fellowship of the Trinity, so God did not need to create us. He was not lonely. But He wanted to make us in order to express His love. God says, "I have carried you since you were born; I have taken care for you from your birth. Even when you are old, I will be the same. Even when your hair has turned gray, I will take care of you. I made you and will take care of you" (Isaiah 46: 3-4).

-If there was no God, we would all be "accidents," the result of astronomical random chance in universe. Life would have no purpose or meaning or significance. There would be no right or wrong, and no hope beyond our brief years here on earth. We would not even be here.

-But there is a God who made us for a reason, and even invite us to follow Him more closely in a consecrated form of life, in monastic life to give a profound meaning to our life on earth and deepened that relationship with Him. We discover that meaning and purpose only when we make God the reference point of our lives.

-The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what He does for us.

There is a poem which gives a clearer picture to this:

You are who you are for a reason.
You are part of an intricate plan.
You are a precious and perfect unique design,
Called God's special woman or man.

You look like you look for a reason.
Our God made no mistake.
He knit you together within the womb,
You are just what He wanted to make.

The parents you had were the ones He chose,
And no matter how you may feel,
They were custom-designed with God's plan in mind,
And they bear the Master's seal.

No, that trauma you faced was not easy.
And God wept that it hurt you so;
But it was allowed to shape your heart

So that into His likeness you would grow.

You are who you are for a reason,
You have been formed by the Master's rod.
You are who you are, beloved,
Because there is a God!

-Points of reflection: We can ask ourselves this question. Knowing that God uniquely created me, what areas of my personality, background, and physical appearance am I struggling to accept?

-We are made to last forever! Knowing our purpose simplifies our life. It defines what we do and what we don't do. Our purpose becomes the standard we use to evaluate which activities are essential and which are not. We simply ask, "Does this activity (example, singing the divine office, which for us is a duty) help me fulfill one of God's purposes for my life?"

-Without a clear purpose we have no foundation on which we base decisions, allocate our time, and use our resources. We will tend to make choices based on circumstances, pressures, and our mood at that moment. Example, I don't feel like attending the divine office, so I won't attend. This is because we have no clear purpose. People who don't know their purpose will likely face stress, fatigue, and conflict.

-Knowing our purpose gives meaning to our life. We were made to have meaning. When life has meaning we can bear almost anything, without it, nothing is bearable. Without meaning, life has no significance or hope. In the Bible, many different people expressed this hopelessness. Isaiah complained, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing" (Isaiah 49:4). And Job said: "My life drags by, day after hopeless day" (Job 7:6) and "I give up; I am tired of living. Leave me alone. My life makes no sense" (Job 7:16).

-The great tragedy is not death, but life without purpose. Hope is essential to our life as air and water. St. Paul said: "if only in this life we have hope in Christ we are of all people most to be pitied." We need hope to cope. Hope comes from having a purpose a meaning. Wonderful changes are going to happen to our life as we begin to live on purpose. St. Bernard always reminds himself, saying: "Why are you here?" In other words, what is our purpose in entering a monastery?

-God says, "I know what I am planning for you...I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future" (Jeremiah 29:11). We may feel we are facing an impossible situation, but the

Scripture says, "God...is able to do far more abundantly than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of, infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thought, or hopes" (Ephesians 3:20).

-Knowing our purpose also leads to peace of mind: "You, Lord give perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm and put their trust in you" (Isaiah 26:3). Knowing our purpose focuses our life. It concentrates our effort and energy on what is important. We become effective by being selective. Even in the books we read we have to be selective because we have only limited time on earth. We have only to read what would be useful and helpful in our spiritual journey.

-It's human nature to get distracted by minor issues. It's like an aimless distraction. We play Trivial Pursuit with our lives. Many people are like gyroscopes (a wheel or disk mounted to spin rapidly about an axis that is free to turn to various directions), spinning around at a frantic pace but never going anywhere.

-Without a clear purpose, people will keep changing directions, jobs, relationships, churches, or other externals, hoping each change will settle the confusion or fill the emptiness in one's heart. They think, "Maybe this time it will be different," but it doesn't solve the real problem, which is a lack of focus and purpose.

-The Scripture says, "Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17).

-The power of focusing can be seen in light. Diffused light has little power or impact, but you can concentrate its energy by focusing it. Example, with a magnifying glass, the rays of the sun can be focused to set grass or paper on fire. When light is focused even more as a laser beam, it can cut through steel. That's the power of focusing.

-There is nothing quite as powerful as a focused life, one lived on purpose. The men and women who have made the greatest difference in history were the most focused. For instance, the apostle Paul almost single-handedly spread Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. His secret was a focused life. He said, "I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead" (Phil. 3:13). We have a contemporary example of a focused life in the lives of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Pope John Paul II.

-If you want your life to have impact, focus it! Prune away even good activities and do only what matters most. Never confuse activity with productivity. We can be busy without a purpose, but what's the point? St.

Paul said, "Let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us" (Phil 3:15).

-Knowing our purpose motivates our life. Purpose always produces fervor & zeal. That is why one of the criteria St. Benedict uses in discerning vocation is whether the novice has zeal & fervor for the divine office, zeal & fervor for obedience and anything that reduces his pride. In other word, whether he has clear purpose in entering a monastery.

-Nothing energizes like a clear purpose. On the other hand, fervor & zeal dissipate when we lack purpose. Just getting out of bed becomes a major chore. It is usually meaningless work not overwork that wears us down, saps our strength, and robs our joy.

-Knowing our purpose prepares us for eternity. Many people spend their lives trying to create a lasting legacy on earth. They want to be remembered when they are gone. Yet, what ultimately matters most will not be what others say about our life but what God says. What people fail to realize is that all achievements are eventually surpassed, records are broken, reputations fade, and tributes are forgotten.

-There's a story of a man whose goal was to become the school's tennis champion. He felt proud when his trophy was prominently placed in the school's trophy cabinet. Years later, someone mailed him that trophy. They had found it in a trashcan when the school was remodeled. He said: "Given enough time, all your trophies will be trashed by someone else!"

-Living to create an earthly legacy is a short-sighted goal. A wiser use of time is to build an eternal legacy. This is the highest & healthy form of ambition. We are not put on earth to be remembered. We are put here to prepare for eternity.

-One day we will stand before God, for it is in the presence of Our Master that we will rise or fall and He will do an audit of our life, a final exam, before we enter eternity. The Scripture says, "Remember, each of us will stand personally before the judgment seat of God....Yes, each of us will have to give a personal account to God" (Romans 14:10-12)

-Fortunately, God wants us to pass this test, so He has given us the questions in advance. From the Scripture we can surmise that God will ask us two crucial questions: First, "What did you do with my Son, Jesus Christ?" The only thing that will matter is, did you accept what Christ did for you and did you learn to love and trust Him? For Christ said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except

through me.” Second, “What did you do with what I gave you? What did you do with your life – all the gifts, talents, opportunities, energy, relationships, and resources God gave you? Did you spend them on yourself, or did you use them for the purpose God made you for?

-The first question will determine where we spend eternity. The second question will determine what we do in eternity. We can consider another question. What would my family and friends or community say is the driving force of my life? What do I want it to be?

-We are made to last forever. There is more to life than the eyes can see. This life is not all there is. Life on earth is just the dress rehearsal before the real production. We will spend far more time on the other side of death – in eternity – than we will here.

-Earth is the staging area, the preschool, the tryout for our life in eternity. It is the practice workout before the actual game; the warm-up lap before the race begins. This life is preparation for the next.

-The psalmist says that our life span on earth is 70 years and 80 for those who are strong. At most, we will live a hundred years, but we will spend forever in eternity. Our time on earth is “but a small parenthesis in eternity.” We are made to last forever.

-The Scripture says, “God has...planted eternity in the human heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We have an inborn instinct that longs for immortality. This is because God designed us, in His image, to live for eternity.

-Even though we know everyone eventually dies, death always seems unnatural and unfair. The reason why we feel we should live forever is that God wired our brains with that desire!

-One day our heart will stop beating. That will be the end of our body and our time on earth, but it will not be the end of us. Our earthly body is just a temporary residence for our spirit. St. Paul calls our earthly body a “tent,” but refers to our future body as a “house.” He says, “For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2Cor. 5:1).

-While life on earth offers many choices, eternity offers only two: heaven or hell. Our relationship to God on earth will determine our relationship to Him in eternity. If we learn to love and trust Him we will be invited to spend

the rest of eternity with Him. On the other hand, if we reject His love, forgiveness, and salvation, we will spend eternity apart from God forever.

-C.S. Lewis said, "There are two kinds of people: those who say to God 'Thy will be done' and those to whom God says, 'All right then, have it your way.'" Tragically, many people will have to endure eternity without God because they chose to live without Him here on earth.

-When we fully comprehend that there is more to life than just here and now, and we realize that life is just a preparation for eternity, we will begin to live differently. We will start living in light of eternity, and that will color how we handle every relationship, task, and circumstances.

-Suddenly many activities, goals, and even problems that seemed so important will appear trivial, petty, and unworthy of our attention. The closer we live to God, the smaller everything else appears.

-When we live in light of eternity, our values change. We use our time and work wisely. We place a higher premium on relationships and character or behavior instead of fame or popularity or achievements. Our priorities are reordered. Keeping up with trends, fashions, and popular values just doesn't matter as much anymore. St. Paul said, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord" (Phil. 3:7-8). I once thought all these things were so important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done.

-If our time on earth were all there is to our life, the hedonist would certainly suggest we start living it up immediately. We could forget being good and ethical, and we would not have to worry about any consequences of our actions. We could indulge ourselves in total self-centeredness because our actions would have no long term repercussions. But, and this makes all the difference, death is not the end of us. Death is not our termination, but our transition into eternity, so there are eternal consequences to everything we do on earth. Every act of our lives strikes some chord that will vibrate in eternity.

-The most damaging aspect of contemporary living is short-term thinking. To make the most of our life, we must keep the vision of eternity continually in our mind and the value of it in our heart. The psalmist says, "Lord, Let me know the shortness of my life that I may gain wisdom of heart."

-There is far more to life than just here and now! Today is the visible tip of the iceberg. Eternity is all the rest we don't see underneath the surface. What is it going to be like in eternity with God? Frankly, the capacity of our brains cannot handle the wonder and greatness of heaven. It would be like trying to describe the Internet to an ant. It's futile. Words have not been invented that could possibly convey the experience of eternity. St. Paul says, "What no eyes has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him" (1Cor. 2:9).

-However, God has given us glimpses of eternity in His Word. We know that right now God is preparing an eternal home for us. In heaven we will be reunited with loved ones who are believers, released from all pain and suffering, rewarded for our faithfulness on earth, and reassigned to do work that we will enjoy doing. We will enjoy unbroken fellowship with God, and He will enjoy us for an unlimited, endless forever.

-One day Our Lord Jesus will say, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt. 25:34).

-God has a purpose for our life on earth, but it doesn't end here. His plan involves far more than few decades we will spend on this planet. It is more that "the opportunity of a lifetime"; God offers us an opportunity beyond our lifetime. The Scripture says, "God's plan endures forever; His purpose last eternally" (Ps. 33[32]:11).

-Someone gave me a T-shirt. In front of the T-shirt, it says: "keep on working for the Lord. The pay is not that much, but the retirement plan is out of this world."

-The only time most people think about eternity is at funerals, and then it's often shallow, sentimental thinking, based on ignorance. We may feel it is morbid to think about death, but actually it's unhealthy to live in denial of death and not consider what is inevitable. Only a fool would go through life unprepared for what we all know will eventually happen.

-Here's a story. Mike and Pat were working side by side at the shipyard. "Listen, Pat" said Mike, "that was an awful break you made yesterday at Calaghan's funeral." "What do you mean?" asked Pat. "Why," Mike said, "you and me went to see him, and you no sooner took a look at him and you burst out laughing. That was no way to do at a funeral, you're hurting people's feeling." "Oh, that?" said Pat. "I'll tell you why. You see, the day before he was killed, he and me was working together and he was telling

me he didn't believe either in heaven or hell; so when I looked at him, I had to laugh, for there he was: all dressed up and no place to go."

-So we need to think more about eternity, not less. We who are Catholics believe that death is not just an end but a new beginning. Perhaps the best ways to understand this is to compare death with birth. We spent nine months in the womb of our mother. Then we outgrew our environment, and our life-support system could no longer sustain us. We "died" to life in the womb as everything keeping us alive seemed to fall apart. But "death" turned out to be birth, and we found ourselves suddenly in the light, living in a new way we could never have imagined. We found ourselves breathing and eating, using a new life-support system we could not have dreamed of in the womb. We found ourselves in a new world where there were opportunities for growth, knowledge, and love which far surpassed anything in the womb.

-Death is really a second birth. Our life-support system, our body, will wear out because of age, illness, or accident. Everything that keeps us alive will seem to fall apart. But death will turn out to be birth once again, as darkness turns into day and we find ourselves suddenly in the Light, fully alive at last, face to face with Our Lord Jesus, in a new world with opportunities for growth, knowledge, and love which far surpass anything on earth. How will this happen? We can't say for sure, although people who have had near-death experiences seem to have at least peeked into the doorway of the life to come. They tell of light, of peace, of being in touch with loved ones in ways unimaginable, of knowing they are loved, of being sure that God is, of having what they describe as a "spiritual body."

-So, this life is a preparation for the next. If we have a relationship with God, we don't need to fear death. It is the door to eternity. It will be the last hour of our time on earth, but it won't be the last of us. Rather than being the end of our life, it will be our birthday into eternal life. No wonder the church celebrates the death of the saints, the day they died.

-Once we learn how to die, we learn how to live. In order not to fear death, it is needful to begin by dying to self, renouncing our will, & detaching ourselves from all unnecessary things. Happy the soul who, so pure in conscience, so firm in hope, sees death as "the foretaste of freedom" of "beatitude," the beginning of what lies in the future, the end of what now is.

-The Scripture says, "This world is not our home; we are looking forward to our everlasting home in heaven" (Hebrews 13:14). Measured against eternity, our time on earth is just a blink of an eye, but the consequences

of it will last forever. The deeds of this life are the destiny of the next. We have to live each day as “the first day of the rest of our life. Actually, it would be wiser to live each day as if it were the last day of our life. “It ought to be the business of everyday to prepare for our final day.” In this sense, we can pray to the Lord, saying, “if there is anything good I can do today, and if there is anything evil I can avoid, let me do it now, for I might not pass this way again.”

*** On Alienation(s) ***

-The modern man is characterized by three alienations: he is divided from himself, from his fellow man, and from his God. These are the same characteristics of the frustrated youth in the land of the Gerasenes.

-The **first** of these is self-estrangement. The modern man is no longer a unity. He is so dissociated, so alienated from himself that he sees himself less as a personality than as a battlefield where a civil war rages between a thousand and one conflicting loyalties. There is no single over-all purpose in his life. He may be likened to a radio that is tuned in to several stations; instead of getting any one clearly, it receives only an annoying static.

-The **second** characteristic of modern man is his isolation from his fellow men. This characteristic is revealed not only by the two world wars within twenty-one years and a constant threat of a third; not only by the growth of class conflict and selfishness wherein each man seeks his own; but also by man's break with tradition and the accumulated heritage of the centuries.

-Nothing is more tragic in an individual who once was wise than to lose his memory, and nothing is more tragic to a civilization than the loss of its tradition.

-The modern soul which cannot live with itself cannot live with its fellow men. A man who is not at peace with himself will not be at peace with his brother/neighbor. World wars are nothing but macrocosmic signs of the psychic wars waging inside microcosmic muddled souls. If there had not already been battles in millions of hearts, there would be none on the battlefield of the world.

-Given a soul alienated from self, lawlessness follows. A soul with a fight inside itself will soon have a fight outside itself with others. Once a man ceases to be of service to his neighbor, he begins to be a burden to him; it is only a step from refusing to live *with* others to refusing to live *for* others.

-**Finally**, modern man is estranged from God. Alienation from self and from one's fellow men has its roots in separation from God. Once the hub of the wheel, which is God, is lost, the spokes, which are men, fall apart. God seems very far away from the modern man: this is due, to a great extent, to his Godless behavior.

-Goodness always appears as a reproach to those who are not living right, and this reproach on the part of the sinner expresses itself in hatred and persecution. There is rarely a disrupted, frustrated soul, critical and envious of his neighbor, who is not at the same time an antireligious man.

-The organized atheism of the present hour is thus a projection of self-hatred; no man hates God without first hating himself. Persecution of religion is a sign of the indefensibility of the antireligious or atheistic attitude, for by the violence of hate it hopes to escape the irrationality of Godlessness. The final form of this hatred of religion is a wish to defy God and to maintain one's own evil in the face of His goodness and power.

-Does such a confused soul exist in the Gospel? Is modern psychology studying a different type of man from the one Our Lord Jesus came to redeem? If we turn to St. Mark's Gospel, we find that a young man in the land of the Gerasenes is described as having exactly the same three frustrations as the modern soul.

-He was self-estranged, for when Our Lord asked, "What is thy name?" the young man answered, "My name is Legion, for we are many" (Mk. 5:9). Notice the personality conflict and the confusion between "my" and "we are many." It is obvious that he is a problem to himself, a bewildered backwash of a thousand and one conflicting anxieties. For that reason he called himself "Legion." No divided personality is happy. The Gospel describes this unhappiness by saying that the young man was "crying and cutting himself with stones" (Mk. 5:5). The confused man is always sad; he is his own worst enemy, as he abuses the purpose of nature for his own destruction.

-The young man was also separated from his fellow men, for the Gospel describes him thus: "...And he was always day and night in the tombs and in the mountains..." (Mk 5:5). "He was a menace to other men, for he had been bound with fetters and chains, and he had rent the chains asunder and broken the fetters into pieces. And no one was able to control him..." (Mk. 4:4,5).

-Isolation is a peculiar quality of Godlessness, whose natural habitat is away from fellow men, among the tombs, in the region of death. There is no cement in sin; its nature is centrifugal, divisive and disruptive.

-He was separated from God, for when he saw the divine Savior, he shouted, "What have I to do with Thee, Jesus the Son of the Most High God? I adjure Thee by God that Thou torment me not" (Mk 5:7). That is to say, "What have we in common? Your presence is my destruction."

-It is an interesting psychological fact that the frustrated soul hates goodness and wants to be separated from it. Every sinner hides from God. The very first murderer said, "And I shall be hidden from thy face, and I shall be a vagabond and a fugitive on the earth" (Gen. 4:14)

-Modern man has locked himself in the prison of his own mind; and only God can let him out, as He let Peter out of his dungeon. All that man himself must do is to contribute the desire to get out. God will not fail; it is only our human desire that is weak. There is no reason for discouragement. It was the bleating lamb in the thickets, more than the flock in the peaceful pastures, which attracted the Savior's heart and helping hand.

*** Alternation ***

-“One freezing winter day, a herd of porcupines pressed together, one against the other, so as to protect themselves from the cold by sharing

one another's warmth. But, painfully discomfited by their spines, it wasn't long before they moved apart from one another again. Obligated by the persistent cold to come close to one another again, they once again felt the uncomfortable effect of their spines, and these alternations between closeness and distance lasted until they had found a suitable distance where they felt protected from harm" (Schopenhauer).

-The Christian life is a continuous going into the presence of God from the presence of men, and coming out into the presence of men from the presence of God.

-True living is the alternation between rest and work, between prayer and daily task.

-It is by such continual changes and vicissitudes that God exercises them Himself in that perfect submission of mind and heart in which true perfection consists; more or less like a wise and strong-minded mother, who in order to break a child's self-will and make him perfectly supple and docile, alternately gives and deprives him of what he likes best, caresses him, scolds him, flatters him, threatens him, and in less than an hour will make him do, or abstain from doing, a hundred different things. That is exactly the interior guidance that God gives these beloved souls whom He wishes Himself to train to pure and solid virtue.

-It is certain that we must expect constant vicissitudes in the interior life. Such is the law to which God has subjected all transitory things in this life, and so universal is this law that a permanent state by that very fact would become suspicious.

-The alternation of light and darkness, of consolations and desolations, are as useful – are as indispensable in the growing and the ripening of virtues in our souls as changes in the weather if crops are to grow and ripen in our fields. We have to learn, then, to resign ourselves to them, and to most sorrowful of these ordeals, whether they come from God's justice or His mercy, are equally just, blessed, adorable, lovable, and beneficial. Often His justice and mercy join in sending them; but on this earth the operation of His justice is never wholly divided from His mercy.

-We must never be astonished to find that a day of great recollection is followed by another of marked spiritual dissipation; for such is the way of things in this present life. This alternation is necessary even in spiritual matters, in order that we may be kept in humiliation and dependence

upon God. The saints themselves have known these alternations, and still more grievous ones at that.

-Once He told me, by way of consolation, not to worry – and He said this very lovingly – for in this life we could not always be in the same condition. Sometimes I could be fervent and at other times not; sometimes I should be restless and at other times, in spite of temptations, I should be tranquil. But I was to hope in Him and not to be afraid (St. Teresa of Avila).

On Antipathies

-Antipathies are certain inclinations which are sometimes, and which excites in us a certain repugnance towards those for whom we entertain

these feelings; a repugnance which prevents us from liking their conversation.

-We must confess that this instinctive attraction to love & dislike others is natural; and is to be seen in the animal creation, which unreasoning, and has nevertheless attractions & antipathies. Take for instance a lamb only a few hours old. You show it the skin of a wolf; the wolf is dead, but nevertheless the lamb will run away, bleat & tremble, and hide itself at its mother's side. Show it a horse, which is far larger animal, and it will not evince the slightest sign of fear, but will be ready to play with it. The only explanation of this is that a natural instinct attracts it to the one, and makes it shrink from the other.

-We must not dwell too much upon these instinctive antipathies or attractions, provided all are kept in reasonable subjection. If we feel a repugnance to converse with a person whom yet we know to be most excellent, and from whom we might learn much that would do us good, we must not give way to the antipathy which prompts us to avoid his presence. On the contrary, we need to strive to listen to the voice of reason telling us rather to seek his company, or at least, if we are already in it, to remain there with a quiet, peaceful mind.

-What remedy is there for these antipathies, since no one, however perfect, can be exempt from them? People who are of a harsh, severe disposition will dislike those who are gentle & mild. They will regard such gentleness as extreme weakness, though indeed it is the quality most universally loved.

-The only remedy for this evil, as indeed for all other kinds of temptation, is simply to turn away from it, and think no more about it.

-If we have simply a natural instinctive dislike to any one, we should not pay attention to it but rather trick our mind and turn away our thoughts from it.

-Whether or not we ought to be surprised at seeing imperfections in each other, or even in superiors? As regards the first point, most certainly we ought not to be in the least astonished at seeing imperfections here just in other religious houses, however perfect they may be. We will never be so perfect as not to be liable, from time to time, to be betrayed into some imperfections, according to the temptations which may beset us.

-It is nothing very extraordinary for a person who has nothing to vex or try him to lead a very peaceful & faultless life.

-Those who are placid & gentle as long as they meet with no contradiction, and who have not gained this virtue at the sword's point, are apparently most exemplary & edifying; but let them be put to the proof, let them be suddenly tried, and you will see them stirred up, showing that their gentleness was not a strong & solid virtue, but imaginary rather than real.

-There is a great difference between getting rid of a vice, and acquiring its contrary virtue. Many people seem to be virtuous, who yet in reality have no virtue at all, because they have never striven to acquire it.

-It often happens that our passions slumber & become torpid, and if, while they are in this state, we do not lay in a supply of strength to enable us to fight & resist them when they wake up again, we shall be worsted in the battle.

-So, we need always to remain humble, and not to believe that we possess virtues, even though we may not, as far as we know, commit the contrary faults. There are certainly many people who are so mistaken as to think, that those who profess perfection ought never to lapse into imperfections, and especially Religious. It seems to them that it is only necessary to enter Religion to become at once perfect; but this is not so. Religious Orders are not formed for the purpose of gathering together perfect people, but of those who have the courage to aim at perfection.

-Never let us for a moment think that while we are in this life we can be free from imperfections. This is impossible, whether we be superiors or subordinates, since we are all human; consequently we need firmly to believe this truth, in order that we may never be astonished at finding ourselves subject to imperfections.

-Our Lord has commanded us to say every day those words in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," and there is no exception to this command, since we all need to obey it. It is, then, unreasonable to say such a one is a superior, and must therefore be free from anger and other imperfections.

-We must never forget what we once were, lest we should become worse, and never think that we are perfect because we do not commit many imperfections.

-We must also beware of astonishment if we find that we have passions, for we shall never be exempt from them.

-We shall always, then, commit some faults; but we must try to make them so rare. We ought not to be surprised that the superior commits imperfections, neither must the superior show any astonishment if his faults are noticed, but he should observe humility & gentleness with which St. Peter received the correction of St. Paul.

-It is hard to say which is the most to be admired, the strength of St. Paul's courage in reproofing St. Peter, or the humility with which St. Peter submitted to the correction given to him.

-Superiors ought to be affable to seculars, so as to help them, and should cheerfully give up part of their time to these persons. But how large should be that portion of time? It should be a twelfth, the remaining eleven parts being employed in the house, in the care of the family.

-Superiors are individuals who are meant to do good not only to persons inside, but also to those who are outside. Bees, indeed, from time to time quit their hive, but only from necessity or for purposes of utility, returning to it as quickly as possible. The queen bee rarely comes out – only, indeed, when the bees are swarming; and then she is quite surrounded by her little subjects.

-A Religious community is a mystic hive occupied by celestial bees, gathered together there to store up the honey of heavenly virtues. For this reason the superior, who is among them as their queen, should be most careful to keep them close to her, so as to teach them how to acquire and to preserve these virtues. She must not, however, on that account neglect conversing with lay people when necessity & charity demands it; but beyond that the superior must be brief with them. We say, beyond the demands of necessity & charity, because there are some persons of high consideration who must not be offended. Religious must never waste time with seculars, under pretext of acquiring friends for their Order.

-But supposing that when the bell rings for office, the superior is unwilling to obey its call, for fear of vexing those with whom he/she is conversing at the moment? Well, we must not be so weak, for unless these persons are of great distinction, or come very seldom, or from a great distance, we must not absent ourselves from the Office or prayer, except when charity absolutely demands it.

-We must be carefully avoid everything which makes us appear somewhat above others, that is, pre-eminent & remarkable. The Superior ought to be recognized & distinguished by her/his virtues, and not by any unnecessary distinctions.

-We ought certainly to be sincerely anxious for the peace & tranquility of our brothers/sisters, as never to do or say anything which might vex them.

-The Fathers used to say it is foreign to a monk to be angry, or to annoy other people. And again: *The man who masters anger masters the devil, but the man who is worsted by this passion is a complete stranger to the monastic life.*

-What ought we then to say about ourselves who give way to violent anger and, even bear malice to the point of animosity toward one another? What else can we do but bewail our pitiable and inhuman condition?

-Let us control ourselves and with God's help come to one another's assistance so that we may be delivered from the bitterness of this pernicious passion, for blessed are those who dwell in unity.

-There are times when, with apparent sincerity, we ask forgiveness of our brother after some discord between us or for some quarrel which has arisen, and yet after the reconciliation we still remain troubled and have hard thoughts against the brother. In this case, we ought not to dwell on such thoughts but to cut them off immediately, for this is remembering evil.

-It needs much self control not to prolong such thoughts and fall into danger. Asking pardon in the way the commandment lays down should heal past anger and so combat thought of revenge, and yet because of this disagreement there remains a certain irritation with the brother.

-Now remembrance of evil or rancor is one thing, loss of temper or rage another, annoyance another, and disturbance of mind yet another. For example, someone who is lighting a fire sets a spark to the tinder; this is some brother's provoking remark, this is the point where the fire of anger starts. Of what consequence is that brother's remark? If you put up with it, the spark goes out; but if you go on thinking, 'Why did he say that to me and what do I have to say to him? And, 'If he did not want to annoy me he would not have said that, and he must think that I also want to annoy him.'

-So you add a small bit of wood to the flame, or some bit of fuel, and you produce some smoke, that is disturbance of the mind. This disturbance floods the mind with thoughts and emotions which stimulate the heart and embolden it to attack. And this boldness incites us to vengeance on the person who annoyed us and this becomes recklessness, that is to say, *the heart is stirred up to rashness when the thoughts are set on malice, but*

malice taken upon itself by prayer and hope leaves the heart at peace (abba Mark).

-If, therefore, we put up with a sharp answer from the brother, the little firebrand is extinguished before it causes trouble. Even if we are a little troubled and we desire promptly to get rid of, since it is still small, we can do so by remaining silent with a prayer on our lips and by one good heartfelt act of humility. But if we dwell on it and inflame our hearts and torment ourselves with thoughts about why he said this to us, and what do we have to say to him, we are blowing on the embers and adding fuel and causing smoke!

-From this influx of thoughts and conflicting emotions the heart catches fire and there we are in a passion. St. Basil calls this passion a boiling up of the blood around the heart: this makes us what is called irascible. But even this commotion can, if we wish, be put out before it becomes rage. If we allow ourselves to remain disturbed, however, we will begin to let fly at others – we will be like someone piling logs on a blazing furnace and fanning the fire and so making more firebrands. This is how we get into a rage.

-This is exactly what Abbot Zosimos said when he was asked to explain the saying, 'Where there is no bad temper fighting dies out.' *"If at the beginning of a dissension,"* he said, *"when there is first smoke and sparks begin to fly, if a man prevents it by blaming himself and humbling himself before he gets drawn into the quarrel and gets into a temper, until, not remaining tranquil but wrangling and becoming reckless, he acts like a man who is piling wood on a fire which gets hotter and hotter until he has made a great blaze. For just as burning logs are reduced to cinders and get covered ash but do not go out for ages, even if water is thrown on them, so also anger that endures for a long time becomes rancor (malice bearing, resentment, bitterness). And for the rest, unless a man sweats blood he will never be free from it."*

-We see how Abbot Zosimos shows us the difference. Here we have heard what the first annoyance is, what temper is, what losing our temper, and what rancor is. We see how from one remark a grievous evil is reached.

-If, from the beginning, we take the blame when we are reproached, without trying to justify ourselves or making counter-charges and so repaying evil for evil, we will be delivered from all these maladies. This is why when a passion arise, when it is young and feeble, we have to cut it off and dash it against the rock, that is, call upon the name of Christ in prayer; otherwise it stiffen and cause us a great deal of trouble.

-It is one thing to pluck out a small weed and quite another thing to uproot a great tree. It is very surprising that we do not pay attention to what we chant in the psalms; we curse ourselves and we do not realize it. Ought we not to know what we are saying when we chant, "If I have paid back evil for evil let me fall down defenseless before my enemies." What does "let me fall down" mean? As long as a man is on his feet he has power to stand up to his enemies, he strikes and is struck, he wins a victory or he is defeated, but he is still on his feet. If, however, he loses his foothold and falls down, if he is lying on the ground, how can he go on struggling with his enemy? So if we have repaid evil for evil, what we are praying when we say this psalm is that not only that we will fall before our enemies but to fall down defenseless. In other words, we pray that we will be knocked out. That would be terrible!

-Let us see what it means for someone to fall down defenseless before his enemies. 'Falling' means no longer to have the power to get up. 'Defenseless' means not to have anything good left in us by which we may at length get up again. For a man who gets up may again take care of himself and when indeed he does so he comes back into the struggle/boxing/ arena.

-Then we, in the words of the psalm, say: "May the enemy pursue my soul and capture me." Not only 'pursue' but 'capture' as well, so that we become subject to him in everything and we are bested in everything we undertake. And we ask that he may throw us down in this way if we render evil for evil. Not only do we pray for this, but we add: "Let our life be trodden down into the earth." What do we mean by our life? Our capacity for acting virtuous, our power of right action, we ask for this life to be trodden into the earth, so that we become completely earthly, and for all our thoughts and actions to be bowed down to earthly things. "Let him plant my glory in the dust." What is this glory of ours if not the knowledge generated in the soul by the keeping of the commandments.

-Therefore, we say all this that he, the enemy, may make our glory into our shame; that we may fix it in the dust and make our life and our glory earthly, that we have no thought of God but only of bodily comfort or the pleasures of the flesh like those of whom God said, "My spirit will not endure in those men because they are flesh" (Gen. 6:3).

-So, when we recite all this in the psalms, this is how we curse ourselves if we pay back evil for evil; to the extent that we do in fact do it and we pay no attention and show no discernment.

-There is a way of rendering evil for evil not only in actions but also in words and in attitude. A man may not seem to render evil for evil by what he does, but he is found to do so in words or in his attitude, general behavior. For there are times when a person, either by his attitude, his movements, or his looks, disturbs his brother, and does so on purpose, and this is to render evil for evil.

-Another man may not render evil for evil, by deeds or words or attitude or movement, but is wounded at heart and harbors resentment against his brother. Another man may have no complaint against his brother, but if he hears that someone has annoyed the brother or if at some time someone murmurs against the brother or reviles the brother, he is glad when he hears it; then it is clear that he too is rendering evil for evil in his heart.

-Another man may not cling to evil and not be glad when someone who has annoyed him is reviled and may rather himself be annoyed if he has caused annoyance, and yet he is not glad when something good happens to his brother and if he sees him praised or at rest he is displeased, even this is a kind of rancor, though it is less serious, because we are told by the Scripture to rejoice with those who rejoiced.

-Finally there is the man who wants to rejoice that his brother is at rest, does all he can to be of service to him, and arranges everything to promote his progress and tranquility.

-We said earlier about the man who apologizes to another but retains a slight irritation against the other brother, and we were saying that through his apology the 'anger' was healed but he had not yet conquered resentment. Another man, if someone should happen to annoy him and apologize and be reconciled, is at peace with the other person and he no longer retains in his heart any remembrance of it; but if it happens that the same brother, some days later, says something to trouble him, he begins to remember the first offence and begins to be troubled not only about the second but about the first. This man is like a person who has a wound and puts a plaster on it; after a while, through the plaster, the wound heals and forms a scar, but it still remains a weak spot and if someone hits him, this place is more easily damaged than the rest of the body and begins to bleed.

-This is what happened to him; he had a wound and he put on the plaster, that is, the apology and the reconciliation; soon the wound is healed, that is, the anger is cured; he began to take care about the resentment through being zealous not to cling to the remembrance of evil in his heart,

and this is the scar of the healed-up wound. But he was not perfectly healed, he still had a slight resentment left behind, this is the scar from which the skin can easily be removed and the whole wound opened up again by a slight blow.

-He has to make a great effort that the scar is completely blotted out and hair grows again and no disfigurement is left behind, so that the place where the wound was cannot be discerned.

-How then can this be put to right? By prayer from the heart for the one who had annoyed him, such as: "O God, help my brother, and me through his prayers." In this he is interceding for his brother, which is a sure sign of sympathy and love, and he is humiliating himself by asking help through his brother's prayers. Where there is sympathy and love and humility, how can wrath and other passions develop?

-As Abbot Zosimos says: "Even if the devil and all his spirits were to set in motion all their cunning tricks to promote evil, all his efforts would be in vain and be brought to nothing by that humility which Christ enjoined on us." Evagrius used to say: "The man who prays for his enemies is a man without rancor."

-We have to work at this and pray for the grace to be able to put it into practice, and understand clearly what we hear, for unless we work at it we will not absorb it by word alone.

-For what person wishing to learn a trade can master it by verbal instructions alone? No! Always he has to start by doing, and doing it wrong, making and unmaking, until, little by little, working patiently and perseveringly, he learns the trade while God looks on his labor and his humility, and works with him.

-And do we wish to master the trade of all trades by word alone, without practical experience of the work? This would be impossible. So, let us fortify ourselves and work with enthusiasm while we have time. We have to walk while we still have the light of Christ, lest the darkness of evil overtake us.

-May God give us the grace to remember and keep what we heard, lest it bring us a heavy sentence on the day of judgment, for the servant who knows his master's will and do not act accordingly will receive a severe beating. May God deliver us from this.

*** Anxiety(ies)-Cares-Worry(ies)**

-When a man's thoughts are filled with anxiety about the affairs of life, he is not free. He is oppressed and enslaved by these anxieties, and worries either about himself or about others (St. Simeon the New Theologian).

-Attachment is an anxiety that, like a bond, ties the spirit down to the earth and allows it no enlargement of heart (St. John of the Cross).

-The soul sleeps peacefully on the breast of Providence playing with the divine wisdom like an innocent child without anxiety about the journey which continues without interruption, and in spite of rocks and pirates and continual storms pursues its even way!

-When we have no wish to meddle in an affair that is none of ours, a delightful solitude is always at hand. But when we are prompted by divine Providence, difficulty and anxiety are to be preferred to that solitude. Certainly the former position is pleasanter and more comforting; yet the latter, since it is harder is more meritorious, assuming it to be God's command that drives us to it, against our inclination.

-Neither be troubled that you are troubled, nor be anxious that you are anxious, nor be disturbed that you are disturbed, but turn naturally to God in sweet and peaceful humility, going so far as to thank Him that He has not allowed you to commit still greater faults.

-All anxiety is a sickness of the soul.

-A further great grace is to feel neither trouble, nor fear, nor anxiety, whether about your present state or about the future, as though you had become insensible to all things. For that is the fruit and the happy effect of your complete self-abandonment.

-Anxious forethought does us much harm; why then do we indulge in it so readily?

-Our perception and our fear of the strict truth of God's judgment is a great grace; but do not spoil it by allowing this fear to become anxiety and perturbation; for the good and true fear of God is for ever sweet, peaceful and tranquil, and mingled with trust.

-We must take great precautions against growing impatient because we are impatient, and growing anxious because we are anxious. Accordingly we must humiliate ourselves gently, and, merely by so doing, we gain more than we have lost.

-Avoid the anxieties which may be caused by either regret for the past or fear of the future, here in a few words is the rule to follow: the past must be left to God's measureless mercy, the future to His loving providence; and the present must be given wholly to His love through our fidelity to His grace.

-We must not be solicitous, anxious, about what we shall eat or drink or wherewith we shall be clothed: we must seek first the kingdom of God all these things shall be added to us. He is not, of course, telling us that we must have no care or concern for our needs, our well-being, no thought for the future; He is not abrogating the earlier decree that we must earn our bread by the sweat of our brow. He is telling us not to be solicitous-anxious: not to be anxious with the anxiety of the man who feels he has no one to rely on but himself. He is telling us to trust our heavenly Father: to be ready, if need be, to forgo things that seem desirable or even necessary rather than do anything contrary to God's will, confident that if we do so, we shall not be losers in the end.

-Safety for the soul that practices prayer will consist in its ceasing to be anxious about anything and anybody, and in its watching itself and pleasing God. This is most important (St. Teresa of Avila).

-Not the order in the cosmos, but the disorder in himself; not the visible things of the world, but the invisible frustrations, complexes, and anxieties of his own personality, these are the modern man's starting point when he turns questioningly toward religion.

-Modern anxiety is different from the anxiety of previous and more normal ages in two ways. In other days men were anxious about their souls, but modern anxiety is principally concerned with the body; the major worries of today are economic security, health, the complexion, wealth, social prestige, and lust. This overemphasis on corporal security is not healthy; it has begotten a generation that is much more concerned about having belts to wear on a sea journey than about the cabin it will occupy and enjoy.

-The second characteristic of modern anxiety is that it is not a fear of objective, natural dangers, such as lightning, beasts, famine; it is subjective, a vague fear of what one believes would be dangerous if it happened. The danger that they fear is inside of them and therefore is abnormally real to them.

-It is important to inquire into the basic reason and ground of anxiety, according to man's present historical condition, of which the psychological is only one superficial manifestation. The philosophy of anxiety looks to the fact that man is a fallen being composed of body and soul. Standing midway between the animal and the angel, living in a finite world and aspiring toward the infinite, moving in time and seeking the eternal, he is pulled at one moment toward the pleasures of the body

and at another moment to the joys of the spirit. He is in a constant state of suspension between matter and spirit.

-In every human being, there is a double law of gravitation, one pulling him to the earth, where he has his time of trial, and the other pulling him to God, where he has his happiness.

-The anxiety underlying all modern man's anxieties arises from his trying to be himself without God or from his trying to get beyond himself without God.

-Anxiety stems fundamentally from unregulated desires, from the creature wanting something that is unnecessary for him or contrary to his nature or positively harmful to his soul. Anxiety increases in direct ratio proportion as man departs from God. Every man in the world has an anxiety complex because he has the capacity to be either saint or sinner.

-When we see a monkey acting foolishly, we do not say to the monkey, "Do not act like a nut"; but when we see a man acting foolishly, we do say, "Do not act like a monkey." Because man is a spirit, as well as matter, he can descend to the level of beasts, though not so completely as to destroy the image of God in his soul.

-It is this possibility that makes the peculiar tragedy of man. Cows have no psychoses, and pigs have no neuroses, and chickens are not frustrated (unless these are artificially produced by man); neither would man be frustrated or have an anxiety complex if he were an animal made only for this world.

-Since the basic cause of man's anxiety is the possibility of being a saint or a sinner, it follows that there are only two alternatives for him. Man can either mount upward to the peak of eternity or else slip backward to the chasms of despair and frustration.

-Yet there are many who think there is yet another alternative, namely, that of indifference. They think that, just as bears hibernate for a season in a state of suspended animation, so they, too, can sleep through life without choosing to live for God or against Him. But hibernation is no escape; winter ends, and one is then forced to make a decision, indeed, the very choice of indifference itself is a decision.

-White fences do not remain white fences by having nothing done to them; they soon become black fences. Since there is a tendency in us

that pulls us back to the animal, the mere fact that we do not resist it operates to our own destruction.

-By the mere fact that we do not go forward, we go backward. Not to progress is to regress. There are no plains in the spiritual life; we are either going uphill or coming down. The will must choose. And even though an "indifferent" soul does not positively reject the infinite, the infinite rejects it. The talents that are unused are taken away, and the Scripture tells that "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16). It means that halfhearted commitment to the faith is nauseating to Christ.

Cares

-It is not the world that is harmful but the cares of this world; it is not riches that is harmful but the love for riches. The blame is not on the created things but on the corrupted will. It is possible to be rich and be deceived by riches, to be in this world and not to be oppressed by its cares (St. John Chrysostom).

-As earth thrown over it extinguishes a fire burning in a stove, so worldly cares and every kind of attachment to something however small and insignificant, destroy the warmth of the heart which was there at first (St. Simeon the New Theologian).

-Without freedom from cares do not expect to find light in your soul, nor peace and silence with your senses at large (St. Isaac of Syria).

Worry(ies)

-It is when I possess least that I have the fewest worries; I am more afflicted when there is excess than when there is lack of it (St. Teresa of Avila).

-Let not the worries caused by the passions and fantasies of the demons weaken you. Believe that although the demons disturb and tempt us, they will achieve nothing, but will only increase our virtue, if we do but keep attention in ourselves with diligence and have a little patience (Sts. Basanuphius and John).

-“Worry is like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do but never gets you anywhere” (Emma Bombeck).

-“Worry doesn’t empty tomorrow of its suffering; it empties today of its strength.”

-She looks after what is His and that He would look after what is hers. Thus, the soul doesn’t worry about all that can happen (St. Teresa of Avila).

-Above all, by means of the most filial trust in God, shun energetically avoidable anxieties.

Banners Of Life

Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit
Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of
the Lord

-St. Augustine says that death in the state of grace is preeminent gift of God, even in the case of infants. In the case of adults this gift sustains their voluntary and meritorious choice, and hinders them from being cast down by adversity. But while each predestined soul will have this gift, none can know, without special revelation that he will persevere. Hence we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling. St. Augustine adds that this gift is not given to us according to our merits, but according to the will of God, a will very secret, very wise, very beneficent. Only to God does it belong to give it, since He alone determines the end of our life. But this gift, even if it cannot be merited, can be obtained by humble supplication.

-The whole order of creation affords us an analogy of the gift-quality of grace. If a stone, say the Rock of Gibraltar, should suddenly break out into bloom, it would be something transcending its nature. If a rose one day would become conscious and see and feel and touch, it would be a supranatural act – an act totally undue to the nature of the rose as such. If an animal would break out into a reasoning process and speak words of wisdom, it would be a supranatural act, for it is not in the nature of an animal to be rational. So too but in a far more rigorous manner, if a human, who by nature is a creature of God, becomes a child of God and a member of the family of the Trinity, and a brother or sister of Jesus Christ, it is a supernatural act for the human, and a gift that surpasses all the exigencies and powers of human nature, even more than blooming surpasses the nature and powers of marble.

-Grace makes a person more than a “new creature,” and infinitely higher than his former condition, than an animal would be if it spoke with the wisdom of Socrates.

-Aside from the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, God has two kinds of gifts: first, there are those which He sends us whether we pray for them or not; and the second kinds are those which are given on condition that we pray.

-The **first** gifts resemble those things which a child receives in a family, such as food, clothing, shelter care, and watchfulness. These gifts come to every child, whether the child asks for them or not. But there are other gifts, which are conditioned upon the desire of the child. For instance, a father may be eager to have a son go to college, but if the boy refuses to study or becomes delinquent, the gift which he intended for him can never be bestowed. It is not because the father has retracted his gift, but rather because the boy has made the gift impossible.

-Of the first kind of gifts Our Lord spoke when He said: "His rain falls on the just and equally on the unjust" (Mt. 5:45). He spoke of the second kind of gifts when He said: "Ask, and the gift will come."

-The greatest gift of God is not the things we think we would like to have, but Himself. And as all love grows, it asks less and less, seeking only to give and give. God, likewise, does not always give us what we want, but He always gives us what we need.

-Although God desires that if ever man shall respond to this gift of self-transcendence, He nevertheless leaves each one free to reject His infusion of love – for gifts cease to be gifts if they are forced on us. God respects man's freedom of will; He did not even enter into this human order of ours without consulting a woman. So, neither, does He elevate us to partake of His Divine Nature without our free consent.

-When God made our human heart, He found it so good and so lovable that He kept a small sample of it in heaven. He sent the rest of it into this world to enjoy His gifts, and to use them as stepping stones back to Him, but to be ever mindful that we can never love anything in this world with our whole heart because we have not a whole heart with which to love. In order to love anyone with our whole heart, in order to be really peaceful, in order to be really whole-hearted, we must go back again to God to recover the piece He has been keeping for us from all eternity!

-By nature, that is, naturally, we are just creatures of God's handiwork. We are not, in the strict sense of the term, God's children; we are only God's creatures. But suppose God gave us the power to being His children, of sharing His Divine Life, of being a member of the family of the Blessed Trinity, of being heirs of Heaven – that would be supernatural for us, more supernatural than for a marble to sprout, and for a rose to write music, or for a dog to speak.

-At the beginning one loves God only for His gifts, for the emotions He sends us. He treats us, then, like a young woman who is being courted. If gifts are no longer given in such abundance after a true marriage has occurred, it is not because the husband's love is less but because it is greater. For now he gives himself. It is not the husband's gift that his wife loves, nor his compliments, nor even the thrill of pleasure she gets from his company. She loves him. The moment the Lover is loved for himself, and then the nature of the gift ceases to matter. Similarly, if God withdraws all sensible gifts, all natural happiness, it is only because He wants the union between the soul and Himself to be more personal and less dependent on His generosity.

-If God sometimes seems to slow to answer our petitions, there are several possible reasons. One is that the delay is for the purpose of deepening our love and increasing our faith; the other is that God is urging us. God may defer for some time the granting of His gifts, that we might the more ardently pursue not the gift, but the Giver. Or we may be asking Him for something He wants us to learn we do not need.

-Those who love God do not protest, whatever He may ask of them, nor doubt His kindness when He sends them difficult hours. A sick man takes medicine without asking the physician to justify its bitter taste, because he trusts the doctor's knowledge; so the soul which has sufficient faith accepts all the events of life as gifts from God, in the serene assurance that He knows best.

-Every holy person is disdained as lighthearted as long as not experiencing trials, but if the winds of persecution bring oppression, the person's pungency is soon obvious, and whatever seemed weak or despicable before turns into fervent virtue. What such a person had willingly hidden within in untroubled times is made known when aroused by the trials. And so the prophet also spoke the truth: "The Lord sends His mercy by day, and makes it known at night." For the mercy of the Lord is sent out by day because it is received and known in untroubled times; it is declared at night because the gift received in peace is clearly seen in times of trial.

-A man who has receive a gift and yet does not know what sort of gift it is stands in the twofold danger of being both ungrateful for what he has received and careless in guarding it. How can a man return thanks for a gift if he does not know he has received it (St. Bernard)?

-I think it is a good to know what I have received from the Lord, so that I may also know what I lack; and, with the Apostle, I think it is my duty to recognize what God has bestowed upon me so that I may know what to pray and sigh for (St. Bernard).

-And since the will is always free, it is the one supreme gift we can make to God. Such yielding of the center of our lives to Christ is the way of supreme happiness. Our happiness varies according to the center about which our lives revolve.

-If it is the ego, there are frustrations; if it is the I, there is a measure of natural happiness, still incomplete. If it is the Divine, there is the joy of being one with infinite Life and Truth and Love.

-It is difficult to name another Catholic doctrine of as hallowed antiquity as the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit that is subject to such benign neglect. Many Catholics born around 1950, learned their names by memory: "wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord!" Sadly, though, once Confirmation Day had come and gone, they were chagrined to find that they had not become the all-wise, all-knowing, unconquerable *milites Christi* (soldiers of Christ) that the pre-Vatican II catechesis had promised.

The Problem

-Ironically, post-Vatican II catechesis has proven even less capable of instilling in young Catholics a lively sense of what the seven gifts are all about. At least the previous approach had the advantage of conjuring up the lurid prospect of a martyr's bloody death at the hands of godless atheists. But, alas, such militant pedagogy went out the window in the aftermath of the Council. But a stream of reports in recent decades on declining interest in the faith among new *confirmandi* suggests that the changes are not having their desired effect. Not that there were no bugs in the pre-Vatican II catechetical machine—there were plenty—but such superficial tinkering did not even begin to address them.

-A recent article in *Theological Studies* by Rev. Charles E. Bouchard, O.P., president of the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, Missouri ("Recovering the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in Moral Theology," Sept. 2002), identifies some specific weaknesses in traditional Catholic catechesis on the seven gifts:

- Neglect of the close connection between the seven gifts and the cardinal and theological virtues (faith, hope, charity/love, prudence, justice, fortitude/courage, and temperance), which St. Thomas Aquinas himself had emphasized in his treatment of the subject;
- A tendency to relegate the seven gifts to the esoteric realm of ascetical/mystical spirituality rather than the practical, down-to-earth realm of moral theology, which St. Thomas Aquinas had indicated was their proper sphere;
- A form of spiritual elitism whereby the fuller study of the theology of the gifts was reserved to priests and religious, who alone, it was presumed—unlike the unlettered masses—had the requisite learning and spirituality to appreciate and assimilate it;
- Neglect of the scriptural basis of the theology of the gifts, particularly Isaiah 11, where the gifts were originally identified and applied prophetically to Christ.

-The 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* had already addressed some of these issues (such as the importance of the virtues and the relationship between the gifts and "the moral life") but avoided defining the individual gifts or even treating them in any detail—a mere six paragraphs (1285–1287, 1830–1831, and 1845), as compared with forty on the virtues (1803–1829, 1832–1844). Perhaps that is why the catechetical textbooks that have appeared in the wake of the new *Catechism* present such a confusing array of definitions of the gifts. These definitions tend to be imprecise rehashings of the traditional Thomistic definitions or totally ad hoc definitions drawn from the author's personal experience or imagination. In light of these developments, it is helpful to review the Church's traditional explanation of the seven gifts.

The Tradition Explanation

-The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are, according to Catholic Tradition, heroic character traits that Jesus Christ alone possesses in their plenitude but that He freely shares with the members of His mystical body (i.e., His Church). These traits are infused into every Christian as a permanent endowment at his baptism, nurtured by the practice of the seven virtues, and sealed in the sacrament of confirmation. They are also known as the sanctifying gifts of the Spirit, because they serve the purpose of rendering their recipients docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in their lives, helping them to grow in holiness and making them fit for heaven.

-The nature of the seven gifts has been debated by theologians since the mid-second century, but the standard interpretation has been the one that St. Thomas Aquinas worked out in the thirteenth century in his *Summa Theologiae*:

- **Wisdom** is both the knowledge of and judgment about "divine things" and the ability to judge and direct human affairs according to divine truth (I/I.1.6; I/II.69.3; II/II.8.6; II/II.45.1–5).
- **Understanding** is penetrating insight into the very heart of things, especially those higher truths that are necessary for our eternal salvation—in effect, the ability to "see" God (I/I.12.5; I/II.69.2; II/II.8.1–3).
- **Counsel** allows a man to be directed by God in matters necessary for his salvation (II/II.52.1).
- **Fortitude** denotes a firmness of mind in doing good and in avoiding evil, particularly when it is difficult or dangerous to do so, and the confidence to overcome all obstacles, even deadly ones, by virtue of the assurance of everlasting life (I/II.61.3; II/II.123.2; II/II.139.1).

- **Knowledge** is the ability to judge correctly about matters of faith and right action, so as to never wander from the straight path of justice (II/II.9.3).
- **Piety** is, principally, revering God with filial affection, paying worship and duty to God, paying due duty to all men on account of their relationship to God, and honoring the saints and not contradicting Scripture. The Latin word *pietas* denotes the reverence that we give to our father and to our country; since God is the Father of all, the worship of God is also called piety (I/II.68.4; II/II.121.1).
- **Fear of God** is, in this context, "filial" or chaste fear whereby we revere God and avoid separating ourselves from Him—as opposed to "servile" fear, whereby we fear punishment (I/II.67.4; II/II.19.9).

-These gifts, according to St. Thomas, are "habits," "instincts," or "dispositions" provided by God as supernatural helps to man in the process of his "perfection." They enable man to transcend the limitations of human reason and human nature and participate in the very life of God, as Christ promised (John 14:23). St. Thomas insisted that they are necessary for man's salvation, which he cannot achieve on his own. They serve to "perfect" the four cardinal or moral virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) and the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity). The virtue of charity is the key that unlocks the potential power of the seven gifts, which can (and will) lie dormant in the soul after baptism unless so acted upon.

-Because "grace builds upon nature" (ST I/I.2.3), the seven gifts work synergistically with the seven virtues and also with the twelve fruits of the Spirit and the eight beatitudes. The emergence of the gifts is fostered by the practice of the virtues, which in turn are perfected by the exercise of the gifts. The proper exercise of the gifts, in turn, produce the fruits of the Spirit in the life of the Christian: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, modesty, self-control, and chastity (Gal. 5:22–23). The goal of this cooperation among virtues, gifts, and fruits is the attainment of the eight-fold state of beatitude described by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3–10).

The Spiritual Arsenal

-The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit can be traced back to its biblical roots. The first—and only—place in the entire Bible where these seven special qualities are listed together is Isaiah 11:1–3, in a famous Messianic prophecy:

-“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the

spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord."

-It is interesting to note how integral these seven concepts were to the ancient Israelite "Wisdom" tradition, which is reflected in such Old Testament books as Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Psalms, Ecclesiasticus, and the Wisdom of Solomon, as well as certain strands of the prophetic books, including Isaiah. This material focuses on how to navigate the ethical demands of daily life: economics, love and marriage, rearing children, interpersonal relationships, the use and abuse of power. It provides a glimpse into how Israel's covenant with Yahweh is lived out in all its nitty-gritty detail.

-It is from this world of practical, down-to-earth, everyday concerns that the seven gifts emerged, and the context of Isaiah 11 reinforces this frame of reference. The balance of Isaiah describes in loving detail the aggressiveness with which the "shoot of Jesse" will establish his "peaceable kingdom" upon the earth:

-He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. . . . They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Is. 11:3–4, 9)

-Establishing this kingdom entails thought, planning, work, struggle, courage, endurance, perseverance, humility—that is, getting one's hands dirty. This earthbound perspective is a profitable one from which to view the role the seven gifts play in the life of mature (or maturing) Christians.

-The seven gifts are indispensable resources in the struggle to establish the kingdom and are, in a sense, a byproduct of actively engaging in spiritual warfare. If a person does not bother to equip himself properly for battle, he should not be surprised to find himself defenseless when the battle is brought to his doorstep.

-The seven gifts are an endowment to which every baptized Christian can lay claim from his earliest childhood. They are our patrimony. These gifts, given in the sacraments for us to develop through experience, are indispensable to the successful conduct of the Christian way of life. They do not appear spontaneously and out of nowhere but emerge gradually as the fruit of virtuous living. Nor are they withdrawn by the Spirit once they

are no longer needed, for they are perpetually needed as long as we are fighting the good fight.

-The seven gifts are designed to be used in the world for the purpose of transforming that world for Christ. Isaiah 11 vividly portrays what these gifts are to be used for: to do what one is called to do in one's own time and place to advance the kingdom of God. The specific, personal details of that call do not come into focus until one has realized his very limited, ungodlike place in the scheme of things (fear of the Lord), accepted one's role as a member of God's family (piety), and acquired the habit of following the Father's specific directions for living a godly life (knowledge).

-This familiarity with God breeds the strength and courage needed to confront the evil that one inevitably encounters in one's life (fortitude) and the cunning to nimbly shift one's strategies to match—even anticipate—the many machinations of the Enemy (counsel). The more one engages in such "spiritual warfare," the more one perceives how such skirmishes fit into the big picture that is God's master plan for establishing His reign in this fallen world (understanding) and the more confident, skillful, and successful one becomes in the conduct of his particular vocation (wisdom).

Soldiers of Christ

-The path to a mature appropriation of the spiritual arsenal represented by the seven gifts needs to be trod as early as possible, and the seven virtues can serve today, as they have for most of the Church's history, as excellent guides along that path. Perhaps it is time to resurrect the traditional image of the baptized as "soldiers of Christ," members of the Church militant.

-The toppling of the Soviet Union, for example, would not have happened without the nonviolent militancy of John Paul II in the pursuit of a legitimate goal. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are our spiritual weaponry for the spiritual warfare of everyday life.

-The navel is the reminder that our body and our life are gifts from another. Nature has placed this sign in the very center of our bodies, where we cannot fail to see it. It is a symbol of the love, goodness and heroic sacrifices of our mothers. Mothers are images of God and grace.

-All through history, God has revealed Himself as the supreme Gift-Giver. Creation is a gift. Life is a gift. The Lord gave His covenants as gifts, and called Abraham, Moses, and the Jewish People to Himself all out of sheer

generosity. Moreover, God sent His Son to us as a gift, and Christ won for us all the gift of eternal life.

-God wants nothing more than to share His own life with us. The Lord wants to make us, as Scripture says, "sharers in the divine nature" (2 Pt. 1:4). As creatures, however, and sinful one at that, we need to be prepared and elevated by God before we can be perfectly united with Him. In a word, we must be changed.

-Part of our transformation into the people God wants us to be happens because His grace makes us virtuous. To be virtuous means not only to do right, but to be the kind of person who does what is good readily, spontaneously, and with joy. The life of the virtues prevents evils from poisoning the love in our hearts, and free us to advance in godliness. But besides strengthening us in goodness, God also infuses into our souls the gifts of Faith, Hope, and Charity – the "theological virtues," which are nothing less than a sharing in God's own divine knowledge and love. Through Faith, Hope, and Love we are brought in union with the Holy Trinity even during our life on earth.

-In giving us the theological virtues, the Holy Spirit makes His dwelling in us and enlivens us with rich blessings of every description, making us daily more like Christ and guiding us to the life of perfection in heaven.

-Scripture emphasizes two groups of blessings that the Holy Spirit gives to those who receive Him. First, there are the twelve "Fruits of the Holy Spirit" that St. Paul names for us in his letter to the Galatians: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity (Gal. 5:22-23). In addition, the Holy Spirit endows us with blessings we traditionally call the seven "Gifts of the Holy Spirit." These particular gifts are lasting (but not indestructible) endowments that perfect the good habits and natural powers of our soul and have the effect of making us supernaturally sensitive and supernaturally responsive to the guidance and inspirations of God.

-Since the Gifts bring about exquisite sensitivity and responsiveness to God, we can say that they are, in a sense, the crowning dignity of our human nature. Even Our Lord Jesus Himself, as true man, was endowed with the Gifts. In His infinite and loving wisdom, God has ordained that it is only through the Gifts of the Holy Spirit that souls should be made fully attentive, alert, and heedful to the Spirit's urging. In receiving the Gifts, we are brought into a deeper conformity to Christ, who in His perfect humanity, was supremely and perfectly sensitive and subject to the inspirations of God.

-Our sharing in the glory of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit is not limited to the time of our short life on earth. It is true that, in this present life, the Gifts assist us in those areas that purify and perfect our relationship with God. They especially protect us against temptation and the trials brought about by evil. But in heaven, our entire life will be one of following the movements and life of the Holy Spirit. The Gifts will enable us to participate in the very life of the Holy Trinity, in a way that only God Himself can teach us. In their essence, then, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit will continue to last and be active in heaven. There they will be fully permanent and perfect, enabling us to enjoy total communion with God and with all the angels and saints in Him. Together we will exult in God's own love and beauty, and will share in them together as His beloved children forever.

What are the Gifts, exactly?

-The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are blessings given to our souls, to enhance and refine the natural powers that our souls possess. "'Soul' refers to the innermost aspect of man, that which is of greatest value in him, that by which he is most especially in God's image: 'soul' signifies the spiritual principle in man," according to the Catechism of the Church.

-God the Holy Spirit is always at work prompting us and leading us to greater purity, greater love, and greater holiness. However, even with the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, our hearts can remain insensitive to the Holy Spirit. The seven Gifts are the remedy for this dullness. They enhance the powers of the soul and make our hearts more sensitive to God, so that we can easily and consistently follow the movements and inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

-The Gifts are lasting, habitual dispositions that keep us keenly attuned and devotedly responsive to even the smallest promptings of God. They make us ready for His initiatives, and enable us to act in a holy, even God-like way.

-These seven graces are called "Gifts" for two reasons. First, they are "Gifts" because God infuses them in us without expecting any payment. Second, they are "Gifts" because they give us the privilege of responding to divine inspirations. The name "Gifts," given in Scripture, seems most appropriate when we consider what supreme blessings and benefits God gives us through them.

Who needs the Gifts?

-We all need the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, since without God's help it is impossible for us to find our way to Him. Besides needing for our sins to be forgiven, we need God to overcome our vices, foolishness, ignorance,

mental dullness, and other defects of mind and soul. He does this in a magnificent way by giving the Gifts, since these more than compensate for the weaknesses of our fallen nature and remedy the spiritual sicknesses that keep us from full communion with God.

-The Gifts are more than remedy, and they strengthen and confirm us in following the good inspirations and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Gifts brings us to hear and obey God readily, and they make doing His will our supreme delight.

How do we obtain the Gifts?

-The seven Gifts, like the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, are given to us in Holy Baptism. Once given they enhance the soul and exist us new, supernatural faculties or power. Unlike the natural faculties, however, the Gifts depend directly upon God for their exercise. We have by nature the power to think and reason (for example), but when we are brought to life by God's grace we are endowed with the Gifts as supernatural faculties, senses (as it were) that make possible our life as new spiritual creatures.

-The real action or operation of the Gifts – and thus their benefits – depend upon the further working of God. In fact, the operation of the Gifts is often hidden to us. It is not unusual for them to be revealed only in retrospect, through an enlightened examination of our actions. This is not surprising since at the time of the Gifts' activity our attention will be on God and on other objects as they relate to Him.

-The operation of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit depends primarily and essentially upon the grace of God. For our part, we can cultivate them by avoiding sin and by exercising the moral and intellectual virtues. Full of ready obedience, we must disown whatever could impede or offer resistance to the movement of the Holy Spirit. For instance, if we are stubborn, selfish, or self-indulgent, we are creating obstacles in our souls and are impeding the work of grace.

-We cannot enjoy the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in a stable and lasting way as long as we remain willing to sin, or unresolved in our determination never to offend God. "No one," Christ reminds us in the Gospel, "can serve two masters" (Mt. 6:24).

-The Gifts of the Holy Spirit appear when we are living in true, divine Charity. When we love God above all things and when love all things for His sake, then that same spiritual fire of love makes us keenly sensitive to

His direction. Thus the Gifts appear with Charity, and in turn they lead back to greater holiness and to greater love.

-The Gifts are always present all together, since in the life of divine love they form an organic, integral whole. (This is so even though, in particular cases, the operation of a particular Gift is needed and evident). In Charity, the Gifts cannot be disconnected or parceled out separately, and they work in such a way that they reinforce, complement, and replenish each other inasmuch as they act together to keep us attuned to doing whatever God wants.

-In Charity, the Gifts cannot be discontented or parceled out separately, and they work in such a way that they reinforce, complement, and replenish each other inasmuch as they act together to keep us attuned to doing whatever God wants.

-Only life can give life, and only life can come from life. The life of God that is grace is a pure gift of God to which we have no right whatever. It was given to us in the first Adam, and restored to us by the merits of the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

-To preserve these gifts for themselves and posterity, one condition was imposed by God, on Adam and Eve, and it was very easy. They merely had to love God Who is their perfection. We must not think that this condition was equivalent to saying a child: "If you eat a wooly worm, I will give you a dollar," because a wooly worm is not the perfection of a child. Rather, it was like saying to the child: "If you drink milk and eat vitamins, you will be healthy." As obeying the law of health is the perfection of the child, so, too, obeying the will of God is our perfection.

The Gift of Wisdom

-Wisdom is the perfection of faith. As Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J., notes in his *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Where faith is a simple knowledge of the articles of Christian belief, wisdom goes on to a certain divine penetration of the truths themselves." The better we understand those truths, the more we value them properly. Thus wisdom, the Catholic Encyclopedia notes, "by detaching us from the world, makes us relish and love only the things of heaven." Through wisdom, we judge the things of the world in light of the highest end of man—the contemplation of God.

The Application of Wisdom

-Such detachment, however, is not the same as renunciation of the world—far from it. Rather, wisdom helps us to love the world properly, as the creation of God, rather than for its own sake.

-The material world, though fallen as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve, is still worthy of our love; we simply need to see it in the proper light, and wisdom allows us to do so.

-Knowing the proper ordering of the material and spiritual worlds through wisdom, we can more easily bear the burdens of this life and respond to our fellow man with charity and patience.

-St. Thomas Aquinas, looking to the etymology, the word origin of the word wisdom, defines Wisdom as a knowing that is "tasted." The gift of Wisdom is, then, a special taste for God and the truth about God that we acquire by experience through the action of the Holy Spirit. Wisdom is where Knowledge and experience coexist.

-Wisdom is not the quoting of facts. Wisdom is a gift that allows a person to understand things from God's point of view. In other words, Wisdom allows a person to recognize truth. A person with the Gift of Wisdom is able to take this truth and use it to glorify God by choosing Godly solutions to problems.

-The wise person, generally speaking, is one committed to thorough, rational investigation of the ultimate cause of things. Endowed with this far-reaching consideration, the wise person then judges all other causes in life through that one ultimate cause. The wise person makes judgments with certainty in such a way that he sets all things in their proper order according to the dictates of this full and far-reaching perspective.

-The Holy Spirit' Gift of Wisdom belongs to the graced person who knows the cause that is simply the highest, the ultimate, without qualification, namely God. These persons are called wise without restriction since they can – and do – judge and set in order all things according to God's divine design and prerogatives. For Wisdom implies a certain rightness of judgment in contemplating and in consulting divine realities. Since truly good things have their highest cause the sovereign good and ultimate end, God Himself, the truly wise person must be said to have a certain knowing familiarity with that highest cause. And knowing It radically transforms the wise person's life.

-Through the infusion of the Holy Spirit one comes to such judgment. "The spiritual man can appraise everything....God has revealed this wisdom to us through the Spirit" (1Cor. 2:15, 10). Unlike the acquired intellectual virtue of wisdom that comes through human effort, the Gift of Wisdom comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. At the same time, the Gift of Wisdom

presupposes supernatural Faith. For this Wisdom judges things according to divine truth, while Faith grasps and assents to divine truth for itself.

-we commonly describe both piety and fear as "wisdom" for good reason. Piety remains central to worship which serves to make faith manifest, especially through our prayerful profession of faith. In the same manner, piety also makes wisdom manifest. We pray that we believe, reverence, and esteem. Our piety reveals the truths, the values, the motivations that govern our life – that is – wisdom. Moreover, Fear and Wisdom share a common occupation, for, as St. Thomas says, if a person fears and worships God he shows that he has a right judgment about divine things. That "right judgment" constitutes the Gift of Wisdom.

-Wisdom for St. Augustine remains deeply affective in character, conditioned throughout by the influence of happiness and love. Wisdom as a perfection in man appears as a special kind of knowing, open to religious meaning, and therefore of ultimate value to the person who possesses it.

-Wisdom suggests immediately or by implication a knowledge of God. Wisdom brings about a right judgment concerning divine realities as well as other things in the light of divine standards by means of a certain spiritual contact and communion (a "connaturality") with divine things. That is to say, the Spirit's Gift of Wisdom empowers us to judge correctly in certain matters through a certain fellowship with them, or through a specific kind of "tasting" or experience.

-Wisdom is not only theoretical but practical as well. As its principal function, Wisdom first contemplates divine ideas and realities. However, in the light of this contemplation, Wisdom also directs human actions according to divine reasons. Through the act of meditation, Wisdom ponders divine things in themselves. Through the act of consultation, Wisdom makes a judgment that directs human actions according to divine directives. In this way we see how Wisdom remains both speculative and practical.

-The special association and fellowship with the divine that Wisdom effects comes from the working of Charity. As a result, Wisdom cannot coexist with mortal sin. Therefore, Wisdom abides in all those who live in a state of grace, free of mortal sin. And the degree of Wisdom that inheres in us varies according to the degree of our union with divine things. St. Thomas goes so far as to assert that even the insane who are baptized have the settled quality of the Gift of Wisdom, but not the activity of the gift, owing to physical impediment which hinders their use of reason.

-In some people, the measure of contemplating divine things and of directing human affairs according to divine standards will not exceed the minimum needed for salvation. All those living in sanctifying grace without mortal sin will attain this degree. However, certain other people receive a higher degree of the Gift of Wisdom through the extraordinary graces dispensed by the Holy Spirit. These people, far advanced in contemplation and more intimately familiar with the mysteries of God, are able to communicate these truths effectively to others. Moreover, they enjoy a higher degree of Wisdom in ordering human life according to divine standards, being able to direct not only themselves but others as well. It is for this reason that Scripture advises us, "If you discover a wise man, seek him out; let your feet wear out his doorstep" (Sir. 6:36).

-St. Thomas associates Wisdom with the peacemaker of the Beatitudes. For a peacemaker is one who brings about peace in himself or in others. Since peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the tranquility of right order, according to St. Augustine's classical definition, it is produced when one puts first things first and arranges everything in harmony with God. This is what Wisdom does. Therefore, peacemaking is well-suited to Wisdom. For, as the wise person studies and assesses the "big picture" with a zealous concern for serving and promoting priorities, for putting first things first, he at the same time establishes authentic peace through the right order of his efforts produce. As the wise person considers and evaluates the many and various options before him according to the mind of God, he produces the kind of tranquility that proceeds only from fitting all the pieces of our life into a divinely providential whole.

-We can understand, then, why the Son of God identifies Himself with Wisdom. The Son is not just any word, but the Word breathing love: the Word which is a knowledge accompanied by love. Consequently the Son's being sent is that sort of enlightening that bursts forth into love. The Son is being sent whenever someone has knowledge or perception of Him. Because of this truth, through the Gift of Wisdom, we come to share in the image of Our Lord Jesus the Son of God. For people are called children of God as they participate in the likeness of His only begotten Son, who is Wisdom Begotten. In the Holy Spirit's Gift of Wisdom that we receive, we enter into the state of being children of God.

-Christ is always moving boundaries out while still respecting the center. That's the key to wisdom: being grounded in the center and still, from that deep foundation, knowing how to move out.

-Without experiencing temptations, no one can acquire spiritual wisdom", says St. Isaac of Syria.

-“God never abandons a soul that puts its trust in Him,” points out St. Nilus of Sinai, “even though it is empowered by temptations, for He is aware of all our weakness.” For instance, “A man knows the weight that can be placed on the back of an ass, a mule or a camel, and burdens each beast with as much as it can carry; the potter knows how long he must keep his clay in the fire, for if he exposes it too long to the flames, the pot will crack, and if he does not bake it long enough, it will not be fit for use. Now if a man has a judgment as precise as this, how infinitely greater is the wisdom of God in judging the degree of temptation which a soul is able to bear.”

-Like love, faith, truth, and other rooted human concerns, the search for wisdom has been an exceptional feature of human endeavor throughout history. As far back as the Eden narrative, as described in the Hebrew Scriptures, wisdom is a vital interest of human purpose and activity in daily life, although the primary human family didn't fair too well in the test over competing wisdoms. Both the Old and New Testaments carry several books called wisdom literature, which focus chiefly on the concerns, issues, and interests of everyday life and work in the world.

-“Wisdom,” we are told, “is supreme, therefore get wisdom.... Wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her” (Proverbs 4:7; 8:11). This is the literature in which the figure of a wise King Solomon looms large, and where we have the famous dictum: the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

-A good deal of the Christian New Testament recognizes wisdom as a central divine and human concern, and it explains that the Lord Jesus Himself grew in wisdom (Gospel of Luke: 2:52). Also, the New Testament engages its readers from a wisdom-based way of reasoning much more than is commonly thought. To cite some examples, the four Gospels include narratives which reflect that much of Christ's teaching was steeped in how the Hebraic wisdom tradition reasons about God, nature, daily human relationships, and our world in the world.

-Christ's parables are examples, but more is going on than that. Christ was living the tradition. So much so that New Testament scholar Ben Witherington, in *Jesus the Sage*, calls Matthew and John “The Gospels of Wisdom,” – narratives suggesting that Jesus' “own story [is] the story of Wisdom in person ..., like and yet even greater than Solomon” (p. 335).

-The Epistles, too, emphasize the centrality of wisdom, such as in the contrast between divine wisdom and the world's wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1-4. Much of the Epistle of James is steeped in the wisdom tradition, and

Christ in the First Epistle to the Corinthians is portrayed as becoming the wisdom of God for believers in him (1 Cor. 1:24, 30). So, wisdom has deeply essential roots in our race and seems to be the purview of no one time or culture.

-Of course, It is one thing to recognize wisdom as essential to our race, but quite another thing to know what wisdom is, where it is found, how it might be applied. Typical understandings abound. "Is not wisdom found among the aged?" the suffering Job asks his friend Zophar, in a book of wisdom literature (Job 12:12). Perhaps. But age itself is no guarantor. Many of us with gray hair still can act pretty foolishly! Wisdom, very generally, is also understood as common sense or good judgment about the issues and interests of daily life or, more narrowly, as a special kind of discernment for judging what is a true or right decision to make, or action to take, in a given situation.

-Wisdom, then, includes a heightened sense of insight to denote someone who is especially clever at sorting out complicated situations that the rest of us would make a complete hash of. Solomon's cliffhanger encounter with the two prostitutes who claim to be the mother of the same vulnerable baby comes to mind. The two women presented Solomon with quite a conundrum, but after hearing how he unraveled it to make his ruling, people "held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice" (1 Kings 3:28).

-Since time immemorial every person on the planet has participated in the same world, shared the common bond of being human, shared the same basic concerns and interests, and desired and worked toward their fulfillment. Even beyond our most essential needs – water, food, shelter – and regardless of whether we are religious or secular in orientation, all peoples everywhere, in any time, have desired that their children are raised safely and educated, that their societies are ordered and lawful, that poverty and hunger should be overcome, that the suffering of others should be eased, that justice prevail, and so on. Shared basic concerns and interests are the stuff of human mutuality, what we all hold in common. They inspire all of us to agree that there is common good to work toward achieving. Shared basic concerns and interests are the stuff of human mutuality, what we all hold in common.

-Call it common ground, or common good, or human mutuality: the shared concerns of everyday life and the decisions people will make in them as they live and work together is a central interest of the wisdom tradition. Work and wealth, family and neighbors, relationships and communication, politics and government, diplomacy and negotiations,

rulers and the administration of justice, business and finance, prosperity and suffering, sickness and health, happiness and grief, social life and the law, the rich and the poor, the single person and the married, parents and children, earning a living – such are subjects the Old Testament wisdom literature finds as its objects. The Book of Proverbs, in particular, focuses extensively on our common humanity. Today, such interests are typically bracketed as secular life, and according to the Old Testament literature the choices people make about them make them wise or foolish.

-Near the end of that lovely passage in Proverbs 8, which discloses the agency of wisdom in the founding of the world, wisdom reveals that she was “rejoicing” in the world and “delighting in mankind,” that is the entire human race; all of us. In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus put it this way: “Wisdom is made right [vindicated] by all her children.” It’s a poignant remark that plays off of a riddle Christ has just made about Himself, and His point seems to be that all sorts of “sinners” that repented may respond wisely to wisdom, act wisely (Luke 7:35; Matthew 11:19). And in the Epistle of James (1:5), which relies on wisdom themes, “any” who lack wisdom should pray for it, because “God ... gives generously to all.”

-Although it is a given in religious traditions that wisdom is a divine gift that can be prayed for, wisdom is also a human task. As the literature explains (e.g., Proverbs 2:3-4), wisdom is to be searched out by us. It can be found in nature, in the give-and-take of human beings who are interacting, experiencing life together; seeking and finding wisdom in and through relationships with those who are not like us. This means of searching out wisdom may seem foreign to us today, if it does not make us bristle. However disrespected as a way of learning wisdom it may be today, it seems to have been respected by the peoples of the old-world Middle East as indispensable for knowing how to plan and act more wisely together toward common goods.

-Wisdom’s focus on advancing cooperative arrangements among people who are different, entails, as would be expected, impartiality concerning the settling of disputes and issues of justice. We see this focus very early on in the formation of Israelite society and jurisprudence, as described in Exodus 18:13-26 and clarified in Deuteronomy 1:9-18.

-So here’s good old Moses and, he’s completely burnt out. He’s just finished waging a terribly exhausting war against Pharaoh and organizing getting a million mean and stubborn slaves and their families out of Egypt and across the Red Sea into the desert, where everyone’s now stuck in the hot sun amidst a host of problems. They’re grumbling and complaining about each other, and there’s no social structures or courts in place yet

for resolving domestic strife. So Moses has decided he will adjudicate all the disputes himself.

-Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of disgruntled Israelites, disaffected Egyptians, and other peoples who had hit the road with Moses are now queuing at his tent day after day waiting their turns, expecting Moses to settle their feuds. But the guy hasn't had a day off since God spoke to him at the burning bush, and this heavy case load is killing him. And the people have had it with queuing in the desert sun all day, while nearby is the person they are taking to court. Days pass. Still no justice. Tempers worsen. More quarrels and fights keep breaking out. What little social order there was has broken down. Anarchy is on the horizon. Justice between the different peoples was to be impartial. Moses required it

-Then the father-in-law shows up! But Jethro is a wise man. He sees the situation and can't believe what he's seeing. "Moses, what in the world do you think you're doing? You can't handle this heavy case load yourself. Look what's happening. You've lost control. People are taking the law into their own hands. You need some qualified help. Here's what you need to do. Save the hardest cases for yourself, but delegate all the other ones to trustworthy people who fear God."

-Moses got the point. He formed a huge organizational structure and appointed many dozens of officials to run it, to serve in various capacities to hear and settle most of the disputes. In the Deuteronomy rendering, as part of a long speech years later, Moses reminds the multitude just how well-constituted and organized this early governing structure was, with its "wise, understanding, and respected men from each of your tribes," who were appointed "to have authority over you – as commanders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens and as tribal officials" (Deut. 1:13, 15).

-In the Deuteronomy speech, Moses clarifies part of Jethro's original advice. Whereas Jethro had suggested that the officials' chief qualification should be that they "fear God," Moses, evidently, understood this to mean that they should be persons of wisdom.

The Gift of Understanding

-Understanding is the second of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit enumerated in Isaiah 11:2-3, behind only wisdom. It differs from wisdom in that wisdom is the desire to contemplate the things of God, while understanding allows us, as Fr. John A. Hardon writes in his *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, to "penetrate to the very core of revealed truths."

-Of course, this gift does not entail a complete understanding of the mysteries of faith, like fully comprehending the mystery of the Holy Trinity or the Real Presence the way that we might a mathematical equation; rather, we understand that these mysteries are credible; that they are compatible with and related to each other; and that they are not unreasonable although they may surpass reason.

-Such certitude moves beyond faith, which "merely assents to what God has revealed." The gift of the Holy Spirit of understanding develops this gift of faith within us. It's a special gift that we received at Confirmation. It's a gift that helps us to see. When we say to someone, "Oh, now I understand." What we are really saying is, "Now, I see. I see what you're saying. I see what you mean. I see your point." This great gift of understanding is this seeing of the heart.

- The essential quality of this gift is a "penetrating intuition" — in a sense, the moving beyond the surface. This gift operates in several ways: first, disclosing the hidden meaning of sacred Scripture, as Our Lord did with the disciples on the way to Emmaus.

-For instance, after the Resurrection, two of the disciples were walking along the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35) and they were pretty dejected because of the Crucifixion. All of a sudden, a stranger walks beside them. They didn't recognize that it was the Lord Jesus. He was risen. He was in the Spirit somehow. But He gave them the gift of understanding. Scripture says that He opened their minds to all the Scriptures that pertained to Him so that they too could believe (Lk 24:13-32). This is what happens to us in prayer. He can open our minds to this gift so that we, too, can truly believe. Understanding will deepen our faith.

-Second, showing the hand of God at work in a person's life, even in the most mysterious or troublesome events, like suffering; and third, revealing the spiritual realities that underlie sensible appearances, like penetrating the mystery of the Lord's sacrifice in the offering of the Mass or recognizing the presence of Christ in the holy Eucharist, as did the peasant who said to St. John Vianney when asked about what he was doing while sitting in Church gazing at the tabernacle: "I look at Him, and He looks at me." This gift brings the virtue of faith to perfection. Accordingly, St. Thomas said, "In this very life, when the eye of the spirit is purified by the gift of understanding, one can in a certain way see God."

-Once we become convinced through understanding of the truths of the Faith, we can also draw conclusions from those truths and arrive at a further understanding of our relation to God and our role in the world.

Understanding rises above natural reason, which is concerned only with the things we can sense in the world around us. Thus, understanding is both speculative—concerned with intellectual knowledge—and practical, because it can help us to order the actions of our lives toward our final end, which is God. Through the Gift of Understanding, we see the world and our life within it in the larger context of the eternal law and the relation of our souls to God. So this beautiful gift of understanding is given so that we, too, may see and believe.

-It is clear, then, that the gift of understanding is closely related to faith. When the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts and enlightens our minds, it makes us grow day by day in the understanding of what the Lord has said and done. Christ Himself said to His disciples: I will send the Holy Spirit and he will make you understand all that I have taught you.

-So much of the sorrow we experience seems to be caused by a lack of understanding. We feel grief and may suffer injury when others misunderstand our intentions, words, or deeds. That grief is complicated by the fact that we, in turn, often find it difficult or impossible to understand the actions of others. But the understanding we seek is not limited to what we say and do. We deeply feel the need for others to understand us “for who we are.” That is we long for others to know us in an all-embracing way that includes a profound appreciation of our unique identity.

-In fact, because we have been created for and ordained to supernatural happiness, we remain ever restless and unfulfilled unless we reach beyond ourselves to certain deeper and ineffable truths. Yet we are not alone in our desire to understand and to be understood. God also wants to be understood by us! And so He blesses us through the Holy Spirit with the Gift of Understanding, to endow us with a certain, intimate knowledge of Himself.

-St. Thomas Aquinas observes that human knowledge starts from the outside through our interaction with the things around us via the five senses. However, the natural light of understanding that we possess bears only limited power. In terms of comprehension, it can carry us just so far. Therefore, we require a supernatural light capable of piercing the boundaries restricting natural light so as to give us access to a knowledge we could never otherwise reach on our own. Such is the Spirit's Gift of Understanding.

-This divine understanding implies a certain excellence of knowledge by inward penetration. The main purpose of this Gift is to effect in the

believer a spiritual certainty of faith. The function of the Gift of Understanding, then, is to enable us to see into the meaning – the core and inner truth – of the principles of what we know in the life of grace.

-Thus, the Gift of Understanding serves to satisfy the urgent longings of our soul by enabling us to apprehend the truth about our final end: we are called to eternal beatific communion with God. The Gift's intellectual light of grace provides us with a right appraisal and appreciation of that ultimate end. At the same time, the special perception of the truth produced by Understanding prompts us to cleave to this end firmly as our greatest good. We come to grasp the value and importance of all things in its light.

-We rely on the Holy Spirit through the Gift of Understanding to enlighten our minds to recognize the supernatural truth on which our wills should be intent. In the process, we come to see all human deeds in relation to the rule of the Eternal Law and our goal of divine communion. The supernatural light of Understanding surpasses the range of natural reason as it endows us with the knowledge of the truth of how human acts are measured by divine law.

-Herein lies the supreme value of the Gift of Understanding. For Understanding reveals to us how God's eternal and necessary truths serve as steadfast standards for human conduct. Since the field of the Gift of Understanding extends to all interests relevant to the faith, Understanding also encompasses the good deeds we perform. Understanding enlightens us regarding works to be done. For human actions are governed by eternal reasons. And our human reason cleaves to God's providential reasons by contemplating and being advised by them. In this way our human reason is perfected by the Gift of Understanding so as to facilitate our ready undertaking of good deeds.

-Just as all those in a state of grace possess divine Charity, so too is the Gift of Understanding theirs. God never withdraws this gift from such holy ones with respect to any matter essential to salvation. Yet, ironically, as St. Thomas explains, in other matters, the Gift of Understanding is sometimes withdrawn in order that our inability to see clearly into all things may remove temptations to pride. In other words, God wisely protects us from the self-inflated haughtiness that comes from being a know-it-all, by making it a little more laborious for us to perceive matters of lesser importance.

-In a special way, the Gift of Understanding gives us privileged access to the meaning of Sacred Scripture. For Understanding enlightens our mind

regarding things we have heard. St. Thomas recalls that graced moment of enlightenment when the Lord commissioned His Apostles and “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Lk 24:45). This Gift of Divine Understanding remains a spiritual benefit of discipleship.

-At the same time, even if we occasionally lack a certain clarity and intellectual acuity regarding particular articles of faith proposed to us for our belief, we should not jump to the conclusion that Understanding has failed us. On the contrary, as believers we can with confidence understand that such articles are to be believed and not to be abandoned on account of anything else. For, as spiritual people, the ultimate authority in our life is not our unguided intellect – as brilliant and ingenious as it may seem – but the divine insight and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, shared with us in the manner and to the extent that He sees fit.

-St. Thomas relates the spirit's Gift of Understanding to the beatitude regarding purity of heart. The single-hearted permit their lives to be purged of fanciful ideas and damaging errors. As a result, the truth about God proposed to the pure of heart is not received as disguised by bodily images or heretical misrepresentations. This cleanness of reception and appropriation is the result of the Gift of Understanding.

-The pure of heart are promised the reward of seeing God. In our present pilgrim condition, the Gift of Understanding empowers us to see, not what God is, but what God is not. As St. Thomas asserts, in this life, the better we know God the more we understand that He surpasses whatever the mind grasps. And with this “knowing ignorance,” this knowing that we do not yet fully know, comes a deep and abiding peace. However, even in heaven the Spirit's Gift of Understanding will continue to aid our insight of the divine. For there we will enjoy the sight of the Lord and behold God's essence in the vision of eternal beatitude.

The Gift of Counsel

-We human beings are rational creatures. Typically, our actions follow some degree of forethought and consideration. We ponder and mull, study, muse and ruminate. We seek out expert opinions, rely on others' experiences, and compare present options with choices of the past. All of this reasoned inquiry so characteristic of thinking, self-reflective beings can be referred to as “taking counsel.”

-The Holy Spirit recognizes and esteems this most human dynamic, and tailor to our way of thinking a special Gift that deepens and perfects the human power of deliberation. Such is the divine Gift of Counsel. The Gift of Counsel renders us sensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit in a

manner supremely compatible and congenial to the deliberating way that we become motivated to act.

-The human person stands in a constant state of searching. The *Catechism* tells us that “only in God will man find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for....He cannot live fully according to the truth unless he freely acknowledges God’s love and entrusts himself to his Creator” (# 27). In our searching, we need the invaluable guidance – the advice or “counsel” – of God, who knows all things.

-Such direction comes to us from heaven through the Spirit’s Gift of Counsel, whereby we are guided by the very advice of God. It is liken to the experience of those involved in human affairs that lack what they need to work things out for themselves. In such a case, we simply turn to those more suitably qualified in order to benefit from their wisdom and expertise. The divine gift of counsel so moves us to avail ourselves of the guiding insights and direction of the Holy Spirit.

-The Gift of Counsel remains highly specific and practical in its orientation. It is given for the sake of our guidance to a very particular end of goal. And what is the end that determines the operation of Counsel? The Gift of Counsel does not bring us assistance in worldly affairs. Rather, this Gift makes us responsive to the enlightenment of God in everything that pertains to the goal of eternal life. All those who are friends of God by grace can expect this benefit of being counseled by God about what we need to do in matters necessary for salvation.

-The Gift of Counsel corresponds intrinsically to the moral virtue known as prudence – the master virtue, which is the habit of recognizing the good and charting the right course to its attainment. Prudence, like the Gift of Counsel, is ordered to the achievement of what is specific and particular. Counsel, then, perfects prudence in regard to the ultimate goal of eternal life. It complements and perfects prudence by introducing the judgment and advice of God Himself – and thus, enlightened by Counsel, prudence welcomes the practical guidance of God and is conformed to the excellence of divine wisdom.

-In the operation of Counsel the Holy Spirit upholds and ennobles our dignity as human persons by assisting us in a manner consonant with our natural way of thinking and acting. Rather than overriding or confounding us, the Holy Spirit safeguards and enlightens our minds in a manner that promotes our human liberty. By enlivening our prudence with Counsel, the Holy Spirit opens our minds to heed God’s own perfect prudence. Our minds are then enlightened without violence, so that supernatural

guidance is assimilated within the natural process of human consideration.

-The Gift of Counsel bears very practical consequences, for Counsel keeps us from foolishness and from impetuosity (acting without thinking). By endowing the soul with divinely shaped reasoning, Counsel saves us from the risks of hasty, rash, and ill-formed practical judgments on our way to eternal life. It protects us from our impulsive and precipitous ways. The Gift of Counsel preserves us from recklessness, and guides our practical actions in the way of the soundest judgment.

-It is also highly significant that the Gift of Counsel liberates us from the trap of self-reliance. We are indeed only too-strongly inclined to depend on ourselves and our own resources in the pursuit of our goals. Such radical individualism prevents us becoming truly mature persons and ensnares us an illusion of self-sufficiency. In reality, of course, maturity always involves a dynamic of mutual, life-giving interdependence, while recognizing our constant, fundamental, and very urgent practical need for God lies at the very root of the life of faith. St. Thomas notes that even the angels in heaven consult God regarding their duties as our protectors and guardians. The all-wise prompting they receive from God also come from the Holy Spirit, through a Gift of Counsel perfectly suited to the angelic intelligences. If the angels in all their power and holiness stand in need of God's practical advice, how much more do we who are ignorant, weak and still on our trial and provisional period.

-The Gift of Counsel is of particular importance for our cooperation with the Lord in the workings of His Providence for others. As the *Catechism* notes, God "wills that each receive what he needs from others, and that those endowed with particular 'talents' share the benefits with those who need them. These differences encourage and often oblige persons to practice generosity, kindness, and sharing of goods" (#1937). Through the generosity to which we are lead by the Spirit of Counsel, this Gift effectively works to weave the very fabric of the Church. The Lord once spoke to St. Catherine of Siena in these words: "I have given many gifts and graces, both spiritual and temporal, with such diversity that I have not given everything to one single person....I have willed that one should need another and that all should be my ministers in distributing the graces and gifts they have received from me" (St. Catherine of Siena, Dialogue 1.7).

-The gift of Counsel insures that the divine distribution will continually takes place according to God's plan in a manner that provides for our cooperation in the sharing of God's blessings. In the light of the Gift of

Counsel's connection with the workings of Providence, St. Thomas Aquinas relates the Gift of Counsel to the Beatitude: "Blessed are the merciful."

-St. Thomas observes that the Gift of Counsel will inevitably guide us to pardon others, since to pardon and give mercifully to others is, by grace, the remedy for all the spiritual ills of our life. The supernaturally merciful are invariably guided by the Gift of Counsel, since God who opens our hearts to clemency also directs the exercise of that virtue through His Gifts.

The Gift of Fortitude

-Fortitude is a virtue only when it goes with other virtues. This is fortitude...when a man conquers himself, restrains his anger, gives in to no allurements, is not grieved by misfortunes, is not elated by successes and does not get carried away by changing trends (St. Ambrose).

-St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that Fortitude (also called Courage), is that kind of firmness of mind and spirit that we need both for doing good and for enduring evil. We require this steadfastness especially when embracing good and shunning evil become more difficult. The Spirit's gift of fortitude preserves us from yielding to untoward pressure.

-It is necessary that your foundation consist of more than prayer and contemplation. If you do not strive for the virtues and practice them, you will always be dwarfs. And, please God; it will be only a matter of not growing, for you already know that whoever does not increase decreases. If here below, as David says, in the company of the saints we will become saints, there is no reason to doubt that, being united with the Strong One through so sovereign a union of spirit with spirit, fortitude will cling to such a soul; and so we shall understand what fortitude the saints had for suffering and dying (St. Teresa of Avila).

-The fortitude of a righteous man would not be praiseworthy if he were victorious without having been tried; when in fact there can be no place for victory without the adversity of a struggle. For 'blessed is the man who undergoes trial, because when he has been tested he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him' (Jas. 1:12) (Eighteenth Conference, The Conference of Abba Piamun: On the three kinds of monks).

-The virtue of interior fortitude is an absolute necessity so that after being defeated by the enemy, the temporarily defeated can resume the fight with greater energy and confidence in victory. Interior fortitude, the capacity to go on hoping and believing in victory, is communicate to the

soul by God in the grace which comes to us through Christ, "that those who believe in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting. Therefore, having girded up the loins of your understanding, be sober and set your hope completely upon that grace which is brought to you in the revelation of Jesus Christ."

-The Gift of Fortitude enables us to endure and persevere in achieving arduous (hard-to-reach) goods and in sustaining sufferings. Of course, this spiritual work is ultimately and gloriously achieved by the Holy Spirit in us when He leads us to eternal life – the consummate end of all good works and the final escape from every danger.

-Endowed with Fortitude, we are prevented from giving in to any fear that threatens us on the way to God. This Gift will not grant these fears a hearing. As a kind of holy censor, Fortitude removes all credibility and influence from the fear and discouragement that would turn us back from the way of the Lord Jesus Christ.

-Such divine assistance is sorely needed in our life of faith. Left to itself, our weak and sinful human will is all too inclined to retreat from following the guidance of reason and conscience. Whenever our will is hindered from obeying the dictates of right reason because, for instance, what we know is good and right has some difficult or unpleasant features, Fortitude steps in to remove that obstacle. Courage, therefore, helps our will to conform rightly to reason. In the face of the greatest evils, Courage preserves the attachment of the human will to what is truly good.

-In particular way, Fortitude is concerned with the fear and difficulty of death. Giving up one's life is indeed the greatest challenge to courage. The Gift of Fortitude, however, enables us to repulse whatever makes steadfastness outstandingly difficult, especially dangers to our bodily death.

-In this regard, Fortitude does more than restrain our fear. Rather, Fortitude guides us to attack our goal – our "high calling from Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3: 14), in a manner that is supernaturally confident and calculated. God Himself secures us, through Fortitude, with confidence in His power to see us through all difficulties and to secure the ultimate blessings of heaven.

The Gift of Knowledge

-In our world there are as many opinions as there are people (if not more!), and when it comes to questions of religion we find that even in the Church we can hear voices of dissent and confusion that would pull us away from God's Truth.

-How can we know what we need to believe, and how to assess things according to Faith? One grace God gives us to enable us to make a complete and penetrating assent (agreement) to the truth of faith is the Gift of Knowledge.

-The Gift of Knowledge is a perfection of the human mind that disposes us to follow the impulse of the Holy Spirit when we judge human or created things in relation to God. Through the Gift of Knowledge, the Holy Spirit guides our judgment so that we can recognize created things, especially human thought, words, inclinations, circumstances, and deeds, in the light of Faith.

-When operative, the Gift of Knowledge is concerned with differentiating between what is and is not consistent with Faith. By this Gift, God enables us to recognize when a human and temporal thing, a plan, a practice, an idea, ought to be received as consistent with the revealed truth or not.

-Our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux in Sermon 36 on the Song of Songs points out that "There are some who long to know for the sole purpose of knowing, and that is shameful curiosity; others who long to know in order to become known, and that is shameful vanity; there are others still who long for knowledge in order to sell its fruits for money or honors, and that is shameful profiteering; others again who long to know in order to be of service, and this is charity. Finally, there are those who long to know in order to benefit themselves, and this is prudence. All these categories, only the last two avoid the abuse of knowledge, because they desire to know for the purpose of doing good. People with sound judgment act in this way.

-Knowledge is always to be put in the service of love. As St. Augustine said: "Let knowledge be used in order to erect the structure of love. Purification of the intellect is rarely practiced today. No one would allow garbage at his table, but many allow it served into their minds.

-Unlike God Himself, whose knowledge is "sheer and simple," instantaneous and perfect, our human knowledge depends on a process of reasoning and logical progress. We naturally need examples, arguments, diagrams, evidence, illustrations, instruction, and many other helps before we can ever know anything with certainty and, of course, we can make mistakes.

-God, on the other hand, judges the truth of all things by a simple and utterly infallible insight. God has a perfect knowledge of Himself, and in

knowing Himself perfectly He know all things perfectly. And shockingly enough, He wants to impart a share of that capacity to us.

-Through the Gift of Knowledge, the Holy Spirit blesses us with the ability to know and judge in an enhanced way that resembles to some extent, the perfect knowledge of God. This Gift operates as a kind of supernatural instinct for discerning the authentic and the inauthentic in all that pertains to God and to our salvation. The Gift of knowledge keeps the saints, those who truly love God, from falling into errors and confusion in faith and morals.

-In his explanation of Knowledge, St. Thomas Aquinas observes that ignorance is never entirely removed from us except by the input of two kinds of knowledge: theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. The Spirit's Gift of Knowledge is both theoretical and practical at the same time. First and foremost, it is engaged with contemplation, illuminating a believer to know what he or she ought to hold by faith.

-Therefore, pure truth remains the gift's main concern. However, the Gift of Knowledge also, and in a secondary way, considers what we do and what we think about – since our practical, active life and works should be directed by the knowledge of divine truth, the matters of faith, and the conclusions to be drawn from them. Knowledge, then, also prevents us from being misled with regard to the moral life and in practical matters that bear on the Faith.

-Lastly, the office of the Gift of Knowledge is to pass a right judgment about created things so as to purify and perfect our relationship with God. Creaturely things can never stir us to spiritual delight unless they are enjoyed in their fitting and proper relation to the Divine Good. In a special way, the Spirit's Gift of Knowledge helps us to come to this right judgment about created things. It helps make us aware of the deadly loss created things may occasion when we stake our happiness on them. And it helps us to maintain a right and holy relation between God's uncreated Goodness and the things of creation that are designed to lead us to divine Goodness. The Gift of Knowledge instills in us a solid sense of balance, proportion, and judgment.

The Gift of Piety

-Piety is that wondrous gift of the Holy Spirit which enables us to treat God with the childlike affection, the confidence and simplicity a loving child displays toward its loving father. It is the gift that allows us to look upon and love God the way a bride loves her beloved.

-Spiritual reading and other exercises of piety sanctify us only in so far as they are the channels of God's action. The soul that is not attached to the will of God alone, will find neither contentment nor sanctification in the various means which it may try nor in even the most excellent practices of piety.

-Can we ever show God the kind of honor and devotion that He deserves? Try as we might, we will never be able to do so on our own. If we are ever going to render God the kind of homage that we owe Him as His creatures and adopted children, then we will need the help of the Holy Spirit.

-The Gift of Piety is the particular Gift by which God enables us to come to Him paying the kind of homage and worship that is appropriate and best. The fact that only God can lead us to praise and honor Him in a fitting way is expressed by the Church in one of the prayers of her liturgy: "Father, you have no need of our praise, yet our desire to thank you is itself your gift. Our prayer of thanksgiving adds nothing to your greatness, but makes us grow in your grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Roman Missal, Preface IV for Weekdays).

-While we tend to think of religion today as the external elements of our faith, it really means the willingness to worship and to serve God. Piety takes that willingness beyond a sense of duty, so that we desire to worship God and to serve Him out of love, the way that we desire to honor our parents and do what they wish.

-In speaking of piety, in general, St. Thomas Aquinas explains that it is concerned with fulfilling our duty and conscientious service towards those who are significant in our life. First and foremost among these stand those to whom we are related, our flesh and blood, and especially our parents. Piety also involves patriotism, our duty and devotion to our country.

-St. Thomas says that piety denotes the reverence which we have to our father and our fatherland. But the virtue of piety naturally extends its regard to all those with whom we share a common allegiance or interests; thus, it is ordered to the common good of all. As a virtue, piety affords us the opportunity to give sanctified expression to the love we bear for and owe to family, nation, friends, colleagues, and associates.

-Like all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Gift of Piety is a lasting perfection or refinement of the powers of our soul. Specifically, Piety makes us readily responsive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit with regard to honoring

God as our Father. St. Thomas explains that, because God is called our Father par excellence, homage to Him is termed piety.

-Finally, although the Gift of Piety affects the way we worship God in prayer and in other religious practices, it is mainly a matter of our devotion to God as His adopted sons and daughters in Christ. The Gift of Piety reminds us that we are God's children, and it gives us special confidence and satisfaction in the recollection. Thanks to this Gift, we offer true worship and service to God the Father, the saints are honored, good works are done to relieve human misery, and we are led to rejoice as we are adopted into the life of the Blessed Trinity.

The Gift of Fear of the Lord

-There is something quite ironic about the Fear of the Lord. This fear is produced by love. As St. Thomas Aquinas explains, love is the mother of which fear is born, for a person fears to lose only what he loves. When our desires get firmly fixed on something, we loathe ever losing it. To be deprived of the object of our affections is something we fear as an evil.

-In this respect, then, fear of its very nature arises from love. This insight urges us to ask ourselves the question: "What do we really fear losing?" If we see what we are afraid to lose, then we will see what we really love in life.

-The Holy Spirit's Gift, Fear of the Lord, is a Gift of filial fear. By this Gift, we respond to the Spirit's guidance in withdrawing from evil pleasures out of love for God. In fact, this Gift transforms the way we regard God. In other words, the Charity (love) active in Fear of the Lord is one that makes us keenly sensitive to how God loves us and to how we need to respond to that love. Through Fear of the Lord, we become deeply sensitive to anything that might diminish our life of loving God and of enjoying His love.

-This Gift is not a matter of anxiety or terror. Rather, it is marked by a calm and eager resolve. In our relationship with God, fear can play a role in two ways. First, fear can be a fear of punishment, especially Hell. We can and should turn us away from evil, run to God, and stay close to Him whenever we feel intimidated by the reality of punishment. This kind of fear is called "servile fear," or the fear of one who obeys the master because of the possibility of punishment. Servile fear, however, does not involve the full range of freedom and grace that Our Lord wants us to enjoy. There is a second and holier kind of fear that has to do not with punishment, but with the wonderful good of communion with God.

-This second kind of fear is not a fear of punishment but of losing God. This is what we called "filial fear," the fear of sons, since it is the kind of fear a good son should have about violating or losing his relationship with his father. To have filial fear means to be eager to avoid the evil of offending God or doing anything that might damage our relationship with Him.

-The Gift of Fear of the Lord also enables us to live the Beatitude, "How blessed are the poor in spirit," in a more authentic way. For the Gift of Fear does not only liberate us from seeking the self-exaltation of pride; it also saves us from craving the fame that can be gained through exterior goods, such as honors, power, prestige, and wealth. Thus through Fear of the Lord we become eager for God alone, and are set free from the pride and greed that would send us racing after treasures other than God Himself.

-Fear of the Lord also strengthens the virtue of temperance, the virtue that keeps us free and reasonable about things that are pleasurable to the body. Since the Gift of the Fear of the Lord prompts us to look to God first of all while shunning everything that could offend or separate us from Him, this Gift also readily restrains us from giving ourselves up to bodily delights. When we love God above all things and are led by the Holy Spirit to prize His love absolutely, then we are more easily going to avoid sins related to bodily desire and pleasure.

-Like all the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, Fear of the Lord is a habitual perfection of the powers of our soul that makes us responsive to the inspiration and movements of the Holy Spirit. When we say this, we mean that Fear of the Lord is a lasting and stable condition, a refinement or disposition that makes us consistently and happily receptive to God.

-In conclusion, St. Gregory the Great in his "Moral Reflection on the Book of Job" (The Moralia), aptly compared the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and also the four cardinal virtues to the banquets Job's sons held in each other's houses, each one taking his turn. He said:

"His sons used to go and hold banquets in each other's houses, each one taking his turn." Job's sons hold banquets in each other's houses, for all the virtues nourish the mind, each one according to its own measure. So he was right to say, "Each one taking his turn," for the turn of each son is the light of each virtue. If I may briefly repeat here the seven gifts of grace, wisdom has its turn, then understanding, then counsel, then fortitude, then knowledge, then piety, then fear. For to be wise is not the same as to understand; many people are indeed aware of eternity, but they certainly do not understand it. Wisdom, therefore, holds a banquet in

her turn, for she refreshes the mind with the hope of certitude of eternal life. Understanding too holds a banquet in his turn, for he penetrates what he hears, refreshes the heart, and light up the darkness in it. Counsel holds a banquet in his turn, for since he does not allow the soul the act forthrightly, he makes it reasonable. Fortitude holds a banquet in her turn, for since she fears no contradiction, she serves the food of confidence to the troubled mind. Knowledge holds a banquet in her turn, for she breaks the fast of ignorance inside the mind. Piety holds a banquet in her turn, for she stores works of mercy inside the heart. Fear holds a banquet in his turn, for since he keeps the mind from taking pride in the present, he comforts it with hope for the future.

"I think, however, that there is something else for us to ponder in these banquets of Job's sons, namely, the fact that they feed one another. For the virtues are all radically abandoned if one does not support the other. Wisdom certainly has less dignity if understanding is absent; understanding, however, is completely useless unsupported by wisdom, for although it reaches very high without wisdom's weight, its own weightlessness carries it to a point from which its fall will have dire consequences. Counsel is banal without raw fortitude, for it indeed finds scope for research, but it is not robust of itself and does not persevere to the completion of its task.

"Fortitude by itself is self-destructive unless upheld by counsel, because the more it knows its own strength, the worse ruin is in store for it if it is not guided by reason. There is no knowledge without the fostering of piety in view, for as long as it puts off the doing of a good action it has in mind, it makes itself the more liable to judgment. Piety itself is useless without the discretion provided by knowledge, because as long as no knowledge enlightens it, it is unaware how to show mercy. And as fear itself, it will certainly never rouse itself to a good action as long as it does not have the other virtues, for since it worries about everything, its very fear will keep it indolent, and it will avoid all good actions. Therefore, since one virtue is nourished by another in a constant mutual service, we are rightly told that Job's sons were fed by one another in turn.

"They would also invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them." Since our virtues promote faith, hope, and charity in all that they do, Job's sons are somewhat like workers who invite their three sisters to a meal, so that faith, hope, and charity may rejoice at the good works that each virtue puts into operation. They wax strong as though by food, since good works give them confidence; after the meal they wish to be filled with the dew of contemplation, and so it is as if they became drunk with wine.

"Rising early, he would offer a holocaust for each one." For we rise early when we are radiant with the light of compunction, and we leave behind us the night of our humanity, opening the eyes of our mind to the rays of the true Light. In addition, we offer a holocaust for each of Job's sons when we offer our sacrifice of prayer for each virtue: lest wisdom stretch herself too much, lest understanding go stray in her subtle running, lest counsel become confused by too much advice, lest fortitude be forward in her confidence, lest knowledge become puffed up by knowing without loving, lest piety should become distorted by being drawn away from its proper object, lest fear fall into the pit of despair by worrying too much about justice.

"It is Inside the four corners of the house that the sons of Job hold their banquet, for it is within the deep places of the mind, which is principally raised by these four virtues to its throne of high rectitude, that the other virtues, as companions of the heart, feed one another. It is indeed the gift of the Holy Spirit that forms prudence, temperance, courage, and justice before all the other virtues in the highest point of the mind, and later molds the mind with seven virtues, that it may learn the strategy to be employed against every single temptation: wisdom against stupidity, understanding against dullness, counsel against premature action, courage against fear, knowledge against ignorance, kindness against hard-heartedness, fear of God against pride."

*** Beatific Vision ***

-We are called to see God, not only in the mirror of creatures, however perfect, not only by His highest radiations in the world of angels. We are called to see Him without the medium of any creature, to see Him better than we see those whom we speak on earth, because God, being spiritual, will be most intimately present in our intelligence, which He fortifies with power to see Him.

-This vision, though it is intuitive and without medium, is still not comprehensive. God alone can know Himself to the full extent of His knowableness. This limitation involves no contradiction. For instance, here on earth many persons may see the same truth more or less profoundly. Many intellects see one and the same truth more or less profoundly. Thus in heaven all the blessed see God without medium, but with a penetration that varies in proportion to their merits, but none as profoundly as God knows Himself, all that He is, all that He can do, all that He will do.

-The Blessed see clearly and intuitively God Himself as He is in Himself, that is, they see His essence, His attributes, and the three Divine Persons. The Council of Florence says: "They see clearly God Himself, one and three, as He is." Hence the Beatific Vision surpasses immeasurably, not only the most sublime human philosophy, but even the natural knowledge of the most elevated angels, even of any creatable angel.

-The first instant of the beatific vision lasts forever, like eternal morning, eternal spring, eternal youth. It resembles the eternal beatitude of God. God's life is one unique instant of immutable eternity.

-The beatific vision of the saints is measured by the unique instant of immovable eternity. The joy of that instant will never pass away. Its newness, its freshness, will be eternally present. As the vision will be always new, so likewise the joy which flows from the vision.

-The beatific vision is one unique, unbroken act, measured by one unique instant of an unchangeable eternity it is an act that cannot be lost. It is the source of happiness of the elect and of their absolute impeccability.

-Eternal joy, beatific love, is ineffable. If here on earth we are enchanted by the reflection of divine perfection in creature, by the enchantments of the visible world, by harmony of colors and sounds, by the immensity of the ocean, by the splendor of the starry heavens, and still more by the spiritual splendors revealed in the lives of the saints, what joy shall we feel when we see God, this creative center of life and love, this infinite plenitude, eternally self-existent, from whom proceeds the life of creation!

-Then, too, we shall see the immense distance between goods that are spiritual and goods that are material. The same material good, the same house, the same field, the same territory, cannot belong simultaneously to many persons. Possession by one hinders possession by another. On the contrary, spiritual goods, the same truth, the same virtue, the same God seen face to face, can belong simultaneously to all. We possess these spiritual goods the more, the more others possess them. Their joy multiplies our joy.

-In eternity the soul will sparkle with its superior strength and comeliness, in the beauty and the grandeur of its intellectual and volitional endowments, and in its great joy in the perpetually present Beatific Vision, from which flows all its other joy. And this great happiness will never end.

-Among the ante-Nicean Fathers who most firmly declare the existence of the beatific vision we must signalize St. Irenaeus. He writes: "That which God gives to those who love Him is the gift of seeing Him, as the prophets have announced. Man of himself cannot see God, but God wills to be seen by us and He grants to us what He wills, when He wills, and as He wills."

-St. Cyprian writes: "What glory and what joy to be admitted to see God, to be honored with Christ Our Lord! This is the joy of salvation, this is eternal life: to live with the just, with all the friends of God in the kingdom of immortality. When God shall shine upon us we will rejoice with inexpressible gladness, sharing forever the kingdom of Christ."

-The beatific vision is a vision of God without medium, but it is essentially supernatural vision. It surpasses the natural object of every created, or creatable intelligence, since every created intelligence is infinitely inferior to God.

-“Although the blessed enjoy already the beatific vision and have their present capacity for love and happiness perfectly fulfilled, this capacity shall be enlarged after the general resurrection, so that then they shall love God more and more blissfully” (St. Bernard); defended by many holy doctors, among them St. Augustine.

-Mystical experience is a midpoint between life of ordinary Christian fidelity and the beatific communion of heaven. Its beginning, therefore, are to be sought in gradually moving away from narcissism and self-indulgence, towards others and towards God.

Duration

-What measures the duration of the departed souls? We must distinguish three kinds of duration: time, eternity, and intermediate kind of duration, which is called eviternity.

-On earth our duration is measured by continuous time, which is itself the measure of continuous movement, especially of the apparent movement of the sun. It is thus that we distinguish hours, days, years, and centuries. When the soul is separated from the body and is not yet beatified, it has a double kind of duration: eviternity and discontinuous time.

-Eviternity measures what is immutable in angels and departed souls. It is the measure of their substance, of their natural knowledge of self and God. Eviternity excludes succession. It is a perpetual present. Yet it differs from eternity, because it has had a beginning, and because it is united to discontinuous time which presupposes past and future.

-Discontinuous time, then, is opposed to continuous or solar time. It is found in angels and departed souls, as the measure of successive thoughts and affections.

-In beatified souls there is added to this double duration (eviternity and discontinuous time) also that of participated eternity, which measures their beatific vision of the divine essence and the love which results from this vision. This is one unique instant, an immovable eternity, entirely differs from that of essential eternity which is proper to God, just as effect differs from cause. Participated eternity had a beginning. Further, the essential eternity of God measures everything that is in God, His essence, and all His operations, whereas participated eternity measures only the beatific vision and the love which follows.

-Our present life involves a succession of hours, in work, prayer, sleep. Eternity, on the contrary, is a continual present, without past or future, a unique instant of life which is possessed entirely and simultaneously. Eviternity approach eternity. It permits us to conceive better the immutability of the life of the departed soul, not beatified, or not yet beatified: the immutability of knowledge which it has of itself, the immutability of the will fixed on its last end, good or evil.

-These different kinds of time, on earth, in purgatory, and in heaven, permit us to distinguish also in the present life two kinds of time: one corporeal, one spiritual. Corporeal time, solar time, measures the duration of our organism. Thus measured, one is eighty years of age, an old man; but, measured by spiritual time, his soul remain very young. Thus, as we

distinguish three ages of corporeal life, infancy, adult age, and old age, so in the life of the soul, we distinguish three ages, namely, the purgative life of the beginners, the illuminative life of those who are progressing, the unitive way of those who are perfect.

-As God necessarily loves His own infinite goodness, so our love, arising from the beatific vision, can never be interrupted or lose its fervor

-The elect in heaven belong to the family of God. The Blessed Trinity, seen clearly and loved sovereignly, dwells in them as in a living tabernacle, as in a temple of glory, endowed with knowledge and love. The Father engenders in them the Word. The Father and the Son breathe forth the personal love of the Holy Spirit. Charity renders them in a measure similar to the Holy Spirit; vision assimilates them to the Word, who Himself assimilates them to the Father of whom He is the image. They enter therefore in a sense into the cycle of the Blessed Trinity. The Trinity is in them, rather, they are in the Trinity, as the summit of reality, thought, and love.

-Beholding the three divine person, the saints understand likewise the personal union of the Word with the humanity of our Lord Jesus, His plenitude of grace and glory, His charity, the treasures of His Heart, the infinite value of His theandric acts, of His merits, the value of His passion, of His least drop of blood, the unmeasured value of each Mass, the fruit of absolution.

-They also see the glory which overflows from the soul of our Savior upon His body, and they see how He is at the summit of all creation, material and spiritual. In Him they see also Mary co-redemptrix, the infinite dignity of her divine maternity, her position in the hypostatic order, superior to the orders of nature and grace. They see the greatness of her love at the foot of the cross, her elevation above the angelic hierarchies, and the radiation of her universal mediation. This vision of Jesus and Mary belongs to the essential beatitude as its most elevated secondary object.

-In heaven, however, no creature will stand between God and the soul. He Himself will be the immediately object of its vision. Scripture and theology tell us that the Blessed see God face to face. And because this vision is immediate and direct, it also exceedingly clear and distinct.

-The blessed see God, not merely according to the measure of His likeness imperfectly reflected in creation, but they see Him as He is, after the manner of His own Being.

-The souls of all the saints in heaven have seen and do see the Divine Essence by direct intuition and face to face, in such wise that nothing created intervenes as an object of vision, but the Divine Essence presents itself to their immediate gaze, unveiled, clearly and openly; moreover, that in this vision they enjoy the Divine Essence, and that, in virtue of this vision and this enjoyment, they are truly blessed and possess eternal life and eternal rest.

-It is of faith that the beatific vision is supernatural, that it transcends the power and claims of created nature, of angels as well as of men.

-Higher way of seeing God by intuitive vision can but a gratuitous gift of Divine goodness.

-St. Thomas Aquinas seems to teach (I.12.1) that man has a natural desire for the beatific vision. Elsewhere, however, he frequently insists on the supernatural character of that vision (e.g. III.9.2. ad Sum). Hence in the former place he obviously supposes that man knows from revelation both the possibility of the beatific vision and his destiny to enjoy it. On this supposition it is indeed quite natural for man to have so strong a desire for that vision, that any inferior kind of beatitude can no longer duly satisfy him.

-To enable it to see God, the intellect of the blessed is supernaturally perfected by the light of glory. This was defined by the Council of Vienne in 1311; and it is also evident from the supernatural character of the beatific vision. For the beatific vision transcends the natural powers of the intellect, but permanent as the vision itself. This permanent invigoration is called the "light of glory," because it enables the souls in glory to see God with their intellect, just as material light enables our bodily eyes to see corporeal objects.

-The blessed soul sees these secondary objects in God either directly, or in as far as God is their cause. It sees in God directly whatever the beatific vision discloses to its immediate gaze without the aid of any created mental image.

-In God, as in their cause, the soul sees all those things which it perceives with the aid of created mental image, a mode of perception granted by God as a natural complement of the beatific vision.

-The secondary object of the beatific vision comprises everything the blessed may have a reasonable interest in knowing. It includes, in the first place, all the mysteries which the soul believed while on earth.

-The blessed see the Godhead in its entirety, but only with a limited clearness of vision. They see the Godhead in its entirety, because they see all the perfections of God and all the Persons of the Trinity; and yet their vision is limited according to their capacity, because it has neither the infinite clearness that corresponds to the Divine Perfections, nor does it extend to everything that actually is, or may still become, an object of God's free decrees. Hence it follows that one soul may see God more perfectly than another, and that the beatific vision admits of various degrees.

-The beatific vision is a mystery. Of course reason cannot prove the impossibility of such vision. For why should God, in His omnipotence, be unable to draw so near and adapt Himself so fully to our intellect, that the soul may, as it were, directly feel Him and lay hold of Him and look on Him and become entirely immersed in Him? On the other hand, we cannot prove absolutely that this is possible; for the beatific vision lies beyond the natural destiny of our intellect, and it is so extraordinary a mode of perception that we cannot clearly understand either the factor or the manner of its possibility.

*St. Bernard openly teaches elsewhere that the souls of the saints, although they are in heaven and enjoy the Beatific Vision, are not yet perfectly united to God by love, nor (by consequence) perfectly happy, so long as they are separated from their bodies. This is the view in which St. Augustine appears to have finally rested, after repeatedly affirming that the just souls are not admitted to the Beatific Vision at all before the General Resurrection. The angelic Doctor at first followed St. Bernard, but afterwards changed his mind, and taught that the reunion with the flesh shall increase the soul's happiness, not "intensive," but only "extensive." This is the opinion now generally received; but the question has never been decided dogmatically. For the canon of the Council of Florence (1438) stating that "the souls of the saints are now perfectly happy, but shall have greater happiness after the Resurrection," may be and has been interpreted in favor of both views.

-The spiritual life is the Bride's journey towards the beatific vision of her Bridegroom by way of her ever increasing likeness to her Bridegroom's incarnate, crucified, and glorified life.

-In her present exile, then, the Bride who longs to see her Bridegroom as he is must first be enlightened by the Sun of Justice that she might grow ever more like him in his brightness according to Paul's words, "We with unveiled face, gazing on the glory of God are transformed into that same image, from brightness to brightness, as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor

3:18). The Bride must remember, however, that this process of illumination and likening to the Word is only accomplished gradually. She must not rashly aspire to the beatific vision of her Bridegroom before she is perfectly conformed to him, but humbly submit herself to the transforming missions of the Word and his Spirit, who will liken her to her Incarnate Bridegroom's humility and charity respectively.

-The lesson to be drawn from the Bridegroom's salutary rebuke is that the only way to the beatific vision of Christ is Christ's own way of humility: "The one who strives towards the heights must have a humble knowledge of himself. Otherwise, when he is raised above himself, he will fall beneath himself, unless he is firmly grounded in himself by true humility." The Bridegroom himself teaches just this when he says in the Gospel, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk 14:11).

-If the soul would successfully undertake and complete this journey from his fallen condition to the promised beatific vision, moreover, it can do so only in and through the redemptive work of the second Adam, Christ the Incarnate Word.

-Human beings' creation in the image of God refers to their innate and ineffaceable similarity to and Capacity for the eternal and consubstantial Image of God, the Word. In the context of the present sermon set, this similarity to and capacity for the Word is seen to consist in that special nobility or excellence of human beings which raises them above beasts and enables them to share in the fellowship of the angels, namely their rationality and freedom.

-Through this rationality and freedom, human beings are capable of knowing, loving, and adhering to the Word in whose image they were made. Human beings will realize this capacity to the extent that they become like the Word through their growing conformity to the humility and charity he exemplifies in his incarnate, crucified, and glorified life.

-To the extent that human beings imitate and participate in the Word's humility and love, they become like the Word and so begin to know, love, and adhere to the Word, to see him as he is, and to share in his own divine life. Had Adam voluntarily submitted himself to the will of his Creator by that humility and charity later revealed in Christ, he would have, by grace, been elevated to the perfection of divine likeness and thereby granted a share in the beatific vision now afforded to the angels. In his first sin, however, Adam proudly despised his Creator's gracious love, scorned subjection to the divine will, and preferred his own will to the will of God.

-Through ignorance of himself and God, then, the monk recapitulates Adam's way of pride and self-will, thereby grows unlike the humble and loving Christ, and so descends with Adam into that bestial existence that leads only to misery, despair, and condemnation. If, therefore, the monk is to be converted to Christ, likened to his humility and love, and thereby begin his ascent with Christ to the beatific vision, he will do so by discovering the truth about himself and God. As St. Bernard remarks in his fifth sermon *De diversis*, life in Christ, the properly spiritual life opposed to the bestial life of the flesh, depends on this two-fold knowledge:

The sum total of our spiritual life consists in these two things: when we consider ourselves we are troubled and saddened to our salvation, but when we consider God we are revived and consoled with the joy of the Holy Spirit. From the knowledge of ourselves we conceive fear and humility, but from the knowledge of God hope and love.

-When at his conversion the monk is compelled to face the bitter truth of his being a disfigured image of God, he will sow the seeds of righteousness by humbling himself to embrace the monastic disciplines of contrition, penance, good works, and ceaseless prayer. Though he sows these seeds in sorrow in this life, he will reap their fruits in joy in the next as he carries home the precious sheaves of his forgiveness, sanctification, and eternal life with God.

-In the beatific vision of the Word as he is, the monk's bitter knowledge of himself at conversion will give way to the joyous knowledge of the God who has willed to redeem him, sanctify him, and offer him a share in his own divine life of knowledge and love. For Bernard, the Psalmist foretells this vision when he writes, "They wept as they went forth, sowing their seeds, but they will return with exaltation, carrying their sheaves" (Ps 125:6-7).

-Even now, they may reap with joy the first fruits of the Spirit. Hosea enjoins them to reap the "hope of eternal life" and the hope of eternal happiness is not without happiness itself. For when by the grace of the Spirit the monk grows in holiness in this life, this growth in holiness grounds his confidence in the forgiveness of his sins, affords him ever growing hope of eternal life, and enables him to savor even now something of the joy he will know perfectly in the beatific vision to come. The monk will, moreover, discover this confidence, hope, and joy through his developing knowledge of himself as being renewed and sanctified in the Spirit: "Those of you who now experience the Spirit at work within you know what the Spirit says, for his voice never contradicts his work. You therefore understand what the Spirit says, for what you hear from without you experience within."

-To hope eternal life and to hope eternal happiness is not without happiness itself. For when by the grace of the Spirit the monk grows in holiness in this life, this growth in holiness grounds his confidence in the forgiveness of his sins, affords him ever growing hope of eternal life, and enables him to savor even now something of the joy he will know perfectly in the beatific vision to come.

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-In the present life, the *Anima-Sponsa* knows herself as one being ever more likened to the humility and charity of her *Verbum-Sponsum*, and this self-knowledge inspires her confident expectation that she will indeed reach that spousal embrace for which she so ardently pines. Yet as long as she remains an exile on her earthly pilgrimage, she must remember that her likening to the Word, her beautification in the Spirit, is still incomplete, especially as she still dwells in a mortal body subject to death and still susceptible to concupiscence.

-Inspired by the trust that wells up in her through the Spirit's gift of charity, however, the Bride looks forward to and strives toward that eternal day when her beauty will be complete as her Bridegroom's is complete and, made perfectly like him in his beauty, she will see him as he is. In this beatific vision, this chaste and consummated union of reciprocal knowledge and love, the Bride's journey of self-knowledge will reach its eschatological culmination for she will then know herself as her Bridegroom knows her, as a perfect likeness to himself. Her knowledge of herself as her Bridegroom's own beloved and beautiful Bride, radiant with his own humility and charity, will be eternally confirmed when she will hear from his own lips, "You are completely beautiful, my love, and there is no flaw in you" (Sg 4:7).

-We are confronted with two opposed and inverted ways of life, the humble way of Christ which leads to divine life and blessedness, and the proud way of Satan which leads to spiritual death and misery. Our decision to embark on either path will turn on our self-knowledge, on our willingness or unwillingness to face the bitter truth of our fallen condition, to acknowledge honestly the disquieting reality of our self-imposed and

inescapable slavery to sin, and the justice of our consequent consignment to eternal death.

-Should we accept and confess this truth about ourselves, we may be converted to Christ and be led by Christ along the way of humility and love which leads to contemplation, divine espousal, and the beatific vision of God. Should we obstinately refuse to see and admit the truth of our sinfulness and weakness, we will succumb to self-deception and embrace Satan's way of pride and self-will which leads to eternal blindness, misery, and condemnation.

-To discover and confess one's fallen condition is by no means pleasant and it is for this reason, that fallen human beings are prone by their excessive self-love to flee this bitter self-knowledge and seek some relief in more comforting self-deceptions. For Bernard, however, to inquire into and acknowledge this humbling truth about oneself is, in fact, the truest form of self-love, for it is only through this humble self-knowledge that one may begin to know and love the Truth in one's neighbors by compassionate charity and thereby come to know and love the Truth in his own nature by contemplation in this life and the beatific vision in the next.

-If, on the other hand, the monk embraces the way of humility and compassion, he begins to be likened to the humility and compassion of the Word-made-flesh, and so begins, by the principle of knowledge through resemblance, to ascend to, and see, the Truth in his own nature. With the eye of his heart washed pure by humility and love, the monk will begin to ascend towards, and to see, God, by a kind of indistinct and transient contemplative glimpse that is itself the foretaste of the distinct, abiding beatific vision of God in glory.

**BEATITUDES SEVEN STAGES IN THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY
ACCORDING TO ST. AELRED OF RIEVAULX, CISTERCIAN FATHER**

BEATITUDES	GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT	DAYS OF CREATION	<p><u>Beginners:</u> (reformation) striving Struggles against negative thoughts, self-knowledge, Knowledge of God</p> <p><u>Making Progress:</u> (conformation) illumination, proceeding, Positive thoughts, Virtues, Works of Mercy</p> <p><u>Fulfillment:</u> (transformation) possession, union Christlike – Mind, Heart, Will Enter into God's rest</p>
1. Poor in Spirit – Kingdom of Heaven	1. Fear of the Lord	1. Light from Darkness	
2. Meek – Inherit the earth	2. Piety	2. Dome: Waters above (good thoughts) Waters below (negative thoughts)	
3. Mourn - Comforted	3. Knowledge	3. Sea , Dry land (heart), & plants <i>Logismoi (evil thoughts)</i>	
4. Hunger & Thirst for Justice – Satisfied	4. Fortitude	4. Sun, Moon, & Stars Christ, Church, & Saints	
5. Merciful – Received Mercy	5. Courage	5. Fish, birds, & animals	
6. Pure of Heart – See God 7. Peacemakers – Children of God (8) Persecution – Kingdom of Heaven	6. Understanding 7. Wisdom	6. Man – God's image & likeness 7. Sabbath Rest (Contemplative rest)	

On The Beatitudes

-Our Lord Jesus preached the beatitudes upon a mountain. This reminds us of the law of Moses that was also given upon a mountain. But the difference is that when the law of Moses was given, God spoke in thunder & lightning – there was commotion, then, the people were ordered to keep at a distance; but now God spoke in a still small voice and the people are invited to draw near, as Christ himself said later: “Come to me all of you who are heavy laden & find life burdensome and I will give you rest.”

-God, who is rich in goodness and mercy, willed that before attaining eternal life, souls who have love Him and who have left all things for Him should receive even in this life the hundredfold which Our Lord Jesus promise.

-Thus we have the beatitudes that Christ preached on the mountain; and although we view them through the shadows of imperfection which can never disappear totally in this exile, they are the true heights of perfection and felicity.

-The beatitudes are a marvelous chain of mountains of which each peak is a stepping stone in the sublime ascent that leads to God. Each one of the beatitudes is something perfect and excellent, a summit in itself; and at the same time it is a beginning of future happiness even in this life.

-All the beatitudes are lofty mountains, but there is a constant ascension from the first one to the last, which seem to touch the very sky. 1st the joy of detachment, the sweetness of tears, then the fullness of justice and the gentleness of mercy; and very near to heaven the light of purity, the peace of love, the ecstasy of martyrdom.

-When Our Lord opened His lips to reveal to us the mysteries of the beatitudes, He gives us a picture of the royal ascent to happiness; He uncovered the sacred of all felicity.

-The first step to be taken by one who wishes to attain the mountaintop is to abandon the road that leads downward. Thus, the first thing we need to do if we are to reach the blessed life described in the beatitudes is to renounce, sincerely and fully, the deceptive joy of what the world offers.

-It is the first peak, the total detachment that liberates, purifies, elevates, and plants divine treasures in our soul.

-Pleasure is deceitful because it promises a happiness that does not exist; tears are true because they express the vanity of human things. Pleasure is the enemy of love because it is egoistic; but tears either come from love or leads to it. Before we have mourned & shed tears we have no repentance, nor a true desire to change, no fear of God in our hearts. For we have not yet become conscious of our guilt nor judged ourselves, nor has our soul had the foretaste of the last judgment and eternal torment. For if we had judged ourselves, if we had experienced such movement of the heart, if we had such feelings, we would have shed

tears forthwith. Without this the hardness of our hearts cannot be softened, nor can our souls acquire spiritual humility, nor have we ourselves the power to become humble.

-The first three beatitudes teach us to die; they disclose the secret of death which gives sweetness and joy.

-The last four beatitudes contain the secret of life; they reveal to us how, from the tomb of the old man, the new man rise, created according to the will of God in justice and holiness of truth.

-St. Thomas teaches that we arrive at these high summits by the exercise of virtues, but principally by the work of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

-The hierarchy of these seven beatitudes corresponds to the hierarchy of the seven gifts.

*The beatitude of detachment corresponds to the gift of fear of God;

*Meekness, to the gift of piety;

*Tears, to that of knowledge;

*Justice, to fortitude;

*Mercy, to counsel;

*Light, to understanding;

*The beatitude of love, to the gift of wisdom.

-The gifts are the roots, the beatitudes are the most sweet fruits which we enjoy in the shadow of the Beloved.

-The eighth beatitude which is the beatitude of pain and martyrdom, is a summary and consummation of all the others.

-The beatitudes are love's triumphant march, the delicate shades of its splendid rainbow, the exceeding full scale of its divine harmony.

-Pain is the richness of poverty, the refinement of gentleness, the divine touch of tears, the grandeur of justice, the unction of mercy, the purity of light, and the fullness of love. "Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

-If we would symbolize those divine realities that hold the secret of happiness, we could have as emblem the Dove of eternal love and the Cross of immortal pain, united in the Divine Heart of Christ.

The First Beatitude: "Blessed are the Poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven."

-The poor in Spirit are happy. Blessedness starts with humility: "Blessed are the poor in Spirit," that is, those who are not puffed up, whose soul is submissive to divine authority, who stand in dread of punishment after this life despite the seeming blessedness of their earthly life. Poverty of spirit is a gracious disposition of our soul by which we are emptied of self in order to be filled with Christ. It is to be content in whatever condition we find ourselves: "I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased and I know how to abound; in any all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me," as St. Paul said.

-Many are poor in the world, but proud, murmuring, and complaining, and blaming their lot. Poor in spirit is also to be humble and lowly in our eyes. To count others better than ourselves, and looking not only on our own interest but also that of others.

-It is to acknowledge that God is great, and we are insignificant; that he is holy and we are sinful; that he is all and we are nothing, less than nothing. We call ourselves poor, because always in want of God's grace. The foundation of all other graces is laid in humility. It is those who see their want, bewail their guilt, and thirst after a Redeemer. Christ must be our righteousness and savior – the healer of our soul.

-To such the kingdom of heaven is theirs. The kingdom of grace & glory is prepared for them. Those who humble themselves, and comply with God when he humbles them, thus shall be exalted.

-Each one of the beatitudes tell us of some aspect of perfection and all of them form a wondrous stairway whereby the soul ascends to God.

-Poverty of Spirit is a total voluntary detachment from exterior goods, namely honor & riches. On many occasions Our Lord taught us the necessity of detachment: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have...and come follow me" (Mt. 19:21).

"-So therefore, everyone who does not renounce all that he possess, cannot be My disciple" (Lk. 14:33).

-Detachment in itself is already happiness. Those who are detached know the joy of being free, of being pure, the incomparable joy of finding God. Of course creatures can help us lead to God too.

-But in order to use things as a means of ascent to heaven we must not tarry or remain with them; we may rest our feet upon them, but not our heart.

-If we let them detain us, instead of serving as steps to lead us upward they change into obstacles; if we give our hearts to them, they become chains that bind and enslave us.

"-To be happy we need to be free, and holy detachment is the soul's first cry of freedom: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

-Detachment, however, does not consummate the marvelous work of our purification, for only on the high peak of the sixth beatitude is the soul bathed in the fullness of light. But already on the mountain of poverty the soul sense that it begins to be transformed; it beholds from afar the sad valleys of earthly things covered with shadows.

-As soon as the heart is empty of creatures, God fills it with Himself. It is clear that to attain the divine prize of detachment which is the fruit of the virtues, we also need the holy divestment effected by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

-The virtues teach us to make good use of creatures; the gift take riches & honors out of our heart in such perfect and definitive manner that we become wholly unmoved by them. As the Scripture says, "If riches abound do not set your heart upon it."

-The first beatitude corresponds to the gift of fear of God and to the virtue of hope. The virtue, setting before us eternal goods, pulls us away from temporal things; and the gift, making us perfectly subject to God, removes us from everything contrary to that happy subjection.

-The gift of the Spirit is not that servile fear that flees from pain, but filial fear which is terrified at the thought of separation from God whom it loves.

-Poverty of Spirit is love that commences, that initiates, the work of despoiling and of pain, for love is as strong as death. It separates, it pulls out, it destroys, in order to transform.

-Love is poor and very rich, opulent in its marvelous nakedness. It rids itself of all because it gives all. Love is Jesus Christ crucified, prodigy of nakedness and abyss of riches.

-To find love we need to strip ourselves of everything and seek the rich treasure of the divine nakedness of Christ "Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." Therefore, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The Second Beatitude: "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*"

-Mourning is a sorrowful thing, for it is the sob of one who is sorry. Does anyone mourn, except for one who is dead? But, every sinner ought to mourn for himself, since there is nothing else so dead as a man in sin. Yet, how marvelous! If he mourns for himself, he comes to life again. Let him mourn through repentance, and he shall be comforted through forgiveness (St. Augustine)

-They that mourn are happy. There is a sinful mourning, which is an enemy to blessedness. These are those who are afflicted and become hardened under it. They mourn without hope.

-There is a natural mourning by the grace of God working with it, and sanctifying our afflictions. There is also a gracious mourning, a penitential mourning for our sins; this is godly sorrow, sorrow for sin, looking unto Christ with constant application to the Holy Spirit to cleanse away our remaining evil. These kind of mourners are blessed. Such mourners shall be comforted with God's pardon & mercy, and with peace, hope, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

-This beatitude is characterized by the luminous explosion of the gift of knowledge. Under the influence of this gift, our soul attains a new vision of life, discovers the profound sense of things on earth, and beholds with astonished eyes its own depths laid bare.

-As it bathes in this light it is deeply stirred. Tears come-tears crystalline as the light, bitter as pain, and gentle as messengers of love, which produces in the soul the miracle of consolation.

-Human consolations are a combination, more or less happy, of the earthly things that alleviates the pain of loss. If we have lost health, friendship will console us. If the bonds of a sweet friendship have been broken, perhaps we shall find consolation in the other things that are dear to us, say for instance, the divine office or lectio or in prayer in which our soul can soar up to the sky like a dove.

-As Noah's dove found no place to rest in the flood, so the soul illuminated by the gift of knowledge does not look upon earth with its welter of miseries as a solid support. But precisely because it does not find a resting place upon the earth, it takes its flight toward heaven. It looks on things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father and not on the things below where the devil is prowling like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

-Below, there is emptiness; but above, there is consolation that is not passing but eternal; not a consolation that quiets our desires for a time but one that fulfills them. It is the fundamental consolation: it is God.

-Holy Scripture attributes to each one of the three divine Persons the power of consoling. St. Paul says: "Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions" (2Cor. 1:3-4). And in this same Epistles the Apostle adds: "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also through Christ does our comfort abound" (2Cor. 1:5).

-God, it is true, is pleased to pour out on the souls He loves an ineffable sweetness and joy immeasurably superior to earthly joys, which, in spiritual language, is called divine consolation.

-Blessed the soul that weeps because it knows its immense emptiness; it shall have the consolation of being filled with God.

-Upon the misery of creatures there will be the reflection of God, the light that shines in darkness. Creation will have a new meaning for the soul, profound & divine. The gentle sound of sister water will be seen as a prayer; the perfume of flowers, the incense of adoration; the mysterious harmony of the woods or the corns or the rice or the coconuts or the mangoes, a song of praise; the noise of the ocean, a triumphal hymn of praise; the heavens, a poem of light, silent and deep, to the divine glory.

-Everything will have meaning, both the negative and positive experience, because everything will speak of God and invite us to love. Everything will be a ladder by which we mount to Him.

-Our soul will even find satisfaction in our own nothingness because that makes the divine beauty more prominent; it will rejoice in being small in order to lean upon the divine greatness; it will not wish to lose its weakness for thus it can feel the joy of clinging to the

divine strength. It is delighted to hear the voice of the beloved: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

-The day of eternity begins already even in our exile on earth; it is like a beautiful dawn for the souls that long to be united with God. The solace of tears is a prelude to eternal joy. This fundamental consolation encourages us in the spiritual combat of life and at times makes us forget the miseries of exile and gives us a supernatural strength to work perseveringly, to suffer without failing; for our eyes and heart are fixed on that paradise whose substance we penetrate by faith, whose reality we already possess through hope, and whose joy we begin to taste through love.

The Third Beatitude: "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth.*"

-The meek are happy. The meek are those who quietly submit to God- who can bear provocation without being inflamed by it; are either silent, or return a soft answer; who, in their patience, keep possession of their own souls. They are stronger than those who conquer a city. These meek ones are happy even in this world. They are blessed, for they learned from Our Lord who said: "Learn from Me for I am meek & humble of heart."

-Meekness stops up the most fertile source of anger, that desire to possess things by which wrath is enkindled in the human heart. Thus the Apostle St. James teaches: "What causes wars and what causes fightings among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and wage war" (James 4:1-2).

-When the desire to possess is quieted, our soul is ready for the tranquility of meekness. St. Augustine attributes the beatitude of meekness to the gift of piety. Piety, in the natural order and in the order of the virtues, refers principally to our parents and, as a logical consequence, to the fulfillment of our duties toward all our relatives, toward all who make up our family, even to love of country. Piety, as the gift of the Holy Spirit, leads us to knowledge of God the Father, and to a sense of our fraternity with all people; for all people are our brothers and sisters if God is our Father. With respect to God, the gift of piety inspires us with sentiments of confidence, and prompts us to give ourselves to Him. A child trusts its father, and gives him its heart.

-The gift of fortitude also conduces/contributes to perfect meekness, because it moderates the passions of the irascible appetite. But the immediate production of beatifying meekness belongs to the gift of piety. Thus meekness is the daughter of light, strength, and unction.

-Meekness is also a daughter of the gift of fortitude, since by this gift the irascible appetite is disposed to receive the influence of the Holy Spirit. The soul which exercises only the virtue of meekness restrains its irritation over some offence, but when perfected in the gift of fortitude, it not only renounces vengeance, but with marvelous serenity rejoices in the injury received. We have an example of this in the Acts of the Apostles. They were beaten, but they left the presence of the Council/Sanhedrin rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Our Lord Jesus.

-To those who have attained such perfect meekness Our Lord promised the earth as a reward, for they are stronger than they who conquered a city. Self-possession implies tranquility and solidity; to possess the land is to enjoy eternal goods of peace and with certainty. People struggle and give in to excessive anger in order to assure the possession of earthly goods. Our Lord teaches us that by the power of sweetness/meekness souls attain the possession of eternal goods.

-Meekness has two aspects: it perfects us and it makes our relation with others peaceful. In this second aspect, meekness depends on the gift of piety.

-As the waters of a lake is undisturbed by the wind reflect clearly and splendidly the image of the sky, so the souls of the meek, never troubled by gusts of anger, possess without ever losing God, the lover of silence and peace.

-When the soul possesses God, it possesses itself in holy meekness. Anger makes us lose control of ourselves, disturbs the peace & harmony of our interior kingdom, & separates us from our brothers. Meekness maintains unchanging peace within the confines of that kingdom, so that the soul, without fear, can sit down tranquilly beneath the fig tree and taste the fruits of the Beloved. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

The fourth Beatitude: “*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied.*”

-They that hunger and thirst after righteousness are happy. Righteousness is here put for all spiritual blessings. To have the whole person renewed in righteousness, so as to become a new person, and to bear the image of God; to have an interest in Christ and longs for the coming of God's kingdom, and who on the basis of this hope actively do God's will now. This longing is no empty, and shall be satisfied. We must hunger & thirst after these blessings. Our desires for spiritual blessings must be earnest.

-Hunger & thirst are appetites that return frequently; so these holy desires are carried out toward renewed pardons, and fresh supplies of grace, grace to do the work of every day in its day, as the living body needs for food. Thus, those who hunger & thirst after spiritual blessing are blessed in those desires, and shall be filled with those blessings.

-Our souls has a natural tendency to be hungry & thirsty for something else; therefore blessed are those who fasten upon the right object. It is God alone can fill our souls, whose grace and favor are adequate to its just desires; and He will fill, who, with a sense of emptiness, have recourse to his fullness. The new covenant is such, that those who seek cannot fail to find, for the spirit that excited these holy desires will lead to Christ.

-The more we possess Our Lord Jesus, the more we desire Him. Whoever partakes of that divine delicacy becomes more hungry, and whoever drinks that generous wine suffers a still greater thirst.

-The other Saturday, I mentioned that hunger and thirst are appetites that return frequently, so these holy desires are carried out toward renewed pardons, and fresh supplies of grace, grace to do the work of every day in its day, as the living body needs for food.

-Our souls has a natural tendency to be hungry & thirsty for something else; therefore blessed are those who fasten upon the right object, which is God – a hunger & thirst for God that resemble the deer that longs and thirsts for the running stream.

-Hunger and thirst express very well the vehemence of its desire. It literally hungers and thirsts for justice or righteousness; for righteousness, signifying the conjunction of all holy works, the accumulation of all heavy labors, that the jubilant and great-hearted soul undertakes as a refuge, so to speak, from its longings.

-Fourteen years of hard labor seem to the soul, as they did to Jacob, a small price to pay for the happiness it desires, for the sufferings of this present life is not worth comparing to the glory to be revealed to us. For this slight and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison.

-Let the Beloved come into his garden! Exclaims the soul satiated with justice. Our Lady typifies the soul satiated with justice, which is perfect fullness and consummate harmony. She sings with inspired accents to Him who is powerful, whose name is holy, to Him who brings down the proud and exalts the humble, to Him who fill the hungry with divine nourishment. So blessed are those who hunger for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

The fifth Beatitude: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

-The merciful are happy. Those are the merciful who are piously and charitably inclines to pity and help persons in misery. We must not only bear our afflictions patiently, but we must contribute all we can for the assistance of those who are in misery. We must have compassion on the souls of others, and help them. A good man is merciful even to his animal.

-The most merciful and charitable cannot pretend to merit, but must fly to mercy. The mercy to which the blessing is attached is learned by looking to the cross of Christ, and the Divine mercy is exercised to sinners through him.

-A truly merciful person not only gives alms from his own possessions, but gladly suffers wrong from others, and has mercy on them. After the works of justice has been completed in our soul, there remains a still more divine work, if one may so express it namely, the work of mercy.

-It is human to take ourselves the miseries of persons we love; but it is divine to assume those of others, even our enemies, in loving them, in making them our own, in taking them to our heart; the tribulations not only of those we love, but even of those who hate us; not only of people who delight us with their charms, but also of those who repel us with their craftiness. It is easy to compassionate certain types of human trouble, but to bend to the misery that seems to force itself on us, tenderly to embrace souls that lie in the disgusting mire of all human abjection, is a thing that is not natural to the egoistic heart of man.

-True mercy does not weaken or humiliate its recipient. It confirms the recipient in his or her human dignity. Christ's parable of the prodigal son is, for Pope John Paul II, a synthesis of the

biblical theology of mercy, and demonstrate how the question of a true humanism inevitably opens up the question of God. In Pope John's Paul's analysis of this most poignant of N.T. parables, the prodigal son is a kind of "Everyman," burdened by the tragedy of the human condition, which is, "the awareness of squandered sonship," of one's lost human dignity. The forgiving father, by being faithful to his paternity and going beyond the strict norm of justice, restores to the wayward son the truth about himself, which is the lost dignity of his sonship.

-Only Christ whose Heart is an overflowing ocean of all perfection can descend to the abyss of all miseries in order to fill it with the opulence of His plenitude.

-God is merciful because He is infinite; we are egoistic because we are limited. Mercy requires a certain divine touch; it is an imitation of God. Therefore Christ said to us: "Be merciful, even as your heavenly Father is merciful" (Mt. 5:20).

-If we combine mercy with prayer, our soul will see the light of truth.

-The light that guides the merciful is the light of the gift of counsel, a more vivid light because it is higher, nearer to the purest sources of light. By it our soul contemplate misfortunes as God does.

-Mercy or compassion is a virtue that brings healing to those who bestow it, not only in this present life but in eternity

-To alleviate the miseries of others the soul forgets itself. But there are eyes that watch it, the eyes of God.

The sixth Beatitude: "*Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.*"

-The pure in heart are happy, for they shall see God. One cannot contemplate God in heaven, nor see Him by the light of faith without purity of heart. And we cannot attain to purity of heart unless first of all we accept the fact that our hearts are not pure.

-Our hearts will be purified, not by looking at our own wretchedness, but by looking at Christ who is all purity & holiness. A strong determination of ever striving, with God's grace, to cleanse the heart & to preserve it unsullied, is the first hope of future purity of heart, the first sign of future perfection, the first characteristic mark of the true disciples of Christ.

-True Christianity lies in the purity of heart, the washing of the heart from our wickedness. "Purity of heart" is not merely the avoidance of "impure thoughts," but refers to the single-minded devotion to God.

-Having an undivided heart requires that there be something big enough and good enough to merit one's whole devotion, rather than parceling oneself out to a number of loyalties – attempting to serve two masters.

-If a person has achieved purity of heart, he has conquered cowardice. But if he is just on the point of achieving it, then sometimes he wins, but at other times he is overcome.

-A person has attained purity of heart when he sees all people as being good, and when none appears to be unclean & defiled.

-The Greeks produced an admirable word to express graphically the idea of holiness: "*hagios*," meaning without earth. To be pure is without earth, that is, to be free from all that is not of God, to look up at the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father and not on the things that are below where the devil, like a roaring lion is roaming around searching for someone to devour. The greater the estrangement from all the lowly things symbolized by earth, the greater and more perfect is purity.

-All purification is painful, it is radical and profound, tearing out of our soul the last vestiges of earth. This is a terrible purification in which God Himself seems to snatch from our soul all that remains in it of earth! This purification may take a while. Without any shadow of a doubt it will be a life long process.

-God is the purest Being, the purest Thought, and the purest Love. His thought is as pure and simple as His being; He reaches out over all infinity without going out of Himself. He is like a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

-God is purity; the mystery of the Trinity is a mystery of purity. Thus, the eternal canticle of the blessed heard by the prophet Isaiah & St. John is a song of purity: "Holy, Holy, Holy" (Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). And because God is purity, He is light.

-For our souls to be bathed in light, become light, we need to be purified but purification is a painful process. So, are we willing to be purified? How much better it is for us to be purged here than in the other life! For he who is purged in this world, by his own free will & the grace of Him, pays less than a cent/penny in a thousand tons.

-The only reason why we were given the law of purifying the heart is to have the clouds of evil thoughts and desires driven away from the atmosphere of the heart, and dispersed by constant attention or mindfulness of God, so that we can see clearly, as on bright fine day, the sun of truth – Jesus Christ Our Lord.

-We need purity of heart, if we are ever to arrive at the vision of Christ, glorious and triumphant. We shall find in His heart the key to all heavenly treasures.

-Justification, which is sinlessness, is a mystery of light: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord," St. Paul says. For our souls to be transformed into the image of God, passing from glory to glory, we must ascend from purification to purification in the continuing effort to become, more & more, glowing crucibles.

-Therefore the 6th beatitude brings the reward of light because it has purity for its merit: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." St. Paul says that God has predestined us to be conformed to His image. In the saddest times, we need to think that the divine artist is using a chisel to make His work more beautiful, and remain at peace beneath the hand that is working on us.

-When the eyes of heart are cleansed, the joy of our heavenly homeland opens to us. If the heart is pure, the thoughts are elevated, the affections healthy, the words chaste, the gestures and manners modest.

-The wonderful fruits of grace and all sorts of virtues, so nutritious for the soul and bursting into blossom on all sides, are the results of purity of heart. The state of purity of heart, in any event, is the last condition to be arrived at by the monk in the world of time. It is moreover the sole condition necessary for a given individual, and imposes meaning and direction on all such observances, which must be considered secondary in respect to it (John Cassian's Conferences, p. 19).

-The contemplation of God is arrived at in numerous ways. For God is not known only through wondering at His incomprehensible substance, because that is still concealed in the hope of the promise, but He is also clearly perceived in the grandeur of things that He has created, in reflecting upon His justice and in the assistance provided by His daily providence.

-Uninterrupted contemplation, then, which is of course identifiable with the purity of heart that is the *scopos* or goal of the monk, was the desired attainment whose absence Paul lamented in himself. As holy as he was, his mind was necessarily occasionally withdrawn from heavenly realities by reason of his preoccupation with earthly activities, and this created in him the profound tension that he expressed in Phil. 1: 22-24 "If it is to be in life in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account."

-Purity of heart is that practice of holiness; at different times described as love of perfection or contemplation or tranquility, "without which the aforesaid end (kingdom of God) will not be able to be seized" (1:5.2).

The Seventh Beatitude: "*Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.*"

-The peacemakers are happy, for they shall be called children of God.

-“Peacemakers” does not connote a passive attitude, but positive actions for reconciliation. It is the task of reconciliation between groups & people at odds. It keeps centrally in view the holy love of God. It knows that there can be no real peace until people are reconciled with God, for as long as people are at odds with God, they are at odds with themselves & with their neighbors. Therefore, the most important work of the peacemakers is the practice of the presence of God.

-Every earthly affection, even that which seems to be the deepest, is shallow. Our hearts were not made for created things, although these things attract us in as much as they are reflections of the divine. But they neither satisfy nor pacify human hearts, nor produce in them the interior movement proper to profound love, the love of God.

-The seventh beatitude is the peak of love. Our soul received all the gifts of the Holy Spirit together with charity when it received grace; but these divine seeds gradually acquire their full development accordingly as our soul prepares itself for this in the different stages of the spiritual life.

-There are two ways of knowing: one, by explanations and theories; the other, by an intimate experience. Learned discourses can tell us what love is, but the theories never equal the intimate teaching that love itself gives us when we have experienced it.

-The impression of beauty that invades us as we contemplate the work of creation is worth more than the most admirable description of creation. For theories teach us about things by analogy with other things that are known and sensed, while the intimate experience makes us savor things in themselves.

-The seventh beatitude, which is love as its highest, is also the very summit of wisdom. The fruit of wisdom and love is peace. Pure peace is something divine that only wisdom and love can produce. To be peaceful, it is not enough to live in sweet concord with our brother; it is not sufficient to have all our powers in tranquil harmony under the empire of the will. Rather, all the desires of our soul must be fused in one single divine desire, all flowing as one great torrent, with no scattered currents of affection anywhere.

-St. Augustine has profoundly said that peace is the tranquility of order; but order is the simplification of the multiple; thus the peaceful soul is the one who rests tranquilly in divine simplicity.

-Love generates peace; but simplification, which is the tranquil order, is the fruit of wisdom. On earth peace is the daughter of light & love, as in heaven the Word and the Holy Spirit are the eternal founts of the peace that emanates from the bosom of the Father.

-Peace & unity exist only where people live in righteousness & virtue. So, if we do not live in righteousness and virtue there would be no peace & unity. Peace is only possible if we pursue an upright way of life, if we are pleaser of God rather than men.

-All people desire peace, but those alone enjoy it who are completely dead to themselves & love to bear all things for Christ.

-A stranger to peace is a stranger to joy. We cannot make peace with others unless we are at peace with ourselves. We cannot be at peace within ourselves unless we are able to make the sacrifices which peace demands.

-A true peacemaker is one who makes man at peace with his God. If we are not a peacemaker, at least we should not be addicted to strife or quarelling or arguing.

The Eighth Beatitude: *"Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

-Those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake are happy. According to the "Status of Global Mission" report which is published by the international Bulletin of Missionary Research there were, on average, 270 new Christian martyrs every 24 hrs over the past decade, such that "the number of martyrs in the period 2000-2010 was approximately 1 million."

-The report defines "martyrs" as "believers in Christ who have lost their lives, prematurely, in situations of witness, as a result of human hostility." Christian martyrs in 1900 were estimated to be 34,000.

-The pain of the martyrs can be better imagine than described. God alone can know to the full the extent of the agonies of His martyrs; we poor mortals can only feebly imagine and less accurately describe them

-The martyrs died as the outcasts of the world, but are crowned by God with immortal honor. The glory of the world is false and transitory, and an empty bubble or shadow, but that of virtue is true, solid, and permanent, even in the eyes of men (martyrdom of St. Nazarius and St. Celsus).

-Of course, not every persecution is here pronounced blessed. The motive must be right: "For righteousness' sake." Some persecutions do not fulfill that requirement. There are some that we unworthily invite by our intolerance.

-It is not the suffering, but the cause that makes the martyr. The advantage of suffering for Christ, are much more considerable than the pain or shame of it.

-There is only one peak higher than the seven beatitudes. It is that of calvary, where Our Lord Jesus, the divine model of perfection and incomprehensible type of happiness, is crucified.

-Nothing is greater in the universe than Our Lord Jesus, and nothing is greater in Christ Jesus than His sacrifice. The most exquisite, the most sublime, and the holiest work of Christ is His sacrifice. The grace of God appeared on the cross in its supreme manifestation.

-The mystery of the cross is the compendium of the beatitudes. The divine nakedness of the cross is the consummation of detachment. The unutterable state of Christ as victim, totally surrendered to divine justice in the sacrifice of calvary, is the height of meekness.

-The sublime monument upon the top of calvary is the last word of love, both human and divine, on earth. There are only two consummations of sanctity because there are only two unities: that of love in heaven and of pain on earth.

-The Father and the Word are joined in the unity of the Holy Spirit, that is, in the unity of love. Our souls are united in the cross of Christ, in the unity of pain.

-Can it be that pain, by dissolving, immaterializes, and, by purifying, simplifies? That pain is the new and earthly name of love? Can it be that God who sits on the throne of love in heaven has chosen the cross for His throne on earth?

-To be holy is to offer oneself as a sacrifice of adoration, as a holocaust of love to the heavenly Father; to offer ourselves through the Holy Spirit as victim, altar, and priest.

-This is why the eighth beatitude, which is the beatitude of persecution, of pain, of challenges, trials & difficulties, of red or white martyrdom; in a word, of the cross, is the consummation and the manifestation of all the others, containing & perfecting them.

-All the virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit converge toward it as the rivers flow to the ocean.

-For St. Francis of Assisi perfect happiness "does not consist in giving good example, in performing miracles, in knowing all sciences and scriptures; it does not consist either in converting all infidels to the faith of Christ, but in suffering all things with patience and with happiness, thinking the pains of Our Lord Jesus, which He had to suffer for love of us." Therefore, the mystery of perfect happiness is the mystery of the cross.

-So let us pray that we may share in that happiness which the Son of God came to recommend and to procure! May we obtain mercy of the Lord; may we be owned as his children; may we see his face; and inherit his kingdom.

-With these enjoyments/Beatitudes & hopes, we will cheerfully welcome the lowest or even the most painful circumstances.

BEATITUDES

(The Internal Principle of Good Living)

-St. Thomas Aquinas said that all people agree in seeking happiness, but they disagree as to where it is found. This helps us explain why some people will adopt a hedonistic way of life and why some people will enter a monastery. Not every enjoyment is true happiness; there is only one beatitude befitting the soul that is God's image and this is the possession of the supreme good.

-No doubt the happiness that Christ promised is in sharp contrast to the ideals of the world. Beatitudes comes the Latin beatitude meaning happiness. Our final goal is happiness or beatitudes. The Baltimore catechism said that God made man in order to know Him, love Him, and serve Him in this life and be happy with Him in the next.

-The beatitudes cannot be taken alone. They are not ideals; they are hard facts and realities inseparable from the cross of calvary.

-Our hope of attaining happiness increases as we approach to it by virtuous living. Beatitudes are the acts that flow from the working of the Holy Spirit in us. They are the acts by which we possess happiness, beginning in this life and perfected in the next.

World seek their happiness in:

Obtained by:

avarice & vainglory

Lust & pleasures

Destroying their
enemies

Injustice & robbery

Hardening their
Hearts

Seeing only the
Things of this life

Stirring discord

1. Excellence & abundance of wealth
& prestige

2. Consolations for the hardship of life

3. Worldly Security

4. Temporal Possession

5. Avoiding the troubles & hardship
of others

6. Worldly Success

7. Having their Own Will

Christ's Happiness Consists in:

1. Excellence & abundance of good things
in God

2. Divine Consolation

3. Secure Possession of real eternal joy

4. The Fulfillment of Justice

5. Divine Mercy & Freedom from Misery

6. The Vision of God

7. Perfect Union with God in Wisdom

Obtained by:

The poor in Spirit

Those who mourn

The meek

Those who hunger
& thirst for justice

The merciful

The pure of heart

Peacemakers

*** Beliefs ***

-One of the aphorisms that is inclined to destroy character is the one that states, "It makes no difference what you believe, it all depends on how you act." The psychological fact is that we act upon our beliefs. If beliefs and ideals are wrong, our actions will be wrong.

-A man who is not true to his aspirations, beliefs, and principles is to be deplored, because such a one has no real aspirations, or beliefs, or principles. So it is likewise with a man who is not true to his religion and its morality. It is painful sometimes to see a "good" man with two personalities – the one that thinks and the one that speaks or acts.

-We are very much the product of what we have learned and experienced in the past. Our education determines our knowledge about particular subject, affects our value system and beliefs, and influences our way of looking at almost every facet of life.

-There are two intellectual factors which influence belief:

1. Good will.
2. Habits of living.

-Why is it, when a string intellectual argument for the faith is given to person A and person B, that person A will accept and person B will not? Since the cause is the same, the effect ought to be the same, but it is not. There must be some other factor present which makes one man embrace, the other reject, the truth – something in the mind it touches.

-A light striking a wall appears different from a light striking a window. Similarly this x factor, which makes for the rejection of divine truth in one case and its embrace in the other, is the will. As St. Thomas Aquinas puts it in his finely chiseled way: "Divine things are known in different ways by men according to the diversity of their attitudes. Those who have good will perceive Divine things according to Truth; those who have not good will perceive them in a confuse way which makes them doubt and feel that they are mistaken."

-What a man will intellectually accept depends to a great extent on what a man is or what he wants to be. The will, instead of admitting a truth presented to the mind, can ward it off and bar it out.

-God's pursuit of a mind is bound to fail unless the mind is also in pursuit of goodness. The message of the angels on Christmas night told us that only men with good will would become God's friends.

-The good will factor is so important that it seems probable there is no such thing as intellectual atheism. Reason is on God's side, not the Devil's; and to deny His Absolute is to affirm a competing absolute. **But if there is no intellectual atheism, there is a frequent atheism of the will, a deliberate rejection of God.** That is why the psalmist places atheism not in the mind but in the heart: "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God." This primary requirement of good will holds

not only for those who are looking for divine truth but also for those who found it and who still make little progress spiritually.

-God's grace is never wanting to those who long to cooperate with it. The will to be wealthy makes men rich; the will to be Christ's makes men Christians.

-Another factor affecting assent to the truth is our **habit patterns**. These are the result of our failure to act upon the moral truths we already recognize. When the Christian truth comes to any mind, it is known according to the manner of the knower; and some knowers have a vast army of acts and habit patterns, prejudices and desires ready to war upon the divine purpose of life. What the mind receives is received against a background, which already forms a pattern of its own, and one it will reluctantly disarrange or change.

-Meditation improves our behavior. As it is often stated that it makes no difference what we believe, that all depends on how we act; but this is meaningless, for we act upon our beliefs. Hitler acted on the theory of Nazism and produced a war; Stalin acted on the ideology of Karl Marx and Lenin and begot slavery. If our thoughts are bad, our actions will also be bad. The problem of impure actions is basically the problem of impure thoughts; the way to keep a man from robbing a bank is to distract him from thinking about robbing a bank. Political, social, and economic injustices are, first, psychic evils – they originate in the mind. They become social evils because of the intensity of the thought that begot them.

-Our wisdom will really become understanding when we apply our faith and belief to everything the Creator has told us.

Benefits of Purpose-Driven Life

-Here are four great benefits of living a purpose-driven life:

➤ **1. Knowing our purpose gives meaning to our life.** The Baltimore

Catechism tells us that God made us to know, to serve, and to love Him in this life, and be happy with Him in the next. We were made to have meaning. This is why people try dubious methods, like astrology or psychics, to discover it. When life has meaning, we can bear almost anything; without it, nothing is bearable.

-A young man in his twenties wrote, "I feel like a failure because I'm struggling to become something, and I don't even know what it is. All I know how to do is to get by. Someday, if I discover my purpose, I'll feel I'm beginning to live."

-Certainly, without God, life has no purpose, and without purpose, life has no meaning. Without meaning, life has no significance or hope. In the Bible, many different people expressed this hopelessness. The prophet Isaiah complained, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain for nothing" (Is. 49:4). And Job said, "My life drags by, day after hopeless day" and "I give up; I am tired of living. Leave me alone. My life makes no sense" (Job 7: 6, 16). For this reason, the greatest tragedy is not death, but life without purpose.

-Hope is as essential to our life as air and water. We need hope to cope. The writer and pediatric American surgeon, Dr. Bernie Siegel (born: 10/14/1932 in Brooklyn, NY) found he could predict which of his cancer patients would go to remission by asking, "Do you want to live to be one hundred?" Those with deep sense of life purpose answered yes and were the ones most likely to survive. Hope comes from having a purpose, a meaning.

-Wonderful changes are going to happen in our life as we begin to live it on purpose. God says through the prophet Jeremiah: "I know the plans I have for you, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (49:11). We may feel we are facing an impossible situation, but the Scripture says, "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think – infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, or hopes" (cf. Eph. 3:20).

➤ **2. Knowing our purpose simplifies our life.** It defines what we do and what we don't do. Our purpose becomes the standard we use to evaluate which activities are essential and which are not. We simply ask, "Does this activity help me fulfill one of God's purposes for my life?" Without a clear goal we have no foundation on which we base decisions, allocate our time, and use our resources. We will tend to make choices based on circumstances, pressures, and our mood at that moment. People who don't know their goal try to do much extracurricular activities, not related to one's vocation – and that causes stress, fatigue, and conflict.

-It is impossible to do everything people want to do. We have just enough time to do God's will. If we can't get it all done, it means we are trying to do more than God intended for us to do) or, possibly, we're watching too much television or news in the internet). Purpose-driven living leads to a simpler lifestyle and a saner schedule. The book of Proverb says, "A pretentious, showy life is an empty life; a plain and simple life is a full life" (13:7). It also leads to peace of mind, as the prophet Isaiah says: "Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee" (26:3).

- **3. Knowing our purpose focuses our life.** It concentrates our effort and energy on what is important. We become effective by being selective. It is human nature to get distracted by minor issues. We play Trivial Pursuits with our lives. The American author, poet, philosopher, abolitionist, naturalist, tax resister, and development critic, Henry David Thoreau (7/12/1817-5/6/1862) observed that people live lives of “quiet desperation,” but today a better description is aimless distraction. Many people are like a gyroscopes, spinning around at a frantic pace but never going anywhere.

-Without a clear goal, people will keep changing directions, jobs, relationships, churches, or other externals – hoping each change will settle the confusion or fill the emptiness in the heart. We think, maybe this time it will be different, but it doesn't solve our real problem – a lack of focus and purpose. The letter to the Ephesian says: “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of Lord is” (5:17). The power of focusing can be observed in light. Diffused light has little power or impact, but we can concentrate its energy by focusing it. With a magnifying glass, for instance, the rays of the sun can be focused to set grass or paper on fire. When light is focused even more as a laser beam, it can cut through steel.

-There's nothing quite potent as a focused life, one lived on purpose. The Church did not give us an active ministry, so that we can focus our life to sing the praises of God day and night. The men and women who have made the greatest difference in history were the most focused. For example, St. Paul almost single-handedly spread Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. His secret was a focused life.

-Hence, if we want our life to have impact, we have to focus it. We have to prune away even good activities and do only that which matters most. We need not confuse activity with productivity. St. Paul said: “but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3: 13-14).

- **4. Knowing our purpose prepares us for eternity.** Many people spend their lives trying to create a lasting legacy on earth. They want to be remembered when they're gone. Yet, what ultimately matters most will not be what others say about our life but what God says. What people fail to realize is that all achievements are eventually surpassed; record broken, reputation fade, and tributes are forgotten. For example, the American tennis player, James Dobson (born 4/21/1936) had the goal to become the school's tennis champion. He felt proud when his trophy was prominently placed in the school's trophy cabinet. Years later, someone mailed him that trophy. They had found it in a trash can when the school was remodeled. James said, “Given enough time, all your trophies will be trashed by someone else!”

-Living to create an earthly legacy is a short-sighted goal. A wiser use of time is to build an eternal legacy. Where our treasure is there will our heart be also. We are created to know, to serve, and to love Him in this life, and be happy with Him in the next.

On Building up Virtues

-Holy Scripture says of the midwives who kept alive the Israelites' male children, that through the god fearing midwives they made themselves houses. Does it mean they made visible house? How can they say they acquired houses through fear of God when we do the opposite, and learn in time, through fear of God to give up the houses we have? Evidently this does not refer to visible houses but to the house of the soul which each one build up for himself by keeping God's commandments.

-Through this Holy Scripture teaches us that the fear of God prepares the soul to keep the commandments, and through the commandments the house of the soul is built up. If we take hold of them and fear God, we shall build houses for ourselves where we shall find shelter in time of bad weather, for not to have a home in time of bad weather is a great hardship.

-We can learn how the house of the soul is built from the analogy of building a material house and the care it demands. If we want to build a house we must see first that we all have the means to finish it, otherwise people will begin to say to us: "This man build a house and was not able to finish it; and they began to mock us." If our resources are inadequate to build the house, we either have to make a loan or to do it little by little without neglecting any important part of the house.

-We do not concentrate on one part and neglect the rest since this is of no use but defeats our aim and make vain the expense and labor. So it is with the soul: we must on no account neglect any part of it, but build it up equally and harmoniously. This is what Abba John means when he says: "I would rather see a man acquire a little of each one of the virtues than master one virtue as some have done, persisting in it and practicing only that but neglecting the rest."

-We may indeed have a certain pre-eminence in that one virtue and, therefore, not be weighed down by the contrary vice, but we remain caught by our other passions and burdened by them and do not pay attention to them, thinking instead that we have acquired something great.

-In this case, we are like a man who builds one wall and raises it up as high as he can and, considering the height of the wall, thinks what a great work he has done. He does not know that one good strong wind coming along will blow it down because it stand by itself, nor from only one wall has that man gained a shelter of himself, for he is exposed on the other sides. That is not the way to do it. If a man wants to build a house and make a refuge for himself he must build up all four walls and protect himself all around.

-However, the first thing we have to do is to dig a solid foundation, which is faith, as the Scripture says: "Without faith it is impossible to please God." So according to this comparison, it is impossible to build our spiritual house without the foundation of faith. Is there occasion for obedience? The stone of obedience must be laid. Does a disagreement arise among us? The stone of patience must be laid. Is there a need for self-control? That stone must be laid too.

-So whatever the virtue required, that stone must be laid in the building, and in this way the perimeter of the building rise up, one stone for forbearance, another for mortifying self-will, one for meekness, and so on.

-In all this, great attention must be paid to perseverance and courage: these are the cornerstones of the building and by them the house is held together and all is united to all so that they do not lean over and fall apart; without these we will not succeed in perfecting any of the virtues. If a man has no courage in his soul, he will not endure with patience, and if he has no patience he cannot entirely succeed. Therefore, it is said: "In patience you shall possess your souls." He who has self-control is stronger than he who conquers a city.

-Similarly, the builder must set his stones in mortar/cement, for if he piles his stones without mortar/cement, the stones come apart and the house falls down. The cement/mortar is humility, which is composed from the earth and lies under the feet of all. Any virtue existing without humility is no virtue at all, as it says in the saying of Amma Syncletica: "As it is impossible to construct a ship without nails, so there is no hope of being saved without humility." The saints, while making progress towards perfection, came to humility.

-Whatever a good man does, he must do with humility so that what he does is kept safe. But besides all this, the house needs what are called tie-beams or braces - that is to say discretion - which, besides adding much to its appearance, draws the whole building together.

-The roof is charity, which is the completion of virtue as the roof completes the house. After the roof comes the crowning of the dwelling place; and what is this crowning? In the book of Deut. 22:8 it is written: "if you build yourself a house and make it your dwelling place, put a crown round your house [i.e. railings around the flat roof] lest your children fall from the roof." The crown is humility. For that is the crown and guardian of all the virtues. As each virtue needs humility for its acquisition - and in that sense we said each stone is laid with the mortar of humility - so also the perfection of all the virtues is humility.

-Who are these children that the book of Deut. Says must not fall from the roof top? These children are the thoughts generated in our souls, which must be guarded through humility lest they fall out of the house. So it is completed, it has its protecting walls, its roof of virtues; there it is, the house of perfection, complete with its crowning virtue of humility and all that it needs to complete it.

-Is there anything left out? Yes! Something remains to be said. What about the builder of the house? If there is no craftsman there, the house may finally deteriorate and perhaps fall down. The craftsman is one who acts with knowledge of what he is doing. For a man may work at the virtues and because he acts without knowledge he may destroy his own work or it may be insecure, so that he cannot find the way to complete it but lays one brick only to have to take it up again. Another may lay one but remove up two. For example, a brother comes along and says one word to annoy or offend you. You say nothing and defer to him - this means you have laid a brick. Then you go off and speak to another brother, and say: 'That nasty brother said this and that to me and I did not say a word, I just bowed down to him in deference.' There you are - you have laid one brick and removed two. You have done it well in the first but you forfeited it by criticizing the brother at his back.

-Again a brother may bow in submission to someone because he desires to be praised; he is humble with a touch of vainglory - this is to lay one brick and take up another. He who humbles

himself 'with knowledge' convinces himself that he has failed, and acknowledges that he has been at fault. This is what it means to humble oneself 'with knowledge.'

-One practices silence but not with knowledge; such a man holds that he acts virtuously, but he does nothing of the kind. The man who keeps silence with knowledge is the man who is convinced that he is unworthy to speak, and this is silence 'with knowledge.'

-Again a man may over-estimate himself because he thinks he is doing a great thing and is humble, and he does not know that he possesses nothing, because he does not act with knowledge.

-Another man serves the sick so to win a reward; in this way he does not act with knowledge. If something painful happens to him he quickly cuts himself off his good work and does not anticipate completing it since he is not acting with knowledge. A man who serves with knowledge serves because he is moved by sympathy for the sufferer, because his heart is moved with pity. If anything happens externally that troubles him, or if the sick man is contentious with, a man who aims at expressing this pity will bear it without being put out, because he sticks to his own intention and knows that the sick man is doing him more good than he is the sick man. We need to believe that a man who ministers with knowledge is relieved of many evil tendencies and the battles they cause.

-Again, if a man practices great mortification from vainglory or in the opinion that he is practicing great virtue, he is not acting with knowledge. Because of this he begins to despise his neighbor and to think that he himself is really something; he is not only laying one brick and taking up two, but also shaking the building and putting the whole wall in danger by judging his neighbor.

-He who practices bodily mortification with knowledge does not think he is being marvelously virtuous nor does he desire to be praised as an ascetic but he maintains that through his mortification he acquires moral vigor, and through this he comes to humility. He is then a good and skillful craftsman capable of building his house in safety, because it has been founded upon a rock which is Christ himself the meek and humble of heart.

-The man who desires, with God's help, to come to such an enviable state must not say the virtues are too great for him or that they cannot be reached. For this is either failing to hope in God's help or shrinking from something good.

-Whatever virtues we desire we have only to practice it and we will see that we have in ourselves power to succeed. See what it says: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Because you are conscious of how far you are from virtue, do not be a coward and ask, 'How can I love my neighbor as myself? How can I pay attention to his troubles as to my own, especially those hidden in his heart which I cannot see or even know: How can I consider them my own?' Do not excuse your slothfulness with thoughts like these, do not consider virtues excessively difficult or unattainable because God never commands impossible things, but make at least a little effort and have confidence in God. Show him your enthusiasm and zeal and you will see the help he brings towards your success.

-Take an example: Suppose there are two ladders, one going upwards to heaven and the other leading down to hell. You are standing on earth between the two ladders. You would not reason it all out and say, 'How can I fly from the earth and be once and for all on the top of the ladder?' This is impossible and God does not ask it of us, but He does ask that we meanwhile keep from going downwards and do not harm our neighbor nor offend him, nor calumniate him, nor rail at him or demean him.

-And so at last we begin to do a little good and are of help to him in speech, and bear with him, and if he needs something give it to him freely, so we go up one rung at a time until finally, with God's help, we reach the top of the ladder.

-For through this repeated coming to our neighbor's rescue, we come to long for what is advantageous for him as well as advantageous for us and what is profitable to him as well as profitable to us. This is 'to love your neighbor as yourself,' for no one does harm to himself or wish harm for oneself.

-If we seek we shall find; and if we ask God, he will enlighten us, for it says in the Gospel, "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you." 'Ask,' it says, that we may call for aid through prayer; 'seek,' that is, search out how virtue may be reached, what brings it about, what we ought to do in order to possess it. "Seek and you shall find" means to inquire every day in this way into everything. To 'knock' is to carry out the commandments.

-Every one knocks at the door with his hands; our hands are given to us that we may do something. We need, therefore, not only to ask, but to seek diligently and know what to do as St. Paul says, "Perfectly prepared for every good work" (2Tim. 3:17). What does 'perfectly prepared' mean? When a man wants to build a ship, he first of all prepares everything he needs down to the smallest nail, the pitch and the caulking (water proofing material to prevent leakage by sealing). So it is when a woman sets up the loom to weave a piece of cloth; everything has to be prepared to the last thread. This is what is meant by being perfectly prepared, to have everything that is needed ready at hand for the work.

-So, therefore, that we may be ready for every good work, let us make all our preparations to do the will of God 'with knowledge' – what He desires and in a way that pleases Him.

-What is it St. Paul means by saying, "The will of God is good and well-pleasing and perfect" (Rom. 12: 2)? Everything that happen, happens with God's permission or approval, as the prophet Isaiah says: "I, the Lord, make the light and create darkness" (Is. 45: 7), and again, "Does evil befall a city, unless the Lord has done it" (Amos 3: 6)? He speaks of evil here in the sense of the consequences of evil and the troubles that are brought upon us for our correction because of the evil we do such evils as famine, diseases, and wars. All this happens to us, not according to God's pleasure, but by permission, with His permission they come upon us for our profit.

-God does not, therefore, want us to desire them or to approve of them. For example: "It is God's will, in that He allows it, that the city be ruined." Since it is God's will that it be ruined, does He want us to set fire to it and burn it, or take a pickaxe and smash it down? Or it is God's will that someone be afflicted or sick; does He wish us then to afflict the person or to say that since it is

God's will that he is sick we shall not take pity on him? No! God does not want this; He does not want us to serve Him in that way. He wants us to desire the good that He intends as a result of this affliction, that which happens according to his good pleasure, all that is done in accord with the commandments: to love one another, to bear one another's burdens, to give alms and the like. That is the good that God wills.

-But what is well-pleasing? If someone does something good, it is always good, but sometimes it is not well-pleasing. For example, it may happen that someone finds a poor orphan girl who is very beautiful. Delighted with her beauty, he takes her in and brings her up because he thinks the poor orphan is beautiful. And that is the will of God – something good; it is not, however, well-pleasing to God. The thing is well-pleasing to God not when a man acts mercifully on account of some human consideration but because the act is good in itself and because he acts sincerely out of compassion. That is truly well-pleasing to God!

-The thing is perfect when a man do good without meanness or reluctance, without despising the recipient but with eagerness according to his ability, of deliberate choice, giving as freely as if he were receiving, doing kindness as graciously as if a kindness were being shown to him – then it is perfect. And so, a man is well-pleasing to God, doing His will, as St. Paul says, “the good, the well-pleasing, and the perfect thing.” This is to act with knowledge.

On Character

-The world has one supreme test for character, and that is the possession of a virtue in a high and eminent degree. Many generals, for example, in our national history are ranked as great characters because of their valor, and many scientists are ranked as great characters because of their wisdom. Some are judged noble because of their love of peace, others because of their bravery in war; some because of their majesty, and others because of their gentleness; some because of their wisdom, others because of their simplicity.

-But this is not the real way to judge character. The possession of one virtue in an eminent degree no more makes a great person than one wing makes a bird. Just as the eagle's power is measured by the distance from the extremity of the other, so a person's character is to be judged, not by the possession of one extreme virtue but by the expanse between that virtue and the opposite one, which complements it.

-Character is nothing more nor less than the reconciling of opposite virtues. In other words, a really great character is not just a brave person, for if a person was brave without being tender, he or she might very easily become cruel. Tenderness is what might be called the other wing to bravery.

-In like manner, majesty alone does not make character, for majesty without gentleness might very soon degenerate into pride. Love of peace alone does not make character, for without the opposite virtue of courage, peacefulness could very easily slip into a spineless cowardice. Wisdom without simplicity makes a person proud; simplicity without wisdom makes a person a simpleton.

-A real character, therefore, does not possess a virtue on a given point on the circumference without at the same time possessing the complementary virtue, which is diametrically opposed to it; for what is character but the tension between opposites, the equilibrium between extremes.

-Thus St. Paul exhibits in his life the beautiful tension between zeal and gentleness; St. John the tension between overflowing love and uncompromising devotion to truth; and Moses the tension between firmness and meekness.

-Just as every engine must have its fly-wheel, every springtime its harvest, every ocean its ebb and its tide, so every really great character must have its pendulum so delicately adjusted that it can swing between the extremes of the magnanimous and the humble, the lofty and the plain, without ever once being detached. Character, then, is the balanced tension between opposite virtues.

-It is in this sense that the character of Our Blessed Lord rises above all people and is the perfect exemplar of goodness and the paragon of virtues. One might show how He combined majesty and gentleness, peacefulness and force, magnanimity and humility, but for the sake of brevity we limit ourselves only to the two extremes virtues that the Lord recommended to His apostles at

the beginning of His public life: wisdom and simplicity: "Be you therefore wise as a serpent and simple as doves" (Mt. 10:16).

-Our Lord did not make this recommendation without possessing it in an eminent degree Himself. He was wise with the Wisdom of God; but He was simple with the simplicity of a child. That is why He came to us as the world's God-Child. But what is more remarkable still, He never used His wisdom before the simple, but only before those who thought themselves wise.

-He was wisdom before the so-called wise, but He was simplicity before the simple. He exceeded the worldly wise with His wisdom and the simple with His simplicity. He outdid the worldly wise with His wisdom. Take, for example, the scene in the temple at the beginning of His public ministry.

-The Passover was drawing near, and pilgrims from Galilee began to gather into Jerusalem. Our Lord came with the throng and entered through the Golden Gate into the temple.

-As He passed beneath the arch and came into the Court of the Gentiles, the open space before the steps that led up to the Holy Place, a busy scene lay before Him. It was more than the mere jostling of crowds paying their yearly tribute of half shekel to the temple treasury.

-Rather, here was a bedlam of confusion. In the heat of April day were hundreds of merchants and shopkeepers mingling the cry of their wares with the bleating of sheep and the bellowing of oxen.

-There were little men with big wicker cages filled with doves, and under the very shadow of the arcades sat the money-changers wrangling in the most dishonest of trades, their greedy eyes aflame with the lust of gain.

-Everywhere there was huckstering, quarreling, bargaining, and the clanking of money to be heard above the chants of the Levites and the prayers of the priests. And all this at the entrance to the Temple of the Most High.

-When our Lord entered, a righteous indignation laid hold of Him, for what is character but a beautiful tension between force and meekness. An anger divorced from meekness is but unsanctified passion, and meekness that cannot kindle into indignation is closely allied to moral collapse.

-And on the occasion, Our Lord's swift indignation was just as much a part of His perfect sanctity as His silent meekness in the hour of the Passion. He could not, being justice itself, be silent before an offense against God.

-His eyes burned with a controlled anger; His firm face set in commanding scorn. His hands reached to some bits of binding cord lying on the floor beside Him. With His fingers, rapidly yet calmly, He knotted them into a whip. The traffickers stood still; the merchants eyed Him with growing fear; then they stepped back from Him as One of Whom they had reason to fear as though in the Last Judgment.

-Then quietly but firmly He began to move His tiny whip of knotted cord. The frightened crowd yielded, and sheep and cattle broke and fled. With His foot He overthrew the table of the money-changers, as they rushed to the floor to gather up their jangling coins from the filth and pollution.

-Before those who sold doves He stood still, for the dove was the offering of the poor, and there was less desecration in their lovely emblems of innocence and purity. To these He was more gently.

-He did not scatter them; He did not break the baskets and release the doves; to their owners He spoke tenderly: "Take these things out from here; and do not make the house of my Father a house of trade" (Jn 2:16).

-And His disciples, seeing this transport of inspiring and glorious anger, recalled to mind what David had written of Him in prophecy: "The zeal of thy house will consume me" (Jn 2:17; Ps. 69:9).

-And if we ask why the greedy traffickers did not resist as their oxen were chased into the street and their money flung on the floor, the answer is because sin is weakness; because there is nothing in the world so utterly abject and helpless as a guilty conscience; because nothing is so invincible as the sweeping tide of God-like indignation against all that is base or wrong; because Vice cannot stand for a moment before Virtue's uplifted arm.

-Base and low as they were, every one of them who had a remnant of his soul not yet eaten away by infidelity and avarice knew that the Son of Man was right.

-All the while there was standing on the marble steps that led up to the Holy of Holies a group of Levites, Scribes, and Pharisees who knew what a heavy loss that stampede would cause the merchants and themselves.

-They looked for the cause of the commotion and saw that He Who provoked it all was a carpenter from lowly Nazareth, with no mark of office about Him, no scrolls, no ensigns of dignity, but only an uplifted hand. They were indignant. How dare this obscure working man with a few ill-smelling fishermen as companions arrogate authority to Himself within the temple precincts, in which they alone were masters?

-They moved down the steps to Him, as He stood alone with the whip cord in His hand and asked Him: "What sign can you show us for doing these things?" (Jn. 2:18)

-He might have pointed His finger at the panic-stricken crowd as a sign that all men fear the justice of God. But these were learned men, skilled in Scriptures, and wise in their own conceits.

-And before those who thought themselves wise, Our Lord was wiser. He would show to them a wisdom so deep, so profound, so revealing the truth of their Scripture, that not even they, the wise men of Israel, would understand.

-In fact, what he said was so deep that it took them almost three years to understand it. Firmly and solemnly with a gesture centered on Himself, He said something beyond their

comprehension, something that in its apparent meaning filled them with perfect stupor and angry amazement because they understood not its depth.

-Their words were over their heads, at the same time they stole into their hearts: "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up". Such wisdom was too profound even for the wise of this earth. It was not until almost three years later that it began to dawn upon them, when the Temple they destroyed on Good Friday was rebuilt by the power of God on Easter Sunday; and even the Truth too is so deep and profound that some of our wise men today have not yet begun to understand it even after two thousand years.

-Character can be formed by studying characters. Character is the true shape and inner consistency of the self. Character is not personality but the cumulative consequence of a lifetime of choices. In another sense life choices are shaped by our character. Character choices are the ones that make us the kind of person we are and constitute the basis of "personal power."

"Out of our beliefs are born our deeds.
Out of our deeds we form our habits;
Out of our habits grow our characters;
Out of our character we build our destiny" (Henry Hancock).

-The very separateness in character between the two parties makes it necessary that in some way they should be one. There must be a point of contact, one with the other. He who is like his brethren will have more power over them than one who is not like them. Hence, in order to be a sanctifier, Our Blessed Lord had to be a man like His unholy brethren. He would make them holy by reproducing in His life the lost ideal of human character and bringing that ideal to bear on their minds and hearts.

-God made a moral universe, a vale of character-making wherein there would be virtue, heroism, saintliness and patriotism, none of which is possible without freedom.

-Occasionally, a habitually good man may fall, but evil is the exception in his life; it is the rule in the life of the gangster. Whether we know it or not, the actions of our daily life are fixing our character for good or for evil. The things we do, the thoughts we think, the words we say, are turning us either into a saint or a devil, to be placed at either the right or the left of the Divine Judge.

-“Technology, wealth and power are not the same as wisdom, purpose and character. And they don’t give us any security, because only God can do that” (Archbishop Charles Chaput).

-The imagination and memory need to be rid of their bad habits, for instance, the recalling to our memory of the wrongs our neighbor did us; eliminating this will prepare for the emergence of character. If left untamed, our thoughts can choke the real self.

-The imagination and memory need to be rid of their bad habits, for instance, the recalling to our memory of the wrongs our neighbor did us; eliminating this will prepare for the emergence of character. If left untamed, our thoughts can choke the real self.

-The first step in character training is to discover what is worst in us. This is done by an examination of the sin to which we are most frequently tempted.

-The blessedness of temptation is twofold. It reveals the weak spot in our character, showing us where to be on guard; and the same temptation gives us an occasion for gaining merit by refusing to submit to it. Self-examination reveals the basic defect in each man's character, what is known as his predominant fault. The predominant fault is the one which prevails over all other faults and to some extent inspires our attitudes, judgments, and sympathies; every individual temperament, despite its variegated expressions, generally follows one consistent line. *Natura determinatur ad unum.*

-The secret of character training is to strengthen this weak spot in our character in cooperation with God's Grace. The evil must be called by its right and ugly name when it is discovered. Judas missed salvation because he never called his avarice by its right name – he disguised it as love of the poor.

-Because the development of character requires constant vigilance, our occasional failures must not be mistaken for the desertion of God. Two attitudes are possible in sin – two attitudes can be taken toward our lapses into sin: we can fall down, and get up; or we can fall down, and stay there. The fact of having fallen once should not discourage us; because a child falls, it does not give up trying to walk. As sometimes the mother gives the most attention to the child who falls most, so our failures can be used as a prayer that God be most attentive to us, because of our greater weaknesses.

-Character building, however, should not be based solely on the eradication of evil, for it should stress, even more, the cultivation of virtue. Mere asceticism without love of God is pride; it is possible to concentrate so hard on humiliating ourselves that we become proud of our humility, and to concentrate so intently on eradicating evil as to make our purity nothing but a condemnation of others.

-Character is great, not by ferocity of its hatred or evil, but by the intensity of its love of God. Asceticism and mortification are not the ends of a Christian life; they are the means. The end is charity.

-He who is charged with character formation will do well if he lays hold of what is best in people, searching for the gold and the dross. There is something good in everybody.

On Character Training

-Strength of character is not stumbled upon in life's moment of need and temptation. Character is built little by little, over days, weeks, months, and years, with thousands of small seemingly insignificant acts of discipline. Self-possession is not an unearned right; it is the privilege of the few who build it, defend it and celebrate it by disciplining themselves (Matthew Kelly, Rediscover Catholicism).

-Everyone in the world is defeated in one area of life or another. Some fell away from their high ideals; others bemoan their failure to marry or, having married, lament because the state failed to realize all its hopes and promises; others experience a decline of virtue, a gradual slipping away into mediocrity, or a slavery to vice; others are subjected to weariness, a failure of health, or economic ruin.

-All these disappointments are voiced in the mournful regret: "If I only had my life to live over again!" But it is of the utmost importance that, in facing our defeats and failures, we shall never yield to discouragement; for discouragement, from a spiritual point of view, is the result of wounded self-love and is therefore a form of pride.

-We can actually conquer defeat – use our failures as assets and our sins as stepping-stones to sanctity. This Christian attitude stands in sharp contrast to the methods of education. Education takes hold of what is best in a person, e.g., talent for music, a gift for invention, or a taste for literature and develops that, to the exclusion of the arts and sciences for which we have no interest. And this is proper – we do not want our sculptors forced to specialize in law. A person's vocation is decided to a great extent by his or her capabilities.

-But character training, on the contrary, takes as deep an interest in a person's greatest lacks as in his greatest gifts. It singles out his predominant failing and, by fighting against it, finally perfects the personality in the virtue contrary to the previous vice.

-The first step in character training, then, is to discover what is worst in us. This is done by an examination of the sin to which we are most frequently tempted. It is very wrong to think that, because we are tempted we are wicked.

-Sacred Scripture tells us: "My brothers and sisters, when you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance" (Jas. 1:2). The blessedness of temptation is twofold. It reveals the weak spot in our character, showing us where to be on guard; and the same temptation gives us an occasion for gaining merit by refusing to submit to it.

-Self-examination reveals the defect in each person's character, what is known as one's predominant fault. The predominant fault is the one that prevails over all other faults and to some extent inspires our attitudes, judgments, and sympathies.

-Every individual temperament, despite its variegated expressions, generally follows one consistent line. It makes little difference that the hidden evil may be in the most remote corner of

the heart; it may have been covered from others' sight, but the mind cannot help being aware that it is there.

-No spiritual progress can be made until the master fault is dug up from its hiding place, brought into the light, and laid before God, for until the position of the enemy is known, he cannot be attacked.

-The secret of character training is to strengthen this weak spot in our character in cooperation with God's grace. The evil must be called by its right name when it is discovered; otherwise we shall excuse our lack of fortitude as an "inferiority complex" and our inordinate love of the flesh as a "release of the libido."

-Judas missed salvation because he never called his avarice by name – he disguised it as love of the poor. Considerable probing is necessary to drag out the predominant fault; it always fights against being recognized. Sometimes it can be detected by discovering what defect makes us most angry when we are accused of it: The traitor flies into rage when he is first accused of being disloyal to his country.

-The sin we most loudly and vehemently condemn in others may be the sin to which our own heart is most addicted: Judas, again, accused Our Lord Himself of not loving the poor enough. Aristotle wisely remarked: "Every man judges of what is good according to the goodness or badness of his interior disposition."

-If we confront the world with the idea that everyone is dishonest, it is amazing how often that initial bias will be confirmed. This is because, just as water seeks its own level, so does the mind seek the level of its prejudice. Thieves consort with thieves, drunkards with drunkards, the prejudiced with the prejudiced.

-The predominant fault is discoverable not only in the environment it keeps, or in the atmosphere it breathes, but also in the way that others act toward us. Nature acts as it acted upon; be suspicious of a neighbor, and the neighbor acts suspiciously. Show love to others, and every one seems lovable.

-The law of physics that every action has an equal and opposite reaction has its counterpart. If we sow the seed of distrust in society, society always returns the harvest of distrust. The emotional reprisals of others can be used as the mirror of our own interior dispositions.

-Once one has discovered the primary fault through any of these methods, the next step is to combat the interior defect. This requires a daily, even moment by moment struggle; sanctification is not a *place* at which one arrives but a *way* one travels.

-There are generally four ways of overcoming the predominant fault: First, by asking God in prayer to illumine the dark places of the soul and to give us strength to conquer the sin. The Council of Trent says: "God never commands the impossible; but in giving us His precepts, He commands us to do what we can, and to ask for the grace to accomplish what we cannot do." Second, by daily examination of conscience. Almost all people count the money in their pockets daily to determine whether the current expense of the day can be met; but how few of us ever balance

our conscience to see if we are going into debt morally & spiritually. Third, by imposing on oneself a penance every time we succumb to the predominant fault, e.g., by saying a prayer for the absent person against whom we bore false judgment. Fourth, by making the predominant fault the occasion of a greater virtue.

-This fourth method is one that is too often ignored, although strength of character cannot be obtained without knowledge of our weakness and the ultimate mastery of it. "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2Cor. 12:9).

-The storm reveals the weakness in the roof; but the part of it that was damaged and repaired is apt, later, to be the strongest. Scar tissue is the strongest skin of all. Kites and airplanes rise against the wind, not with it. Earth does not reveal its harvest without plowing, nor the minds their treasure without study, nor nature its secret without investigation. One's defect, overcome, may become one's greatest strength.

-Goodness is too often confused with passivity. There are a number of people who are considered to be good, when really they have not enough courage to do either a very good or a very evil act of any kind.

-But character does not depend on a want of energy to do wrong; it requires the use of great energy in doing right when wrong solicits us. The greatest sinners sometimes make the greatest saints: A Paul who hated became a Paul who loved; a sensuous Magdalene became a spiritual Magdalene.

-The convents and monasteries are full of potential devils – saintly souls who could have been very wicked men and women, in their vitality, if they had not corresponded to God's grace. St Therese of the Child Jesus said that if she had not been responsive to God's mercies, she would have been one of the most evil women who ever lived.

-On the other hand, the prisons contain a population of potential saints; the energy the criminals used in sinning was not wrong – it was the use to which they put their energy that was wrong. Lenin was probably a saint in reverse; if he had used his energy in violence toward self and the cultivation of love, instead of in violence toward others and the cultivation of hate, he could have become the St. Francis of the twentieth century.

-The moral quality always associated with Moses is meekness – but Moses was not born meek; he was probably hot-headed, quick-tempered, and irascible, for Moses killed an Egyptian – and that is not the mark of a meek person. He was also the first to "break" the Ten Commandments; coming down from Mt. Sinai where he had conversed with God, he found his people adoring the Golden Calf and, in a fit of anger, smashed the Tablets of the Law.

-Anger is not meek; the weak spot in Moses was his hot-headedness, but this man turned the worst in him into the best, so that later on – in his conduct toward the fickleness of Pharaoh, in his attitude toward the ingratitude and waywardness of those whom he delivered, in his bearing toward his family, in his final disappointment at not entering the Promised Land – he maintained such an even temper that Sacred Scripture describes him as "very humble [meek]" (Nm. 12:3).

-Moses acquired meekness by fighting against an evil temper. He rooted out the worst in him; and then, with God's help, he became one of the best of men.

-In the N.T., the character most often praised for charity is John; toward the end of his life, he preached incessantly on the theme "Love one another." John describes himself as the "beloved disciple," and to him was given the privilege of leaning on the breast of the Lord Jesus on the night of the Last Supper. However, John was not always so loving.

-He once tried to play politics through his mother, getting her to ask Our Lord to give him and his brother the seats closest to Our Lord when He came into His kingdom. Charity does not try to dominate or rule.

-On another occasion, when the city of the Samaritans rejected Our Lord, John and his brother, James, asked Our Lord to rain down fire from heaven to destroy the city. Charity is not vengeance. There must, in truth, have been a tendency toward hatred in John, for the Lord called him a Son of Thunder.

-However, at some time or other in John's life, he seized upon the weak spot in his character – upon his want of kindness to his fellow man – and through cooperation with grace he became the apostle of charity, the virtue he had lacked before.

-The temptations of the saints were seen as opportunities for self-discovery. They allowed temptations to show them the breaches in the fortress of their souls, which needed to be fortified until they would become the strongest points.

-This explains the curious facts about many saintly people – that they often become the opposite of what they once seemed to be. When we hear of the holiness of some souls, our first reaction is: "I knew him when...." Between the "then" and the "now" has intervened a battle in which selfishness lost and faith won out.

-They followed the advice of St. Paul: "Let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings closely" (Heb 12:1). They became what they were not.

-Because the development of character requires constant vigilance, our occasional failures must not be mistaken for the desertion of God. Two attitudes are possible in sin – two attitudes can be taken toward our lapses into sin: We can fall down and get up; or we can fall down and stay there.

-The fact of having fallen once should not discourage us; because a child falls, it does not give up trying to walk. As sometimes the mother gives the most attention to the child who falls the most, so our failures can be used as a prayer that God be most attentive to us, because of our greater weaknesses.

-There's an incident in the life of St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi. One day while she was dusting a small statue of Our Lord in the chapel, she dropped it on the floor. Picking it up broken, she kissed it, saying: "if you had not fallen, you would not have gotten that."

-Sometimes, in the case of a continued weakness, it is well to count not only the falls, but to count also the number of times a temptation to do wrong was overcome. The reverses we suffer in the heat of battle can lead us to strengthen our purposes.

-The trials and temptations of life prove that in each individual there is an actual I-potential. The "actual ego" is what I am now, as a result of letting myself go. The "possible I" is what I can become through sacrifice and resistance to sin.

-Persons are like those ancient palimpsests or parchments, on which a second writing covered over the first; the original gloss of sin and selfishness has to be scraped off before we can be illuminated with the message of divinity.

-No character or temperament is fixed. To say "I am what I am, and that I must always be," is to ignore freedom, divine action in the soul, and reversibility of our lives to make them the opposite of what they are.

-In baptizing the duke of the Franks, the bishop reminded him of how he could reverse his past: "Bend your proud head, Sicambre: adore that which thou hast burned and burn which thou hast adored."

-No character, regardless of the depths of its vice or its intemperance, is incapable of being transformed through the cooperation of divine and human action into its opposite, of being lifted to the I-level and then to the divine level.

-Character building, however, should not be based solely on the eradication of evil, for it should stress, even more, the cultivation of virtue. Mere asceticism without love of God is pride; it is possible to concentrate so hard on humiliating ourselves that we become proud of our humility, and not to concentrate so intensely on eradicating evil as to make our purity nothing but a condemnation of others.

-When a character is motivated by love alone, it finds much more goodness in the world than before. As the impure find the world impure, so those who love God find everyone lovable, as being either actual or potential children of God.

-This transformation of outlook takes place not only because loves moves in an environment of love, but principally because, in the face of the love diffused by the saint, love is created in others.

-As jealousy in A begets jealousy in B, so generosity in A begets generosity in B. Loves begets love; if we are kind, we get kindness back. The lover gets much more out of the world than the person who is cool or indifferent: He or she has not only the happiness of receiving, but the happiness of giving as well.

-Even when our love is not reciprocated by the wicked, the barbed word or insult never hurts us. A priest once told St. John Vianney that a priest as ignorant of theology as he was should never go into a confessional box. The Curé answered: "Oh, how I ought to love you, for you are one of

the few who know me thoroughly. Help me to obtain the favor I have been seeking so long...to withdraw myself into a corner and to weep for my sins."

-Love makes us loathe the faults that hold us back from love. But we are not disheartened over them – for our failings are never insurmountable, once they are discovered and recognized as such. It is excusing them or labeling falsely that prevents our spiritual progress. Most important of the rules for attacking evil in ourselves is to avoid direct, in favor of indirect assaults. Evil is not driven out – it is crowded.

-Sustaining all our efforts to develop character, there is memory of the divine plea: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28).

-Not until a nobler, finer love is found can a person master his or her vices or overcome mediocrity. In a complete conversion, souls that were formerly addicted to vice no longer feel any desire for their old sins but, rather disgust.

-As the eye blinks at dust, so the soul now blinks at evil. Sin is not fought; it is rather no longer wanted. Love casts out sin as well as fear. The great tragedy of life is that so many persons have no one to love. As a man in love with a noble woman will give up all that displeases her, so a soul in love with God gives up all that might wound that Love.

-Whoever is charged with character formation will do well to lay hold of what is best in people, searching for the gold and not the dross. There is something good in everybody. After the death of a street cleaner who had a reputation for dissolute living and infidelity and cruelty to his wife and children, most of his fellow street cleaners recalled all the evil about him except one companion who said: "Well, whatever you say about him, there was one thing he always did well. He swept clean around the corners."

-In dealing with ourselves, we should look for what is worst and make it, with God's grace, the occasion of spiritual growth. But in dealing with others, we should look for what is best, in order that, as we show mercy to others, God may show the grace of His mercy to us.

-The right and the wrong methods of character formation are revealed in Our Lord's story of the unclean spirit: "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through wander less regions looking for a resting place, but it finds none. Then it says, I will return to my own house from which I came. When it comes it finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Thereupon, it goes and brings along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there; and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So it will be so with this evil generation" (Mt. 12:43-45).

-Our Lord is telling us here that it is never enough to be free from the powers of evil; we must also be subject to the power of good. The elimination of an ego does not necessarily imply the happiness of the I, unless the I, in its turn, lives by a higher spirit of love. The ego in the story has been rid of its evil occupant – it looks orderly and decent; it is swept and garnished. But it is empty, and an empty house decays more quickly than one that is occupied.

-So, when there is no ruling principle or master enthusiasm to take over the soul vacated of its ego, the emptiness can be preempted by some other force that is also evil.

-There is a parallel to this in the political order, from which, a few centuries ago, ethics and morality and religion were exiled – only to find that, in the 20th century, irreligion, atheism, and anti moral forces entered the political order to take their place.

-Casting out the unclean spirit is not enough, unless there is a new possession by a cleaner spirit. Nature abhors vacuum. There is no such thing as a nonreligious individual; one is either religious or antireligious.

-Consciously or unconsciously, as time goes on, one's mind takes on some new allegiance; if God is lacking, that person becomes more and more captive to some temporal mood or fancy.

-Unless the new spirit of love comes in to take possession of the unbeliever, one of three other spirits will come to take charge – that of pride, or lust, or avarice.

-No one is ever safe against the tyrant of the ego except through the power and love of God. The only way of keeping evil out is to let God in. The person who wishes to expel evil without praying for the presence of God is doomed to failure. Nothing is secured until God is there and until God's Love is spread throughout our hearts.

-Great patience is required to effect this transformation. If characters become impatient, it is because they fail to realize the great heights that have to be attained. Because the perfection at which we aim is lofty and difficult, human souls need and should gladly accept the calm, pure happiness the Infinite Designer sometimes sends them. We should not insist on constant strife against ourselves; there is a time for reaping in the spiritual life. Joylessness can hold us back from God.

-A want of resoluteness, too, can spoil our efforts, for, as St. James says: "The doubter being double-minded and unstable in all his way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord" (Jas. 1:8). This halfhearted temper in character development sees prayer as something that may do goods, and in any case can do no harm; it trusts in God, but it places a greater reliance on the economic solution for its ills.

-It first plans and prays, and then tries to perform the plan without the prayer. Character cannot develop under conditions of such disorder, confusion, and dividedness. Conflict of such kind makes the mind tired, as it tries to blend two things that will not mix, fatigues itself in crossing from one road to the other.

-Character is built by singleness of purpose, and nothing so unifies our goals as a temptation that is overcome, a conflict resolved by the love that only shows the answer, but gives us the strength to reach for it. The search for spiritual unity is identical with the effort to perfect the character.

-And since there is no unity except in the truth that is God, the quality of our search will depend on where we place the emphasis on the sentence "I seek the truth." If the stress is put on the I, the character is ego-centered still, and truths are merely values to be assimilated for our vainglorious growth. But if it is the Truth toward which we wish to grow, our souls are able, at last, to disregard the self and overflow its narrow boundaries.

-The world has one supreme test for character, and that is the possession of a virtue in a high and eminent degree. Many generals, for example, in our national history are ranked as great characters because of their valor, and many scientists are ranked as great characters because of their wisdom. Some are judged noble because of their love of peace, others because of their bravery in war; some because of their majesty, and others because of their gentleness; some because of their wisdom, others because of their simplicity.

-But this is not the real way to judge character. The possession of one virtue in an eminent degree no more makes a great person than one wing makes a bird. Just as the eagle's power is measured by the distance from the extremity of the other, so a person's character is to be judged, not by the possession of one extreme virtue but by the expanse between that virtue and the opposite one, which complements it.

-Character is nothing more nor less than the reconciling of opposite virtues. In other words, a really great character is not just a brave person, for if a person is brave without being tender, he or she might very easily become cruel. Tenderness is what might be called the other wing to bravery.

-In like manner, majesty alone does not make character, for majesty without gentleness might very soon degenerate into pride. Love of peace alone does not make character, for without the opposite virtue of courage, peacefulness could very easily slip into a spineless cowardice. Wisdom without simplicity makes a person proud; simplicity without wisdom makes a person a simpleton.

-A real character, therefore, does not possess a virtue on a given point on the circumference without at the same time possessing the complementary virtue, which is diametrically opposed to it; for what is character but the tension between opposites, the equilibrium between extremes.

-Thus St. Paul exhibits in his life the beautiful tension between zeal and gentleness; St. John the tension between overflowing love and uncompromising devotion to truth; and Moses the tension between firmness and meekness.

-Just as every engine must have its fly-wheel, every springtime its harvest, every ocean its ebb and its tide, so every really great character must have its pendulum so delicately adjusted that it can swing between the extremes of the magnanimous and the humble, the lofty and the plain, without ever once being detached. Character, then, is the balanced tension between opposite virtues.

-It is in this sense that the character of Our Blessed Lord rises above all people and is the perfect exemplar of goodness and the paragon of virtues. One might show how He combined majesty and gentleness, peacefulness and force, magnanimity and humility, but for the sake of brevity we limit ourselves only to the two extreme virtues that the Lord recommended to His apostles at the beginning of His public life: wisdom and simplicity: "Be you therefore wise as a serpent and simple as doves" (Mt. 10:16).

-Our Lord did not make this recommendation without possessing it in an eminent degree Himself. He was wise with the Wisdom of God; but He was simple with the simplicity of a child. That is why

He came to us as the world's God-Child. But what is more remarkable still, He never used His wisdom before the simple, but only before those who thought themselves wise.

-He was wisdom before the so-called wise, but He was simplicity before the simple. He exceeded the worldly wise with His wisdom and the simple with His simplicity. He outdid the worldly wise with His wisdom. Take, for example, the scene in the temple at the beginning of His public ministry.

-The Passover was drawing near, and pilgrims from Galilee began to gather into Jerusalem. Our Lord came with the throng and entered through the Golden Gate into the temple.

-As He passed beneath the arch and came into the Court of the Gentiles, the open space before the steps that led up to the Holy Place, a busy scene lay before Him. It was more than the mere jostling of crowds paying their yearly tribute of half shekel to the temple treasury.

-Rather, here was a bedlam of confusion. In the heat of April day were hundreds of merchants and shopkeepers mingling the cry of their wares with the bleating of sheep and the bellowing of oxen.

-There were little men with big wicker cages filled with doves, and under the very shadow of the arcades sat the money-changers wrangling in the most dishonest of trades, their greedy eyes aflame with the lust of gain.

-Everywhere there was huckstering, quarreling, bargaining, and the clanking of money to be heard above the chants of the Levites and the prayers of the priests. And all this at the entrance to the Temple of the Most High.

-When our Lord entered, a righteous indignation laid hold of Him, for what is character but a beautiful tension between force and meekness. An anger divorced from meekness is but unsanctified passion, and meekness that cannot kindle into indignation is closely allied to moral collapse.

-And on the occasion, Our Lord's swift indignation was just as much a part of His perfect sanctity as His silent meekness in the hour of the Passion. He could not, being justice itself, be silent before an offense against God.

-His eyes burned with a controlled anger; His firm face set in commanding scorn. His hands reached to some bits of binding cord lying on the floor beside Him. With His fingers, rapidly yet calmly, He knotted them into a whip. The traffickers stood still; the merchants eyed Him with growing fear; then they stepped back from Him as One of Whom they had reason to fear as though in the Last Judgment.

-Then quietly but firmly He began to move His tiny whip of knotted cord. The frightened crowd yielded, and sheep and cattle broke and fled. With His foot He overthrew the table of the money-changers, as they rushed to the floor to gather up their jangling coins from the filth and pollution.

-Before those who sold doves He stood still, for the dove was the offering of the poor, and there was less desecration in their lovely emblems of innocence and purity. To these He was more gently.

-He did not scatter them; He did not break the baskets and release the doves; to their owners He spoke tenderly: "Take these things out from here; and do not make the house of my Father a house of trade" (Jn 2:16).

-And His disciples, seeing this transport of inspiring and glorious anger, recalled to mind what David had written of Him in prophecy: "The zeal of thy house will consume me" (Jn 2:17; Ps. 69:9).

-And if we ask why the greedy traffickers did not resist as their oxen were chased into the street and their money flung on the floor, the answer is because sin is weakness; because there is nothing in the world so utterly abject and helpless as a guilty conscience; because nothing is so invincible as the sweeping tide of God-like indignation against all that is base or wrong; because Vice cannot stand for a moment before Virtue's uplifted arm.

-Base and low as they were, every one of them who had a remnant of his soul not yet eaten away by infidelity and avarice knew that the Son of Man was right.

-All the while there was standing on the marble steps that led up to the Holy of Holies a group of Levites, Scribes, and Pharisees who knew what a heavy loss that stampede would cause the merchants and themselves.

-They looked for the cause of the commotion and saw that He Who provoked it all was a carpenter from lowly Nazareth, with no mark of office about Him, no scrolls, no ensigns of dignity, but only an uplifted hand. They were indignant. How dare this obscure working man with a few ill-smelling fishermen as companions arrogate authority to Himself within the temple precincts, in which they alone were masters?

-They moved down the steps to Him, as He stood alone with the whip cord in His hand and asked Him: "What sign can you show us for doing these things?" (Jn. 2:18)

-He might have pointed His finger at the panic-stricken crowd as a sign that all men fear the justice of God. But these were learned men, skilled in Scriptures, and wise in their own conceits.

-And before those who thought themselves wise, Our Lord was wiser. He would show to them a wisdom so deep, so profound, so revealing the truth of their Scripture, that not even they, the wise men of Israel, would understand.

-In fact, what he said was so deep that it took them almost three years to understand it. Firmly and solemnly with a gesture centered on Himself, He said something beyond their comprehension, something that in its apparent meaning filled them with perfect stupor and angry amazement because they understood not its depth.

-Their words were over their heads, at the same time they stole into their hearts: "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up". Such wisdom was too profound even for the wise of

this earth. It was not until almost three years later that it began to dawn upon them, when the Temple they destroyed on Good Friday was rebuilt by the power of God on Easter Sunday; and even the Truth too is so deep and profound that some of our wise men today have not yet begun to understand it even after two thousand years.

-Life is a quarry, out of which we are to mold and chisel and complete a character (Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, German poet and philosopher).

-You cannot dream yourself into a character; you must hammer and forge yourself one.

-It should also be noted that the character of the weak is consistently of this sort: they quickly and easily pour out abuse and sow discord, but they themselves do not wish to put up with the slightest mistreatment, and although they carry on violent arguments and get on their high horse without any fear of the consequences, they are unwilling to bear small and indeed very minor things wrath (Sixteenth Conference, The First Conference of Abba Joseph: On Friendship)..

On Chastity

-It is significant that St. Benedict does not refer to this promise of chastity in his chapter on monastic profession (RB 58). When the monk pronounces his vows, the word *chastity* or *virginity* is not even mentioned. Its absence in the traditional profession formula implies that consecrated chastity is included in the vow of conversion of life.

-A promise of chastity is so fundamental that you cannot conceive the monastic state without it. Just as it is hard to think of a blind man driving a truck in the center of a modern city, so also it would be very difficult to imagine monastic life without a promise of chastity.

-Beauty is not necessarily the cause of fornication, nor is deformity the guarantee of continence. Many who are noted for their bodily pulchritude are made more illustrious through their chasteness while others of ugly men become also ugly in soul through fornication.

-Chastity without love is like a lamp without oil (St. Bernard).

-The beginning of chastity is refusal to consent to evil thoughts. The completion of chastity comes when mortified thoughts are followed by a mortified body.

-Do not imagine that you will overwhelm the demon of fornication by entering into an argument with him. Nature is on his side and he has the best of argument. So the man who decides to struggle against his flesh and to overcome it by his own efforts is fighting in vain. The truth is that unless the Lord overturns the house of the flesh and builds the house of the soul, the man wishing to overcome it has watched and fasted for nothing. Offer up to the Lord the weakness of your nature. Admit your incapacity and without your knowing, you will win for yourself the gift of chastity.

The excellence of those who by their disposition of love turn from vice

-There is a great difference between the person who puts out the fire of vice in himself through fear of Gehenna or through the hope of future reward and the person who dreads wickedness and impurity because he is disposed toward the divine love and who holds to the good solely out of love of purity and a desire for chastity, not looking to a promised future reward but delighting in his awareness of the present good and doing everything out of a pleasure in virtue rather than with an eye toward punishment (Eleventh Conference, The First Conference of Abba Chaeremon: On Perfection).

-The person who has overcome the onslaught of vice, who now enjoys a secure peace and has passed to a disposition for the virtuous itself will hold constantly to that state of goodness which now possesses him entirely, because he believes that nothing is more damaging than damage done to inner chastity (Eleventh Conference, The First Conference of Abba Chaeremon: On Perfection).

-There is also a seventh degree of chastity, but is so rare and so far above the— namely, the control of the genital movements during sleep, including the discharge of semen.

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-Nature demands its due, to be sure, but a pure heart can reduce movements of this kind to a bare few.

-Chastity, on the other hand, is a love of purity for its own sake, which penetrates into the unconscious and which can act to control even "involuntary" bodily movements.

-The wonder of this state, which is achieved as the result of God's prodigious gift, can only be told by those who have themselves experienced it.

-For him it is simply a means to an end and not the summit of perfection or, rather, it is at best an indication of and an accomplishment to that perfection which may be characterized as love or inner tranquility or purity of heart.

The body of sin and its members

-It is clearly proven that the chastity of bodily abstinence alone is not sufficient for perfect purity unless integrity of mind is also present. "Whoever looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt. 5:28).

That intense human effort is insufficient to acquire the purity of chastity

-Yet we should be certain that although we undergo all the rigors of abstinence – namely, hunger and thirst, along with vigils and constant work and an unceasing pursuit of reading – we are still unable to acquire the perpetual purity of chastity through these efforts unless, while exerting ourselves constantly in them, we are taught in the school of experience that its incorruption is granted to us by the bounty of divine grace.

-For this reason alone everyone should realize that he must persevere tirelessly in these practices. Thus, once he has obtained the mercy of the Lord through being afflicted with them, he will deserve to be freed from the assault of the flesh and from the domination of the ruling vices, thanks to the divine gift. But he must not believe that through these things he will attain by himself the unspoiled bodily chastity that he seeks (Twelfth Conference, The Second Conference of Abba Chaeremon: On Chastity).

On the differences and degrees of chastity

-Accordingly, although there is a great difference in sublimity among the degrees, I would distinguish six lofty summits of chastity. 1st degree is that the monk not be undone by carnal attacks while awake. 2nd degree is that his mind not dwells upon pleasurable thoughts. 3rd degree is that he not be moved to desire, even slightly, by looking upon a woman. 4th degree is that he not permits a movement of the flesh, however simple, while awake. 5th degree is that, when a discussion or some necessary reading evokes the thought of human generation, a very subtle assent to the pleasurable action not comes upon the mind. Rather, it should look upon this with the gaze of a tranquil and pure heart, as a kind of simple act and as a ministry that is unavoidably part of the human nature. Let it make nothing more of this recollection, which it should think of like brick making or some other task. 6th degree is that he not be deluded by the alluring images of women even when asleep. For although we do not believe that this delusions is sinful, nonetheless it is an indication of a desire that is still deeply ingrained. For each person is tempted, even while asleep, according to how he behaves and thinks while awake.

-Highest degree of chastity (granted by the graciousness of the divine gift cannot be proposed as a kind of general precept) namely, that our mind would be so stamped with the purity of chastity that even the natural movement of the flesh would have died and one would not produced any disgusting fluid at all.

That the inexperienced cannot discuss the nature of chastity and its effects

-When a person, by constant attentiveness of heart, arrives at the state of purity where his mind is already completely free of this passion's titillation but his flesh expels something like an excess of moisture during sleep, he will recognize with utter certainty that nature is at work.

-Thus, when he wakes up and discovers that his flesh has been polluted after a long period of time, without his having been aware of it at all, let him then – and only then – blame the needs of nature. He has without a doubt arrived at the state where he is the same at night as during the day; the same in reading as at prayer; the same alone as when surrounded by crowds of people; so that, finally, he never sees himself in secret as he would blush to be seen by men, and that inescapable eye does not see anything in him that he would wish to be hidden from human gaze.

-The Psalmist adds how this may be acquired, since it seems beyond the condition of human nature, and he says: 'For you possessed my reins' (Ps. 139:13). That is to say, I have not earned this purity by my own effort or virtue but because you put to death the fire of wanton pleasure that was implanted in my reins.

The reply, that a disturbance of the flesh occurring during sleep does no injury to chastity

-Abba Chaeremon: Chastity subsists not – as you think – thanks to a rigorous defense but rather by love of itself and by delight in its own purity. For it is not chastity but abstinence when adverse pleasure still offers some resistance.

-The cessation of strictness during sleep is not injurious to those who by the grace of God have interiorly received the disposition of chastity.

-As long as we feel that we are being afflicted by a disturbance of the flesh, we know that we have not yet arrived at the heights of chastity but are still toiling under a frail abstinence, engaged in battle whose outcome is always inevitably doubtful.

That there is a great difference between abstinence and chastity

-Perfect chastity is distinguished from the toilsome rudiments of abstinence by its perpetual tranquility. For this is the consummation of true chastity, which does not fight the movements of carnal lust but detests them with utter horror, maintaining a constant and inviolable purity for itself. This can be nothing else than holiness.

-"But, once the flesh has stopped lusting against the spirit, and has given in to its desires and to virtue, they began to be mutually joined to one another by a most stable peace, and they dwell as 'brothers' in unity' (Ps 133:1), according to the words of the Psalmist.

-He calls us to sublimer things and even wishes to show us the place wherein the Lord delights, saying: 'His place is in peace' (Ps. 76:2) –that is, not in the struggle of conflict and in the battle of vice but rather in the peace of chastity and in perpetual tranquility of heart.

-If anyone has deserved to arrive at this place of peace through the extinction of his carnal passions, proceeding from this degree he will become a spiritual Zion – that is, the observation of God – and will also be his dwelling place. For the Lord dwells not in the struggle of abstinence but rather in the continual observation of virtue (Twelfth Conference, The Second Conference of Abba Chaeremon: On Chastity).

On the wonders that the Lord works especially in his holy ones

-Who would not be struck dumb at the works of God when he notices that the fire of wantonness, which he previously believed was natural and as it were inextinguishable, has grown so cold that he does not feel himself aroused even by a simple movement of the body?

That only those who experience it know the sweetness of chastity

-The more the mind has advanced to a more refined purity, the more sublimely it will see God and it will grow in wonder within itself rather than find the ability to speak of it or a word to explain it.

-Whoever has deserved to arrive at that state of virtue which we have been speaking of, after examining in the silence of his mind all the things that the Lord works in those who are his own by his special grace and aflame with astonished reflection on them all, will cry out with the deepest emotion of his heart: 'wonderful are your works, and my soul knows them exceedingly.'

-This, then, is the wondrous work of God – that a fleshly human being, dwelling in flesh, would have rejected fleshly desires, would hold to one state of mind in the midst of so many different affairs and assaults and would remain changeless in every changing happenstance.

A question about the character of abstinence and the length of time in which chastity could be perfected

-Germanus: "Since the admiration for this not human or earthly but clearly heavenly and angelic chastity stupefies and amazes us so suddenly as to inspire a dreadful hopelessness rather than to challenge our minds to ask this for themselves, we beg you to teach us by the most comprehensive instruction about the character of the discipline and the length of time in which it could be acquired and perfected, in order that we may both believe that this can be achieved and be encouraged to ask for it after a little while. For we are somewhat of the opinion that this is ungraspable by those who dwell in this flesh, unless a certain method and approach are suggested to us by which it can be arrived at in sure fashion."

The reply, on the period of time that it takes to recognize the possibility of chastity

-Abba Chaeremon: It is rather rash to impose a set period of time for the achievement of this chastity that we have been spoken about, particularly since there is a great diversity of wills and strengths.

-Such a thing cannot be easily determined even in material arts and visible disciplines. For of necessity they are grasped, whether more quickly or more slowly, by each individual in accordance with the attentiveness of his mind and the character of his abilities. Nonetheless we can firmly fix a form of discipline and a length of time within the context of which its possibility may be realized.

-Whoever, then, has withdrawn from every useless conversation; has put to death all anger and concern and worldly care...yet does not believe that he will obtain it due to these efforts or this abstinence but rather by the mercy of the Lord, because without this belief every intense human effort is in vain – that person will know in not more than six months that perfection in this is not impossible for him.

-To begin not to hope for it by one's own laborious efforts is a clear sign that purity is already near. For if someone has truly grasped the force of the verse: 'unless the Lord has built the house, those who are building it have labored in vain,' it follows that he should not glory in the deserts of his purity, since he realizes that he has obtained it not by his own toil but by the Lord's mercy.

On the end and the remedy of chastity

-For each one of us who contends against the spirit of fornication with all his strength, it is a notable victory not to expect relief through his own efforts. Although this belief seems easy and evident to all, yet it is seized with as much difficulty by beginners as is the perfection of chastity itself. For when purity smiles on them ever so slightly, they immediately flatter themselves in the depths of their conscience by a pride that subtly slips in.

-They think that they have achieved this by their own diligent zeal. Thus it is necessary for them to be gradually deprived of heavenly protection and to be oppressed by those passions which the divine power had extinguished until they realize by experience that they are unable to obtain the good of purity by their own strength and toil.

-This is the consummation of chastity – that no wanton pleasure would touch a monk when he is awake and that no illusory dreams would lead him astray when he is asleep, but that when a disturbance of the flesh creeps up on him while sleeping, due only to the carelessness of a weary mind, then, just as it was aroused without any pleasurable titillation, so likewise it would return to calm without any bodily sensuality.

-We have expressed these things about the end of chastity to the best of our ability not with words but with experience as our teacher. Although I think that they will probably be considered impossible by the lazy and the negligent, nonetheless I am sure that they will be accepted and approved by zealous and spiritual men (Twelfth Conference, The Second Conference of Abba Chaeremon: On Chastity).

*Notes:

-The idea that one is not morally responsible for what occurs during one's sleep, when no sinful provocation has preceded, was not universally held in antiquity. Cf. Caesarius of Arles, Sermon 177.4

The reply, on the imaginary chastity of the Philosophers

-Abba Chaeremon: "With what horror should the words of Diogenes be recounted: For what he did, which the philosophers of this world are not embarrassed to recount as something memorable, can be neither spoken of nor listened to by us without shame.

-As the story is told, he said to a person who was to be punished for the crime of adultery: δῶρεάν Πωλόιμενόν Θανάτῳ μὴ ἀγοράξῃ – that is,; You should not purchase with your death what is freely sold.

-It is obvious, then, that they did not know the virtue of true chastity to which we aspire. Therefore, it is quite certain that our circumcision, which is in the spirit, can only be possessed by the gift of God, and that it only exists in those who are devoted to God with utter contrition of spirit (Thirteen Conference, The Third Conference of Abba Chaeremon: On God's Protection).

An example of chastity which teaches that not everything should be emulated by everyone

**Story of a married man whom the demon obeyed to leave the body of a possessed man. It was found out that he kept his wife a virgin during their 12 yrs of marriage. He did try to enter a monastic life but was forced by his parents to marry.*

-Many things which have been rightly practiced by some led others who imitated them into greater danger, and that what the Lord has bestowed by a special favor upon a few cannot be seized upon by all (Fourteenth Conference, The First Conference of Abba Nesteros: On Spiritual Knowledge).

The revelation of an experiment concerning perfect chastity

**Story of Paphnutius who was sad because the "fire" was not yet at peace with him. His hand was burned in the oven by a flame that darted up.*

**An angel approached him and said: "why are you sad, Paphnutius, that this earthly fire is not yet at peace with you, when there still resides in your members a disturbance of fleshly movements that has not yet been completely purified? As long as its roots flourish deep within you, they will never allow this material fire to give you any peace. You will certainly not be able to consider it harmless until by signs of this sort you see that all these internal movements are extinct: go, take a naked and very beautiful virgin. If while you hold her you notice that the tranquility of your heart is untouched and that seething carnal emotions do not disturb you, neither will the touch of this visible flame, gentle and harmless like that of the three young men in Babylon, come in contact with you.*

-And so Paphnutius, struck by this revelation, did not, to be sure, taken upon himself the dangers of the divinely revealed test. Instead he probed his conscience, examined his purity of heart, and concluding that his chastity would not yet bring him through this trial...." (Fifteenth Conference, The Second Conference of Abba Nesteros: On Divine gifts).

-In fact it is a greater virtue and a sublime grace to extinguish the inner lust of the flesh than by a miracle of the Lord and by the power of the Most High to subdue the wicked attacks of the demons and to expel them from the bodies of the possessed by invoking the divine name (Fifteenth Conference, The Second Conference of Abba Nesteros: On Divine gifts).

That there are three causes for the emission of genital fluid

-“Our forebears have taught that there are three causes, which occurs at irregular and in opportune moments.

1. It is stored up due to a surfeit of food,
2. or it flows forth due to a careless mind,
3. or it provoked by the snares of the making enemy.

-The first, then, is the vice of gluttony (that is, of overeating or gormandizing), which causes this excess of the vile moisture to be expelled.

-The second cause arises when the mind is empty of spiritual pursuits and practices and is not instructed in the discipline of the inner man. It lusts after bits of impure thoughts.

-The seeds of all one's former passions remain there. To whatever degree the body may be chastised by rigid fasting, as long as these lie concealed in the depths of the mind they still disturb with their wanton fantasies the person who is sleeping.

-Even if this cannot be completely arrested not so much by the flesh in its weakness as by the caution and strength of the mind, at least it can be reduced to simple emission with the help of God's grace.

-Therefore the first thing to be done is to restrain our wandering thoughts, lest the mind grow accustomed to these diversions and, while dreaming, be drawn to still more horrible temptations of lasciviousness.

-The third cause arise when, through a well –ordered and careful practice of abstinence, we wish to acquire the perpetual purity of chastity by contrition of heart and body, but in his hatred the deceitful enemy assaults us in the following way while we are carefully looking out for the welfare of our flesh and our spirit: striving to destroy the assurance of our conscience and to humiliate us by some kind of guilt, especially on those days when we want to be pleasing in the sight of God, by reason of a greater wholesomeness, he pollutes us without any irritation of the flesh or consent of the mind, nor by the illusion of some fantasy, but by the simple emission of fluid, thus keeping us from Holy Communion.

-We find that we can get along very well without the pleasures of the flesh, but we cannot get along without the pleasures of Christ's spirit, and we exchange the one for the other, and that is the vow of chastity.

-The wisdom which is from God is chaste, in that it seeks not the things that are its own but "the things that are Jesus Christ's," so that, instead of letting us follow each his own will, it makes us consider what is the will of God (St. Bernard, Sermon For Christmas Day).

-"The tiger dies when it has no prey, and the lion's cubs are scattered." Every imitator, you see, who wants to have a correct appearance does not show up pure in all respects. Why? Because hypocrisy leads that person to pretend to have certain virtues while being secretly subject to other vices, and suddenly these hidden vices break out all over the external appearance, and they present the hide of pretense as a coat for people to see, variegated by their own admixture. We often wonder why a person seems to practice admirable virtues so effortlessly and yet so soiled with such evil actions. But every hypocrite is a tiger presenting a pure color that he is imitating, alternating with the abrupt blackness of vices. The hypocrite is often praised for purity and chastity while being rendered sordid by the disgrace of avarice. Hypocrites often show off the imposing splendor of liberality while being stained by the blemishes of lust. They often put on the fine clothes of chastity and generosity while barbaric cruelty blackens them, as though they were zealous for justice. They often wear generosity, chastity, and devotion, creating a becoming

show, however marked by the intermingled darkness of pride. So it happens that the hypocrite does not present a pure self-image but one that is clouded with vices, just as the tiger absolutely cannot have one color.

-The minds of sinful people do not take the trouble to notice what they have lost, and apparently without knowing it they lose their integrity. Innocence disappears from their hearts, truth from their mouths, and chastity from their bodies, and as time passes, so does life from their old age. Yet they hardly notice these unceasing losses, so completely are their attention and their heart's desire wrapped up in worldly cares. Soundlessly they endure the pain of guilt, without knowing how much life and innocence they are losing.

-“With singular care, Religious should preserve chastity as a treasured gem. Everyone knows that in the present condition of human society the practice of perfect chastity is made difficult, not only because of the prevalence of depraved morality but also on account of false teachings which glamorize excessively the merely natural condition of man, thereby pouring poison into his soul. An awareness of these facts should impel Religious to stir up their faith more energetically -- that same faith by which we believe the declarations of Christ when He proclaims the supernatural value of chastity that is sought for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is this same faith which assures us beyond doubt that, with the help of divine grace, we can preserve unsullied, the flower of chastity.

-“To obtain this blessed objective, it is, of course, necessary to practice Christian mortification with more courageous zeal, and also to guard the senses with more diligent care. Therefore, the life of the Religious should find no place for books, periodicals or shows which are unbecoming or indecent, not even under the pretext of a desire to learn things useful to know or to broaden one's education, except possibly the case, duly ascertained by the Religious Superior, where there is proven necessity for the study of such things. In a world pervaded by so many sordid forms of vice, no one can adequately reckon the powerful effectiveness of the sacred ministry of one whose life is radiant with the light of a chastity consecrated to God and from which he draws his strength” (Pope Paul VI, ADDRESS TO THE GENERAL CHAPTERS OF RELIGIOUS ORDERS AND CONGREGATIONS MAY 23, 1964).

-“The pagans fancy that they are throwing a colossal crime in the face of the Christians when they put their captivity in the worst light by charging further that rapes were wrought not only on married women and marriageable maidens, but also on consecrated virgins. Here, we are not to speak of faith, or piety, or strictly of the virtue we call chastity, but are to confine our discussion to the narrow limits of sense of shame and reason. I am not so much concerned to give an answer to strangers as to offer comfort to my fellow Christians. Therefore, let this stand as a firmly established truth: The virtue which governs a good life controls from the seat of the soul every member of the body, and the body is rendered holy by the act of a holy will.

-“Thus, as long as the will remains unyielding, no crime, beyond the virgin's power to prevent it without sin, and which is perpetrated on the body or in the body, lays any guilt on the soul. An attack on one's body may inflict not merely physical pain, but may also excite carnal pleasure. If such an act is perpetrated, it does not compromise the virtue of chastity, to which the sufferer clings with an iron will; it merely outrages the sense of shame. We must not consider as committed with the will what could not, by the very constitution of nature, occur without some fleshly

satisfaction" (St. Augustine, *City of God*, Book I *Christianity Did Not Cause the Fall of Rome*, Ch. 16).

-“Since chastity is a virtue of the soul, and has its companion fortitude, which is determined to undergo any evil rather than consent to wrong, and since, moreover, no man, be he ever so courageous and chaste, has it in his absolute power to protect his body physically, but only to consent or to resist with his will, what person of understanding will deem that one’s own chastity is lost if somebody else satisfies his lust on a body that has been forcibly seized and outraged? For, if chastity is lost in that manner, then chastity certainly is not a virtue of the soul, nor can it be reckoned among those virtues which constitute a good life. Rather, it must be regarded as one of the physical endowments, such as strength, beauty, sound health, and the like, which if diminished, in no way impair a good and righteous life. If chastity is no more than that, to what purpose should one strive to preserve it even at the body’s peril?

-“If, on the other hand, it is a virtue of the soul, then it is not lost even though the body be outraged by force. In fact so long as the virtue of holy continence does not yield to the impurity of carnal lust, the body itself is made holy thereby” (St. Augustine, *City of God*, Book I *Christianity Did Not Cause the Fall of Rome*, Ch. 18).

-Not that God, the Father of all, needs anything, but it is to our good to worship Him by justice, chastity, and the other virtues, making our whole life a prayer built on seeking him and walking in his footsteps.

-Seeking purifies, and following divinizes, our affections, by making Him their object.

-This is, indeed, splendid praise of God the Father and a fine statement of the kind of life a man is commanded to live in His honor.... (St. Augustine, *City of God*, BOOK XIX *Philosophy and Christianity on Man’s End*, Ch. 23).

-“The Christian rule of chastity must not be confused with the social rule of “modesty” (in one sense of that word); i.e. propriety, or decency. The social rule of propriety lays down how much of the human body should be displayed and what subjects can be referred to, and in what words, according to the customs of a given social circle. Thus, while the rule of chastity is the same for all Christians at all times, the rule of propriety changes. A girl in the Pacific islands wearing hardly any clothes and a Victorian lady completely covered in clothes might both be equally “modest,” proper, or decent, according to the standards of their own societies: and both, for all we could tell by their dress, might be equally chaste (or equally unchaste)” (C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behavior, The Cardinal Virtues, The Best of C.S. Lewis*).

-“When people break the rule of propriety current in their own time and place, if they do so in order to excite lust in themselves or others, then they are offending against chastity. But if they break it through ignorance or carelessness they are guilty only of bad manners. When, as often happens, they break it defiantly in order to shock or embarrass others, they are not necessarily being unchaste, but they are being uncharitable: for it is uncharitable to take pleasure in making other people uncomfortable.

-“I do not think that a very strict or fussy standard of propriety is any proof of chastity or any help to it, and I therefore regard the great relaxation and simplifying of the rule which has taken place in my own lifetime as a good thing. At its present stage, however, it has this inconvenience, that

people of different ages and different types do not all acknowledge the same standard, and we hardly know where we are. While this confusion lasts I think that old, or old-fashioned, people should be very careful not to assume that young or "emancipated" people are corrupt whenever they are (by the old standard) improper; and, in return, that young people should not call their elders prudes or puritans because they do not easily adopt the new standard. A real desire to believe all the good you can of others and to make others as comfortable as you can will solve most of the problems" (C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behavior*, *The Cardinal Virtues*, *The Best of C.S. Lewis*).

-“Chastity is the most unpopular of the Christian virtues. There is no getting away from it: the old Christian rule is, “Either marriage, with faithfulness to your partner, or else total abstinence.” Now this is so difficult and so contrary to our instincts, that obviously either Christianity is wrong or our sexual instinct, as it now is, has gone wrong. One or the other. Of course, being a Christian, I think is the instinct which has gone wrong.

-“But I have other reasons for thinking so. The biological purpose of sex is children, just as the biological purpose of eating is to repair the body. Now if we eat whenever we feel inclined and just as much as we want, it is quite true that most of us will eat too much: but not terrifically too much. One man may eat enough for two, but he does not eat enough for ten. The appetite goes a little beyond its biological purpose, but not enormously. But if a healthy young man indulged his sexual appetite whenever he felt inclined, and if each act produced a baby, then in ten years he might easily populate a small village. This appetite is in ludicrous and preposterous excess of its function” (C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behavior*, *The Cardinal Virtues*, *The Best of C.S. Lewis*).

-“Perversion of the sex instinct are numerous, hard to cure, and frightful. We have been fed all day long on good solid lies about sex. We have been told, till one is sick of hearing it, that sexual desire is in the same state as any of our other natural desires and that if only we abandon the silly Victorian idea of hushing it up, everything in the garden will be lovely. It is not true. The moment you look at the facts, and away from the propaganda, you see that it is not.

-“They tell you sex has become a mess because it was hushed up. But for the last twenty years it has not been hushed up. It has been chattered about all day long. Yet it is still in a mess. If hushing up had been the cause of the trouble, ventilation would have set it right. But it has not. It is the other way round.

-“The human race originally hushed it up because it had become such a mess. Modern people are always saying, “Sex is nothing to be ashamed of.” They may mean two things. They may mean “There is nothing to be ashamed of in the fact that the human race reproduces itself in a certain way, nor in the fact that it gives pleasure.” If they mean that, they are right. Christianity says the same. It is not the thing, nor the pleasure, that is the trouble. The old Christian teachers said that if man had never fallen, sexual pleasure, instead of being less than it is now, would actually have been greater.

-“Some muddle-headed Christians have talked as if Christianity thought that sex, or the body, or pleasure, were bad in themselves. But they were wrong. Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the body which believes that matter is good, that God Himself once took on a human body, that some kind of body is going to be given to us even

in Heaven and is going to be essential part of our happiness, our beauty, and our energy. Christianity has glorified marriage more than any other religion: and merely all the greatest love poetry in the world has been produced by Christians. If anyone says that sex, in itself, is bad, Christianity contradicts him at once. But, of course, when people say, "sex is nothing to be ashamed of," they may mean "the state into which the sexual instinct has now got is nothing to be ashamed of."

-“If they mean that, they are wrong. It is everything to be ashamed of. There is nothing to be ashamed of in enjoying your food: there would be everything to be ashamed of if half the world made food the main interest of their lives and spent their time looking at pictures of food and dribbling and smacking their lips. I do not say you and I are individually responsible for the present situation. Our ancestors have handed over to us organism which are warped in this respect: and we grow up surrounded by propaganda in favor of unchastity” (C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behavior*, *The Cardinal Virtues*, *The Best of C.S. Lewis*).

-There are people who want to keep our sex instinct inflamed in order to make money out of us. Because, of course, a man with an obsession is a man who has very little sales-resistance. God knows our situation; He will not judge us as if we had no difficulties to overcome. What matters is the sincerity and perseverance of our will to overcome them.

-Before we can be cured we must want to be cured. Those who really wish for help will get it; but for many modern people even the wish is difficult. It is easy to think that we want something when we do not really want it. A famous Christian long ago told us that when he was a young man he prayed constantly for chastity; but years later he realized that while his lips had been saying, “Oh Lord, make me chaste,” his heart had been secretly adding, “But please don’t do it just yet.” This may happen in prayers for other virtues too; but there are three reasons why it is now specially difficult for us to desire – let alone to achieve – complete chastity.

-“In the first place our warped natures, the devils who tempt us, and all the contemporary propaganda for lust, combine to make us feel that the desires we are resisting are so “natural,” so “healthy,” and so reasonable, that it is almost perverse and abnormal to resist them.

-“Poster after poster, film after film, novel after novel, associate the idea of sexual indulgence with the ideas of health, normality, youth, frankness, and good humor. Now this association is a lie. Like all powerful lies, it is based on truth – the truth, acknowledged above, that sex in itself (apart from the excesses and obsessions that have grown round it) is “normal” and “healthy,” and all the rest of it. The lie consists in the suggestion that any sexual act to which you are tempted at the moment is also healthy and normal.

-“Now this, on any conceivable view, and quite apart from Christianity, must be nonsense. Surrender to all our desires obviously leads to impotence, disease, jealousies, lies, concealment, and everything that is the reverse of health, good humor, and frankness. For any happiness, even in this world, quite a lot of restraint is going to be necessary; so the claim made by every desire, when it is strong, to be healthy and reasonable, counts for nothing. Every sane and civilized man must have some set of principles by which he chooses to reject some of his desires and to permit others” (C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behavior*, *The Cardinal Virtues*, *The Best of C.S. Lewis*).

-One man does this on Christian principles, another on hygienic principles, another on sociological principles. The real conflict is not between Christianity and "nature," but between Christian principle and other principles in control of "nature." For "nature" (in the sense of natural desire) will have to be controlled anyway, unless you are going to ruin your whole life. The Christian principles are, admittedly, stricter than the others; but then we think you will get help towards obeying them which you will not get towards obeying the others.

-“In the second place, many people are deterred from seriously attempting Christian chastity because they think (before trying) that it is impossible. But when a thing has to be attempted, one must never think about possibility or impossibility. Faced with an optional question in an examination paper, one considers whether one can do it or not: faced with a compulsory question, one must do the best one can. You may get some marks for a very imperfect answer: you will certainly get none for leaving the question alone. Not only in examinations but in war, in mountain climbing, in learning to skate, or swim, or ride a bicycle, even in fastening a stiff collar with cold fingers, people quite often do what seemed impossible before they did it. It is wonderful what you can do when you have to.

-“We may, indeed, be sure that perfect chastity – like perfect charity – will not be attained by any merely human efforts. You must ask for God's help. Very often what God first helps us towards is not the virtue itself but just this power of always trying again. For however important chastity (or courage, or truthfulness, or any other virtue) may be, this process trains us in habits of the soul which are more important still. It cures our illusions about ourselves and teaches us to depend on God. We learn, on the one hand, that we cannot trust ourselves, even in our best moments, and, on the other, that we need not despair even in our worst, for our failures are forgiven. The only fatal thing is to sit down content with anything less than perfection” (C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behavior, The Cardinal Virtues, The Best of C.S. Lewis*).

-“Thirdly, people often misunderstand what psychology teaches about “repressions.” It teaches us that “repressed” sex is dangerous. But “repressed” is here a technical term: it does not mean “suppressed” in the sense of “denied” or “resisted.” A repressed desire or thought is one which has been thrust into the subconscious (usually at a very early age) and can now come before the mind only in a disguised and unrecognizable form.

-“Those who are seriously attempting chastity are more conscious, and soon know a great deal more about their own sexuality than anyone else. They come to know their desires as a rat catcher knows rats or a plumber knows about leaky pipes. Virtue – even attempted virtue – brings light; indulgence brings fog.

-“If anyone thinks that Christians regard unchastity as the supreme vice, he is quite wrong. The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronizing and spoiling sport, and back-biting; the pleasures of power, of hatred. For there are two things inside me, competing with the human self which I must try to become. They are the Animal self, and the Diabolical self. The Diabolical self is the worst of the two. That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to Church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it is better to be neither” (C.S. Lewis, *Christian Behavior, The Cardinal Virtues, The Best of C.S. Lewis*).

-The teaching of *Humanae Vitae* can only be understood in terms of virtue, more precisely the virtue of chastity in marriage.

-*Humanae Vitae* teaches that there are certain actions that are wrong in themselves since they contradict the moral order arising from our human nature and so can never be justified even for the most noble desirable of ends. They do not make us virtuous or enable us to draw close to God.

-"Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it to lie down at noon." But another voice, that of Job, says: "Tell me why you judge me like this?"

-"This man does not complain of the judgment, he merely queries its cause, seeking to gain knowledge from his afflictions rather than be destroyed by them.

-"Still another man made a similar requests: "Make your ways known to me, Lord, teach me your paths." What he means by path he reveals in another text: "He leads me in the path of righteousness."

-"The man who longs for God does not cease to seek these three things, righteousness, judgment, and the place where the Bridegroom dwells in glory: the path in which he walks, the wariness with which he walks, and the home to which he walks.

-"About this home the prophet says: "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord; and again: "O Lord, I love the beauty of your house, and the place where your glory dwells." Of the remaining two he says: "Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of your throne.

-"The man who is in earnest rightly seeks these three things, since they are the throne of God and the foundation of his throne. By a special privilege of the bride, all these gifts beautifully and equally concur in the crowning of her virtues.

-"She receives loveliness from the habit of righteousness, prudence from her knowledge of judgments, and chastity from her desire for the presence or glory of her Bridegroom" (St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 33, Song of Song II, l. 1, p. 145).

-"The voice of the Turtle Dove is heard in our land. Nowhere, I think, will you find him speaking like this of heaven, nowhere else like this of earth. Notice then the utter happiness of hearing the God of heaven says: 'in our land.'

-"This is clearly not the language of domination but of fellowship and intimate friendship. He speaks as Bridegroom, not as Lord.

-It is love that speaks, that knows no lordship. Love neither looks up to nor looks down on anybody. It regards as equal all who love each other truly, bringing together in itself the lofty and the lowly. It makes them not only equal but one.

-"Usually the voice of the Turtle-dove does not sound very sweet, but it suggests things that are sweet. If you buy the little bird she is cheap, but if you make her an object of discussion, her price is high.

-With her voice more akin to mourning than to singing, she reminds us that we are pilgrims.

-“I listen willingly to the voice of the teacher who does not stir up applause for himself but compunction in me.

-You really resemble the turtle-dove if you preach repentance: and if you want your words to be convincing you must depend more on your repentance than on your eloquence.

-As in my situations but above all in this business, example is more effective than preaching.

-“You will stamp your preaching with authority if you are conscious of accepting for yourself the values you preach.

-Actions speak louder than words. Practice what you preach, and not only will you correct me more easily but also free yourself from no light reproach. You will not be the target if someone says: ‘They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger.’ Nor need you be afraid to hear: ‘You who teach others, will you not teach yourself?’

-“The turtle-dove is commended not only for its mourning but also for its chastity. For it was by merit of this that it was worthy to be offered up as a sacrificial victim for the virgin birth. Its chastity is acknowledged at any age. It is content with one mate; if he lost it does not take another, thus arguing against man’s tendency to marry more than once.

-“It is shameful that reason cannot lead man to that uprightness which nature achieves in the bird. During its widowhood you may see the turtle-dove fulfilling with unflagging zeal the duties of holy widowhood. Everywhere you see it alone, everywhere you hear it mourning; you never see it perched on a green bough – a lesson to you to avoid the green but poisonous shoots of sensual pleasure. Rather it haunts the mountain ridges and the top of trees, to teach us to shun the pleasures of earth and to love those of heaven.

-“One may conclude from this that the preaching of chastity is also the voice of the turtle-dove. From the very beginning this voice was not heard on the earth, but instead that other: ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’ This call to chastity would have been to no purpose when the homeland of those risen had not yet been opened up, where men in a far happier state ‘neither marry nor are given in marriage,’ but are like the angels in heaven” (St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 59, Song of Song III, III. 8, p. 127).

*** Christian Life ***

-Our Christian life on earth is oriented towards our personal encounter with Christ. This encounter takes place when we are in our own everyday place and look for Him there sincerely, without much as entertaining the prospect of failure. We find Him remarkable. It is then we begin to live; our life begins to have meaning, because our human nature is now firmly and consciously directed towards the purpose for which it was created.

-The Christian life is lived with the life of Christ in the soul.

-The entire purpose of the Christian life is ultimately to restore man's control over the passions, and especially the capacity to be chaste.

-The Christian life is a continuous going into the presence of God from the presence of men, and coming out into the presence of men from the presence of God.

-The truth concerning Our Lord Jesus Christ is the center of evangelization. This truth about Christ is not a theological abstraction, for from it would come "choices, values, attitudes, and ways of behavior that could create "new people and a new humanity through a radically Christian life.

-One of the reasons we seldom advert to the Divine Presence in our soul by grace is because we are too absorbed by creatures. That is why the Christian life is called warfare; why it demands mortification. As physical life is the sum of forces which resist death, so the supernatural life is, in a way, the sum of the forces which resist sin.

-When we fail to measure up to our Christian privilege, we should not be discouraged for discouragement is a form of pride. The reason we are sad is because we look to ourselves and not to God; to our failing, not to His Love. We will shake off our faults more readily when we love God than when we criticize ourselves. The sick person looks happily at the physician, not at his wounds. We have always the right to love God in our heart, even though now and then we do not love Him in our acts.

-The difference between a truly Christian life and a good human life is like the difference between a rose and a crystal – a difference in levels of living.

-Life must always come from life – it cannot emerge from the inanimate. Human life must come from human parents, and Divine Life must be fathered by the Divine.

-Christian life is at bottom about being continually rejuvenated and re-created by the power of the Spirit; but this cannot happen automatically: we must want to be made young and new again and cooperate in this process.

-Christian life means to continue always being created by God. No one can be a Christian without learning how to become totally dependent on God as Father, in union with the Lord Jesus as our brother and Mary as our mother.

-For our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the doctrines of the faith are never finally understood until they are performed in the Christian life, and, for this reason, doctrine and spirituality remain for him always intimately and necessarily related. Consequently, if we are to understand the role Christ assumes in St. Bernard's theology of self-knowledge and the spiritual life, we must first begin with an account of his teaching concerning the Person and work of Christ, the Incarnate Word. For while it is true, that St. Bernard and his Cistercian contemporaries are concerned less with the metaphysical constitution of the Person of Christ and more with the meaning of the redemption

Christ has effected, it is also true that St. Bernard understands well the link between an account of Christ's Person and an account of his redemptive work.

-In the Christian life, we know, there is a harmony of means and ends. Through prayer and a devout life, and through the Sacraments of the Church, the Christian is changed, by the Grace of God, to become more like the Lord Jesus and thus more worthy to participate in the Kingdom He has prepared for those who truly follow Him. Those who are His are known by the fruits they bear: patience, humility, obedience, peace, joy, love, kindness, forgiveness – fruits which at one and the same time prepare for and already share in the fullness of that Kingdom. End and means are one; what is begun in this life is perfected in the life to come.

-In the Christian life everything is referred to Christ, the old self with its constant "I will" must be done away with and a new self, centered in Christ and His will, be born.

-As to the fatalism of those who believe that man must be slaved (conformed) to the "spirit of this present age," it is disproved by the experience of every Christian worthy of the name – for the Christian life is nothing if it is not a struggle against the spirit of **every age** for the sake of eternity.

Christian Life is a Struggle

-There is a law written across the universe that no one shall be crowned unless he has first struggled. No halo of merit rests suspended over those who do not fight. Icebergs that float in the cold streams do not command our respectful attention just for being icebergs; but if they were to float in the warm waters of the Gulf Stream without dissolving, they would command awe and wonderment. They might, if they did it on purpose, be said to have character.

-The only way one can ever prove love is by making an act of choice; mere words are not enough. Hence, the original trial given to man has been given again to all men; even the angels have passed through a trial. Ice deserves no credit for being cold, nor fire for being hot; it is only those who have the possibility of choice that can be praised for their acts.

-It is through temptation and its strain that the depths of character are revealed. Scripture says: "Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12).

-The defenses of the soul are seen at their strongest when the evil which has been resisted is also strong. The presence of temptation does not necessarily imply moral imperfection on the part of the one who is tempted. In that case, Our Lord could not have been tempted at all.

-An inward tendency toward evil, such as man has, is not a necessary condition for an onslaught of temptation. The temptation of Our Lord came only from without, and not from within as ours so often does. What was at stake in the trial of Our Lord was not the perversion of natural appetites to which the rest of men are tempted; rather, it was an appeal to Our Lord to disregard His divine mission and His Messianic work. The temptation that comes from without does not necessarily weaken character; indeed, when conquered, it affords an opportunity for holiness to increase.

-The temptations of man are easy enough to analyze, because they always fall into three categories: they either pertain to the flesh (lust and gluttony), or to the mind (pride and envy), or to the idolatrous love of things (greed).

-Although man is buffeted all through life by these three kinds of temptation, they vary in intensity from age to age. It is during youth that man is most often tempted against purity and inclined to the sins of the flesh; in middle age, the flesh is less urgent and temptations of the mind begin to predominate, for instance, pride and the lust for power; in the autumn of life, temptations to avarice are likely to assert themselves. It is a common psychological experience that those who have given way to lust in youth are often those who sin by avarice in their old age.

-When we fail to measure up to our Christian privilege, we should not be discouraged for discouragement is a form of pride. The reason we are sad is because we look to ourselves and not to God; to our failing, not to His Love. We will shake off our faults more readily when we love God than when we criticize ourselves. The sick person looks happily at the physician, not at his wounds. We have always the right to love God in our heart, even though now and then we do not love Him in our acts.

-Character is great, not by ferocity of its hatred or evil, but by the intensity of its love of God. Asceticism and mortification are not the ends of a Christian life; they are the means. The end is charity.

-Our Christian life on earth is oriented towards our personal encounter with Christ. This encounter takes place when we are in our own everyday place and look for Him there sincerely, without much as entertaining the prospect of failure. We find Him remarkable. It is then we begin to live; our life begins to have meaning, because our human nature is now firmly and consciously directed towards the purpose for which it was created.

-Good men are not tempted in the same way as evil men, and the Son of God, Who became man, was not tempted in the same way as even a good man. The temptations of an alcoholic to "return to his vomit," as Scripture puts it, are not the same as the temptations of a saint to pride, though they are, of course, no less real.

-Because we have the tendencies to evil there must be self-denial or pulling out of the weeds, in order that the divine life of grace may grow.

-One of the reasons we seldom advert to the Divine Presence in our soul by grace is because we are too absorbed by creatures. That is why the Christian life is called warfare; why it demands mortification. As physical life is the sum of forces which resist death, so the supernatural life is, in a way, the sum of the forces which resist sin.

-Nature itself suggests mortification. In addition to the anabolic, or building up of life, there is yet another process of life, namely, the catabolic, which corresponds to contraction in the mineral order. Iron not only expands when it is heated, but it also contracts when it is cooled. Life not only nourishes itself but becomes the nourishment for other kinds of life.

-The various orders of creation are so many different expressions of this law. The plant not only consumes the hydrogen, oxygen, sunlight, and water which are necessary for its life, but in its turn becomes food for the animal; the animal not only nourishes itself on the plants of the field, but even gives its life for man in order to be served as food at his table.

-The Christian life is lived with the life of Christ in the soul. The entire purpose of the Christian life is ultimately to restore man's control over the passions, and especially the capacity to be chaste.

-Once a thing has been nourished by a kingdom below, it becomes, in its turn, the nourishment of a kingdom above it. If this law did not exist all life would perish from the earth. If the chemical kingdom in a selfish way would refuse to give itself to plants, if the sky would refuse to bless the plant with its rain, all plant life would perish from the earth. If the plant in a selfish way would refuse to give its nourishment to the animal in the field; if the seed would refuse to give itself as food to the bird; if the sea would refuse to feed the fish, then all animal life would pass away from this earth. If the chemicals and the plants and the animals would refuse to give their energies and their lives for man, then all human life would pass away from this earth.

-In other words, life must not only expand by growing, but must die by contraction in order to become the food of a higher life. The whole universe would be a world of parasites if things did not give up their lives for other things.

-What are the benefits of self-immolation? First, is it just that life should exist for other life? We can answer this question by asking another. Has the plant life within itself? Has the animal a perfect life? Does not the very fact that plants and animals and man need nourishment prove that they have not a perfect life, but that they are dependent on other life?

-Only God has perfect life. If nothing has perfect life but God, shall we deny to this imperfect life the right to live? And if we admit the right to live, we admit the right to live on a lower plane of life.

-Shall we deny reciprocity in the order of living things? Is it not just that if things nourish themselves on others, they in turn should become the nourishment of something higher? In other words, it is only just that if things consume, they shall also be consumed; if they immolate, they shall also be immolated; if they receive, they shall also give.

-What is the benefit and the purpose of all this? What high purpose could God have had in imposing this law on immolation on the actual universe? He has a most wonderful plan if we would but study it closely, and His plan is to give to each of the kingdom a higher life than they naturally possess.

-The mineral kingdom, the air, the sunlight, the carbonates and the like have no life. But what happens to them once they enter into the plant? The plant does not destroy them; it does not blot out their existence; it takes away nothing either from their dignity or their role, but it adds something to them. It ennobles the mineral by associating it with its life; it makes it share a life which it never enjoyed before. It gives the mineral new laws; it confers on it the dignity of plant life. In other words, it elevates the nature of the mineral kingdom.

-The same benefit accrues to the animal kingdom. As the mineral gives itself up in order to live a higher life in the plant, so too does the plant immolate itself for the animal in order to have its life ennobled in the animal. The plant is torn up from the soil by the roots; it is plucked from the pasture by the devouring teeth of beasts; it is ground as good and passes into the animal organism. But in passing into the animal it does not cease to be plant life; if it did it would never nourish the animal.

-What does happen is that it now begins to be governed by other laws directed to new purposes, organized in new cells, in a word, the plant now begins to take on a higher life.

-But is there anything which can ennoble the existence of man? Is there anyone for whom man can die to himself in order that he might have a higher kind of existence? If there were not, what a terrible world this would be! We have no right to say there is no higher life than man, any more that the rose has a right to say there is any higher life than itself.

-Suppose the order of the universe stopped with man. Then the plant would be higher than man for the plant could continue its existence in an ennobled way in the animal; then the animal would be higher than man for the animal could have its existence enriched in man. Certainly there must be some nature above the nature of man into which man can be assumed in order that he might be supernaturalized. There must be some higher kind of life which will be the

perfection of human life in a way immeasurably superior to the perfection of plant life in an animal. And what is this life? It is the life of God, a life infinitely distant and remote from the life of man which man is destined to participate for all eternity.

-We have seen the different processes by which the lower creation shares in the life of the higher. But when we consider that mystery, "hidden in God from all eternity," the elevation of man to be a sharer of the divine nature," there exists nothing in creation resembling it.

-We may see some faint analogy in the examples already given, but they are the examples of created things. From the life of God, every creature – even the highest angel – must be forever excluded. Yet God has communicated this life, freely and gratuitously, to intellectual creatures. God could have done this wondrous thing in various ways, but He has revealed to us the way He has chosen. God Himself designed to become a sharer in our humanity in order that we might share in His divinity. Christ Our Lord is the link between us and God. Because Christ has a human nature He is like unto us in all things except sin; because He has a divine nature in the unity of person, he is God. The common denominator between Him and us is His human nature. This is the link between us and the life of God.

-Now if we are to live a higher life, if we are to become incorporated into the life of God, if we are to have our life ennobled, then we must in some way enter into the life of Christ. We must become one with Him if we are to share in His life.

-What is the inspiration of this law of dying to ourselves in order to live to another? What mysterious energy is it that inspired the Incarnate Word to make our dead selves stepping stones to higher things? It is love, because God is love. Love is the inspiration of all sacrifice. And love, be it understood, is not the desire to have, to own, to possess – that is selfishness. Love is the desire to be had, to be owned, to be possessed. It is the giving of oneself for another. The symbol of love as the world understands it is the circle continually surrounded by self, thinking only of self. The symbol of love as Christ understands it, is the cross with its arms outstretched even unto eternity to embrace all souls within its grasp.

-Sinful love as the world understands it finds its type in Judas the night of the betrayal: "What will you give me and I will deliver Him unto you." Love, in its true sense, finds its type in Christ a few hours later when, mindful of His disciples, He say to the friends of the traitor who blistered His lips with a kiss, "If therefore you seek Me, let these men go."

-Love then is the giving of self and as long as we have a body and are working out our salvation, it will always be synonymous with sacrifice, in the Christian sense of the word. Love sacrifices naturally just as the eye sees and the ears hear naturally. That is why we speak of "arrows" and "darts" of love – something that wounds.

-The bridegroom who loves will not give his bride a ring of tin or of brass, but one of gold or of platinum, because the gold or platinum ring represents sacrifice – it costs something.

-The mother who sits up all night nursing her sick child does not call it hardship, but love. The modern men forget that love is synonymous with sacrifice; they will ask what an avaricious

woman she must have been who demanded solid gold in the form of a ring, just as they will ask what cruel kind of God is it who asks for sacrifice and self-denial.

-If there is a young lover in the world who will do anything for the one he loves, then we do not find it unreasonable that a God should so love the world as to send it His only begotten Son. And if a father will lay down his life for his son then we shall not find it unreasonable that the Son of God should lay down His life for His friends, for "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

-If all lovers tend to become like those they love, then we shall not be surprised to find creatures who will lay down their lives for their divine lover; and who will become so much like Him that they will carry about on their body the stigmata of the Passion. Love is the reason of all immolation. So too the man who loves his perfected life in Christ will die to himself, and this dying to himself, this taming of his members as so many wild beasts, this being imprinted with the cross, is mortification.

-Christ then has given no new law when He said that we must fall to the ground and, like a seed, die. He merely restated a law which our experience has verified a thousand times and still has not yet learned to apply to every corner of the universe, and particularly those corners of our souls which need it so badly.

-Love, simply because it does inspire mortification, is foolishness from the world's point of view. No one ever quite understand the lovers but the lovers themselves; they live in a universe apart; they breathe another atmosphere. Love implies sacrifice and sacrifice seems foolish to the world.

-If love is equivalent to sacrifice and all sacrifice from the world's point of view is foolishness, Christ on the Cross is the supreme folly. From the standpoint of the world He was the greatest failure in history; in the ledger of the world's estimate of things, He suffered the greatest defeat. First of all, He could not win and could not keep friends. Peter, his chief apostle, denied Him to a maidservant; John, who leaned on His breast, is silent when the master is accused; Judas, whom He called to be one of the judges of the twelve tribes of Israel, sells Him for thirty pieces of silver. In His four trials, before the four judges, He failed to have a single witness to testify in His favor. He could not keep His friends, and is not that the test of one's success in life?

-More than that, if He were God, why did He not try to win the favor of Pilate when he said, "do you not know that I have power to release you?" He could have won His freedom by ingratiating Himself with the Roman governor, and He did not. "Folly," cries the world.

-If He is all powerful, why does He not strike dead those who scourge and mock Him? "Folly," again cries the world. If He could raise up children of Abraham from the stones, why could He not raise up friends at the moment of arrest? "Folly," cries the world.

-If He could have won His release from Herod with just a miracle, why did He not work one? "Folly," cries the world. If He could sustain the whole world in the palm of His hand, why did He permit Himself to fall beneath the weight of the cross? "Folly," cries the world.

-If the magic touch of His hands could restore sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, why did He permit hard nails to pierce them? "Folly," cries the world. If He could have proven His divinity

by coming down from the cross, "Let Him now come down from the cross and we will believe Him," why did He not step down as a king from His throne? "Folly," again cries the world.

-As a demagogue He would have succeeded; as a God He was crucified. The cross is folly and Christ is failure. So says the world. Hence it is that every lover of Christ and Him crucified must share His folly. The law is no different for the disciple than for the Master. The world calls everyone a fool who leaves his riches, his friends and family, his wine and his song, for the monastery or the convent, and exchanges silks and satins for the hair shirt and the discipline.

-The world calls him a fool who does not strike back when he is struck and who does not malign when he is maligned. The world calls him a fool who follows the so-called old and "antiquated" laws of the Church on the sanctity of marriage and rejects the modern views that glorify license and lust. The world brands him a fool who hangs himself on the cross of mortification when he might come down and shake dice with the soldiers even for the garments of a God.

-Yes, but "the foolishness of God is wiser than men," and "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." It is only from the world's point of view that we are a fool, as our Lord was before the court of Herod. In the sublime words of St. Paul, "We are fools for the sake of Christ."

-Common sense never drove any man mad; common sense is said to be sanity and yet common sense never scaled mountains and much less has it ever cast them into the sea. Common sense is not violence and yet, "the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force." Common sense never makes a man lose his life, and yet it is in losing our life that we shall save it.

-Life sometimes can be saved by stepping within an inch of death in jumping a precipice, but common sense never makes the leap. The soldier at times can cut his way out from his enemies but he must have a carelessness about dying – and common sense has not that carelessness.

-The kingdom of heaven can sometimes be gained only by plucking out an eye, but common sense never plucked it out. "It is common sense that makes a man die for the sake of dying," it is love which makes a man die for the sake of living – and so too, it is this love of Our Lord Jesus and Him crucified, which produces the wisdom of God at the cost of the foolishness of earth; which makes men throw down their lives to take them up again; which makes men sell fields for the pearl of great price; which makes men fling "the world a trinket at their wrist," laugh at death, and say with a modern saint, "I need no resignation to die but resignation to live." This does not mean the Gospel of Christ is a gospel of sorrow.

-Consider the words of blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman: "It is but a superficial view of things to say that this life is made of pleasure and happiness. To those who look under the surface it tells a very different tale. The doctrine of the Cross does but teach, though infinitely more forcibly, the very same lesson which this world teaches to those who live long in it, who have much experience in it, who know it.

-The world is sweet to the lips, but bitter to the taste. It pleases us at first, but not at last. It looks gay on the outside, but evil and misery lie concealed within. When a man has passed a certain number of years in it, he cries out with the Preacher, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' Nay, if he has

not religion for his guide, he will be forced to go further, and say, 'All is vanity and vexation of spirit; all is disappointment; all is sorrow; all is pain.'

-The sore judgments of God upon sin are concealed within it, and force a man to grieve whether he will or not. Therefore the doctrine of Christ does but anticipates for us the experience of the world....The Gospel hinders us from taking a superficial view and finding a vain transitory joy in what we see; but it forbids our immediate enjoyment, only to grant enjoyment in truth and fullness afterwards. It only forbids us to begin with enjoyment. It only says, if you begin with pleasure you will end in pain. It bids us begin with the Cross of Christ, and in that Cross we shall first find sorrow, but in a while peace and comfort will rise out of that sorrow.

-That Cross will lead us to mourning, repentance, humiliation, prayer, fasting; we shall sorrow for our sins, we shall sorrow with Christ's suffering; but all this sorrow will only issue, nay, will be undergone in a happiness far greater than the enjoyment which the world gives – though careless worldly minds indeed will not believe this, ridicule the notion of it, because they never have tasted it, and consider it a mere matter of words, which religious persons think it decent and proper to use, and try to believe themselves, and get others to believe, but which no one really feels.

-They alone are able truly to enjoy this world who begin with the world unseen. They alone enjoy it, who have first abstained from it. They alone can truly feast, who have first fasted; they alone are able to use the world, who have learned not to abuse it; they alone inherit it, who take it as a shadow of the world to come, and who for that world to come relinquish it.

-Hence, the purpose of the discipline is not to destroy freedom but to perfect it. Freedom does not mean our right to do whatever we like, but to do whatever we ought; a man does not become free as he becomes licentious, but as he diminishes the trace of original sin.

-Self-denial is a denuding of the ego – it seeks to make the true-self free to follow God. The more the ego knocks off the chains which bind it to things outside itself, the freer it is to be its own, I. As the drunkard is liquor-possessed, so the saint is self-possessed.

-There is a potential nobility or even divinity in all of us, as there is a potential statue in a crude block of marble. But before the marble can ever reveal the image, it must be subjected to the disciplinary actions of a chisel in the hands of a wise and loving artist, who knocks off huge chunks of formless egotism until the new and beautiful image of Christ Himself appears.

-Self-discipline, then, is not an end in itself but a means to an end. Those who make self-discipline the essence of religion reject some of God's creatures, such as matter, as evil generally become proud. But detachment, properly practiced, is only a means of attachment to God. When there is no love of God, there is no true self-discipline.

-St. Paul tells us that philanthropy, sacrifice, alms, even martyrdom, if embraced for any reason except love of God does not deserve an eternal reward. "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1Cor. 13:3).

-In the romantic order, a youth reveals his love for a girl by a surrender of other women's friendships and a concentration on the beloved. In the spiritual order, the soul reveals its love of God by a detachment from creatures and an attachment to the creator alone.

Christian Spirituality

-There are three essential elements to an authentic Christian spirituality:

1. Penance or conversion
2. Contemplation or adoration
3. Service or response

-Any spirituality which leaves one of these must be judged seriously impoverished and to that extent deficient.

-Without a powerful moment of repentance or conversion, activity at the third stage is dangerous, both for the individual and for those around him or her.

-A person who has made spiritual progress will be able to enter into each phase more deeply, and to move from one to the other more naturally and aptly.

-Each eventually seems to make little sense without the others; it is powerful in its own right, but also facilitates our movement into and deepens the effect the others have upon us.

-These three are thus the "trinity" of the practical experience of our Christian faith.

-Usually one who has made progress can think back and remember having gone through each phase as a distinct moment – especially the conversion experience, which is often painful and requires a substantial exercise in personal honesty and courage.

-As we discover our complicity with evil, we progressively discover our need for a greater power than our own if we are to find the courage necessary to face and change our situation.

-Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi: The way we pray determines the content of our beliefs.

-Spiritual life as it is lived requires concrete images that call up our memories, gather our experiences, concentrate our emotions, and touch our deepest aspirations.

-Christian maturity is not a state one reaches once and definitively, it is rather a cycle of experiences, of which contemplation is an important element, but still only one.

-For most people there is an early, powerful, and canonical set of experiences to which they later look back as having been a turning point in their foundational, the "bedrock" for their later spiritual growth – experiences to which they return in prayer continually for nutrition and re-orientation. They recall being somewhat different people before and after that event.

-This cycle of penance or conversion, adoration or contemplation, and service or response becomes regularized in one's devotional life.

-A healthy spirituality has to encompass and move back and forth between all these three.

-In sum, if we ignore this cycle, it is to our spiritual loss and impoverishment, our efforts will fail to get traction or to obtain firm footing. This cycle is like the practice of bar to which every ballet dancer, no matter how expert they become, must return each morning, to do again the same basic exercises done the first day.

-Analogously, this cycle presents the fundamental spiritual discipline which, deepened by experience and improved through habit, sharpens and strengthens us until we come to dance with divine providence, with God.

Christ's Office as Teacher, King, and Priest

-“Give me a man who loves and I will tell him what God is.” Such are the words of St. Augustine. Anyone who ever loved craved unity with that which he loved. Thus in marriage the ideal is the unity of two in one flesh; in religion the ideal is to be one in spirit with Christ.

-There is not a single person who loves Christ who does not strive to be united to Him in thought and in desire and even in body and mind. But here is the problem: How be one with Christ? His earthly life ended over nineteen hundred years ago. Therefore to some He is only a figure who crossed the stage of history, as did Caesar and Aristotle, and then is seen no more. Such souls believe that the only way they can be united with Christ, is by reading what someone wrote concerning Him, or by singing hymns in His name, or by listening to a sermon on His life.

-It's no wonder that such people soon begin to think of Our Lord as a teacher of ethics, or as a great humanitarian reformer like Buddha or Socrates, for they too also once lived, preached, and edified, and left behind them a beautiful memory.

-If Christ is not what He claimed to be, what His Miracles witnessed, what the Jewish and Gentile prophecies foretold, namely, the Son of the living God – then He is a deceiver, a liar, and a charlatan. If He is not the Christ, the Son of the living God, he is the anti-Christ.

-Let us try what Our Divine Lord really is. Let us begin with ourselves. Have we ever thought of how wonderfully we have been made; that there is in us something which can be seen and touched, namely, our body whose nature is fleshy; but there is also something invisible about us, namely our mind and soul with its thoughts, its loves, and its desires. Our soul is, in a sense, “incarnate” in a body, that is, our soul animates and unifies our body.

-Now consider the person of Christ. He is the true incarnation, not of a soul in a body, but of God in the form of man. There is something visible about Him, namely, His perfect human nature, which can handle tools, pat little children's head, be thirsty and think and desire like other men. But there is also something invisible about Him, and that is His divinity.

-His divinity could no more be seen than our soul, though it could be seen working through His human nature, as our soul works through our body. Just as our body and our soul combine to make one person, so in an infinitely more perfect way, His human nature and His divine nature make but one person, the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, true God and true man.

-St. John closes his Gospel with the words that if had written down all Our Lord had done “the world itself would not be able to contain the books that should be written” (Jn. 21:25). This beautiful variety of Our Lord's words and actions, however, can be reduced to three: He taught, He governed, and He sanctified. He taught because He is a teacher; He governed, because He is King; He sanctified, because He is Savior or priest.

-**First**, as teacher, He is truth. Because He is God, He is absolutely divine, infallible Truth. He said: “I am the truth.” For the first time in history, truth and personality were identified. Up until then and since, men have always said: “Here is my doctrine; this is my system; follow these rules.” But these ideals were outside their personality, just mere abstractions. No man can fall in love with a theory

of geometry or a metaphysical proposition. Truth to be loved must be personal, and Our Lord pointed to Himself as the truth.

-No one else ever taught that He was the personification of truth. Buddha and others gave systems apart from their personalities. But in the person of Our Lord, truth and personality are one. There was no truth apart from Him. He is the truth.

-There was nothing recommended or taught outside or beyond Him, for in Him all the scattered ways and systems found their center and their source. All truth – philosophic, scientific, artistic, and legal – is in Him. He is wisdom. He is all the arts and all the sciences. He is the university, for all knowledge turns about Him Who is the truth with whom we can fall in love.

-Second, Our Lord fulfilled the office of king. As king He is the source of authority. There is something else beside His truth that He ought to have communicated, and that is His authority. As the Son of God He said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt. 28:18). The winds and the seas obeyed Him, and when Pilate boasted that He had the power to condemn Him (dictators always speak that way), Our Lord reminded him: "Thou would not have any power over me at all, if it had not been given you from above" (Jn.19:11).

-It is absolutely incredible that this power to change the hearts of all nations should have died with Our Lord. We are living in a world where false authorities are claiming our allegiance, where public opinion makes us dizzy; where the power of the state invades all personal rights. Hence we have need of someone to remind the modern Pilates that there is another power from above.

-We have plenty of authorities to tell us what is right when the world is right; we want a living Christ today who will tell us what is right when the world is wrong.

-Third, Our Lord fulfilled the office of priest or redeemer, for He is the author of our sanctification. When He was on earth, not only did He lift up limbs long paralyzed with disease and death, and open blind eyes to the light of God's sunshine, but He cleaned souls and purged hearts. As He identified truth and power with His personality, so He identified sanctification. "I am the Life." And by "Life," He did not mean mere physical life, but spiritual, sanctified, divinized life. He came as a link between God and man. Man is unholy; God is holy, and there is nothing in common between the two. But because He is both God and man; therefore He could be mediator between earth and heaven. This is the meaning of Christ the priest, a link between God and man, bringing God to man and man to God.

Characteristics of Christ's Mystical Body

-Christ did provide to make His truth, authority, and life come to us in this twentieth century. But how? In the same way He did then; through human nature. When we write, we use our hand as the visible and fleshy instrument of our invisible mind; so Christ, who is God, in more perfect way, taught, governed, and sanctified through His human nature, which was the visible instrument of His invisible divinity.

-Christ said that He would take on a new body, and that through it He would continue to be united with us until the end of time. It would not be another physical body like that which He took from the Blessed Virgin Mary. He spoke of another kind of body. If we look up the word "body" in the dictionary, we will find it can mean one of two things: wither something physical or something

social, i.e., either our physical organism of flesh and blood which is vivified by a soul; or it can mean a social grouping of persons who are considered as a whole because they have the same ideals and help one another. For example, we speak of the nation as the “body politic,” or of a group of university professors as an “educational body.”

-This new body would not be like these, that is, a moral body, for their unity comes from the will of men. Rather Christ’s new social body would be bound to Him not by the will of men, but by His heavenly Spirit, which He would send on leaving the earth.

-Here are only seven of the many things Our Lord said about the body which He would assume:

1. He told us that to be a member of His new body we have to be born into it. But it would not be through a human birth, for that only makes us son of Adam; to be a member of His new body we would have to be reborn through the Spirit in the waters of Baptism, which would make us sons of God.

2. The unity between this new body and Him would be through sharing His life: “I am the vine, you are its branches...you have to live on in me, and I will live on in you” (Jn 15:5)

3. His new body would be like all living things, small at first – even, as He said: “Like mustard seed,” but it would grow in simplicity to complexity until the consummation of the world. As the Lord puts it: “First blade, then the ear, then the perfect grain in the ear” (Mk. 4:28-29).

4. A house expands from the outside in, by the addition of brick to brick; human organizations grow by the addition of man to man, for instance, from the circumference to the center. Christ’s body, He said, would be formed from the inside out, as a living embryo is formed in the human body. As Christ received Life from the Father, we would receive life from Him. As He puts it: “That they too may be one in us, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee” (Jn 17:21).

5. Our Lord said that He would have only one body. It would have one shepherd who, He said, would feed His lambs and His sheep. “There will be one fold, one shepherd” (Jn 10:16).

6. He said that His New Body would not manifest itself before men until the day of Pentecost when He would send His truth-giving Spirit. “He will not come to you unless I go away” (Jn 16:7).

7. The most interesting observation He made about His body was that it would be hated by the world, as He was. Anything worldly, the world loves. But what is divine, the world hates. “Because I have singled you out from the midst of the world, therefore, the world hates you,” He said (Jn. 15:19).

-The nucleus of this new body was to be His Apostles. They were to be the raw material into which He would send His Spirit to quicken them into His prolonged self. The privilege of evangelizing the world was reserved to them. This new body, of which they were the embryo, was to be His posthumous self, and His prolonged personality, through the centuries.

-Here we come to something really startling. Remember, Our Lord is teacher, King, and priest or Savior. But now we find Him communicating to His new body His triple office of teaching,

governing, and sanctifying. He Who is the infallible teacher and Who said: "I am the Truth," now tells His body "I will send...the truth-giving Spirit,...to guide you into all the truth" (Jn 16:8, 13).

-So much would He be identified with the new body, that when anyone heard His body speaks, they would be hearing Him. "He who listens to you, listens to me; he who despises you, despises me; and he who despises me, despises him that sent me"(Lk 10:15). His truth would be the new body's truth, and therefore infallible, divine, heavenly truth.

-Secondly, Our Lord Who is king, said: "All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt. 28:18). This authority He so communicates to His body that its commands are His commands; its orders are His orders, which He ratifies. "I promise you, all that you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and all that you loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt. 18:18).

-Finally, Our Lord is priest or Savior, for He redeemed us to God through His death on the Cross. This holiness and power of sanctification he now communicates to His new body. His new body is told to baptize, to offer the sacrifice of the Mass, and to forgive sins. "When you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven, when you held them bound, they are held bound" (Jn. 20: 23).

-The nucleus of this new body was the Apostles. But until Our Lord sent His Spirit on them 50 days after His Resurrection, they were like the elements in a chemical laboratory. We know up to 100 percent the chemicals which enter into the constitution of a human body, but we cannot make a baby because we lack the unifying principle of a soul. The Apostles could not give their body divine life any more than chemicals can make human life. They needed God's invisible, divine spirit to unify their visible human natures.

-Accordingly, ten days after the Ascension, the glorified Savior Who is in heaven sends upon them His Spirit in form of tongues of living fire. As cells in a body form a new human life when God breathes a soul into the embryo, so the Apostles appeared as the visible Body of Christ when the Holy Spirit came to make them one. This is called in Tradition and Scripture the "Whole Christ" or "the fullness of Christ.

-The new body of Christ now appears publicly before men. Just as the Son of God took upon Himself a human nature from the womb of His mother the Blessed Virgin Mary, so now He takes a new body from the womb of humanity, overshadowed by the Holy spirit. Just as He once taught, governed, and sanctified through human nature, so now He continues to teach, to govern, and to sanctify through other human natures which makes His body.

-Because this body is not physical like a man, nor moral like a bridge club, but heavenly and spiritual because of the Spirit which made it one, it is called Mystical Body. As my body is made up of billions and billions of cells, and yet is one body because vivified by one soul, presided over by one visible head, and governed by an invisible mind, so this New Body of Christ, though made up of billions of people who are incorporated into Christ by Baptism, is one because it is vivified by the Holy Spirit of God, and presided over by one visible head, and governed by one visible mind or head Who is the risen Christ.

-This Mystical Body is His prolonged self! That He is continuing to live in it now, recall the story of St. Paul whose Hebrew name was Saul. Perhaps no one ever lived who hated Christ more than Saul.

The early members of Christ's Mystical Body prayed that God would send someone to refute him. God heard their prayer; He sent Paul to answer Paul. One day, this persecutor, breathing with hatred, set out on a journey to Damascus to seize the members of Christ's Mystical Body there and bind them and bring them back to Jerusalem.

-The time was only a few years after the Ascension of Our Lord. Remember that Our Lord is now glorified in heaven. Suddenly a great light shone about Saul and he fell to the ground. Aroused by a voice like a bursting sea he hears: "Saul, Saul, why dost thou persecute me?" Nothingness dared to ask the name of omnipotence: "Who art thou, Lord?" And the Voice answered: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."

-How could Saul be persecuting Our Lord Who is now glorified in heaven? Saul was doing nothing that Stalin did not do to Poland and Hungary. Why then should the voice from heaven say: "Saul, Saul, why dost thou persecute me?"

-Well, if someone stepped on your foot, would not your head complain because it is part of our body? Our Lord is now saying that in striking His body, Paul is striking Him. When the body of Christ is persecuted, it is Christ the invisible head Who arises to speak and to protest.

-The Mystical Body of Christ therefore no more stands between Christ and us, than His physical body stood between Mary Magdalene and His forgiveness, or His Hand stood between the little Children and His blessing. It was through His human body that He came to men in His individual Life; it is through His Mystical Body that He comes to us in His mystical corporate life.

-Christ is living now! He is teaching now, governing now, sanctifying now. He will continue to do so till the end of time through His Mystical Body in the Holy Spirit.

God Communicates Through a Community

-If you study the history of revealed religion you discover two facts: 1st, God extends His Mercies to humanity through a community of His choosing; 2nd, Over this chosen body He Divinely appoints a man as its head and His vicar.

-In the very beginning of history God made the first man Adam as the head of humanity. As a father's crimes disgrace his family, so in a greater way Adam's sin became our sin. But God in His mercy promised a redeemer born of a woman who would crush the spirit of evil. When sin multiplies on the face of the earth, God saves humanity in the flood, not by providing each man with an individual lifesaver. Rather, he selects a small community over which He divinely appoints one man – Noah. Through this little social body God promises blessings to the world.

-Later on, God chooses another man, Abram to be the head of a new race or religious body, and with him He enters into a new covenant. "In thee all the races of the world shall find blessing" (Gen. 12:3). It was the first time in history that God ever changed his name from Abram to Abraham, which means "father of many nations." Through him, not only his own people, but the Gentiles are to be blessed. It is serious to take away a man's name, but obviously God did it to remind Abraham that his relation to the God-approved community was not personal, that is, his by right, but functional, that is, because of the role he fulfilled in it as God's vicar.

-After the death of Abraham, the headship of the new community passed on the divinely chosen Isaac. Next came Jacob, who one night just before the dawn underwent a spiritual combat "as fierce as the battling of men"; it was known as the wrestling with an angel. As Abraham's faith revealed God's spiritual strength, Jacob's triumph revealed man's spiritual strength.

-For the second time in history God changes the name of a man. He gives new and added power to the spiritual corporation or body which is destined to enrich the world through the coming of its savior, as God says to Jacob: "Thou shalt not be called Jacob any longer; Israel is to be thy name" (Gen. 35:10).

-Later, Moses was appointed by God as the head of the new chosen body, as God said: "I will make you my own people and will be your God" (Ex. 6:7).

-After Moses, there is Josua, and later David, and the kings and prophets. God never communicated His blessings to an individual for himself alone, nor to the world in general. He did it always through a corporate body with whom He entered into a covenant and over which He chose a head. Faithful or unfaithful, virtuous or sinful, infallible was the destiny of this religious Body. God was to be with this instrument He had chosen. No matter what it did, even though it fell among idolaters, even though their love of the flesh damaged their efficiency, God's purposes went on and prevailed, for as it has been said: "God alone can write straight with crooked lines."

-About two hundred years before Christ was born, so many Jews were scattered throughout a Grecian civilization that it became necessary to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. This translation has since been called the Septuagint, because it was said to be done by seventy men. When they came across the word qahal, which stood for the community which was visible in its members, and yet invisible in the spirit of God that watched and protected it, these learned old men translated this important Hebrew word qahal into Greek word ecclesia.

-Finally, in the fullness of time, He Whom the prophet foretold would be born in Bethlehem, and Who would be conceived by a virgin, now appears as God in the form of man: Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is born in the qahal or ecclesia of the Jewish people. That is what the Gospel means when it tells us He came "into His own." But, and this is important, He also said that He came not to destroy His qahal or ecclesia, but to fulfill and perfect it. But before He would do this humanity would have to know Who He is, for He hit history with such an impact He split it into two.

-The scene took place in the half-pagan city of Caesarea-Philippi. He, the Lord and Master of the world, stopped to ask a question – the most important one He ever asked in His life: "What do men say of the Son of Man? Who do they think He is?" (Mt. 16:13).

-Notice: "What do men say?" It was a test for religion based on majority idea, the poll, public opinion, or the individual's interpretation of his own emotional experiences. "What do men say?" The answer was one of total confusion, a babel. "Some say John the Baptist," they told Him, "others Elijah, others again Jeremia, or one of the prophets" (Mt. 16:14).

-All rudimentary guesses of the poor and ignorant! No certainty! No agreement! No unity so dear to the heart of God! Leave the secret of His divinity to polls, to masses and majority votes, and you get only contradictory, contrary, and confusing responses, one man denying what another has said! Our Lord had for this confusion only the withering scorn of His silence.

-Our Lord now turns from quantity to quality, from the mob to the intelligentsia. He questions the senate, the federation, the parliament, the Congress, the House of Lords, as He says to them: "And what of you? Who do you say that I am?" (Mt. 16:15). You, my council, my followers! Not men, but you....And the twelve Apostles do not answer. Why are they silent? Because, perhaps, if they all spoke at once, there would only confusion of tongues; because, if one spoke for the others, too, they would have asked who gave him authority to speak; because they knew deep in their hearts that if the answer was to be based on the majority, then God's truth would not be absolute.

-There was no certitude in the conciliar body any more than among individuals. Men will never agree among themselves; the best they can do is to federate their guesses. Such federations of opinions are like spiritual archipelagoes, little islands separated from one another by whirling waters of skepticism, and united only in fiction by a common name. There is no one to speak for them; there is no authority; there is no head; there is no unity. A body without a head is a monstrosity whether the body be physical, social or religious.

-Something now happens which is less of man than of God. One man now steps forward. It is he who is always mentioned first in every list of the Apostles. He is the only person, outside of His heavenly Father, whom Our Lord is united to Himself as to say: "We." He is also the third man in history whose name is changed by God. We may suspect then that as with Abraham and in Jacob, some new and unheard of perfection is to be given to the qahal or ecclesia.

-This man's original name was Simon, son of Jona. When Our Lord first saw him, a year and a half before this episode, He said: "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona"; then Our Lord changed his name: "Thou shall be called Cephas" (which means rock). He changes his name from Simon to Rock.

-This same man whose name was changed to Rock now steps forward, not because the Apostles asked him to do so, not because he was smarter than the others, or because he knew the answer in his own flesh and blood, but because there came to him a great light, a light that made him first for eternity. That heavenly revelation gave him the answer to the question of the Master as with infallible certitude he affirms: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:17).

The Man Christ Chose upon Whom His Church is Built

-Peter knew Who Christ was. He was not John the Baptist! He was not Elijah! He was the one for whom the Gentile and Jewish world had been expectantly looking for so many centuries. He is Emmanuel! God with us! The Son of the living God! Jesus Christ, true God and true man! The moment he said it he was certain he had divine assistance. And Our Lord told him that was how he knew it as He said: "Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Jona; it is not flesh and blood, it is my Father in heaven that has revealed this to thee" (Mt. 16:18)

-At this moment Simon, the descendant of Abraham, who revealed the power of God, and the descendant of Jacob, who revealed the power of man, combines in himself the powerful

initiative of a human will cooperating with the infallible assistance of a heavenly Father, the God-man who changed his name now sets him at the head of the new and perfected religious body, a new Israel, a new Christ-qahal, a divine ecclesia with these words: "And I tell thee this in my turn, that thou art Peter, and it is upon this rock that I will build my Ecclesia, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it; and I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt. 16:17-19).

-Our Divine Lord leaves nothing undetermined about his new qahal or ecclesia, for he spoke of three things: its foundation, what is outside it, and what is inside it, and all three revolved about one man. The foundation is the Rock who is Peter; the door to the ecclesia from the outside is to be opened by keys, and these keys swing from the cincture of Peter; once on the inside the same rock and key-bearer has the power to bind and loose, to seal and unseal consciences even for registry in the book of life.

-Now the time has come to translate the word qahal or ecclesia into English. It means "church," and so Our Lord meant it when He said: "Thou art Peter, and it is upon this rock that I will build My Church."

-Between our created personality and His uncreated personality there is a bond of love. So inseparable are the two that Our Lord did not communicate to Peter the power of ruling and governing His Church until three times Peter had told Our Lord that he loved Him above all else.

-The submission we make to Our Lord in His Mystical Body is something like the loving submission that we make to the best and oldest and wisest of our friends, or the obedience a son gives to his father. We feel no distance between us who are taught, and the Church of Christ which teaches.

-There finally comes a moment when there is a partnership begotten of love for that common truth. The more we know Our Lord and obey the truth manifested through His Body, the Church, the less we feel under Him. The more His truth becomes ours, the more we love Him. To fall from faith in Our Lord in His Mystical Body is like falling from friendship with a person we love.

-But we know in whom we believe: Our Lord living in His Mystical Body.

-The devil has pretty well convinced some of his subjects that they should not accept the authority of Christ, because they would be weakening their reason. He suggests that any limitation upon reason is due to a sinister cause

-The error of the devil is that continuance in loyalty and love means discontinuance in mental growth. To the devil, to continue to be loyal to the wife, a country, an ideal, is a mark of slavery and a want of freedom.

-Freedom is not a liberation from truth, but in the acceptance of truth. I am free to draw a triangle only on condition that I accept the truth of the triangle, and give it three sides, and not in a stroke of broadminded-ness give it thirty-three sides. This is what Our Lord meant when He said: "The truth will set you free" (Jn. 8:32).

-If the grace of God did not give us the fullness of truth, and we are looking for it, we would begin our search by looking through the world for a Church that did not get along with the evil in the world! If that Church were accused of countless lies, hated because it refused to compromise, ridiculed because it refused to fit the times and not all time, we would suspect that since it was hated by what is evil in the world, it therefore was good and holy; and if it is good and holy, it must be divine. And we would sit down by its fountains and begin to drink the waters of everlasting life.

The Cloister

-The writers of the Middle Ages did not hesitate to compare the cloister to paradise. They had in mind both the earthly and the heavenly paradise. They saw the monk as having rediscovered the first, when God comes again to take the evening air and share intimacy with his friends.

-And they considered too that the monk had already in some way entered the heavenly Paradise in that even here below he tasted its joys. While the image is beautiful we must admit that the road ahead of the monk is long and arduous.

-But there are others to be seen, who (I grieve to say it), after despising the glory of earthly pomp, appeared to have learned pride in the very school of humility, and in the cloister itself, under the wings of the meekest and humblest of masters, to have become more arrogant and impatient than ever they were in the world.

-And what carries perversity further still, many are unable to put up with the least contempt in religion, who, while living in the world, could make themselves appear nothing better than contemptible. Their motive for entering the cloister would seem to be this, that since there was no chance of honors for them where honors were sought for by others, there at least they might hope for some honors where such things were avoided by all but themselves (St. Bernard).

-It is therefore necessary to conceal during our earthly life whatever of good we possess, because "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure, which a man having found hid it." This is the reason why we hid ourselves, even bodily, in these woods and cloisters (St Bernard, Sermon on Psalm 90).

-On Bernard's reading of the *Rule*, it is here, in the third step of humility, that one ascending this ladder enters the monastic enclosure for it is here that he submits in obedience to a superior. Conversely, Bernard suggests, it is in the tenth step of pride that the monk who has despised his brothers and scorned the rule of his superiors must be expelled from the monastic enclosure.

-Once more, the monk's pattern of descent imitates that of Lucifer. When Lucifer revolted against the rule of his Superior, Christ, and so violated the concord of the citizens of heaven, he was justly expelled from the paradise of heaven. In the same fashion, when the monk revolts against the rule of his superiors, and so disturbs the concord of the monastic community, he must eventually be compelled to leave the paradise of the cloister, either by his own decision or by that of his superiors.

-Marie-Bernard Saïd follows Leclercq's interpretation of the garden as the paradise of the cloister and adds that the soul's sight of this garden marks its entry into the unitive way as it "catches a glimpse of the Bridegroom in fleeting moments of sweet contemplation."

-Bernard hastens to add that what reason here sees is not the future reward promised the Bride in heavenly glory, but the wages she earns here and now in her temporal life. These wages are the Bride's wisdom which, Bernard insists, can be taught only by the Spirit and is to be found not in books, but only by experience.

-In effect, the radiant light Bernard has the soul glimpses within the paradise of the cloister is the radiant light of the Bride's peaceful self-awareness, the rest in good conscience she enjoys through the mercy of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

-Bernard's concluding reference to Ephesians 5:27 which refers the Church as Christ's Bride confirms that the soul has now begun to assume the self-awareness of the Bride it once only glimpsed from afar in the garden of the monastic enclosure. By joining this verse to 1 Corinthians 13:12, however, the abbot indicates that the soul's growth in this self-awareness of the Bride will proceed gradually in this life as it is by stages cleansed of sin and conformed to the beauty of the Bridegroom's humility and charity.

-Thus the soul's journey of self-knowledge from the courtroom of self-judgment to the garden of the cloister is only a prelude to the soul's journey through the life of grace, a journey of ever deepening self-awareness as the Bride and, in consequence, ever greater vision of the Bridegroom. Yet, as the soul proceeds along this ascending journey of self-knowledge and the knowledge of God, it is filled with growing confidence, for its deepening vision of the Word confirms its inward sense that it is being transformed within by that same Word and so likened to him.

-The soul that once trembled with fear and was ashamed to see its own, self-disfigured face now begins to delight in the sight of her own face as it is made ever more beautiful by the mercy of Christ, and in this new self-awareness conceives the daring desire to enter into mystical marriage with the Bridegroom whose very beauty she now bears.

-In *On Conversion*, Bernard reprises this fundamental itinerary of the soul's ascent, but also elaborates it, identifying several intervening phases of self-knowledge the soul experiences as it ascends to its self-awareness as Christ's Bride. There Bernard makes clear that the reason's growth in humility will be a far lengthier and more arduous process than it might appear in the *Steps*.

-By a painstaking pedagogy, the Word reveals to the soul the full measure of its brokenness not all at once, but by a gradual series of painful lessons in the school of self-knowledge. Within this school, reason learns by experience first his inability to reform himself through the mastery of his bodily senses, and then his powerlessness to liberate his spouse, the will, from her self-enslavement to sin.

-Yet, once the Word has brought reason to see and to confess in tears the full measure of the soul's brokenness, he then consoles reason with the delightful prospect of a new self-awareness as his own Bride, radiant with his own spiritual beauty and at rest in the peace of good conscience. Now that the soul sees both what it truly is and what it truly might become, the will is enabled, by the inward, efficacious Word of God resounding within it, to embrace the life of holiness reason has been permitted to glimpse within the monastic cloister.

-Having converted the soul's will to himself, the Word adorns his Bride with one further gift, not explicitly mentioned in the *Steps*, namely the purification of the soul's memory by the forgiveness of sins. By this purification, the Word allows the soul to recall its sinful past without any lingering trace of shame or guilt and so to embrace her new identity as the Word's Bride, truly worthy, by his gift, of her espousal to him. In SC 85, Bernard completes his account of the soul's ascent to

self-knowledge with his last and most evocative picture of the *Anima-Sponsa* in the beauty of her newfound self-awareness.

-At the origin of her spiritual ascent, this soul stood self-condemned in the courtroom of her own mind, ashamed to see her self-disfigured face and filled with fear before the undeceived eyes of Truth. Now, thanks to the mercy of the Word, she may delight in her own renewed countenance and rejoice in the knowledge that her beautiful soul now delights the gaze of her divine Bridegroom. She rests in the peace of her good conscience, acknowledges that all her restored beauty is her Bridegroom's gift to her, and, knowing herself as his Bride, longs to offer her entire self to him in thanksgiving and love.

-Radiant with her Incarnate Bridegroom's own beauty, the beauty he desires above all in his Spouse, she is sometimes rapt to the contemplative enjoyment of the Word and so absorbed in him that she ceases to be aware even of herself. Though indistinct and passing, this vision is nevertheless the soul's assurance that the Word has begun to conform her to his own beauty will bring her beauty to its complete and eschatological fulfillment.

-In the meanwhile, when returned to herself, she delights to give herself to her brothers and sisters in compassionate love for she knows that she is only Christ's Bride insofar as she realizes within herself and participates in Christ's one Bride, the Church. As she grows ever more into the form of Christ's Bride and grows ever more aware of this truth within herself, she is inflamed with confident expectation of that eternal day when, with her will entirely conformed to her Bridegroom's, she will forget her very self and pass over entirely into God.

Commit your ways to the Lord

-The term "way" means properly the act of treading or going; then, a way or path; then, a course of life, or the manner in which one lives; and the reference here is to the whole course of life, or all that can affect life; all our plans or conduct; all the issues or results of those plans. It is equivalent here to "lot" or "destiny." Everything, in regard to the manner in which we live, and all its results, are to be committed to the Lord.

-And he shall bring it to pass - Hebrew, "He shall do it." That is, He will bring it to a proper issue; He will secure a happy result. He will take care of your interests, and will not permit you to suffer, or to be ultimately wronged. The thing particularly referred to here, as appears from the next verse, is reputation or character.

-Commit thy way unto the Lord,.... Or "thy works", as in Proverbs 16:3; that is, all the affairs and business of life, which are a man's ways in which he walks; not that men should sit still, be inactive, and do nothing, and leave all to be done by the Lord; but should seek direction of God in everything engaged in, and for strength and assistance to perform it, and go on in it, and depend upon him for success, and give him all the glory, without trusting to any thing done by them: or, as some render the words, "reveal thy way unto the Lord"; not that God is ignorant of the ways of men, and of their affairs, and of their wants and necessities, but it is their duty to ask, and it is his delight to hear; they may come and use freedom with him, and tell him their whole case, and leave it with him, believing he will supply all their need: or, as others render it, "roll thy way on the Lord"; see Psalm 55:22; meaning not the burden of sin, nor the weight of affliction, but any affair of moment and importance that lies heavy upon the mind; trust also in him; it is an ease to the mind to spread it before the Lord, who sympathizes with his people, supports them under and brings them through their difficulties; and he shall bring it to pass; as he does whatever he has appointed and determined shall be, and whatever he has promised, and whatever will be for his own glory and his people's good.

-Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.

-"Commit thy way unto the Lord." Roll the whole burden of life upon the Lord. Leave with the Lord not thy present fretfulness merely, but all thy cares; in fact, submit the whole tenor of thy way to him. Cast away anxiety, resign thy will, submit thy judgment, leave all with the God of all. What a medicine is this for expelling envy! What a high attainment does this fourth precept indicate! How blessed must he be who lives every day in obedience to it! "Trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." Our destiny shall be joyfully accomplished if we confidently entrust all to our Lord. We may serenely sing:

"Thy way, not mine, O Lord, However dark it be; O lead me by your own right hand, Choose out the path for me. Smooth let it be or rough, it will be still the best; Winding or straight, it matters not, It leads me to thy rest. I dare not choose my lot, I would not if I continued..."

-Roll the burden of cares of thy life's way upon the Lord, leave the guidance of thy life entirely to Him, and to Him alone, without doing anything in it thyself: He will gloriously accomplish (all that concerns thee):

-Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring *it* to pass. Do not be led by your own wisdom, but obey God and he will finish his work in you.

-Commit - All thy cares and business, and necessities, commend to God by fervent prayer. Commit thy way (Pr 16:3). Works what you have to do and cannot set forth as a burden.

-Trust in Him - literally, "on Him." He will do what you cannot (compare Ps 22:8; 31:6). He will not suffer your character to remain under suspicion.

-When we look abroad we see the world full of evil-doers, that flourish and live in ease. So it was seen of old, therefore let us not marvel at the matter. We are tempted to fret at this, to think them the only happy people, and so we are prone to do like them: but this we are warned against. Outward prosperity is fading. When we look forward, with an eye of faith, we shall see no reason to envy the wicked. Their weeping and wailing will be everlasting.

-The life of religion is a believing trust in the Lord, and diligent care to serve Him according to His will. It is not trusting God, but tempting Him, if we do not make conscience of our duty to Him. A man's life consists not in abundance, but, Thou shalt have food convenient for thee. This is more than we deserve, and it is enough for one that is going to heaven. To delight in God is as much a privilege as a duty. He has not promised to gratify the appetites of the body, and the humors of the fancy, but the desires of the renewed, sanctified soul. What is the desire of the heart of a good man? It is this, to know, and love, and serve God in this life and be with Him in the next.

-Commit thy way unto the Lord; roll thy way upon the Lord, so the margin reads it. Cast thy burden upon the Lord, the burden of thy care. We must roll it off ourselves, not afflict and perplex ourselves with thoughts about future events, but refer them to God. By prayer spread thy case and all thy cares before the Lord, and trust in Him. We must do our duty, and then leave the event with God. The promise is very sweet: He shall bring that to pass, whatever it is, which thou has committed to Him.

-There's no doubt that committing our concerns into God's hands frees us from the confusion, conflicts, and cares that fill the world today. All of our trials, or normal goings-ons, ought to be given to Him. Pray about all of it to Him. We need to put the concerns and cares behind us, and who better with than God? Then, after dying of ourselves, we ought to recognize our dependence on Him to carry the matters for us.

-Committing ourselves to God can only be done with faith, for even the slightest doubt in your heart that your way is not a good one, faith will refuse to have anything to do with it. Committing our matters to Him must be continuous. We need to allow Him to pass judgment on our ways. Only when we truly commit our way to the Lord and leave it with Him will we no longer be anxious and fearful. Take it to Him, refraining from walking away with it again. Closely examine your habits. Are they right in the eyes of God? Have you placed it all in His hands?

-Accordingly, we are taught from this passage how to preserve our minds in tranquility amidst anxieties, dangers, and floods of trouble. There can be no doubt, that by the term ways we are here to understand all affairs or businesses, and undertakings.

-Therefore, the man, who, leaving the issue of all his affairs to the will of God, and who, patiently waiting to receive from His hand whatever He may be pleased to send, whether prosperity or adversity, casts all his cares, and every other burden which he bears, into His bosom; or, in other words, commits to Him all his affairs, - such a person rolls his ways upon the Lord Hence, David again inculcates the duty of hope and confidence in God: And trust in Him.

-By this he intimates, that we render to Him the honor to which He is entitled only when we entrust to Him the government and direction of our lives; and thus he provides a remedy for a disease with which almost all men are infected.

-Whence was it heard that the children of God are envious of the wicked, and are often in trouble and perplexity, and yield to excess of sorrow, and sometimes even murmur and repine, but because, by involving themselves immoderately in endless cares, and cherishing too eagerly a desire to provide for themselves irrespective of God, they plunge, as it were, into an abyss, or at least accumulate to themselves such a vast load of cares, that they are forced at last to sink under them?

-Desirous to provide a remedy for this evil, David warns us, that in presuming to take upon us the government of our own life, and to provide for all our affairs as if we were able to bear so great a burden, we are greatly deceived, and that, therefore, our only remedy is to fix our eyes upon the providence of God, and to draw from it consolation in all our sorrows.

-Those who obey this counsel shall escape that horrible labyrinth in which all men labor in vain; for when God shall once have taken the management of our affairs into His own hand, there is no reason to fear that prosperity shall ever fail us.

-Whence was it heard that God forsakes us and disappoints our expectations, if it is not because we provoke him, by pretending to greater wisdom and understanding than we possess? If, therefore, we would only permit him, he will perform his part, and will not disappoint our expectations, which he sometimes does as a just punishment for our unbelief.

-And he will bring forth thy righteousness as the light this David says, in order to anticipate the misgivings which often trouble us when we seem to lose our labor in faithfully serving God, and in dealing uprightly with our neighbors; nay, when our integrity is either exposed to the calumnies of the wicked, or is the occasion of injury to us from men; for then it is thought to be of no account in the sight of God. David, therefore, declares, that God will not suffer our righteousness to be always hid in darkness, but that he will maintain it and bring it forth to the light; namely, when he will bestow upon us such a reward as we desire. He alludes to the darkness of the night, which is soon dispelled by the dawning of the day; as if he had said, We may be often grievously oppressed, and God may not seem to approve our innocence, yet this vicissitude should no more disturb our minds than the darkness of the night which covers the earth; for then the expectation of the light of day sustains our hope.

-“Commit your ways to the Lord.” This is the fundamental, underlying principle behind everything that we do with God. If we are not committed, He will not come and grab us rudely by the ear and drag us before the court of Heaven. He will call to us, plead with us, maybe even cajole a bit, but no force will be involved. We commit ourselves to God because we love Him. Read, re-

read, and read again and again this set of verses on love and obey. They are the keys to committing yourself fully to God's will.

-Deut. 30:16 [If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which] I command you today, to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land into which you go to possess.

-Deut. 30:20, And love the Lord your God, obey His voice, and cling to Him. For He is your life and the length of your days, that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

-Psalm 119:145, I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord; I will keep Your statutes [I will hear, receive, love, and obey them]. John 14:15 If you [really] love Me, you will keep (obey) My commands. John 14:23 Jesus answered, If a person [really] loves Me, he will keep My word [obey My teaching]; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home (abode, special dwelling place) with him.

John 14:24, "Anyone who does not [really] love Me does not observe and obey My teaching. And the teaching which you hear and heed is not Mine, but [comes] from the Father Who sent Me." John 15:10, "If you keep My commandments [if you continue to obey My instructions], you will abide in My love and live on in it, just as I have obeyed My Father's commandments and live on in His love."

1John 5:2, "By this we come to know (recognize and understand) that we love the children of God: when we love God and obey His commands" (orders, charges)—[when we keep His ordinances and are mindful of His precepts and His teaching].

-When these verses begin to really sink in—when you can grasp the significance of them, when you have meditated them until they actually take hold of your mind, then it will be time to commit your ways to God. -Read these verses over and over until they likewise begin to take hold of your spirit:

Psa. 31:5 Into Your hands I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O Lord, the God of truth and faithfulness.

Psa. 37:5 Commit your way to the Lord [roll and repose each care of your load on Him]; trust (lean on, rely on, and be confident) also in Him and He will bring it to pass.

Prov. 16:3 Roll your works upon the Lord [commit and trust them wholly to Him; He will cause your thoughts to become agreeable to His will, and] so shall your plans be established and succeed.

Is. 26:4 So trust in the Lord (commit yourself to Him, lean on Him, hope confidently in Him) forever; for the Lord God is an everlasting Rock [the Rock of Ages].

Job 5:8 As for me, I would seek God and inquire of and require Him, and to God would I commit my cause—

Is. 26:4 So trust in the Lord (commit yourself to Him, lean on Him, hope confidently in Him) forever; for the Lord God is an everlasting Rock [the Rock of Ages].

Acts 20:32 And now [brethren], I commit you to God [I deposit you in His charge, entrusting you to His protection and care]. And I commend you to the Word of His grace [to the commands and counsels and promises of His unmerited favor]. It is able to build you up and to give you [your rightful] inheritance among all God's set-apart ones (those consecrated, purified, and

transformed of soul).

Lev. 11:44 For I am the Lord your God; so consecrate yourselves and be holy, for I am holy; neither defile yourselves with any manner of thing that multiplies in large numbers or swarms.

Lev. 20:7 Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am the Lord your God.

1Chr. 29:5 Gold for the uses of gold, silver for the uses of silver, and for every work to be done by craftsmen. Now who will offer willingly to fill his hand [and consecrate it] today to the Lord [like one consecrating himself to the priesthood]?

Rom. 8:39 Nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1Th. 5:23 And may the God of peace Himself sanctify you through and through [separate you from profane things, make you pure and wholly consecrated to God]; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved sound and complete [and found] blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah).

-This is the prayer of commitment that each of us should make every day, and which we will pray on Sunday night as a way to kick off this year of experiencing God: "Father according to your promise in proverbs 16:3, I commit my work to You. I give You my life and ask that You cause my thoughts to line up with Your will so that I might do all that pleases You. Establish Your Will in me, gracious King. I ask this in Jesus' name, claiming the promise that You gave us in 1 John 5:14-15)."

-What does God see when He looks upon the lives of men? We make choices every moment of every day that give a clearcut perspective of who we are. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good. A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit. A fool rejects his father's discipline, but he who regards reproof is sensible." Proverbs 15:3-5 Can we be sensible without the active grace of God working for our good? We are helpless apart from God's interaction, participation, and direction in our lives. Do you fully comprehend the marvelous grace of God.

-“The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous... The fear of the Lord is the instruction for wisdom, and before honor comes humility.” Proverbs 15:29,33 How is distance from God measured? What can be seen in our lives that tells of the distance that is between God and us? Distance is truly a heart issue and what we delight in we will feel closer to. Do you delight in God? Do you find your hope and help in God? “The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answers of the tongue is from the Lord. All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the Lord weighs the motives. Commit your works to the Lord and your plans will be established. The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.” Proverbs 16:1-4 Are your own thoughts and feelings the motivating factor of your life? Do you strive to obtain glory for your deeds? Will you rather commit your way to the Lord and delight in Him?

-There must be a point in your life that you choose whether you will serve God or yourself. God knows all that we do. There is no loophole that allows or affords us to live for ourselves and to obtain God's salvation. A choice must be made. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling. It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud. He who gives attention to the word will find good, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord.” Proverbs 16:18-20 We must in humility acknowledge that we are incapable of saving ourselves. We must make the critical choice that God is the only one who is able to save us from our helpless state. Will you embrace the wonderful wisdom found in the grace of God? The

fearfully wondrous God of creation is present before you ready to release you from the bonds of depravity that ensnarl you. Will you commit your way to the Lord? Stop striving and know that God is God and His way is the way of hope. Rest in the truth that God has made a way for you.

On Community - Relationship

-“One freezing winter day, a herd of porcupines pressed together, one against the other, so as to protect themselves from the cold by sharing one another's warmth. But, painfully discomfited by their spines, it wasn't long before they moved apart from one another again. Obligated by the persistent cold to come close to one another again, they once again felt the uncomfortable effect of their spines, and these alternations between closeness and distance lasted until they had found a suitable distance where they felt protected from harm” (Schopenhauer).

-St Thomas teaches that full enjoyment of heavenly consolation in the contemplative life is impeded whenever our active life is not yet perfectly disposed & ordered. Because the active life is so complicated & difficult, it is the source of much disquietude, of many impediments that deprive us of divine joys. Therefore the Spirit must give order to the ways of that life also.

-Where there is order, there is sweetness; wherever the Holy Spirit accomplishes His work, His heavenly fruits are to be found.

-There are two parts in our active life: one comprising our relations with other people, the other, our relation with inferior things. Of necessity we must live with other people, our brothers. We cannot remove ourselves from them.

-We attain sanctity more efficaciously by living with others than by withdrawing ourselves from them. A tendency to avoid others would also be against the common life. This includes fleeing from the presence of individuals or from the community in general, or not participating in community exercises without sufficient reason.

-It is impossible for us to avoid relationships with others, and at times these relationships are very difficult. Life in community inevitably there are collisions. In all our relationships we need to remember the important fact that each person is made in the image and likeness of God. Each person is unique, each has something special to show which no one else has. Therefore, we need to take people as they are and not as we would like or expect them to be.

-St. John Berchman said that Community life was his greatest penance. As cenobites our movement toward God is relational, that is, we need one another. As we noticed if we are excluded from community, friends, family, these cause a psychological implication which is not always to our own advantage.

-Common life is a way of relating & respecting each other's personality. It is frequently spoken of as a life of brothers or sisters in common or a life of sharing one's personal belongings & giftedness with others, in particular with the members of one's congregation.

-It is easy and pleasant to have dealings with people who are kind to us and with whom we have some bond of liking. But to deal with everyone, the good and the bad, those who are sympathetic to us by their kindness and those who repel us by their cunning, those who wish us well and those who wish us ill, requires a balance very hard for our soul to attain.

-Our relationship with our brothers must conform not only to the rules of reason, but to the divine norms left to us by Our Lord Jesus. And we know by experience how hard this can be.

Sanctity for us religious, after all, consists in rising above such ordinary annoyances of community life. We express our love for our brothers by sacrificing ourselves for the community. We need not to lose heart in sufferings & in bodily labors for the sake of the community, for this too means 'to lay down our lives for the brothers.'

-How easily do we fail in charity even with those who are nearest to us, with whom we are united by blood or affection. Our relations with others, then, are both very important & very difficult. It is necessary for the Holy Spirit with His light, His fire, and His action to come and dispose our heart, our soul, and our life so that our association with others may be harmonious and holy.

-Our relations with our brothers are summarized in the precepts of fraternal charity that Christ preached with so much earnestness during His whole life but especially on the day of His passion: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have love you...."

-To make us understand the importance of this precept, He said on that same blessed night: "By this will all people know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another."

-We Christians have to love, without exception, the person whom we feel sympathy and those for whom we feel a natural repugnance; we have to love the good & the bad, friends & enemies, for charity does not admit exceptions. We need to pray for those who persecute us, and do good to those who harm us. A very hard thing for our egoistic & poor wounded human nature – but how great, how noble and holy is this doctrine of charity?

-The love of charity is not a speculative love, it is not a love of simple affection. It is an efficacious love, active and operative. To love thus is to desire to do good to others irrespective of our feelings.

-Clearly, our works are always inferior to our desires, because the will to do good can be unbounded, without limit; whereas the execution of that will is not. We are very limited creatures; our spiritual & material resources are so meager that we cannot do good to all people, not even to all who are very close to us. But our Christian duty demands that we try to do good to all according to the measure of our strength, according to the opportunities that present themselves to us, and as discretion guides us.

-Consequently our relations with our brothers can be reduced to two points: to have the will to do good to them, and actually to do good to them as many as possible. That is the disposition which the Holy Spirit forms in our soul, but it is very slow in its development and we must engage in numerous struggles to achieve victory.

-However, little by little that charitable and generous will is forged in the depths of our being; little by little we accomplish the intention of our heart. And when the two things, our will & its execution, reach a certain maturity, then God grants us the divine consolations, the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

-The things that God ordains, even when they are very difficult, always contain a drop of heavenly sweetness.

-Happiness is not found in selfishness, in self-centeredness, in accumulation of things; it is found in generosity, in frugality, to forget ourselves a little, to give away our heart, our time in service to our brothers & our community. Giving is intimately related to loving, and giving and loving are things of God.

-God loves; God gives. He is always giving. He opens His hands, and fills every living creature with blessings. God does good to all creatures, pouring His graces and gifts everywhere. Only as we learn to love God and others do we gain real freedom and autonomy in a society in which most people live in a state of slavery to their own needs and desires.

-By coming out of ourselves to one another, by giving our heart through kindness, goodness, & respect for one another, we resemble God. But no matter how real our goodness, no matter how great our generosity, we will assuredly come across someone who opposes our plans, who wounds us, who brings evil upon us; as long as this world still remains there will be good & bad in it, and it is impossible for us to remove ourselves from the bad and communicate only with those who are good, for this means that we have to leave this present world, as St. Paul puts it.

-In our dealings with one another, then, there is necessarily much to make us suffer, and if we did not have the gifts of God we would react angrily to those who oppose us. Anger is a passion by which we respond to the evils and injustices inflicted by others.

-But Christ has taught us about mildness, or meekness. At first the idea of this virtue seems too difficult to us. Why take away the right to anger? Why preach its opposite? Mildness seems to place us in a position of inferiority; the world believes that gentle people are ignored by others. But in the Sermon on the Mount Our Lord said: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." They are stronger than those who conquered a city.

-Anger removes us from our brothers; it may have easy victories, but they are superficial. It is not anger or violence that truly wins the earth, it is gentleness taught by Christ. And there is history to prove it; the whole record of humanity is a commentary on the beatitude of the Mount, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

-Love doesn't mean that we have to feel the same toward everyone: we are not asked to enjoy the company of all people equally. Love is a disposition of the heart. It has to do with a chosen and cultivated long-term attitude of the heart

-Monastic teachers held that a movement toward God necessarily moves us closer to other people. Whatever good or ill we do for our brother, we do for ourselves because we are joined to one another in the body of Christ which is the Church.

-Praying to God to make us love without any other effort on our part will not make us love. God will not change our hearts without a real participation on our parts.

-The idea that we should at all times be above reproach makes us a mockery of repentance and forgiveness as well as of love, because it suggests the need always to look good in the sight of our brothers, and never to be caught in fault. No one can really escape the truth that sooner or later we will discover our own shortcomings as far as living in community is concerned.

-All of us have some of the old Adam or Eve in us and so none of us is in a position to judge someone else self-righteously. No amount of goodness can put a person in a position to render judgment on another's sin. Only God can do this.

-Growth toward perfect love in fact moves us increasingly into a deeper compassion for other people's human frailty. Love makes us less critical as we identify with others. When you see someone sin, says one of the Desert Fathers, say, "Oh, Lord, He today, I tomorrow!"

-In our relations with our brothers, if we will sacrifice our self-will, our own convenience, our own comfort, and try to serve, we will be happy. If we are always the first to give way to the wishes of others, are quick to acknowledge ourselves in the wrong, or to have committed a fault, we will be at peace, and there will be unity in the community. Patience will not be needed in heaven, but so long as we are on earth we need to practice it. We need to be patient with each other, with ourselves, and with Divine Providence.

-An area where we can usually examine ourselves and make a special effort to rectify what is wrong, is that of relationships with one another in community life. We can only live happily and contentedly if there is openness and understanding.

-We will have to learn about ourselves, if we are to discover what is displeasing in the sight of God and what is difficult for those whom we have to live.

-Community is what is happening when brothers are coming to life and bringing each other to life. Community life is made up of a lot of small things. It is the small courtesies that matter: small marks of consideration, thinking of each other, being sensitive to others, aware of their needs, aware of their moods, tactful in handling them, kind in rebuking them, and be gentle to one another.

-Finally, community life is always a joy if we live unselfishly, if we control the itch to be self-assertive and are determined not to seek our own will.

*** Compunction ***

-Compunction is something more than remorse for past sins. It is a habitual awareness of the tendency to sin. It has a twofold thrust: 1st, It keeps alive a sense of guilt with regard to previous failures; 2nd, It warns of weakness in the face of future temptations. Compunction views both past and future in terms of God's mercy. The soul, conscious of personal insufficiency and seeing itself powerless to remedy what it sees within itself, puts complete trust in the power of grace.

-Where remorse and self-pitying are often tending towards despair and work its emotion inwards so that it can become to some as an obsession, compunction on the other hand works towards God. Compunction is just as much aware of evil as remorse but sees it chiefly in relation to God rather than to self. An example of this is what St. Paul said in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, "As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death" (2nd Cor.7:9-10). This is what happened to both Peter and Judas. Peter's grief produces repentance that leads to salvation, but Judas grief produces death because he eventually committed suicide.

-Those who imagine that the soul of compunction is the soul of misery have failed to understand the matter. Compunction has nothing to do with self-appointed misery, which more often than not is, like indulged scrupulosity, a defense against conscience. Remorse may be an escape, a reflex action, a device to screen guilt; compunction cannot be other than the expression of humbled love.

-Compunction is a dual sensitivity. It places before us both the reality of our sinful condition and the urgency of our desire to be possessed totally by God. It is active disgust at our low-level way of living out our lives, knowing that we are made for something better and that nothing less than God can bring us what our nature craves. It is precisely the comparison between what we are and what we could be which constitutes the triggering cause of the experience of compunction.

-It is a gift of divine love which is aimed at bringing us to salvation. It causes in us salutary pain & fear which keeps us from forgetting the possibility of eternal death, and thus serves as a check on carnal desire, a remedy for depravity, and destroys any lack of seriousness or concern with trivialities.

-At the heart of compunction is a sense of pain, a stinging, a sensation of being pricked. It is a question of being pierced, aroused from torpor and complacency and stimulated to action. It has nothing to do with an obsessive and depressive sense of guilt, with endless reviewing of past failures & sins(St. Bernard, Sermon 11 on the Song of Songs).

-Compunction is objective and realist. It does not have to fancy guilt. The guilt is there, and compunction views it in the light of truth. There may be the scorching shame which accompanies remorse (regret for one's sins or for acts that wrong others: distress from a sense of guilt), but the resolution which results from compunction is like to be more effective. Compunction leads to sympathy with others, gratitude to God, and wider understanding of divine Providence.

-Far from inducing depression in a person, true compunction makes for peace and joy. Based on the right kind of fear, it proceeds to the right kind of joy. "The fear of the Lord is honor and glory

and gladness and a crown of joy," says Sirach; "the fear of the Lord shall delight the heart....With him that fear the Lord it shall go well in the latter end, and on the day of his death he shall be blessed" (Sirach 1:12,13).

-Compunction is also related to spiritual desire. Sometimes, those who remember that they have done things which are wrong are pierced with pain at the recollection and become afire with love for God. They are consumed with a passion of desire as they yearn for their heavenly homeland.

-Compunction comes into our lives through various channels. Primary among them is the attentive reading of the Scriptures, by the comparison of our lives with those of the fathers of the church, and by heeding the rebukes which spiritual men hurl at us.

-Compunction of heart is a treasure infinitely to be desired, and an unspeakable gladness of the heart. It is healing to the soul; it is remission of sins; it brings back again the Holy Spirit into the humble and loving heart (St. Bernard).

-True compunction is a precious treasure, an ineffable joy to the heart. Compunction is born of love, and begets more love: and the love of God is the source of the only genuine joy.

-Compunction is one of the elements of custody of the heart.

-As soon as we pour the water compunction on the sacrifice of our deeds, a brightness shines upon our souls and makes light whatever was dark in them, or lay hidden in shadow (St. Peter Damian).

-Tears of compunction increase the strength of heavenly desire (St. Peter Damian).

-Tears of compunction Flow from our love of God, and on the other hand, because of tears, our souls burn more fiercely with love of God (St. Peter Damian).

-It is precisely the comparison between what we are and what we could be which constitute the triggering cause of the experience of compunction. Compunction, for St. Gregory the Great, is more than contrition for sin; it is also desire for God. It is the machine by which the soul is lifted up to lofty things.

-Compunction is a gift of divine love which is aimed at bringing us to salvation. It causes in us salutary pain and fear which keeps us from forgetting the possibility of eternal death, and thus serves as a check on carnal desire, a remedy for depravity, and destroys any lack of seriousness or concern with trivialities.

-compunction is a dual sensitivity. It places before us both the reality of our sinful condition and the urgency of our desire to be possessed totally by God. It is an active disgust at our low-level living, knowing that we are made for dome thing better and that nothing less than God can bring us what our nature craves.

Some words of Abba Serapion on overcoming thoughts by disclosing them, and on the danger of self-confidence:

-“When I was still a boy and was living with Abba Theonas, I got into this habit, due to the attacks of the enemy: after I had eaten with the old man at the ninth hour, every day I would secretly hide one biscuit in my bosom, which I ate clandestinely at night without his knowledge.

-“By God's providence it happened that, in order to snatch me from this yoke of willing captivity, some brothers sought out the old man's cell for the sake of edification.

-“When the meal was finished the spiritual conference began. The old man responding to the questions that they had asked about the vice of gluttony and the disposition of hidden thoughts, was discussing their nature and explaining the frightful dominion that they exercise as long as they are concealed.

-“Meanwhile, struck with compunction by the power of the conference and terrified by my guilty conscience (for I believed that these things had been spoken of because the Lord had revealed my inmost thoughts to the old man), I was first shaken by secret sighs. Then as my heart's compunction grew I broke into open sobbing and tears, and from my bosom, the knowing accomplice of my theft, I produced the biscuit that by wicked habit I used to take out to eat clandestinely, and I put it in the center. I threw myself on the ground with a plea for pardon, confessing how every day I would eat secretly, and with an outpouring of tears I begged them to ask the Lord to free me from my horrible captivity.

-Then the old man said: “Take heart, my boy. Your confession freed you from this captivity even before I spoke. Today you have triumphed over your conqueror and adversary, defeating him by your confession more decisively than you yourself had been overthrown by him because of your silence.

-The old man had not even finished these words when lo, a burning lamp coming from my breast so filled the cell with the odor of sulphur that the overwhelming stench nearly made it impossible for us to remain there.

-“And so, he said, ‘it has been in accordance with the old man's words. To such an extent has the domination of that diabolical tyranny in me been destroyed by the power of this confession and been rendered forever ineffective that the enemy has never again tried to stir up the thought of this desire in me, nor after this have I ever again felt myself shaken by the temptation to pursue that furtive desire.

-“This is what we read in Ecclesiastes as well, expressed beautifully in a figurative way. “If a snake bite without hissing,” it says, “there is no abundance for the charmer,” indicating that the bite of a silent snake is dangerous. This means that if a diabolical suggestion or thought has not been disclosed by confessing it to a charmer (namely, to a spiritual man, who by the songs of Scripture can heal a wound immediately and draw the snake's harmful venom out of a person's heart), he will not be able to help the one who is in danger and about to perish” (The Second Conference of Abba Moses: On Discretion).

-The great want of modern piety is a real, deep, vigorous, inward repentance. If someone dance till four in the morning and go to communion at ten, there would be reasonable doubts in his abiding sorrow for sin. If someone is in the theater till midnight, it is right not to credit the compunction of his morning's meditation.

On Confidence

-You might ask if a soul sensible to his own misery can go with great confidence to God. It is safe to reply that not only can the soul which knows his misery have great confidence in God, but that, unless he has such knowledge, he cannot have confidence in Him; for it is this true knowledge & confession of our misery which brings us to God.

-The greater our knowledge of our own misery, the more profound will be our confidence in the goodness and mercy of God; for between mercy & misery there is so close connection that the one cannot be exercised without the other.

-St. Bernard in his sermon on the Songs of Songs said: "Knowledge of God preserves us from despair, because God is full of mercy, His nature is all good, and His actions pity & pardon. Knowledge of self preserves us from pride, for nothing is more efficacious for acquiring humility than knowledge of ourselves as we really are. This twofold knowledge assures salvation, because seen in its light there appears the need for an encounter between man's misery & God's mercy." Here is the foundation of humble hope.

-If God had not created man He would not have been actually merciful, since mercy can only be exercised towards the miserable.

-It would be no great matter to accept our nothingness & strip ourselves of self (which is done by acts of confusion) if the result of this were not the total surrender of ourselves to God, as St. Paul teaches us when he says: "Strip yourself of the old man, and put on the new, for we must not remain unclothed but clothe ourselves with God,"

-This little withdrawal is only that we may press on the better towards God by an act of love & confidence. Even if we do not feel such confidence, we must still not fail to make acts of it, saying to Our Lord: "Although, dear Lord, I have no feeling of confidence in Thee, I know all the same that you are my God, that I am wholly yours, and that I have no hope but in your goodness; therefore I abandon myself, with all that I have or am, into Your hands."

-Having done this, we have to be at peace, and without dwelling at all upon our troubles, but speak to Our Lord of other things. One of the dangers if we keep on focusing on our own troubles rather than focusing on Our Lord is that our own troubles will sink us down like St. Peter when he focuses on the "waves rather than Christ. The waves were too much for him, and he was afraid so he sank. It's the same with us too.

-We can be assured of this: God who knows all and sees all, will set all things straight in the end, for He knows how to write straight on crooked lines. Even better, He will dry every tear from our eyes. In the meantime He mysteriously takes our sorrows and uses them to heal the world.

-As we continue holding our soul deep in our inward parts, we will discover that God has magnetic attracting quality! Our God is like a magnet! Our God naturally draws us more and more toward Himself.

-The conclusion of this point is that it is very good for us to be covered with confusion when we know & feel our misery & imperfection, but that we must not stop there. Neither must the consciousness of these miseries discourage us, but rather make us raised "Our hearts to God by a holy confidence, the foundation of which ought to be in Him and not in ourselves.

On the Consolations of the Holy Spirit

-consolation is the happiness that carries pain with it. It springs from the very heart of grief; therefore the Holy Spirit is called "The Paraclete," the "Consoler," because He gives us in our exile a happiness which is not incompatible with grief.

-when Christ came into this world, when He consummated His works and transformed all existence, He did not eliminate pain. The Christian life does not suppress suffering. That implies the purification of our hearts, and the heart is not purified completely except by suffering & sacrifice.

-In the daily trials & combats arising from the flesh, the world & the devil, that are never wanting to those who live devout lives in Christ, we learn by experience that our life on earth is a ceaseless warfare, and so we are impelled to repeat the song of gratefulness to God day after day for every victory won.

-The Christian life is a reflection of the life of Our Lord Jesus. The heart of the Christian is the image of the divine Heart; and it can contain, if it is faithful to Our Lord, both deep pain & celestial consolations.

-The Holy Spirit is the Consoler because He is infinite love. Knowledge is precious, but it does not console; art delights us, but its object is not to console; the only thing that consoles us is love. When our heart is torn to pieces, when great bitterness fills our soul, nothing but a divine reality can assuage our pain, that is, love: love that knows how to bind divinely both pain & grief; grief that alone possesses the heavenly secret of drawing forth happiness from profound sorrow & pain.

-The first consolation, the first trace of consolation, that the Holy Spirit bestows on us is the joy of freedom. If we are not happy & content, it is because we are not free; because we carry chains we may be unaware of, or may even love. These chains are our attachments, the wealth that turns our heart to material things, the pleasures that weaken our will, the pride that carries us above ourselves.

-St. Francis of Assisi was the saint of happiness because he was the saint of detachment. The Holy Spirit frees us. He detaches us from the things of earth, and breaks our chains. "Love is as strong as death." This means that love is like death in separating us from everything.

-The Holy Spirit detaches our heart from earthly things, infuses into our soul divine simplicity, and makes us free. This is the first consolation of the Spirit, the consolation of freedom. We are called to freedom, only not to use our freedom to satisfy the demands of our body or as a pretext for doing evil.

-The more we advance along the paths of virtue, the more our heart and our spirit can perceive the divine taste of the consolation of the Spirit. "Taste & see that the Lord is good."

Characteristics of the Consolations

-We know from our own experience that life is a matter of lights & shadows, joys and sorrows. It is impossible to find anyone who is without sorrows; impossible also to find anyone in whose life there is not, if only for a few brief instants, a spark of happiness.

-Undoubtedly there are more sorrows in our spiritual life than in our material, but there are also more consolations. A verse from the Psalms expresses it thus: "When cares abound within me, Your comfort gladdens my soul" (Ps. 93:19).

-These two things, solace and desolation or sorrow, are indispensable. They have their respective purposes to accomplish and their fruits to bring forth. The life of the Spirit demands solace, for solace expands the heart, and when the heart is expanded it runs in the way of the Lord.

-Consolations nourish us, fortify us, and make us capable of performing all the sacrifices necessary to fulfill the holy will of God. In the supernatural order God willed to give us a ray of happiness, a drop of consolation, that we might fulfill our duties with greater ease.

-God's knowledge of how to proportion and time our consolations & our desolations is marvelous. He measure out for our soul the precise quantity of each, at the moment when it is needed, so that in times of prosperity we will not be unmindful of adversity and in times prosperity we will not be forgetful of adversity.

-We can trust His understanding and His care for the health of our soul, because He is infinite wisdom, infinite love. He seeks only our good.

-At times we feel repugnance for the trials we experienced, but they are pains that purify us, detach us, make our love more disinterested, open our eyes to the divine light and our heart to the ineffable love of God.

-It is like a pearl formed by a grain of sand getting into a mussel shell. It irritates and causes pain. The inner part of the mussel send tears which congeal around the grain of sand and make a beautiful pearl. So our sufferings and tears and irritations make pearls, that's why the kingdom of God is liken into a pearl of great price because we have to pass through many tribulations before we can enter into it.

-The spiritual life requires joy and stress just as the fields need sunny and cloudy days to produce their harvest. There is no doubt that God holds the key to the mystery of spiritual consolations & desolations.

-St. Paul uses expression which is enough to tell us the nature of divine consolations: "The fruits of the Spirit." The plants, when they have reached maturity, produced their fruits, whose characteristics are mildness, sweetness, and delicious taste. The word "fruit" expresses two principal ideas: perfection and sweetness, or, in other words, maturity and delectability (delightful, highly pleasing, delicious). These are the two marks of the consolations which the Holy Spirit pours into our souls.

-Grace, with its royal retinue of virtues & gifts, is the seed which the Spirit has planted in our souls. All that admirable unison which forms the visible universe is worth less than one degree of grace.

The Psalmist expresses this precisely when he said: "What is man that you care for him...you made him little less than the angels and crown him with honor & glory and put all things under his feet."

-Grace is so excellent, so beautiful, because it makes us resemble God. By grace we belong to the divine order, to the divine family.

-The seed that the divine Sower planted in the fertile field of our heart, when developed under His gentle operation, reaches maturity and then produces its fruit, mild and delicious: the consolation of the Holy Spirit.

-Philosophy teaches us that pleasure is proper to function. When we perform our tasks in a right manner, in accord with the capacity of our intellectual life, we experience pleasure. Pleasure, then, is the result of a perfect work. For instance, the man who has accumulated treasures of knowledge does not enjoy that knowledge fully by having it habitually in his soul, but only when he puts it into practice, when he works, when he does something with it.

-The fruits of the Holy Spirit are spiritual joys that accompany our works when these have attained a degree of maturity. We might say that each time our soul accomplishes a stage in the spiritual life, we find a divine light. Each level of the spiritual life has its corresponding fruits. The work of the Spirit in us is a work of order because the spiritual life consists in the perfect ordering of our being.

-In the beginning of time, a marvelous order existed. All man's being was in consonance, his lower part marvelously subordinated to his superior part, and the whole completely subjected to God. His nature was a lyre in perfect tune that sang unceasing praise to the divine glory. Then sin appeared and the harmony was broken.

-The work of grace is to re-establish in us, as far as the economy of the redemption demands it, something of the concord of paradise; to subject the inferior part of our soul to the higher part; to order our heart with all its affections, and to place our whole being under the dominion of God.

-Just as all flowers do not open their calyxes (the outside usu. green or leaflike part of a flower) in every season, nor all plants produce their fruits at the same time, so each consolation of the Holy Spirit has its special moment for appearing in our spiritual life.

-But we may be certain that if we are generous, if we are strong, if we follow the paths Christ has marked out for us, if we are docile to the Spirit's inspirations, we shall find all along our road not only thorns that torture us, but flowers that breathe forth sweet aroma, and fruits that are delicious to our spiritual palate.

Solace and Desolation

-Spiritual consolations are not constant in the spiritual life; ordinarily, they are intermittent. There are seasons of joy and seasons of suffering; times of consolation and times of desolation. The reason for these variations is not that God is limited or restricted in his gifts, but that we have need of the sterner experiences.

-If consolations expand our heart, if they fortify and give us courage, desolations, on the other hand, produce precious fruits, fruits that are perhaps even richer and more abundant.

-God has put a divine efficacy into pain. Desolations purify us, elevate us, illuminate us. They prepare our soul for union with God. We see, therefore, that it is His wisdom & goodness which intertwine consolations and desolations in our life; now He bathes us in solace, now He leaves us uncomfortable. Both states are tokens of His divine generosity, proofs of His love, for both are most advantageous to our spiritual progress.

-It is very common in the beginning of our spiritual life, when we turned to God that He should fill us with consolations so as to attract us, to steal our heart away. When we had given our heart to Him completely, then, with inimitable mastery, He begins to draw away His consolations, in order that suffering & pain may come and accomplish their rich and solid work.

-If we had greater serenity of soul, more intense faith, we would receive with equal gratitude from the hand of God delight and anguish. We would comprehend that everything God does to us He does for our good; that sorrow & happiness are both messengers of His eternal love, instrument He uses with ineffable tenderness to accomplish His divine work in our soul.

-Joy is more agreeable to our poor nature than sorrow: only with difficulty do we appreciate the value of sufferings and the knowledge that perfect happiness springs from them. But consolations and desolations alike come from love, to do the work of God within us.

-The nature of the development of our spiritual life logically demands this alternation. We cannot come to a conclusion about the state of our soul from its suffering or its rejoicing. The spiritual novice will say: "When I feel fervor & consolation, everything is very well with me; when I do not, things are wrong. This reasoning is incorrect. Consolation & desolation cannot be taken as a measure of spiritual condition. Both are necessary to health & progress.

-Consolation indicates, certainly, that our soul has taken a step in the spiritual life; but desolation may be a sign that it is even nearer to the summit. In reality, we should neither look for consolation nor refuse. What we must seek, is God, for we should not be after the consolations of God, but the God of consolations. What we must cling to, is His holy will. All other goods are secondary. He will send them to us in His own good time.

On Constancy

-Unmixed good or unmixed evil is only to be found in paradise or in hell. In paradise, happiness, repose, & consolation exist in all their perfection, with no admixture of evil, trouble, or affliction; while in hell, on the contrary, are found utter evil, despair, trouble, & disquietude, without any admixture of good, of hope, tranquility, or peace. But in this present life, good is never to be found without evil following in its train; for example, there is no wealth without anxiety, no repose without labor, no consolation without affliction, no health without sickness.

-In short, good & evil are, in all things here below, mingled & commingled; this life presents a continued variety of diverse accidents. Thus God has willed that the seasons should be diversified, and that summer should be followed by autumn, winter by spring, dry season by rainy season, to teach us that in this world nothing is lasting, and that temporal things are perpetually mutable, inconstant, & subject to change. It has been said that in this life the only thing that doesn't change is change itself.

-Our lack of recognition of this truth is what makes us unstable & changeable in as much as we do not make use of the reason which God has given us, which reason renders us unchanging, firm, & steadfast.

-It is said that the wise man, that is, the man who is guided by reason, will render himself master of the stars. This means that by the use of reason he will remain firm & constant amidst all the various events & accidents of this mortal life.

-Let the weather be fine or let it rain, let the air be calm or let the wind blow, the wise person pays no attention to it, knowing well that nothing in this life is lasting, and that this is not a place of rest.

-In affliction we need not despond but wait for consolation; in sickness we need not torment ourselves but wait for health, or if we see that our pain is such that death must follow, we have to thank God, hoping for the repose of that life immortal, to which this life is but a prelude.

-If tragedy overtakes us we should not distress ourselves, for we know very well that prestige or wealth do not exist in this life without anxiety; if we are despised we know well that honor below has no permanence, but is generally followed by dishonor & contempt.

-In short, in all kinds of events, in prosperity or adversity, we need to remain steadfast & constant in our resolution to aspire and to strive after eternal blessings. In times of prosperity we should not be unmindful of adversity, and in times of adversity we should not be forgetful of prosperity. In the words of St. Paul we can say: "I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in Him who strengthens me."

-It is a very great error to be unwilling to suffer or to feel variations & changes in our feelings, not governing ourselves by reason & refusing to allow ourselves to be governed by it. Feelings are part of us, but we are not our feelings. So, if it happens that there's a conflict between our feelings & reason, then we have to follow our reason. Our feelings have to be guided by our reason. It means that if we feel angry we should not act it out.

-God has given us reason to guide us, but there are times that we allow ourselves to be governed by our passions, which ought to be subject & obedient to reason, according to the order which God requires of us.

-Most people in the world allow themselves to be governed by their passions and not by reason; therefore they are, generally speaking, inconstant, variable, and changeable in their demeanors. They wish people to accommodate themselves to their temperaments but will not accommodate themselves to those of others.

-They allow themselves to be carried away by their inclinations & private affections & emotions, without being on that account considered faulty by the standard of the world; and provided that they do not interfere much with their neighbor's tastes and ways, they are not looked upon as unreasonable or capricious. And why? Simply because this is an ordinary defect among the people of the world. But in Religion, especially here in the monastery where we rub each other's elbow from time to time, we have to strive to guide our passions by our reason. We can present our thoughts and ideas in community gathering but do it humbly & sincerely without quarrelling or arguing, because arguments will only lead to more arguments. It does not convince others and do not lead to peace because it does not change the heart.

-When the human spirit suffers itself to be guided only by its own inclinations & aversions, what follow is perpetual inconstancy & all kinds of faults. Thus if we wish to live happily, and in perfect manner, we need to accustom ourselves to live according to reason & obedience, not according to our own inclinations & aversions. We have to cherish our way of life, at least in our higher will. If we despise it today, it is possible that we will despise it tomorrow or the day after.

-We have to believe that in proportion to the growth of divine love in our souls, will be our increase in careful observance of our way of life.

-In the lives of the Desert Fathers a question was asked: "How is it that the ascetics (monks) of our day do not receive grace after the manner of the ancients, despite their toil? The answer was: Charity was then supreme, and everyone drew his neighbor on high; whereas now charity has become cold, and everyone pulls the neighbor down. This is why we do not deserve the grace of God" [Lives of the Desert Fathers].

-In the visitation card this year Fr. Mark encourages us to look at something that is good in our brothers instead of focusing on their bad habits or characters. St. Therese of the child Jesus was very aware of the weaknesses of her sisters but she always endeavor to see the flicker of goodness of her sisters no matter how little it is. Then she realizes that it was the Devil who presents to her the faults and failings of her sisters.

-This is very true because love covers multitude of sins, as St. Paul would say. If we truly love someone we could hardly see their faults.

-As regards external things there are the Rules & Constitutions to guide us in our way of life and regular in our prayer, our eating, our sleeping, and the same with other exercises, which are always at the same hour, when obedience or the bell summons us.

-In what, then, can we display our caprice & fickleness? It is in the changes of our tempers, wills, & desires. At present we are joyous, because all things are succeeding as we wished; very soon we shall be sad, because a little unexpected contradiction have arisen. But did we not know that this is not the place where pure & unalloyed pleasure is to be found, and this life is full of such troubles?

-If we governed ourselves by reason, would we not see that if it was good to serve God yesterday, it is still very good to serve Him today, and will equally be very good to do so tomorrow? He is always the same God, as worthy to be loved in dryness as in consolation.

-Today we desire one thing & tomorrow another. Now we love someone very much and take delight in his conversation; tomorrow we shall scarcely be able to endure him. And why? Is he not as worthy of being loved today as he was yesterday? If we attended to the dictates of reason, we should see that this person ought to be loved because he is a creature who bears the image of the divine Majesty; and thus we should take as much pleasure in his conversation now as we did formerly.

-All this proceeds from the fact that we allow ourselves to be guided by our inclinations, our passions, or our feelings, thus perverting the order placed in us by God, that all should be subject to reason. For if reason does not dominate all our powers, our faculties, our passions, inclinations, feelings, and indeed all that makes up our being, what will be the result; if not a continual state of vicissitude, inconstancy, changeableness, and inconsistency which will make us sometimes fervent & full of courage, but as often slothful, careless & idle; at one moment joyous, at the next melancholy? We shall be calm for an hour, and then uneasy for two days: in short, our life passes away in idleness & waste of time.

-We need to repeat over & over again to ourselves, so as the better to impress the truth upon our minds, that no inequality of events must ever carry away our hearts & minds into inequalities of temper; for unevenness of temper proceeds from no other source than our passions, inclinations, or unmortified affections.

-We need to strive to be calm in the midst of our annoyance, and ask Our Lord to remove it when it pleases Him.

-In our spiritual life there are two things equally opposed, and yet equally necessary to be brought into harmony, that is, to strive after perfection as the state of our life demands, and yet to have no anxiety at all about our perfection, but to leave it entirely to God. This means that we must take all the care which God wishes us to take about perfecting ourselves, and yet leave the care of arriving at perfection entirely to Him.

-God wishes our care to be calm & peaceful one, which shall make us do whatever is judged to be fitting by those who guide us, and always proceed faithfully along the road marked out for us by the duties of our state of life. We have decided to become a monk, so we have to accept all the challenges that the monastic life demand. We have to do all we can to keep our heart supple, flexible, & accommodating, submissive & ready to yield in all lawful matters, and to show in our undertakings obedience & charity, for blessed are the pliable or flexible of heart, for they shall not break when they are bended.

-And for the rest, we should repose in God's fatherly care, trying as far as possible to keep our soul at peace, for the place of God is in peace and in the peaceful & restful heart.

-When the lake is very calm, and when the winds do not agitate its waters, on a very serene night, the sky with all its stars is so perfectly reflected in it, that looking down into its depths the beauty of the heavens is as clearly visible as if we looked up on high.

-So when our soul is perfectly calm, unstirred, & untroubled by the winds of our superfluous cares, anxieties, unevenness of spirit & inconstancy, it is very capable of reflecting in itself the image of the Lord.

-But when our soul is troubled, tossed & agitated by the tempests of our passions, cares, & anxieties, and when we allow ourselves to be governed by them, and not by that reason which makes us like to God, then we are wholly incapable of reflecting the lovely & beloved image of our crucified Lord, or the variety of His incomparable virtues.

-We therefore must leave the care of ourselves to the mercy of divine Providence and yet at the same time do simply & graciously all that is in our power to amend & perfect ourselves, taking always careful heed not to allow our minds & hearts to be troubled & disquieted.

on Contemplation & Action

Now as they went on their way, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

-Nowadays, when we speak of the 'active life', we think especially of some external activity carried on in the service of our fellowmen, while we tend of the 'contemplative life' in terms of separation from the world and the search for God alone. It can be said that the apostolate is the characteristic mark of the one, and prayer the characteristic mark of the other.

-But John Cassian's terminology does not by any means correspond exactly with these ideas. For him, the 'active life' consists in eliminating vices and acquiring virtues, while the 'contemplative life' has as its object knowledge of the things of God, and especially the hidden meaning of Holy Scripture. It can, therefore, be said that *ascesis* and *exegesis* are the characteristic marks of the two lives, although the term 'exegesis' must be understood not as a scientific discipline in the modern sense, but as the penetration of the mysteries of God by a purified soul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

-According to Cassian, the active life does not consist essentially in external works, but in a work which is accomplished in the soul. The active life is not a matter of tangible activity, as it is for us. It is an effort which we should be more inclined to think of as ascetical. No doubt, this effort will reveal itself in part through works of charity, for charity is the queen of the virtues. But, besides these good works which are aimed at procuring the good of one's neighbor, the active life embraces all sorts of virtuous actions whose sole beneficiary is the person who does them.

-Charity, according to Evagrius and Cassian, is the end of the active life and the doorway to contemplation.

-For Cassian, the active life tends especially to the good of the subject who devotes himself to it. Its object is to pacify the soul in view of contemplation. Even acts of charity towards our neighbor are envisaged as means for extinguishing the vices of avarice or anger, rather than as disinterested acts in the service of one's neighbor.

-The modern point of view, on the contrary, particularly stresses the outward and social aspects. The active life now means principally the external service of others, so much so that the acquisition of the most interior of virtues is often considered simply as a condition for efficiency and influence.

- In such a climate as this, contemplation itself comes to play a social role. For, according to a well-known formula, the interior life is the soul of the entire apostolate, and this can be made to mean that union with God has no better justification than its effectiveness for the building-up of the Church on earth.

-For John Cassian, the active life prepares for the contemplative life. Its purpose is to purify the heart in order to make it capable of seeing God. Any authentic contemplative life presupposes that this purification has been accomplished, and can, therefore, only unfold after success has been achieved in the active life.

-Nowadays, the idea of the contemplative life as following on the active life scarcely makes sense. Even when the superiority of contemplation over action is admitted, people do not see any reason for making contemplation the object of action.

-The story told by Cassian, according to which the first hermits sprang, towards the end of the persecutions, from a cenobitic way of life which went back to the time of the Apostles, is simply the expression, in legendary form, of this relationship between the two kinds of life.

-Any genuine eremitical and contemplative life could only be the flowering of success achieved in the cenobitic life, in the course of which purity of heart had been obtained by diligent application to the works of the active life. Conversely, the cenobitic life is a preparation for the eremitical life.

-Whatever St. Benedict's ideas may have been concerning the relationship between the life of the cenobium and the eremitical life, which Cassian had analysed in more than one way, St. Benedict certainly had a very great esteem for the contemplative spirituality of the hermit, and he urged his own cenobites not only to admire it platonically, or to make their asceticism a preparation for it; he also urged them to put into practice, here and now, some of its most characteristic realities.

-Even if not every cenobite is destined to become a hermit, it still remains true to say that the purpose of the cenobite's asceticism is to establish in us the reign of charity, which is synonymous with apatheia (stillness) and purity of heart, and which finds its fulfillment in solitary contemplation.

-The elimination of thoughts springing from the passions, which is the fruit of the active life, that is, asceticism is not to be regarded as an end in itself. Thus purified, the mind must soar upwards to free itself even from simple thoughts and to strive towards that unity which the contemplation of God demands.

-We cenobite could not achieve the immediate object of our asceticism, which is the acquisition of the virtues, without having recourse to unceasing prayer. Hence unceasing prayer is, at the same time, the privilege of contemplatives and the condition for arriving at the goal of the active life which is purity of heart and ultimately the vision of God.

-Cassian presents the best cenobites as those who have been seized by the so-called 'prayer of fire' made famous by Abbot Isaac. Abbot Isaac stresses that this sublime form of prayer is not reserved to the perfect, but is often granted, by the grace of the Spirit even to sinners.

-St. Benedict often reveals a particular interest in the qualities of prayer. He is strong in providing for private prayer in the oratory, an idea which seems to have been inspired as much by St. Augustine as by Cassian. St. Benedict observes that private prayer can be prolonged, if this

happen to come about through an inspiration of divine grace. He also associates tears and compunction with this personal prayer. In his eyes, they are its inseparable companions.

-Thus we find in RB a very marked interest in private prayer, and in the dispositions which the monk ought to bring to prayer. This is one of the occasions when the Rule gives proof of St. Benedict's constant preoccupation with the good of the individual.

-One of the benefits of the cenobium is that it ensures the complete absence of material cares; and this liberation from cares assures an incomparable calm of spirit, which even surpasses that which is to be found in the desert. Nothing could be more favorable to pure prayer than this.

-Even if the common life of the cenobium has its own values, it does not prevent the cenobite from praying, and praying a great deal, more or less as the hermit does.

-In Cassian's school, the aspiration to pure unceasing prayer never ceases to be the soul of the monastic life, whether solitary or not.

-The end of the chapter on humility fits better into Cassian's first scheme where the contemplative life emerges as the Promised Land towards which the asceticism of the cenobitic life is leading. "Now, therefore, after ascending all these steps of humility, the monk will arrive quickly at that perfect love of God which casts out fear. Through this love, all that he once performed with dread, he will now begin to observe without effort, as though naturally, from habit, no longer out of fear of hell, but out of love of Christ, good habit and delight in virtue. All this the Lord will by the Holy Spirit graciously manifest in his workman now cleansed of vices and sins."

-The Rule of St. Benedict emphasizes certain values which are proper to our cenobitic way of life, as, for example, fraternal relations within the community, or the possession of goods in common as a sign of charity.

-St. Benedict brings out the value of certain irreplaceable benefits of the common life, that is the same as giving the common life a standing of its own, independent of its function as a preparation for the solitary life.

-We have to agree that the Rule of St. Benedict effectively strengthens the ideal of the common life and the links which hold it together. It may, therefore, be legitimate to conclude that RB, like the works of Cassian before it, tends to insert into the cenobitic life itself the lofty spiritual experiences about which the Fathers speak.

-From the standpoint of modern terminology, the Benedictine life seems to us to be purely and simply contemplative. It is directed to nothing else than the monk's encounter with God in separation from the world and forgetfulness of it. No secondary apostolic end or charitable activity is comparable with this single aim.

-The only purpose of work is to occupy us in earning our own living, and to provide the means to meet the ordinary obligations of hospitality and almsgiving. Our *lectio* has no other purpose than to feed our souls and nourish our prayer. In a word, the kind of life organized by St. Benedict presents all the characteristics of what is called the contemplative life.

-Finally, contemplation is not only the reward which lies at the end of the road, it is indispensable, too, during the journey. True, its object is limited and its quality inferior; for it is measured to the needs of a soul that is seeking before all else to avoid sin. But, however modest it may be it emerges as nothing less than a true beginning of the contemplative life.

-Martha and Mary must join together in order to show hospitality to the Lord and have Him always present and host Him badly by failing to give Him something to eat. How would Mary, always seated at His feet, provide Him with food if her sister did not help her? His food is that in every way possible we draw souls that they may be saved and praise him always (St. Teresa of Avila).

-Martha and Mary are very beautifully portrayed in the Gospel as examples of this attitude and manner of behavior. For although Martha was indeed devoting herself to a holy service, ministering as she was to the Lord Himself and to His disciples, while Mary was intent only on spiritual teaching and was clinging to Jesus' feet, which she was kissing and anointing with the ointment of a good confession, yet it was she whom the Lord preferred, because she chose the better part, and one which could not be taken from her.

-You see, then, that the Lord considered the chief good to reside in theoria alone – that is, in divine contemplation. Hence we take the view that the other virtues, although we consider them necessary and useful and good, are to be accounted secondary because they are all practiced for the purpose of obtaining this one thing.

-For when the Lord said: "You are concerned and troubled about many things, but few things are necessary, or even one," He placed the highest good not in carrying out some work, however praiseworthy, but in truly simple and unified contemplation of Him.

-When He says: "Mary has chosen the good part" although He says nothing about Martha and certainly does not seem to reprimand her, nonetheless in praising the former He asserts that the latter occupies a lower position. Again, when He says: "Which shall not be taken from her," He indicates that the latter's position could be taken from her (for a person cannot uninterruptedly practice a ministry in the body), but He teaches that the zeal of the former can surely not come to an end in any age (John Cassian's Conferences, The First conference of Abba Moses).

*** Contrition ***

-St. Gregory of Sinai once said: "Until a man has experience forsakenness and defeat, until he has been wounded and enslaved by every passion and conquered by the thoughts of his mind, so that he can find help neither in his own powers nor in God, nor in anything else, and is driven to the brink of despair with no avenue of escape: until then no man can have true contrition, nor can he realize that he himself is the least of slaves, more evil than the very fiends that have beset him and conquered him."

-Thus when we discovered and confessed the humbling truth that we are a fallen, disfigured image of God, voluntarily enslaved to sin, subject to suffering, and condemned to eternal death we grow in self-knowledge which leads to contrition of heart. Bitter though it may be, however, this knowledge of ourselves as a disfigured image is truly salutary for it moves us to turn to God and to seek His healing. We know that we are an image disfigured by our sin, and this is the source of our humility, but we likewise see that we remain an image of God, and this grounds our hope that our Creator may still will to restore us in the likeness of the Incarnate Word, as St. Bernard says: "Pierced by the thorns of his misery, will he not be converted in his sorrow? Let him be converted, I say, to tears, converted to contrition and sighs, and cry out in his humility, 'Cleanse my soul, for I have sinned against you' (Ps 40:5)."

-Moreover, when the monk humbled by true self-knowledge approaches God in contrition and seeks His healing, his self-knowledge will lead to the true knowledge of God, as he finds in God "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor 1:3).

-When at our conversion we are compelled to face the bitter truth of our being a disfigured image of God, we will sow the seeds of righteousness by humbling ourselves to embrace the monastic disciplines of contrition, penance, good works, and ceaseless prayer. Though we sow these seeds in sorrow in this life, we will reap their fruits in joy in the next as we carry home the precious sheaves of our forgiveness, sanctification, and eternal life with God. In the beatific vision of the Word as he is, the bitter knowledge of ourselves at conversion will give way to the joyous knowledge of the God who has willed to redeem us, sanctify us, and offer us a share in His own divine life of knowledge and love. For St. Bernard, the Psalmist foretells this vision when he writes, "They wept as they went forth, sowing their seeds, but they will return with exaltation, carrying their sheaves" (Ps 125:6-7).

-Contrition in the heart, confession on the lips, complete humility in all one does, this is the fruit of penitence.

-“A man who wants to strip himself of what is bad,” says the monks Callistus and Ignatius of the Fathers of the Philokalia, “let him do so through tears, and he who want to acquire virtues let him acquire them through weeping. If you have no contrition, know that you are possessed by vanity, for it prevents the soul from being contrite.”

-In addition, St. Peter Damian pointed out that “any sacrifice of good works is pleasing in the eyes of the heavenly Judge if it is sprinkled with the tears of a contrite heart.”

-No virtue is perfect without effort, nor is it possible for anyone to mount to the stability of the mind that he desires without great contrition of heart.

-The clearest indication of true contrition is to refrain in future from falling into grave sins, and actively to seek at all times to correct and decrease our lightest faults.

On Conversion Of Manners

-In the textual history of the Rule of St. Benedict there has been a certain play on words between *conversatio* (way of life) and *conversion* (conversion). The latter word is used in the *Rule of the Master*, upon which the RB is based, whereas *conversatio* is more prevalent in the RB. Until recently the phrase, *conversation morum*, which St. Benedict uses to describe the content of the young monk's solemn profession (RB 58: 17), was understood as "conversion of manners" or "conversion of life" taken in its more personal and subjective aspect – one's moral conduct.

-A better appreciation of the general context in which St. Benedict wrote his Rule indicates that the phrase should be taken in a more objective sense: "Conversatio morum" is the way of life which corresponds to the monastic calling. It is a dynamic in which both personal conversion and community observances play their part.

-What, then does this vow mean? What are the obligations it implies for us? And how do we enter into its spirit? When the monk pronounces this vow, he promises to "live monastically." He embraces the whole life of prayer and asceticism which is at the heart of the monastic vocation. The monk is a convert from the worldly way of life and he embraces a new life – the monastic life. This new manner of living, in its turn, will bring him to the interior conversion of heart which is the whole purpose of the external way of life. Thus the first conversion leads to a way of life which can carry the monk to the inner core of his being.

-The monastic life, immediate object of the vow of conversion of life, does not mean only the interior, spiritual life of each monk, but also, and more directly, the external life of monastic discipline. Better still, *it is the life of monastic discipline in its true spiritual dimension*: the observances of one's own community taken and used by the monk as a precious instrument to encounter God and to grow in the image of Christ. It is the life of service to which St. Benedict refers when he says, "We must establish a school of the Lord's service" (Prol. 45). It is the service described by the 2nd Vat. Council: "The main task of monks is to render to the Divine Majesty a service at once simple and noble, within the monastic confines" (PC 9).

-Dom P. Schmitz (quoted by Dom Augustine Roberts) stresses the ascetical aspect of this service when he says: "The monastic life for St. Benedict and Cassian consists in a life of constant struggle against the habits of the world, the vices, the passions and everything that can draw us away from God, and a life of continual effort to acquire virtues. It is the active part of the spiritual life, that which Cassian calls the "active life" (cf. Conf. 14).

-We can say that conversion of life is, in the first place, the monastic life in its active aspect of struggle against vice and growth in virtue. It is the "spiritual combat" absolutely necessary to make a monk. It is to be a "soldier of Christ," to belong actively and dynamically to a community in which "nothing is to be preferred to the love of Christ" (RB 4: 21).

-This spiritual combat is described in many sayings of the Desert Fathers when they reply to the question of a disciple, "What should I do to be saved?" For example: *A certain brother came to Abba Poemen and said: what ought I to do Father? I am in great sadness. The elder said to him: Never despise anybody, never condemn anybody, never speak evil of any one, and the Lord will give you peace.*

Abba Pambo questioned Abba Anthony saying: What ought I to do? And the elder replied: Have no confidence in your own virtuousness. Do not worry about a thing once it has been done. Control your tongue and your belly.

An elder said: Here is the monk's life-work – obedience, meditation, not judging others, not reviling, not complaining. For it is written: You who love the Lord, hate evil. So this is the monk's life-work – not to walk in agreement with an unjust man, nor to look with eyes upon evil, not to go about being curious, and neither to examine nor to listen to the business of others. Not to take anything with his hands, but rather to give to others. Not to be proud, nor malign others in his thoughts. Not to fill his stomach, but in all things to behave with discretion. Behold, in all this you have the monk.

-From such sayings of the Desert Fathers, what characterizes the life of a monk is a dynamism of renunciation that leads to the experience of ultimate reality. There is a complete conversion of life – external life style, moral life, affective life, intellectual life. For the Christian monk, the beginning and the end of this dynamism is the person of Jesus Christ.

-John Cassian describes three aspects or stages of the monk's life of renunciation. These three dimensions of monastic conversion are present from the beginning, but are expressed progressively with variable intensities. 1st, the external renunciations: solitude & stability, celibacy, poverty, manual labor, fasts, non-violence, recitation of the psalms. 2nd, and above all, the internal renunciations. Here is the conversion of the heart and interior purity, the virtues and attitudes which corresponds to the external observances: humility, gentleness, fraternal love and patience, obedience, discretion, interior discipline, etc. This is the true "active life" – an asceticism oriented toward the acquisition of inner Christian virtues and of their Queen which is charity. It is an asceticism of humility because God gives His grace to the humble. 3rd, the contemplative renunciations: the secret annihilation of the imagination of the soul itself in order that the contemplation of God and the mysteries of Christ may blossom forth from a connaturality with Him and with His kingdom in us, until this kingdom comes to complete fulfillment in heaven.

-For Cassian, the renouncements of body and heart are mutually necessary. There can be no achieving interior purity without an asceticism composed of concrete and precise acts, and no ascetical observance without the inner virtue which governs it. This interplay of observances and inner attitudes forms an environment where continual prayer springs naturally from purified hearts.

-Prayer, then, and the contemplative dimension of monastic life in general are included in the vow of conversion. In fact they are vital to it. The monastic experience consists precisely in the journey of the monk from the first renunciations to the lasts. It is the passage from the self-love of fallen humanity to the complete victory of the love of Christ.

-The concept of the monastic life as a dynamic movement focused on Christ through a life of conversion and renunciation dominates the entire Rule of St. Benedict, especially the Prologue: *Return by the labor of obedience to Him from whom you have departed by the sloth of disobedience...renouncing your own will...in order to fight for the true King, Christ the Lord....Let us follow His paths, taking for guide the Gospel, in order that we may merit to see in His kingdom Him who has called us. If we desire to abide in the dwelling of His kingdom, we shall not arrive at it except by running with good works...Therefore, our hearts and our bodies must be prepared to fight under holy obedience to His precepts...and as we progress in our monastic life (conversatio)*

and in faith, our hearts will be enlarged, and we shall run with unspeakable sweetness of love in the way of the commandments of God. Thus we shall share by patience in sufferings of Christ and, likewise, deserve to accompany Him in His kingdom (vv. 2-3, 21-22, 40, 49-50).

-The same approach is evident in RB 7 [Rule of St. Benedict]:

Let him hold fast to patience silently in his inner heart when he meets with difficulties and contradictions and any kind of injustice, enduring all without growing weary or running away. For the Scripture says, "He who perseveres to the end shall be saved"...and secure in the hope of divine recompense, they continue joyfully and say, "But in all these tribulations we triumph through Him who loves us...." Having climbed all these degrees of humility, the monk will soon arrive at that love of God which, being perfect, excludes all fear. By it, all that which before he observed not without misgivings, he will begin to keep without any labor, as it were naturally and by habit. No longer for fear of hell, but for love of Christ and connaturally, for the delight of virtue. All this the Lord will manifest by the Holy Spirit in His workman now purified from vice and sin (vv. 35, 39, 67-70).

-Also in Epilogue: *Whoever you may be who hasten on toward the heavenly homeland, practice with the aid of Christ this little rule of initiation that we have sketched, and then, finally, you will arrive with the protection of God at the loftier heights of doctrine and virtue that we have described (73: 8-9).*

-For the third renunciation, see RB 7 and 20: *The monk judging himself guilty at all times because of his sins, should believe himself at the dread judgment, and say continually in his heart what the publican of the Gospel said with his eyes fixed on the ground, "Lord, I am a sinner and not worthy to lift up my eyes to heaven...." How much the more, then, are complete humility and pure devotion necessary in supplication of the Lord who is God of the universe! And let us be assured that it is not in saying a great deal we shall be heard, but in purity of heart and in tears of compunction (7: 64-66; 20: 2-3).*

-To sum up, the vow of conversion of life according to the Rule of St. Benedict signifies the personal giving of oneself to the daily struggle to correct our own negligence and grow in Christian virtue. It means to tend constantly to the perfection of humility in the monastic life and to the full implantation of the kingdom of God in body and soul. It implies perseverance in this life unto the end, because love remains unsatisfied until it fully possesses the beloved.

-Conversion of manner according to the mind of St. Benedict is simply a formal commitment to live until death as a fervent monk. By our vow of conversion we are always persons in formation.

-St. Bernard, for his part, gives a beautiful summary of the matter of the vow of conversion as the first Cistercians saw it:

Our way of life is rejection by men. It is humility, voluntary poverty, obedience, peace, & joy in the Holy Spirit. Our way of life is subjection to a teacher, to an abbot, to a rule, to discipline. Our way of life is to apply oneself to silence, to practice fasting, vigils, prayer, manual work, and above all to hold on to the more excellent way which is charity, advancing in all these observances from day to day and persevering in them until the last day (Letter 142).

-This is conversion of life!

Commitments of Conversion

-When we embrace the monastic life, we take on the “spiritual combat” as the essential commitment of the monk. In the first place, we promise to *tend toward the perfection of the love of Christ through self-renouncement*. The vow of conversion of life makes explicit the principal duty of every person dedicated to God, as pointed out by the 2nd Vat. Council:

All the faithful, of whatever state of manner of life, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity (LG 40). Let religious be especially solicitous in that, through them, the Church really shows the face of Christ better each day to the faithful and to non-believers (LG 46).

-This basic obligation to tend to perfection is repeatedly underlined in books that treat of the religious state. They can be read with profit in connection with our vow of conversion.

-In particular, we promise *fidelity in the use of well-defined ascetical means*:

- *poverty and chastity*
- *the basic observances of our Order*
- *the inner attitudes or virtues which are the soul, the spirit, and the only real fulfillment of the observances*

-The evangelical counsels of *poverty and chastity* are thus included in this vow. What is said in works of the religious vows of poverty and chastity ought to be applied to our vow of conversion of life.

-The *basic observances* of the Order, lived in the place where we made the vow, constitute the principal matter of conversion of life. This is important. The novice who is preparing to make this vow learns how the life lived in his own monastery constitutes a withdrawal from the world for the sake of union with God. After experiencing it for a while, he decides to embrace the life as it is lived in this community. But doing so, he promises to live the monastic life not in some *ideal* form (which never exists), but according to the concrete observances of the community he has made his vow.

-In all monasteries there are deficiencies and imperfections. When we come face to face with these weaknesses, our vow of conversion of life does not ask us to reform the monastery or to criticize the faults that are there, but requires that we ourselves be good monks and contribute our efforts to maintain the fervor and observance of the house.

Basic Observances

-Among the observances and customs we practice in the monastery, some are essential and pertain directly to the matter of the vow of conversion of life. Others are accidental and changeable, for example, the ceremonies during the divine office, vocal prayers, clothing, haircuts, etc. And many others are not strictly monastic observances because they already oblige all Christians, for example, fraternal charity, mutual service, the sacraments, a minimum of prayer, & respect for superiors.

-We can say that the particular concrete means that are inseparable from the monastic state and, therefore, form the matter of the vow of conversion of life are five:

- withdrawal from society (enclosure and silence)
- life of prayer (lectio and liturgy)

- austerity of life (fasts, vigils, etc.)
- common life (for cenobites)
- monastic work (especially emphasized by St. Benedict & the Cistercians. We are only monks when we live by the labor of our hands)

-In order to understand the obligations implied in these five means of loving God, it is necessary to repeat that the vow of conversion of life is neither just a general promise to "tend to perfection," nor a vow to observe customs and ceremonies. It is a commitment to embrace and to live in depth *those corporal and spiritual disciplines without which the life would not be truly monastic.*

-These disciplines are the elements that the Vatican II referred to as essential to the organized contemplative life:

The institutes that are integrally ordered to contemplation, so that their members, in solitude and silence, in assiduous prayer and fervent penance, are free for the exclusive search for God, maintain always an eminent place in the Mystical Body of Christ (PC 7).

-The observances which in other places the Council has called "the essential elements of the monastic institution" (AG 18) and "those exercise proper to the contemplative life" (PC 7), are described here in detail:

- ❖ withdrawal from society ("in solitude and silence")
- ❖ life of prayer ("in assiduous prayer...free for the exclusive search for God")
- ❖ austerity of life ("fervent penance")

-To these three characteristics of the monastic-contemplative life we add two, more common to other religious institutes, but especially singled out by the Benedictine-Cistercian tradition: common life and monastic work.

-Who, then, imposes on us the obligation to keep these observances? No one. This is very important. We freely choose the obligation on embracing the monastic state. Therefore, even during the novitiate these basic disciplines are obligatory as duties of our state of life.

Withdrawal From Society

-Solitude and silence separate us from society. It is because of them that such withdrawal becomes essential to the contemplative state. Their importance results from two factors: one, *personal and psychological*, the other, *social and ecclesial*.

-Psychologically, solitude and silence are necessary for a life of prayer. They make us sensitive to the voice of the Spirit who speaks not in the strong wind, nor in the earthquake, but in a "tiny whispering sound" (1 Kings 19:12). The instruction "Venite Seorsum" emphasizes this personal element, quoting a letter from St. Bruno, founder of the Carthusians:

In silence and solitude men are able to recollect themselves and, so to speak, to dwell within themselves as much as they please, cultivating the buds of virtue and feeding happily on the fruits of paradise. Here one strives to acquire that eye by whose limpid glance the bridegroom is wounded with love, and in whose purity alone may God be seen. Here one is occupied in busy leisure, and rests in quiet activity. Here, as a recompense for the fatigue suffered in strife, God grants His athletes the reward they have longed for, namely a peace unknown to the world and

the joy of the Holy Spirit. This is the better part that Mary chose, that shall not be taken away from her (VS II).

-Christ in the desert consecrated this life of solitude and silence. After Him, its richest fruit is the person himself who has embraced such a life. The crucible of the desert experience, with its dryness and lack of human support, becomes a mother's womb in which the monk is made anew, thanks to the spiritual stamina and interiority which it stimulates. Through this interiority, the monk's solitude becomes a special form of presence in the world, putting him in a *new relation* to the entire universe.

-It is true that solitude and silence reduce the possibilities of expression, but they do this only in order to open up new avenues of life, as is seen in this saying of St. Anthony of the Desert: "The monk living in the desert is saved from three battles: those with his eyes, his tongue, and his hearing. One battle remains – the combat of the heart."

-In the detachment of solitude and silence, false friends disappear. The monk's heart comes to the surface with its inner division and unexplored regions. Little by little, inner harmony is restored with its necessary conditions and demands. The inner fruit of withdrawal from society is peace which the world cannot give, the restoration of the image of God.

-The other function of solitude and silence is *social and ecclesial*, as a witness to the eschatological orientation of the mystery of Christ which Our Lord Jesus Himself tried to explain to His disciples: "I came from the Father and came into the world. Now I am leaving the world to go to the Father."

Norms of Enclosure

-St. Benedict affirms that "to wander outside is in no way useful for the souls of monks" (RB 66 and 67), and almost all monastic reform movements have insisted on the importance of a return to the spirituality of the desert. The desert solitude is made concrete for us in a geographic separation from cities and towns and in the norms of enclosure.

-We are all responsible for the observance of our enclosure. Permissions to leave ought to be for true necessity. Our trips, visits of families and friends, communication by letter or telephone are governed by the limits imposed by the contemplative life.

-Habitual negligence of enclosure or silence would go against the vow of conversion of life. In the case of a brother who has more or less standing permission to leave the monastery or to speak, but frequently abuses his function in the community or the confidence of his superior by going out when it is not necessary, battling the breeze, habitually giving himself over to worldly diversions (movies, secular magazines, smoking, etc.), it would be an infidelity against his vow of conversion and perhaps a sin of scandal.

-Some isolated acts would also be morally dangerous, such as sending a letter, calling by phone or leaving the enclosure against the known will of the superior. These would be not only against the vow of obedience but also contrary to conversion of life. A similar situation is involved in a deliberate conversation against the norm of silence merely to satisfy a personal desire for communication. Much, of course, depends on the motivation behinds such acts.

Life of Prayer

-This is the second essential service of the contemplative life and, under charity, is the end of all the other particular means of the monastic state. Its importance is seen in this paragraph from the Conciliar decree directed to all religious. With even more reason, then, it concerns us as monks:

Drawing on the authentic sources of Christian spirituality, let the members of communities energetically cultivate the spirit of prayer and the practice of it. In the first place they should take the sacred Scriptures in hand each day by way of attaining "the excellence knowledge of Jesus Christ" through reading these divine writings and meditating on them. They should enact the sacred liturgy, especially the most holy mystery of the Eucharist, with hearts and voices attuned to the Church; here is the most copious source of nourishment for the spiritual life (PC 6).

-At the same time, its difficulty appears in this witness from the desert:

They asked Abba Agathon, "Father, what is the most difficult virtue in the monastic life?" He replied, "Excuse me, I believe that there is no work more difficult than to pray to God. As soon as a man begins to pray, the demons come to distract him, since they know that no other work puts such obstacle to their action as prayer does. Whatever other work you undertake, provided you persevere in it, will have its rest, but prayer demands a struggle unto the last breath."

Lectio Divina

-Lectio Divina goes beyond and underneath merely human information, or books and articles which are purely technical, theological, or pastoral in nature. It does, however, make use of such studies when necessary. The difference between lectio and study lies more in the attitude of the monk than in the reading material itself.

-In their encounter with the Word of God, the monastic Father developed a whole method of prayer based on sacred reading. This method is expressed in the formula *Lectio, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio*, which means that from his reading, assimilated by the active reflection of his reason, imagination, and other faculties, the monk passes to a more direct, more personal and intimate conversation with God, with the Lord Jesus, Mary, or the Saints. This more personal prayer is the spontaneous expression of our feelings and desires. The human heart opens up to the Lord in thanksgiving, compunction, petitions, and adoration. Many other methods of prayer, such as the "Jesus prayer," are simply expressions or applications of this basic rhythm.

-According to this underlying rhythm, contemplation is generally brief and passing experience of the intimate presence of God as He unifies one's whole being, thoughts, and desires in Himself in a central point of the heart which remains unknown, yet experienced. In its light, Scripture and the themes of Salvation History take on new meaning.

-Basic to these different forms of prayer is the need to love God, the desire to know the Lord Jesus, to be with Him, to "see the face of the Lord," to commune with His reality by approaching Him as we really are. A person who embraces the religious life without a need for some kind of such intimacy with God in prayer is making a great mistake.

-Since this is so, habitual and continued neglect of lectio divina constitutes an infidelity against the vow of conversion of life. Although there be a question in such cases of a personal crisis in

faith, the root cause may spring from a lack of love. In any case, disdain and contempt for all prayer life outside of some purely exterior formalities can constitute a serious sin against the vow. -In practice, such contempt is rarely found in the monastery. Before arriving at such point, the monk usually leaves his vocation.

Austerity of Life

-This is the third observance of the contemplative life enumerated by the Council in "Perfectae Caritatis." We ought always to place before our eyes the example of Our Lord Jesus in order to enter into the true spirit and practice of our austerities. Penance is meant to be a *sharing in the sufferings of Christ*: in His fasting, His nights of prayer, His work, His fatigue & humiliations.

-By austerities our will is strengthened, the body is subjected to the soul and the moral virtues are rooted in our whole being. God uses our austerities in order that our human personality, wounded by concupiscence, be reestablished in the image of Christ and give itself to His service and contemplation with full interior liberty.

-In a more particular way, *abstention from food and night prayer* for the sake of increased attention to God are significant parts of monastic asceticism. Thus we can open ourselves in humility of body and soul to the world to come, where all needs will be satisfied and all darkness banished.

-Physically speaking, Benedictine or even Cistercian life is no longer excessively austere and persons of generally good health can follow the common rule. So much the more, then, should we be careful not to exempt ourselves from the fast and common austerities, e.g., vigils, monastic work, routine chores, simplicity in meals and clothing. The vow of conversion of life demands reserve in requesting legitimate exemptions. The safest way is to accept the exemptions imposed or prescribed and not to seek them.

-The following would normally go against the vow of conversion:

- ✚ excessive eating, especially between meals.
- ✚ Not observing the fast of the community or seldom getting up for vigils, even with permission, if there is no reason or need for the evasion. The normal monk can eat less once in a while and rise early. He needs to do so to strengthen his response to grace and to avoid more serious weaknesses.
- ✚ Likewise, a habitual seeking for pleasures, comforts, and permission far beyond the norms of the community.

-In practice, the obligations of austerity of life are fulfilled by accepting the ordinary penances with an enthusiasm born of faith. These penances are usually just the elements or disciplines that form an integral part of the Rule and the life of the community: the form of work by which we support ourselves, the horarium, the spiritual and atmospheric climate of the monastery, the diet, etc.

Common Life

-This fourth basic observance of monastic life is the primordial expression of the evangelical poverty which we promise. The common life was strongly stressed by monastic legislators prior to

St. Benedict, such as St. Pachomius and St. Basil (4th century) and St. Augustine (5th century). It is a central element in the Benedictine-Cistercian tradition.

-At the same time, it is a continual and eloquent testimony to the presence of Christ in the midst of His people" "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20). The common life constitutes, in the same way as consecrated virginity, a living and provocative sign of what the life of every Christian will be after the last coming of Christ. The Council proclaims this in strong terms:

As the first-born of many brethren, and through the gift of His Spirit, the Word Incarnate founded, after His death and resurrection, a new brotherly community composed of all those who received Him in faith and in love. This He did through His Body, which is the Church. There everyone, as members one of the other, would render mutual service according to the different gifts bestowed on each. The solidarity must be constantly increased until that day on which it will be brought to perfection. Then, saved by grace, men will offer flawless glory to God as a family beloved of God and of Christ their Brother (GS 32).

-Seen in this light, a monastic community is not simply a more or less happy gathering of a group of nice people. It is the *concrete expression, here and now, of the great mystery of reconciliation and unity of all mankind under the leadership of Christ.*

-The positive obligation of the common life is *regularity* and *punctuality*. This is very important, especially in the novitiate when the young monk form habits which will influence the rest of their life. What God looks for from us is not mere exterior conformity, but the active love which expresses itself in unity ourselves with the community as much as possible. It means witnessing to the *presence of Christ* in community exercises, fulfilling even the details of our obligations, and applying ourselves generously to the work at hand in order to support the community.

A habitual negligence in the common exercises, accompanied by disdain, pride, or laziness would go against the vow of conversion of life.

-The rule itself indicates that the abbot can *dispense* a monk from some obligations of the common life when there is sufficient reason, i.e., health, age, work or another serious motive. Nevertheless, we should guard ourselves against abuses that can weaken the common life and the spirit of conversion.

-A spirit which seeks *privileges, special permission and escapes* is the greatest enemy of the common life. We fail in this regard when we pile up (with or without permission) useless or superfluous things in private corner. Christ is our only good. Only God can satisfy us.

-As the monk grows in the spirit of conversion of life, he restricts his necessities. He learns to live with less. He seeks opportunities to sacrifice himself, especially when such sacrifice can benefit others.

-A tendency to *avoid other* would also be against common life. This includes fleeing from the presence of individuals or from the community in general, cultivating exclusive friendship, or not participating in community meetings without sufficient reason. Common life is the opposite of a rigid life, but what has to be avoided is an antisocial tendency.

Infidelities Against the Vow (Apostasy and flight)

-By the vow of conversion, we promise to lead a converted life in the monastery. Thus the most direct infidelity against the vow would be to abandon the monastic state and the search for Christian perfection without a valid reason in order to return to secular society and the custom of the world.

-The general norms of the Church refer to this abandonment of religious life as "apostasy" and "flight." When the act is consummated illegitimately and without permission, the apostate or fugitive is not free of the obligations which he assumed at the time of his religious profession. For his own peace of conscience and his personal integrity, he should return without delay to his community, or at least reestablish contact with the superiors.

-Serious infidelities against the vow of Conversion of life:

- A serious violation of poverty or chastity.
- Illegitimate abandonment of the monastic life, permanently by apostasy or temporarily by flight.
- To leave the monastery without permission when one thus exposes himself to an occasion of grave sin or of giving scandal. There is also a question here of the vow of obedience.
- When a monk shows complete disdain for all the corporal observances and spiritual disciplines of his life, without in any way using the essential means of perfection which the monastery provides.
- When the monk refuses to use any remedy whatsoever against a moral vice, or when he does absolutely nothing to avoid the loss of his vocation. There is involved here an existential rejection of growth in the kingdom of God.

-Less Serious infidelities against the vow of Conversion of life

- Lack of regularity, a voluntary tepidity in the spiritual life, laziness at work, etc. Much depends on the degree of disdain for the basic observances of the monastic life.
- Habitual attachments to the pleasures and affairs of the world which are opposed to the monastic life. These are probably the most common infidelities, though they depend in great part on the person and on circumstances such as the culture of the country in which we live, age, or health.
- Negligence or carelessness in the observance of less important monastic customs does not necessarily constitute a sin. It could be a voluntary or involuntary imperfection. The vow of conversion of life embraces only the *essential observances*, without which the life would not truly be monastic and, for us, Benedictine or Cistercian. The details of observances are opportunities to love rather than occasions to sin. In this spirit, in order to live the full meaning of conversion of life, to grow in the intensity of love of God, and to avoid greater faults, we should be regular and faithful even in these lesser responsibilities.

Principal Factor in the Monastic Life

-Thanks to our vow of conversion of life, the main purpose, in fact the *only* purpose of our state of life is made explicit – to enter into the kingdom of Christ and to let His kingdom enter into us. The other vows thus appear in their true light. They find their true meaning as particular applications of the vow of conversion of life:

- We rid ourselves of the spirit of the world by renouncing a worldly manner of life-not to live as seculars
- We put on Christ by interiorizing a new manner of life.
- Turning of the monk into another man that he may be able to say: "I live not I but Christ lives in me."

-We have already noted that many elements of monastic asceticism correspond to distinct aspects of the human life, passion, and resurrection of Christ. In fact *all* the monk's spiritual combat has a strong paschal and baptismal character.

Hence to withdraw into the desert is for the Christian tantamount to associating himself more intimately with Christ's passion. It enables him, in a very special way, to share in the paschal mystery and in the passage of Our Lord from this world to the heavenly homeland. It was precisely on this account that monasteries were founded, situated as they are in the very heart of the mystery of Christ (VS I).

-Monastic profession is often described as a second baptism but beyond the act of profession itself, all the life of the vows is marked with the sign of the paschal mystery, the passage of Christ to His Father. We receive this mark interiorly with baptism. By religious profession the monk "is more intimately consecrated to divine service in order to derive more abundant fruit from this baptismal grace" (LG 44).

-The vow of conversion of life underlines this paschal spirit. "To fight for the true king, Christ the Lord" (RB Prol.) involves a continual passage from this world to the Father. It is a clearing of the way for the Spirit of the risen Christ. The monastic observances constitute, even externally, a dying with Christ to the works of the world and a rising with Him to a new life in His kingdom.

-The spirit of conversion is simply to bring to fulfillment, in a monastic context, the promise of baptism that we renew every year during the Paschal Vigil: "We renounce the Devil and his works, and we promise to serve the Lord faithfully in the holy Catholic Church.

Leaving the World

-In order to pass to the Father it is necessary to leave the world. We have seen that conversion of life includes withdrawal from society as a fundamental element. Now, this physical movement toward the fringe of society is no more than a means and a sign of a deeper and more enduring separation – "to make oneself a stranger to the conduct of the world," as St. Benedict says (RB 4: 20).

-What is this conduct of the world? Obviously it does not mean the professions and tasks of the world, such as those of carpenter, factory worker, doctor, or student. Much less does it signify *the world of men* in its positive Christian reality as *"the whole human family along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which that family lives; the world which is the theater of man's history and carries the marks of his energies, his tragedies, and his triumphs; that world which the Christian sees as created and sustained by its Maker's love, fallen indeed into the bondage of sin, yet emancipated now by Christ, who was crucified and rose again to break the stronghold of the Devil, so that this world might be fashioned anew according to God's design and reach its fulfillment (GS 2).*

-With this world, in fact, the monk becomes more and more deeply united by means of his special contemplative insertion into it!

-The world from which the monk wishes to separate himself signifies rather a mode of activity which does not come from the kingdom of heaven. It is the search for a security in this world, the hunger for human praise, the selfish use of people, the desire to have more than is necessary, the manipulation of others for one's own advantage, the drive to seek success with the least possible effort, to avail oneself of deceit and privileges, fleeing from difficult situations, escaping responsibilities, seeking to dominate others, driving a good bargain, enjoying oneself. Such is the wisdom of this world" (1Cor. 3: 19)) which can be active, as we know, within the monastic enclosure and within ourselves.

-We grow in the spirit of our withdrawal from society by handing over to God all our energy and abilities, by bringing to completion our conversion of heart, submitting all our being, our interests, and our desires to the will of Christ, so that they may be purified and transformed by His Spirit.

-This is really just the spirituality of the *beatitudes*, which are the primary expressions of the new law of love, so opposed to the ideals of this world – poverty, meekness, suffering, justice, purity, etc. These values and inner attitudes are precisely the distinctive signs of the religious vocation: "Religious, by their state in life, give splendid and striking testimony that the world cannot be transfigure and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes" (LG 31).

Purity of Heart

-“Going to the Father” and “leaving the world” imply “leaving things.” If the monk leaves the things of the world it is not because they are bad, but because they impede him in his paschal journey with Christ to the kingdom of heaven. They are good, but for the moment he cannot use them because his heart, his love, *is not pure*. When we are full of self-love, creatures contribute to our ruin. But when we are purified by grace, then creatures help us to love God: “Blest are the single-hearted for they shall see God” (Mt. 5: 8). The difficulty is not in things but in us.

-So what matters most in the vow of conversion of life is purity of heart – the *renouncement of oneself*. We can renounce everything in the world and follow the monastic observances with exactitude, but will profit us nothing without the renouncement of ourselves. In fact, the observances will do us much harm, rooting in us the most dangerous form of pride.

-The practical conclusion is obvious – the importance of *humility*. If the body of conversion of life consists in the essential monastic observances: solitude, silence, lectio divina, austerity of life, common life, work, and the like – its soul is found in Christian humility. The body is necessary, but without the soul it is of little value, even dead.

-The spirit of monastic life, this spirit of humility and love, *is the Spirit Himself of Christ, the Holy Spirit, working in the heart of the monk*, leading him to the desert, purifying him, and raising him to the Father.

-The monastic spirit, then, is nothing other than the special mode of action of the Spirit of Christ in the person who gives himself fully to the observances of our life. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit will express Himself in the life of the monk by a free and serene *fidelity* to these observances. And

above all by love for the brethren: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love remains in death" (1Jn. 3:14).

Transformation in Christ

-In the last analysis, the vow of conversion has a transforming character. An inner spiritual transformation is implied in its relation to the paschal mystery and its orientation to purity of heart.

-St. Paul sums up what this process of conversion consists in: "Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may judge what is God's will" (Rom. 12:2).

-We separate ourselves physically from the world, we follow Christ into the desert, we embrace the monastic observances and the life of prayer, we give ourselves permanently to a common life of poverty and fraternal love only to make ourselves more like Christ, to have His thoughts, His desires, His aspirations and sentiments.

-This living in Christ and Christ in the monk is the definitive "manner of life" (*conversatio*) implied by our vow. All this dynamism of conversion and new life is what we embrace on the day of profession. It is an ascetic life, but above all it is a life of transformation in Christ.

-It is a journey, and the principal factor of any journey is its destination. Our goal is "to see in His kingdom Him who called us" (Prol., 21), which implies transformation: "All of us, with faces uncovered, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed in His image" (2 Cor. 3:18).

-The spirit of our vow of conversion of life is *to desire and to aspire to a mystical transformation in Christ*, not in order to be better than any other people nor to believe ourselves superior to others by our grade of sanctity, but simply because Christ died and rose again precisely for this. This is why we were baptized: "Through baptism into is death we were buried with him, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life" (Rom. 6:4). "This life I live now is not my own: Christ is living in me. I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20).

On Conversion

-What does the soul feel like when it begins to encounter the grace of God? First, the soul feels itself in crisis. On the one hand, there is a profound sense of one's own helplessness and, on the other hand, an equally certain conviction that God alone can supply what the individual lacks.

-If there were only a sense of helplessness, there would be despair, pessimism, and eventual suicide. This is, indeed, the condition of the post-Christian pagan: He or she feels the total inadequacy of his or her own inner resources against the overwhelming odds of a cruel universe and thus falls into despair.

-Such a person has one-half the necessary condition for conversion – namely, a sense crisis – but he fails to link up his powerlessness with divine power Who has sustains and nourishes the soul. But when this is done, paganism vanishes and gives place to what might be called creative despair: “despair,” because one realizes one's own spiritual disease; “creative,” because one knows that only a divine physician outside oneself can bring healing to one's wings.

-This despair does not usually arise from a sense of one's stupidity or ignorance or mistakes, but because of one's inadequacy, one's sense of dependence, or even one's admission of guilt.

-Second, the soul becomes the battlefield of a civil war during a conversion. It is not enough that there be a conflict between consciousness and unconsciousness or self and environment, for such tensions can be simply psychological.

-The tension or conflict is never very acute when the dueling forces are contained within the mind itself; conversion is autosuggestion, but a flash of lightning from without. There is a great tension only when the self is confronted with the non-self, when the within is challenged by the without, when the helpless of the ego is confronted with the adequacy of the divine.

-Not until the tug-of-war begins, with the soul on one end of the rope and God on the other, does true duality appear as the condition of conversion. There must be in the soul the conviction that one is in the grip of and swayed by a higher control than one's own will; that, opposing the ego, there is a Presence before Whom one feels happy in doing good and before Whom one shrinks away for having done evil.

-It is relatively unimportant whether the crisis, which results in a feeling of duality, is sudden or gradual. What matters is the struggle between the soul and God, with the all-powerful God never destroying human freedom. This is the greatest drama of existence.

-Third, there is an impression that one is being sought by someone – the “Hound of Heaven” – who will not leave us alone. The tragedy is that many souls, feeling this anxiety, seek to have it explained away, instead of following it to where, at the end of the trail, it is seen as God and actual grace working on the soul.

-The voice of God causes discontent within the soul in order that the soul may search further and be saved. It embarrasses the soul, for it shows us the truth, tears of all the masks and masquerades of hypocrisy.

-But it consoles the soul too be effecting a harmony with the self, with others, and with God. It is for everyone to decide – to accept or reject the voice he hears. Once these two currents of inner frustration and divine mercy meet, then the crisis is crucial – it involves a cross.

-The crisis itself can take a thousand different forms, varying from souls that are good to those that are sinful. But in both these extremes there is a common recognition that the conflicts and frustrations cannot be overcome by one's own energy. The common forms of crisis are the moral, the spiritual, and the physical.

-Fourth, the soul now wants to get out of its sins. Up to this point, the soul had covered up its sins; now it discovered them in order to repudiate them. What is owned can be disowned; what is perceived as an obstacle can now be surmounted.

-The crisis reaches its peak when the soul becomes less interested in stirring up external revolutions and more interested in the internal revolution of its own spirit; when it swings swords, not outward but inward, to cut out its baser passions; when it complains less about the lying of the world and begins to work on making itself somewhat less a liar than before.

-The moral sphere has two ethical poles: one, the immanent sense of evil or failure; the other, transcendent power of God's mercy. The abyss of powerlessness cries out to the abyss of salvation.

-The Cross is now seen in a new light. At one moment, it bespeaks the depth of human iniquity that, in essence, would slay God; at another moment it reveals the defeat of evil in its strongest moment, vanquished not only by the prayers for forgiveness from the Cross but by the triumph of the Resurrection.

-But this cascade of divine power cannot operate on those who live under the illusion either that they are angels or that sin is not their fault. A person must first admit the fact of personal guilt; then, though the consciousness of having been a sinner does not vanish, the consciousness of being in a state of sin is relieved.

-Once the will to sin is abandoned, then the soul sees that it has become acceptable to the Savior, not because it was good, but because the Savior is good. The moral crisis is ended when Christ confronts the soul, not as law but as mercy, and when the soul accepts the invitation, "Come to me, all you who labor, and are burdened, and I will refresh you" (Mt. 11:28).

-Fifth, there is definite change in behavior and conduct of life. Not only does conversion change one's values; it also reverses the tendencies and energies of life, directing them to another end.

-If the convert before conversion was already leading a good moral life, there is now less emphasis on keeping a law and more emphasis on maintaining a relationship of love. If the convert has been a sinner, his spiritual life frees him from bad habits and excesses that before weighed down the soul.

-He often finds that these practices were not so much appetites as attempts to flee responsibility or to ensure, by plunging into unconsciousness, that he could avoid the necessity of choice.

-Before conversion, it was behavior that to a large extent determined belief; after conversion, it is belief that determines behavior. There is no longer a tendency to find scapegoats to blame for the faults of self, but rather a consciousness that the reformation of the world must begin with the reformation of self. It desires for peace in the world, but it has to begin in oneself.

-There is still a fear of God, but it is not the servile fear a subject has for a dictator, but a filial fear, such as a loving child has for a good father or mother whom he would never wish to hurt.

-From such love one does not ever need to run away, and the previous acts of dissipation, which were disguised forms of flight, are now renounced.

-Once the soul has turned to God, there is no longer a struggle to give up these habits; they are not so much defeated as crowded out by new interests. There is no longer a need of escape, for one is no longer in flight from oneself.

-Having done one's own will, such a one now seeks to do God's will; he who once served sin now hates it; she who once found thoughts of God dry or even unpleasant now hopes above all else one day to behold the God Whom she loves.

-The transition the soul has undergone is as unmistakable as the passage from death to life; there has been, not a mere giving up of sin, but such a surrender to divine love as makes one shrink from sin because one would not wound the Divine Beloved.

-Sixth, the soul also receives certitude. Philosophy gives proof for the existence of God; the science of apologetics gives the motives for believing in Christ, the Son of God; but all the incontrovertible proofs they offer fall short of the certitude that actually comes to a convert through the gift of faith.

-Imagine a young man whose father has been lost for years. A friend, returned from a trip, assures him that he has certain evidence that his father really exists on another continent. But the young man is not fully satisfied with the evidence, however convincing it is; until he is restored to his father's actual presence, he will not have peace.

-So it is with conversion: Before, one knows *about* God; afterward, one *knows* God. The first knowledge the mind has is notional and abstract; the second is real, concrete, and it becomes bound up with all one's sentiments, emotions, passions, and habit.

-Before conversion, the truths seemed true but far off; they did not touch one personally. After conversion, they become so personalized that the mind knows that it is through with the search for a place to live; it can now settle down to the making of a home.

-The convert's certitude is so great that his mind does not feel that *an answer* has been given, but *the answer* – the absolute, final solution, which one would die for rather than surrender.

-Those who have never gone through the experience of a complete conversion imagine that reason must be completely abdicated for such a step. We hear them make such remarks as, "I cannot understand it; he seemed like an intelligent man." But those who have gone through the experience of conversion see that just as the eye winks, closing itself to the light for an instant that it may reopen and see better, so too one winks his reason for that brief instant in which he admits that it may not know all the answers.

-Then, when faith comes, the reason is found to be intact and clear-sighted than before. Both reason and faith are now seen as deriving from God Himself; they can never, therefore, be in opposition. Knowing this, the convert loses all doubts. His certitude in his faith becomes unshakeable – indeed, it is his old notions that are now apt to be shaken by the earthquake of his faith.

-Seventh, another effect is: peace of soul. There is a world of difference between peace of mind and peace of soul. Peace of mind is the result of bringing some ordering principle to bear on discordant human experiences; this may be achieved by tolerance, or by a gritting of one's teeth in the face of pain; by killing conscience, or denying guilt, or by finding new loves to assuage old griefs.

-The peaceful soul seeks, now, not only to live morally, but to live for God; morality is a by-product of the union with God. All the energy that was previously wasted in conflict – either in trying to find the purpose of life or in trying alone and futilely to conquer one's vices – can now be released to serve a single purpose: to know, to serve, and to love God in this life and be happy with Him in the next.

-Regret, remorse, fears, anxieties that flowed from sin now completely vanish in repentance. The convert no longer regrets what he might have been; the Holy Spirit fills his soul with a constant presentiment of what he can become through grace, as St. Aelred says: "What is God by nature, we will be by grace."

-And there are many other ways in which peace of soul will manifest itself after conversion: it makes somebodies out of nobodies by giving them a service of divine sonship and daughtership; it roots out anger, resentments, and hate by overcoming sin; it gives the convert the faith in other people, who are now seen as potential children of God; it improves one's health by curing the ills that sprang from a disordered, unhappy, restless mind; for trials and difficulties, it gives one the aid of divine power; it brings one at all times a sense of harmony with the universe; it sublimates one's passions; it makes one fret less about the spiritual shortcomings of the world because he or she is engrossed in seeking personal spiritualization; it enables the soul to live in a constant consciousness of God's presence, as the earth, in its flight about the sun, carries its own atmosphere with it.

-In business, in the home, in household duties, in the work place, all actions are done in the sight of God, all thoughts revolve about God's truths. The unreasonable blame, the false accusations, the jealousies and bitterness of others, are borne patiently, as Our Lord bore them, so that love might reign and that God might be glorified in the bitter as in the sweet. Dependence on God becomes strength; one no longer fears to undertake good works, knowing God will supply the means.

-But above all else, with this deep sense of peace, there is the gift of perseverance, which inspires us never to let down our guard, or to shrink from difficulties, or to be depressed as the soul presses on to its supernal vocation. So be it.

*** On Created Things ***

-Just as almighty God was able to create what is good out of nothing, so, when He willed it, through the mystery of His incarnation he also restored the good that was lost. He made two creatures that were to know Him, namely, angels and humans. Pride ruined them both and cut them off from the inborn state of uprightness. One creature was covered with flesh, but the other had no weakness arising from the flesh. The angel, you see, was pure spirit, but the human being is spirit and flesh.

-Humankind had been placed in Paradise, that if he bound himself to obedience of his Creator by chains of love, he might one day pass on to the heavenly fatherland of the angels, without undergoing bodily death. He was created immortal, you see, but in such a way that if he sinned, he could also die. He was created mortal in such a way that if he did not sin, he could also not die. So by reason of free will he would reach the happiness of that place in which he could neither sin nor die.

-They reach the higher ones yet more vigorously, so that they scorn all the things of time, not only because they will soon be lost but because they simply do not want to be held back by them, even if they could be had forever. They draw themselves away from the love of the things that have been created beautiful, because the footsteps of their hearts are on the trail of the Creator of beauty himself.

-Our first parents could have gone as well, without bodily death, if they had remained in that state in which they were created.

-When the man was created, he had this restful calmness when he received a will that allowed him free choice against his enemy. He soon surrendered to the enemy by his own volition, however, and he discovered for himself the opposition to himself; in the heat of battle he had to struggle against his weakness. Although he had been created by God in peace and quiet, he was defeated by the enemy through his own volition and put up with the cries of battle.

-if the Bride neglects to know herself, if she presumptuously aspires to spiritual heights before she is worthy of them, she will be compelled to abandon the inner sanctuary of her heart, go forth after her restless, wandering senses among the world of created things, and there strive to find some small consolation for her deepest yearnings in the satisfaction of her sinful, fleshly desires.

-By a "shameful exchange of desires," the Bride who once was eager "to feed her exiled and pilgrim soul on holy meditations and heavenly goods, to seek the good-pleasure of God and the mysteries of His holy will, and to penetrate the heavens by her devotion" will now, abandoned by grace, have to "enslave herself to the shameful servitude of her body, obey her flesh, satisfy her stomach and palate, and beg throughout the whole world, whose form is passing away, to find some little consolation for her ever ravenous curiosity."⁹⁹

-In other words, the Bride who does not know herself will have to exchange the spiritual life for life in the flesh and labor in vain to slake her burning thirst for her Beloved by the immediate gratification of sinful desires for all that is not him. Her life in the flesh will therefore be a life of misery as well as sin, for all the worldly things her flesh and senses crave—sensual pleasures, riches, knowledge, power, and prestige—fall short of the One her soul loves.