

RECTITUDE

RECTITUDE

ANTONIN SERTILLANGES, O.P.

*Translated by the Dominican Nuns
Corpus Christi Monastery
Menlo Park, California*

McMULLEN BOOKS, INC.
New York 1953

Nihil obstat

PAUL K. MEAGHER, O.P.

Censor deputatus

Imprimatur

✠ JOHN J. MITTY

Archbishop of San Francisco

Copyright, 1953

MCMULLEN BOOKS, INC.

Printed in U.S.A.

AT THE POLYGON PRESS, BROOKLYN, N. Y.

CONTENTS

Integrity

1	Integrity	3
2	Interior Order and Chaos	5
3	Internal and External Order	7
4	Rectitude	9
5	Integrity and Freedom	12
6	Integrity and Security	14
7	The Elements of Integrity	16
8	The Great Work	19

Humility

9	The Spiritual Foundation: Humility	25
10	The Meaning of Humility	27
11	Humility is Truth	30
12	The Grandeur of Humility	32
13	The Audacity of Humility	35
14	The Hopes of Humility	38
15	The Peace of Humility	40
16	The Humility of the Saints	43

Charity

17	The Spiritual Crowning-piece: Charity	49
18	Charity, Mother of the Virtues	51
19	Charity, Mother of the Religious Virtues	54
20	Charity, Mother of the Personal Virtues	57
21	Charity, Mother of the Family Virtues	60
22	Charity, Mother of the Social Virtues	63

23	Charity, Regulator of the Virtues	67
24	Charity, Vitalizer of the Virtues	69
25	Charity, the Liberator	72
26	Unifying Charity	75
27	Generous Charity	78
28	Disinterested Charity	81
29	Charity, Source of Joy and Peace	84

Work and Leisure

30	Work	91
31	The Qualities of Work	94
32	The Duties of State	97
33	The Duty of State a Form of Worship	101
34	Divine Intimacy in the Duty of State	103
35	Personal Development in the Duty of State	106
36	The Social Utility of the Duty of State	109
37	The Beauty and Unassuming Charm of the Duty of State	112
38	The Daily Grind	114
39	Leisure	118
40	The Utilizing of Leisure	121
41	Travel	124

Temptation

42	Snares to Rectitude	129
43	The Inevitability of Temptation	132
44	The Utility of Temptation	134
45	Victory over Temptation	137
46	Twofold Pledge of Victory	140
47	The Passions	143
48	Utilization of the Passions	146
49	The Body	149
50	The Spiritual Destiny of the Body	151

Sin

51	Sin	157
52	The Disorder of Sin	160
53	The Horror of Sin	163
54	The Madness of Sin	166
55	Excuses for Sin	169
56	The Eventual Benefit of Sin	172
57	The Temporal Slavery of Sin	175
58	The Responsibilities of Sin	178
59	The Penalty of Sin	181
60	Conversion	185
61	Delayed Conversion	188
62	Repentance	191

Our Aids

63	Our Aids	197
64	Grace	200
65	Prayer	203
66	Prayer and Life	207
67	Prayer of Petition	211
68	Salutary Distractions	214
69	The Eucharist	218
70	The Effects of the Eucharist	221
71	Frequentation of the Eucharist	224
72	Christ our Model	227
73	The Virgin Mother	232
74	Life with Mary	235
75	The Saints	238
76	The Communion of Saints	241

INTEGRITY

— 1 —

INTEGRITY

The sum total of our duties is included in the word: integrity.

Integrity, for man, consists in finding himself in his totality and, as image of God by his spiritual nature, clothing himself, so to speak, in his sacred character.

In this profound sense, human integrity has only once been realized on this earth; but it shone beforehand and still shines upon our gaze as an ideal.

It is futile to say: the human ideal does not exist; there are differing social spheres, epochs, races and temperaments, of which the ideal, likewise, differs. How can this be true, if humanity is a species, if there is such a science as anthropology and, consequently, such a thing as natural, normal human behavior?

To discover the man in us is a great work. Culture and civilization attempt it, with some checks and set-backs. Each individual soul, without disregarding its peculiar personal characteristics, is called upon to accomplish the task on its own account. The very fact that no one is competent for it, that no man satisfies our idea of man, is an argument in favor of a pre-existing ideal type presented to every conscience. The ideal exists, for in every judgment it is used as a basis of comparison. Relatively few people have actually seen the standard metre in the Breteuil Pavilion; nevertheless, anyone who buys a metre of cloth uses that measure.

A little self-interrogation will reveal that, even at times of severest disappointment, we never lose faith in man. We recognize folly, and yearn for wisdom. We suffer injustice, and dream

of justice. The just man is a kind of rainbow; not being able to reach out and grasp it, we admire it at a distance.

Is there not a wellspring of enthusiasm always ready to burst forth as soon as an authentic type of humankind seems about to develop or suddenly to appear? It never does present itself; but it shines concealed within us whenever we ardently acclaim its bare outline.

After all, they were real men who suggested to us what would be the best way of living; as a repercussion, this concept within us becomes a criterion of men. The ideal and the real thus constantly intrude upon one another, the real casting a shadow on the ideal, the ideal dazzling the real by the splendor of its light.

We hear of novelized biographies; but should not every man novelize his life, raising it to its highest significance and power? The being we received at birth is not definitive; it is embryonic, plastic. With an unlimited capacity for being moulded into the form which God commissions us to achieve together with Him during our earthly career, the rudimental being finds only in this achievement its primary meaning, corresponding to the thought which created it and consequently is its standard. But we have a tendency to consider only the inferior self which is less exacting and more susceptible. Were we to rise to the height of the sublime self, the divine self, we should be coming back to the simple truth about ourselves.

Such is the meaning of the moral sense. It is the very meaning of life in its perfect form. Furthermore it is the meaning of being and of its Source, whereby the moral sense borders on the religious. The difference lies in the fact that, morally, one ascends from nature to God, while, religiously, one descends from God to nature. In both cases, by fulfilling the thought of God, we are obeying ourselves. Receiving without resistance the creative

impulse, we are urged forward, under a law of acquiescent, responsive liberty, in our own paths and our own direction.

The sense of integrity, the moral sense, conscience: three modes of expressing the idea of our connection with primary Thought, of that existence before time which is the measure of our existence in time, of that being which we have in God whereby, all together, as St. Thomas explains, we are perfectly ourselves and we are God.

— 2 —

INTERIOR ORDER AND CHAOS

Order is the work of the wise man. Creative wisdom eliminated chaos and so, in its own measure, does every honest piece of work. On the contrary, every evil work, every breach of life's integrity tends to reestablish chaos, outwardly and in ourselves.

A drop of water in the ocean makes no false moves; the entire firmament would oppose it. In the bosom of God, firmament of the soul and law of its movements, how can one act wrongfully?

There is but one explanation: the depraved will sets herself up as a false wisdom, a mistress of error unto herself, which she then professes to obey as if it were rectitude, law, and order. What order? That which I please. What wisdom? That of my imagination, my senses, my roused passion, refracting the light as it feels inclined.

It is natural that each man should adore the god he creates for himself and observe its precepts. The evil lies in the fact that we create false gods for ourselves when there is a God, and we

project on to nothingness the image of the All which we perceive, radiating and attracting us, in our lucid moments.

The good operates in that which is, evil in that which is not. Goodness is a correlation of our constituent elements; badness is their dispersal by treason against the law which organizes them. Integrity, the perfection of good, presupposes an economy of thought, feeling, speech and act in the original sense of the word "economy", signifying assiduous care and arrangement.

The good steward in the Gospel is commended because, thanks to him, all goes well in the house and there is peace. To each and all he gives "meat in season." Meat is whatever sustains life. The meat of the soul is what causes it to live spiritually, namely, right action, which is as bread to the body,—“as the pasture to the ox,” says the Zend Avesta. Is this not the meaning of Christ's words to His apostles beside the well of Jacob: “I have meat to eat which you know not . . . to do the will of Him who sent Me”?

Therein lies not only our sustenance, but our very existence, if by it we mean that which causes us to be what we truly are in the absolute sense, not in the vitiated, falsified concrete of a sinful conscience.

What is an upright conscience? A hidden spirituality, an active law, which is to our personality what personality is to nature, striving to impregnate and direct it, to make use of it for its ends. But just as matter resists spirit, so does the inferior spirit, the “law in my members” referred to by St. Paul, resist the coordination of conscience and maintain a state of chaos.

And yet, should not the ideal good man, the wise, just man, the complete man,—should he not be at the very center of things as the supreme victory of the Creator over chaos? A universe of reduced dimensions, but tremendously exalted in value, the masterpiece of the planetary system and perhaps of all visible creation?

Why is the Son of Mary called the Flower of Jesse and the Flower of the world, unless it is because there was concentrated and harmonized in Him every created value, the whole value of His race and of man? The complete Christian would thus be, with his Christ, at the center and summit of all things, assuming the right to say in his turn, without blasphemy or even audacity: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life"; for he would be following in the footsteps of his living ideal to such an extent that he, too, would be identified with the ideal way; he would have espoused truth so as to be "one spirit" with her; he would present a finished exemplar of life the imitation of which would suffice for real living.

Is this a chimera? No, a light before our eyes, a star guiding, encouraging, attracting, yet remaining, and beyond our reach.

— 3 —

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ORDER

Man is adept in a thousand and one crafts, but not that of his own destiny. Man can make anything, except man. By external action, in the pride of the display and ease procured thereby, we work, so to speak, on the circumference of our lives, and how often to the neglect of their center!

This evil has now attained unparalleled proportions. We are warned of it from all sides. It is no longer only the moralists who raise the cry; biologists, physicians, even aesthetes are protesting.

Moral integrity influences everything including our appearance and our physical condition. It is to be believed that if men are not so consistently beautiful and flourishing as the lilies and anemones, this is not merely because a greater complexity of

elements is involved but because in the course of generations the law of the species has not been observed. Still less is it so at the present time.

Maine de Biran wrote: "As long as the every-day art of living is not made to keep pace with those that produce new diversions, new instruments for the control of nature, all the miracles of genius will have done nothing in behalf of the ultimate real object of all its labors." What the great psychologist means by the every-day art of living is the morality which directs action; what he assigns to genius as the object of its labors is destiny. But men no longer know where destiny lies, and the every-day art of living has no more laws.

I think Goethe was flattering himself, but he expressed a splendid thought when he said to Eckermann: "I have never considered my exterior life anything but a symbol, a visible impression of what was transpiring within me." Even were all to happen as it should within us, there would still be room for accidents and tactical errors; but the symbolism of which Goethe speaks would nevertheless have a deep meaning and our destiny be enriched by the charm of harmony.

Just as nature is a precipitate of spirit, a manifestation of spirit, the work of the Creator and of His divine wisdom, so exterior life, individual life, social life, civilization, is a concentrate of the wisdom and virtues of man.

Furthermore, the two terms of the comparison meet. What is human thought but an emanation of creative thought; what is virtue but an indirect result of divine government? Man's successes are therefore divine successes. The fruits of human wisdom, as well as those of genius, are to the honor of Him who is called the God of virtues and the Father of lights. It is God who penetrates into humanity and civilization by means of right thinking and virtuous action.

How few Christians rise to the level of these considerations so pregnant with power to inspire! How far removed from them are we all in practice! Within every group, every social class, the failure of our efforts derives essentially from our spiritual dissipation, our forgetfulness of the primary values, our aptitude, perhaps even our eagerness, to follow the mob.

The moral sense has weakened even among believers. That sense of procedure, if I may term it thus, whether in individual behavior or in the world's advance, is almost lost; that is why all other values are in jeopardy. The victories of life have never depended so strictly, so immediately upon the victory over self.

— 4 —

RECTITUDE

Integrity has another name; it is called straightforwardness or rectitude. Such terms refer to the two extremities of our life and their junction: starting-point, terminus, and vital curve, after the manner of a projectile.

In firing, the projectile must be kept rigid. At any rate, from the shoulder to the target the line must be clean-cut and properly directed. So it is with action, with the habitual trend of action. A taut bowstring presents us with another image.

Rectitude means injecting the influence of life's purposes into life itself and thence proceeding straight toward the goal. Is there any room for hesitancy in the Christian? The ends of life are known to him by faith. The starting-point is incontestable; it is given to us each day; for our life recommences daily with its permanent conditions and changing opportunities. The line

of conduct can be deduced from it; all that is necessary is to beware of warping or side-tracking, and the ends will be attained.

The ends: how far are they from determining our steps in the everyday run of life! We do not repudiate them; we hail them from a distance at more or less wide intervals. What is lacking is the pressure they should exert upon the hidden wellsprings of the soul.

As a matter of fact, in spite of all our pretensions to absolute self-determination, it is but just to admit that we generally do not know what we want, that is, we disregard, in favor of transitory desires, the essential craving inherent in the Christian conscience. Bringing our secondary desires into harmony with the primordial will that characterizes us as Christians and as men: that is what we term rectitude.

The Savior gives us its formula when He says: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his justice." That admonition contains two terms which explain and complete one another. The kingdom of God consists in justice; justice consists in seeking first and in all things the kingdom of God, which brings with it all the rest in its wake: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you."

He who claims to deal justly with men and things, while forgetting God, is just after the fashion of a servant who pays his debt with money he has stolen from his master. The man who forgets God robs Him of the whole of life and, finally, loses it himself; for it cannot be snatched out of the hands of its sovereign Lord. On the other hand, he who professes to serve God, and is not just toward men and things, deprives even God of what belongs to Him in things, so that he fails both in piety and justice. How can he expect to receive *all these things* together with God?

There is thus a sham uprightness. In fact, there are several

varieties, as many as there are wrong turnings between a moral starting-point and its destination.

People affirm or deny, according to their mood or the advantage of the moment, that the end justifies the means, that it is possible to advance toward the good with an upright intention by tortuous paths. This is one of those pieces of trickery whereby sinful man is pleased to clothe himself in a pretence of righteousness. When he has not the courage to renounce his evil ways, there is always the expedient of disguising them. In this instance they are colored by the reflection of goodness which the end in view is supposed to cast upon them, bathing them in its light. But it is an illusion. The end does not justify the means, because justification and reprobation apply to man, and man is qualified by what he does before being qualified by what he claims to foresee issuing from his action.

Do you lie with a view to being of service? Very well, we give you credit for wanting to be of service; but you lie and one who lies is a liar. No superimposed intention can wash away that stain.

In the long run, the manœuvres which disregard uprightness are rarely even an immediate gain; ultimately they always betray us, for the supremacy of the Creator's purposes condemns them.

Presupposing the validity of Christian hopes, even a child can perceive the obviousness of the following propositions: To arrive at the place toward which one is advancing, one must walk straight forward. To face a just judgment, one must be just. To attain to completion in the integral development of one's being, one must possess integrity. Integrity, straightforwardness, justice: three terms for the same idea, an idea bearing all the weight of a supreme verdict.

— 5 —

INTEGRITY AND FREEDOM

People are inclined to define freedom as the power to do what one wants. This formula can be supported; but left to its ambiguity or pushed to the extreme, it is absurd.

True liberty consists not in doing what one wants, but what one ought, what should be done in order to attain the ends one naturally pursues. Liberty is a means, not an end. When I declare myself to be free I am immediately asked: free from what? This question demands an answer. Arbitrary vacillation is meaningless; the mind has no hold upon it. If I wish the road to open freely before me, I must want to reach some destination; but where can I go without some direction?

When children play without any control or supervision, quarrels are not long in arising and even danger or, at any rate, disorder and boredom. Even play has need of a rule. Human life has much more need of one. It is essential to its success; even to its very freedom, if by this we mean the possibility of following one's path without undergoing the thousand and one hindrances imposed by chance.

He who pretends to do what he wills becomes the slave of all things; for nothing in this world will long obey caprice. Order alone is profitable; disorder is insolvent. "Headstrong liberty is lashed with woe," according to Shakespeare. He who does his duty with integrity reconciles his surroundings and possesses himself; therein is contained the germ of true freedom.

Man controls nature, but only on condition of respecting its laws. Man stands erect before man and counts upon useful

cooperation; but let him begin by accepting the law of justice and of social relations. Likewise, before God and the divine order man feels free and sure of his movements when he, first of all, accepts that order, renounces rebellion, enters into the rhythm of creation, and does not strive to achieve his own purposes except in harmony with those of the world.

“What is liberty?” asked the wise Periander; and he himself replied: “a tranquil conscience.” A good conscience is the law of the universe, since “all things are for the elect,” and the elect are only consciences ultimately, the just in possession of their reward. If, then, liberty is a disposition intrinsically within the law, the protecting framework of the law, a good conscience is liberty itself.

“Man alone with himself comprises a government,” Lacordaire would say. He is then free yet governed. And when he is governed from without by the law of things, by the law of God which envelops the order of things, he is still in a certain sense alone with himself, since he is within the whole of which he forms a part, and is free to the extent of disposing both of himself and of all things, including God Himself.

To will only the good—what a simplification of life that is! What unity in our being! What ease in all our undertakings! What peace! Is that not being free? In the great current which leads all things to God, I swim along, ever guided and supported by the tide, even when it pelts me and dashes against my face.

Should I feel constrained by it? Am I not assured, in the event of my fidelity, of achieving myself freely and perfectly? I am only asked to be what I am, to consent to my being by recognizing the law of its Principle. What is the good will that is expected of me but a share in that Will which is essential goodness and which alone is efficacious for happiness?

Inspire me, my God, with that peaceful, liberating good will.

When I complain of Thine appeals and demands, it is of Thy goodness that I complain. When I speak of *chains*, I am foolishly referring to the protective reins which enable me to “run”, according to the Psalmist, “when thou hast enlarged my heart.” To obey Thee is to free myself from my false self and from all the vicissitudes of things; it is leading the life Thou hast given me, without hindrance from without or within, bringing it to perfection, insisting upon its happiness, which is the whole aspiration of my being.

— 6 —

INTEGRITY AND SECURITY

Incapable as we are of profiting by our victories, why are we so anxious to obtain them? When we triumph over life in the direction of our desires, we are not far from believing that all has been gained and considering the good itself involved in what satisfies us.

Many well-intentioned people act as if goodness were a poor fellow in need of mankind's pity, cleverness, indeed even trickery and vices; as if it were not all of us who have need of goodness, sole effective guarantee, sole “buckler”, as it is called in Scripture, sole element conveying real, complete security.

With goodness, one possesses everything, without it nothing; and the ingenuity one has exerted is no more than the game of a dupe. It would be strange if one could succeed against God; so would it be if one were not to succeed with God, entering into His plans by a generous integrity.

It makes little difference whether we have human means at our command or not. Should we possess them, they must be subordinated without attributing any decisive result to them; should we not possess them, we know that God supplies for their lack on behalf of good will alone. Was not the salvation of the world effected by a humble Jewish life and the annihilation of the cross? Jesus had one single means: doing the will of His Father. Thereby He overcame all things,—death and the world and hell.

But we imagine we have superior resources. To insure our careers we have experience at our disposal and an ever watchful intentness. How wise we are! Except that it is hardly the part of true wisdom to be mistaken in the matter of essentials. To expect to obtain the effects of goodness by having recourse to loop-holes is falling into the meshes of evil; in such misguided proficiency lies ruin. There is no juggling with the moral order.

Every false good turns into its opposite: pleasure into uneasiness and disgust, worldly glory into contempt for the world, wealth into rapacity and real indigence, power into terror and servility, all things into death and nothingness. Righteousness alone is always the same, nor can it change except by tending toward betterment and perfection.

What a paradox, when we think of it! Moral good balances all things, so powerful are its hidden transformations. In vain do the objects which it gathers together appear to differ or oppose each other, according to human judgment; thanks to its mediation they are equally acceptable and useful. Pleasure and pain are all the same to him who directs them toward the same end. Success and failure are both successes when God guarantees the outcome and the heart is all that matters. Being entirely devoted to one's duty is the only sane economy, for the law of integrity

coincides with the law of creation, the sole assurance of results. Duty is, in the spiritual realm, a negotiable instrument that will never be protested.

Not only is one thing worth as much as another, measured by this standard; but even what is worth nothing still possesses some worth. Nothing is really lost which is done for goodness' sake unprofitably, which comes to nought, or which seems to result in a total loss. To lose is to surrender to non-existence, and goodness is concerned only with what is. Whatever aims at it can no more come to grief than Providence itself. The good is endowed with the stability of God. It has the span of time at its disposal and all that it envelops in its spheres. What does all the rest matter to one who has possessed himself of that power? Eternity, what is time in face of thee?

— 7 —

THE ELEMENTS OF INTEGRITY

Many people would like to believe that integrity is concerned only with money matters or those more or less associated with money. It would be a guarantee of honesty at no great expense. An "honest" merchant, notary or banker would thus pose as a man of integrity and reap the honors attached thereto. By no means. Integrity has to do with the whole of life. If it refers to money, that is because money represents a great many things; but it does not represent all of them. As a matter of fact, in financial affairs as in all others, integrity is of no interest or concern except to the moral man.

What does the moral man care about the diversity of objects

and circumstances? This very diversity reveals and evaluates him under various aspects; but it is always he himself who is involved. His unity is indivisible, nor can he be called integral unless his duty is accomplished integrally.

But in opposition to this moral man, judged from above by the standard of goodness and an incorruptible verdict, there arises the individual, half-conscious of himself, who merges somehow into his external activity, loses himself in the crowd, dissembles his own quality amid collective states, or even escapes deliberately behind his functions, his social situation, the opinion men form of him, protected by a complete system of appearances which have no connection with his real, interior morality.

The question which presents itself in speaking of integrity is to find out how it stands with the person himself and within himself, the person in his communing with the infinite whereby we are all judged, the person who dies alone, as Pascal would say, but who also lives alone, in so far as the judgment falling upon him from above is concerned. So true is this that the person remains, as it were, infinitely removed from what is nearest to him, removed from the appearances and complications which might confuse the accounts, from the multitude in the midst of which he conceals himself, where responsibility is submerged; in short, in a nakedness and glaring light where nothing any longer shields a man from that integral, omniscient gaze of which conscience is only the timid interpreter.

Thus regarded, is the person good? Integrally good in intention and habitually in practice? Does he will the good, the whole good, nothing but the good; is he ready to dare and to endure all things rather than betray it grievously? Does he carry the sense of his responsibility into every sphere wherein he dwells and acts? Does he look all circumstances in the face: his personal as well as family and professional obligations, his position in his

community, however humble and unassuming it may be? Does he approach his work with a sense of duty, not merely with a view to achieving results, to success, money or notoriety,—as if such results taken by themselves, detached from moral rectitude, were not petty larceny on the part of the conscience? Is he as watchful over the probity of his means as of his ends, recognizing that the good is one and the same at the goal and on the way thither, and that, in truth, conscience has but one end: the good, so that a good means is also an end to it, while a bad means is its enemy?

Finally, with regard to his neighbor, is the person integral in the sense of loving what he should love, serving what he should serve, coming to the aid of those who have a legitimate claim on his help or consolation, identifying himself with all love of the good, dissociating himself from every evil without rejecting or despising anyone who is drawn into evil, avoiding all dissensions, all the factionalism which hinders the good and sets the leaders of one group against another,—and in short, since he is on the side of God, being on the side of all, even of those who refuse to be on his side?

The matter may be simplified by affirming, according to a division which is eminently correct, that the integrity of man presupposes just relations with God, with himself, and with all other men; with God who is his source and therefore more himself than he is; with himself, for he finds his unity and fulfilment only in the submission of all his faculties to reason, their right rule; with all other men, his associates in humanity, his brothers in the divine paternity, his team-mates in the work to be undertaken here below.

It might be added, were this not understood by reason of the subordination of things to persons, that integrity demands a just relationship to things themselves, so that they, too, are directed

toward their end rather than diverted from it, and the human harmony thus becomes, in so far as lies in our power, a universal harmony.

Such is the *just* man of Holy Scripture with whom the integral man is identified, providing we use the two terms in their precise sense.

In contrast we have been offered the superman, but quite erroneously, as that concept is understood. The superman of Nietzsche certainly rises above the commonplace man, devoid of energy or of elevated ideas; but as for the perfect balance of human values, taking into account the divine, and, so to speak, the musical precision of life,—the superman has no notion of it.

Nevertheless, the acceptance of this rectitude is the condition of salvation and in its achievement it is salvation's self. For eternal salvation is nothing else but the complete harmony of the soul in its perfect relationship with God and with everything. The opposite is hell.

— 8 —

THE GREAT WORK

Looking at things in themselves, it would be a mistake to swell out one's voice and declaim about the great work, referring to wisdom. It is no more difficult to be wise than to be foolish; in fact, it is much simpler, and Cyrano was right in wanting to simplify his life by showing himself sublime in all things and toward all things. Does not wisdom consist in unifying, therefore in simplifying ourselves and, in relation to ourselves, all that concerns us?

Nevertheless, Henry de Montherlant is correct when he asserts that "Wisdom isolates one as much as genius." It isolates because the generality of men prefer passionate complications to virtuous simplicity. What can one expect when even wisdom and genius do not understand one another and, in their turn, become isolated each from each? Genius which does not fulfil itself in moral greatness is naught but a great misery, "the misery of a great gentleman," Pascal would say. Wander far from genius and forget all moral greatness,—to what depths will your life not fall? Yet such is the usual situation.

Hence, the just man, the man of integrity, in the sense we have defined, is not only rare, he is generally misunderstood and persecuted. It is hard to see what is a long way off; that which stands on an eminence humiliates and offends by putting us in the shade. Justice practised toward all separates us from our friends; it would bring us closer only if our friendship consisted precisely in a pact to be just. How rare is such sublimity!

On the other hand, they are praised and sought after who flatter and please, who yield when they must, who compromise. If, in the matter of virtue, so many imitation pearls are in circulation, this is not merely because there are so few experts, but rather because, when you come right down to it, people are not anxious to obtain an expert opinion. They lower the ideal to bring it down to their own level; it is then possible to lay claim to it and take pride therein. That is what they call a quiet conscience. Fraud? Of course, from the viewpoint of the absolute; but our humanity is so scoundrelly!

It takes a great many elements to make a just man. The *narrow gate* of the Gospel is so narrow that it seems to have been measured to the minimum dimensions of each one. We must efface ourselves, compress our personalities, so to speak, in

order to find on the other side, under God's wing, a plenitude which renders us commensurate with the whole sphere of His creation.

Integrity demands death to self. In spite of the fact that such a heroic operation is most advantageous, it is of the greatest rarity. Its reward lies in this: the death of the false self is the birth of the true one. The apparent destruction is a creation. By living according to God and forming within one His living image, one prepares for deification; in fact, one already attains it, for, behold—the limits of your being, ye spiritual dead, are coterminous with those of the world.

The ideal would be for every man to be able to say to himself at his last hour: my life has not merely passed, it has really been lived; it has attained its full value and assumed its characteristic form; it ends in fulfilment; my last day is only my last opportunity for growth, and dying is still a gain to me.

As can be seen, this would presuppose a youth already devoted to moral greatness. Those who say indulgently: "Youth must have its fling," forget that which, in youth as well as throughout our existence, constitutes our eternal being. Youth has its time; so have maturity and old age. But the eternal is present all the time and no one may sacrifice it to what is passing.

It is shameful for age to be unaware of what is eternal about youth; it is frightful for youth to despise what survives of the eternal in old age. Should not each in itself respect this twofold aspect of our abiding age; and is not integrity more perfect at this price?

However, the moral order is so great that it cannot be thwarted by our delays, diminished by our infidelities, annihilated by our falls. Duration, in our lives, is secondary; fulfilment is everything. It follows, hence, that at any age, whatever be the

past, whatever the bitterness which seasons our remorse, integrity still remains possible to us. The decisive winging of one's flight may begin at any moment, enabling that heart to soar into the heaven of heavens which had, up to then, been a prisoner of earth.

HUMILITY

— 9 —

THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION: HUMILITY

Scarcely has one mentioned humility, even broaching the subject quite humbly and with prudent reserve, when the brows begin to lift, the back stiffens, and a wag of the finger indicates: Not me! Me—that poor human “me” which thus rears up in rebellion: doesn’t it know what it is, what pride has in store for it, that of all the seven devils haunting us, it has lodged the worst one in itself?

St. Bernard considered humility the greatest of all the teachings of Christ. This is not apparent at first sight, for many delicate connections intervene between this principle of the spiritual life and its ultimate consequences; but the obscurity does not invalidate the assertion of the great monk: avoiding notice is characteristic of the foundations and roots of everything.

When we were attempting to present a summary of our duties, we believed it could be found in integrity or rectitude. It now remains to be said that humility presents itself to rectitude as its basic condition, awaiting the appearance of love as the soul of the entire spiritual life and, as it were, its crown.

Humility leads to rectitude because it wills obedience to the sovereign order whose dominion it has recognized, because once the egotistical, proud self has surrendered, God is everything to it, the neighbor in God, and its own person in union with God and neighbor.

The “*abstine et sustine*” of the Stoics, which, in the eyes of Pascal, seemed to summarize their morality, should in this sense

be chalked up to the credit of humility, whereas the pride of its inventors threatened to disturb the moral economy to the point of destroying it.

Humility *abstains* from what contradicts God, from what competes with God, in itself and in all that it undertakes. It *sustains* the action of God in itself and beyond self, with a patience and zeal exempt from negligence, because the position and function which it attributes to itself in the divine order would have it so, overawed as it is by the being of God, overawed in another sense by the powers and ostentatious promises which fasten upon its nothingness.

Humility is not simply a conviction of the mind; it is an attitude of soul. It therefore implies a worship paid to the sovereign good, whence submission and service are born. Everything falls into place for us by the mere fact that we are in place. Adapted to things as they are, we act in harmony with all things, as far from abusing our neighbor as ourselves, ready for mutual services in an order where mutual service is the law, unconscious of envy or greed because this world was made for all and should be at the disposal of all, as gratified by the advantages of others as by our own, for the unsocial, inimical self has melted away and, somehow, evaporates under the divine radiance.

As for pride, it knows neither how to obey nor how to love, how to control itself nor how to serve. It is never satisfied with anything or anyone, since it gauges all things according to its pretensions and only esteems people to the extent of the honor it receives from them; and on that point it is insatiable.

The safeguard and progress of all the virtues is thus found to be in strict dependence upon humility, so that St. Francis Xavier could say: "In the footsteps of Jesus Christ one mounts only by descending." Whereas pride insinuates itself into all the passions to lead them to extremes, humility calms and subdues them. It is

the enemy of those anarchistic forces which pride nourishes and the support of the beneficent forces that pride would break.

The least little parcel of virtue thus preserved is of greater worth than much virtue self-inflated. Proud virtue is an attempt to scale a crag which overhangs a declivity. What is the use of climbing, when the adventurer's fall and that of his rock are marked as inevitable from the start?

Humility, which begins all things, confers moreover that stability and perseverance whereby all things are completed. Where is the vulnerable spot in one who makes no account of himself? He has substituted for himself that which eludes all mutability and all caprice; he needs must share in its security. As Leonardo da Vinci wrote in his notes: "He who sets his course by a star changes not."

— 10 —

THE MEANING OF HUMILITY

It is important not to be deceived about the meaning of humility. There is a false kind; in fact, there are even several, for error always diverges from truth in a variety of ways.

There is what is commonly known as humility "with a hook out", an obvious way of fishing for compliments and arousing protests. This weakness has no need of being hunted down; it is adequately punished by a smile. Another form is more subtle and capable of monopolizing the whole of life; Sainte-Beuve denounced it in his own person when he wrote in his *Cahiers*: "I am a hypocrite; I give the impression of being quite detached and all the time I'm thinking about nothing but glory." That

pale sunshine of the dead to which Balzac referred dazzles many of the living; one might esteem them for it, did not their be-dazzlement go so far as to conceal or veil from their sight the Sun of justice. But aspiring after glory as a kind of sovereign good, hiding it from oneself and assuming for the purpose the appearance of unconcerned modesty, is a twofold evil of which the second is assuredly the worse. Diderot describes it somewhat paradoxically but shrewdly when he says: "Modesty is the mainstay of pride."

Then there is the humility of some mystics inclined, so it would seem, toward narcissism. It impels them to admire, as it were, their own nothingness, to make it develop under their fostering care as a plant grows when the sun looks upon it. The plain, simple name for this is self-love.

The mere fact that you strike this attitude of humility proves that you are not humble. By taking self as an object and lingering over it, you betray your attachment. Forget yourself! As a servant of God, think of God and His concerns; then your nothingness will become evident to you without detaining you; it will avoid that inflation which is another name for pride. The sincere self-annihilation of the humble man is but the hidden, unconsciously magnificent dwelling reserved for Him who is.

Therefore does Ecclesiasticus indicate as the origin of pride "the falling off from God." Pride drives out God. False humility, even when it professes its service, leaves God outside and installs self in His place. One may have "good reasons" for doing so,—one's qualities and virtues; but one turns them into vices. Moreover, pride and false humility occupy every level; they require only this easy condition: being full of oneself.

How miserable to batten on indulgent flattery and sometimes on compliments which one despises; even worse to feed one's pride on a hypocritical disparagement of one's own person. True

humility has a dignity corresponding to it which is equally true, although ignored by it officially. By casting itself on its knees before the God within, does it not also honor the living temple, even when it reserves all the worship for the deity enshrined there? God in me, I in God—do they not amount to the same thing?

Thus does humility find its deepest meaning. It consists in seeing God first and taking one's rightful rank in the harmonious balance between God and His creation, the visible and the invisible. Forgetting self, it opens up to the invading flood of all that surpasses it, realizing that it would be so insignificant to be nothing but oneself.

A noble citizen is one who keeps his place in the civil order, claiming no other. A noble creature, in a divine universe, is one who keeps his place in that order; nothing in himself, he bows before Him who is all, and prostrates himself with a spontaneous gesture in grateful adoration.

The only pride which becomes a man of lofty sentiments is that which belongs to all men; without demanding this, for humility makes no demands, it yet contains it entirely.

The man who insists upon his rights deserves none. The one who forgets himself and dedicates himself to great things accommodates himself to their glory; he justifies the beautiful lines of Chesterton: to the effect that Humility is what renews for us the wonder of the stars.

— 11 —

HUMILITY IS TRUTH

The meaning of humility becomes more clearly defined when we set it face to face with truth, the truth of our minds and the truth which corresponds to them in things.

Humility is truth because it alone puts man "in his place," in that place, foreign to all localization, which is measure and degree in the thought of the Creator. Does not truth have its dwelling-place in Him who is very Truth? What we are there, we and all things, that we truly are. Now what does the man see who judges thus and judges himself thus from God's point of view, from God's level, if I may so express it? He sees a vast radiation of being entirely belonging to its Source, differing from this original plenitude only in its deficiency, living by it and devoid of consistency without it, in such wise that no created nature has the right to attribute anything whatever to itself as strictly its own, except its defects, that is to say, in the case of a reasonable creature, its sins.

That is what humility sees. The humble man is one who knows what a creature is and what a sinful creature is, because he knows what a creator God is and what a holy God. Then, rejecting the passionate illusions and the flattering appearances which deceive us, he prostrates and adores. He looks on himself and finds there, under that radiant, pure light, only cause for self-abasement.

When I attribute something good to myself, that means that the something is mine, and that I am good. But our Master has said: "One is good: God," and all things come from God and belong to Him.

Every interior victory presupposes an inspiration, every exterior work a collaboration, proceeding from that source. Every good that we conceive and execute is but God going to meet God. We are involved in the matter, certainly, but never alone, even to the extent of becoming a party to it by giving our soul's consent; never do we act by right of ownership. We are proprietors of one thing only: evil, since God can no more be implicated in its nonentity than He can be absent from being. Scarcely anything for us to be puffed up about!

Magnifying ourselves before God partakes of the character of profanation and blasphemy. Exalting ourselves before our neighbor and hankering after his adulation is deception, deliberate deception, and further, it is indirectly a spoliation of God. "God loves humility so much," says St. Vincent de Paul, "only because He loves truth, being Truth itself."

Moreover, this does not belittle us unless we are incapable of acknowledging it. True it is that pride sets up as a god in the place of God and is therefore a monster; but on the other hand, humility, by the mere fact of annihilating self in God, becomes, as it were, God together with God, reducing itself to nothingness only for the purpose of magnifying the God within by a sort of substitution of persons.

"Every creature of God," says M. Jouhandeau, "has the right to be royal." Yes, indeed; still, that royalty must be perceived where it is. It consists in the kingdom of God within us. Out of God, there is neither king nor crown.

It may be said that pride is, in a sense, an infinite aberration, for it is the assertion of self at the expense of the infinite, withdrawn from the source of all reality and of the sole independent reality. How can the slightest atom of truth be found there?

On the contrary, by dying to self and its arrogance, one reawakens in God and in His universe, judging all things in their

true relationships, discerning how one stands personally and in regard to all things. Hence it may be asserted that humility contains a whole philosophy, indeed the whole of philosophy, for by really experiencing what one is in the infinity of being, one senses and experiences at the same time what humanity is, what the creature is. "Every man embodies the complete form of the human state," Montaigne wrote; likewise every being embodies the form of being.

If I am humble, I live according to creation as it is, without displacing myself, in the very breath of the creator Spirit, in the wisdom of the Word and in the heart of the Father.

One can only be humble by comparing oneself to something great. One can only be as humble as one should be, humble in the full sense of the word, by comparing oneself to absolute greatness, to the Infinite itself. Then one is in the way of truth.

— 12 —

THE GRANDEUR OF HUMILITY

We must never weary of proclaiming humility's greatness. It needs to be avenged for such a quantity of detestable or stupid contempt heaped upon it that there is no danger of excess in the matter. But is it really very difficult to understand that we are so much the greater in God as we feel smaller in ourselves; that in God we are God and in ourselves nothing? The sense of this nonentity outside a loving dependence on God and of this wholeness in the love of God is what I call the grandeur of humility.

Soren Kierkegaard has written: "It is magnificent to be clothed like the lilies of the field; it is still more glorious to be

the sovereign standing erect (man); but the supreme glory is to be nothingness in adoration." Yes, for by adoring we reign over creatures with God and are like unto God. By reigning over the world without God, we retain our likeness to the world, as the main branch of a tree is tree and the foremost man of France a Frenchman. What is the use, then, of playing king? One reigns but over nothingness, being nothing oneself.

Appearances notwithstanding, and without any attempt at paradox, it is humility which forms the basis of glory, which makes the great truly great and exalts the lowly. "*Deus humilium celsitudo*," chants the liturgy, "Oh God, Thou height of the humble." Moreover, do not geniuses as well as saints recognize the fact? When Newton compares himself to a child playing with pebbles and shells before the ocean of truth, does he not add a new dimension to the mind which had succeeded in measuring the weight of the stars? At the moment when he annihilates himself before God, the humble creature passes over to the side of God and sees recoiling behind him the vast universe, whereas, standing alone under the stars, he must suspect their pity and recognize its justice.

There was a time when the ocean ruled alone over the globe devoid of continents or islands. Where was man then? Where will he be after a similar period of future time? Between these two silent immensities does he make a stir and give himself airs? O vanity of vanities!

Strictly speaking, a humble person is not one who abases himself, but one who magnifies the universe and God. Otherwise, self-abasement would again be only introversion, the falling prey to an obsession with self. We repudiate that kind of humility; it is cousin-german to the strange pride of the materialist, glorying in the very contempt in which he holds himself and vacillating between two estimates of man: beast or god.

Genuine humility does not cause the sense of individual value to dissolve except into the sense of the unlimited. It communicates to man the dignity of feeling himself to be in his rightful place within immensity. It situates him in the center of the world, center and world that he is, for all things range themselves about the spirit and are included therein, in the heart of the supreme Spirit.

“(Man) is a nonentity and he is a miracle . . . He is a God, he is nothingness encompassed by God, destitute of God, capable of God and filled with God, if he so wills.” These words of Bérulle corroborate those of Tauler who affirms with quiet profundity: “If God were to find a truly humble man, He would doubtless reveal to him his greatness.”

Oh how great it is indeed to yield to the truth of one's relations with God and with all things to attain to the level, as it were, of that vast order by reflecting it in one's thought while assenting with the heart!

It may be said without stretching any of the terms, nay rather with the strictest accuracy, that the greatness of the soul has no other limits than those of its humility. Take away humility and all greatness is rendered void; presuppose it and all limits disappear because God participates therein wholly.

The glory of God, to whom humanity is consecrated, far from obscuring the glory of the person, rather creates it by uniting him to itself. The more I am nothing without God, the more God is resplendent within me where He is myself, the more resplendent am I in Him where I am He. Then the soul lives in itself in God, wholly nothingness and wholly God.

Assuredly, in the human sense of these terms, a great thought or action is not necessarily humble, nor is a humble thought or action necessarily great; but the most authentic form of these two qualities unites them. A man is not genuinely great unless

he recognizes the narrow limits of personality and its subordination to the order of the world. He is not really humble unless he yields himself to the invasion of universal values which besiege us from all sides and render us truly great.

— 13 —

THE AUDACITY OF HUMILITY

One might easily be led to believe that humility and timidity go together and that it would not take much to break down a man who professes not to count on himself. But precisely the contrary is true. "Timidity is a disease of pride," according to M. Francis Chevassu. A humble man is afraid of nothing. Is not fear an anxiety about self? When a man has renounced self as negligible or worthy of contempt, before whom shall he tremble? Ambrose in the presence of Theodosius, Chrysostom before Eudoxia or Thomas More braving Henry VIII are adequate representations of magnanimous humility.

Never does a man raise his head so imposingly above the world, above events, perils and obstacles, as when he has first bowed it before God. When reality intimidates me I have only to make this interior gesture to intimidate it in my turn.

With Nietzsche we have defined heroism as a state of soul by reason of which the subject no longer counts. If this definition is correct, it may be added that the humble man is a hero under all circumstances, for, in his estimation, everything is superior to the interests of his *ego*. He expects to be thwarted, misunderstood, calumniated; is this not always the result of setting oneself deliberately outside the trend of the world? He doesn't care;

that will not stop him. Once he has resolved upon his course, he will carry it out at any price, for the very notion of price has no meaning for him. Nothing is costly to one who does not count the cost. As for his adversaries,—where are their arms? What can you do against a man who has solemnly resolved once and for all not to exist?

Plato writes in his *Phaedrus*: “Every soul which has succeeded in becoming the follower of a god should, until it experiences a reversal, be safe from all evil. But if this soul is capable of always accompanying its god, it will be forever beyond all reach.” Is this not the case with humility? What nonsense to suppose that one can lose heart in the company of God or that giving all to Him renders one less courageous or less free! The more God acts in us the more we are; the more we are the more we can do, and the more we feel capable of doing the more moral strength we possess.

It is M. André Suarès who remarks that “pride resembles courage as the damned resemble the blessed elect.” The elect soul, completely lost in God, is there enkindled and set at rest; the damned soul, reduced to devouring itself, has not found the conditions for courage but for despair.

This humility which fears nothing dares anything in behalf of the interest which it has substituted for the personal one. Having breathed in God, according to St. Thomas, it exhales Him. It would consider itself lacking in a clear perception of truth and goodness were it not ready to brave anything for the sake of their triumph. It will act, whether in great or small matters, with almost the same willingness, for in both cases it is determined to do all that it can. Nor will it seek any return, for it thinks nothing of what it does and regards as its highest reward the happiness of having none.

Humility will be found peaceable and unconcerned as long as its own interests or the despised objects of this world are in question; but let God's honor be touched, it rises up with astonishing energy. Do not expect it to be silent before the blasphemer or abandon the field to the sectarian. It faces the issue, attacks if necessary, because the absence of personal interest spontaneously produces in it a kind of universal interest and of personal responsibility with regard to the things that matter. "Whatever is noble is by nature calm and seemingly dormant," writes Goethe; "but its opposite rouses it and obliges it to assert itself."

Moreover, since humility has no personal stop-sign, no boundaries marked out by selfish ambition, but only as its one objective the unlimited spaciousness of the good, its audacity will ever dare more and more. It will forget what it has done for the sake of what remains to be done, for like charity, it does not permit its left hand to know what its right hand is doing.

Above all, it will not become ossified, prematurely decrepit, nor recoil from the invitations of heaven before the end to spare itself some pains. Much less will it fall, through the compromises of activity, into that state of servitude to which Sainte-Beuve was alluding when he said: "Most men of renown die in a real state of prostitution." The prostitution of good is the course followed by him who expects to be paid wages for his existence: celebrity, power, wealth or indolent repose. He who has renounced himself and all things in favor of the one Thing necessary plays his part to the very end. He clings to it unostentatiously but fearlessly and without succumbing to discouragement. The opportunity is enough for him, without need of being advertised or proclaimed by any notoriety. Publicity is not typical of action or endurance derived from so sublime a source.

— 14 —

THE HOPES OF HUMILITY

It is characteristic of humility not to make any demands since it counts for nothing. But, by an astonishing paradox, it is humility which fosters the most stupendous, most buoyant hopes.

We need only understand wherein it places them. It does not aspire after temporal successes. The glory of creative genius or conquest, the fame of an apostle or prophet have no attraction for it, at least with deliberate consent. Even in its wake, supposing it capable of dreaming of posterity, it is not concerned with leaving a name, "that last sigh, remaining of anything," as Barbey d'Aureville remarks. It even goes so far in spite of its aspiration after all good, as to restrain excessive ambition for the cause of good, content with whatever Providence assigns to it and entrusting thereto the distribution of tasks.

"Excessive, vain individuals fall into grave misfortune," according to Sophocles. This is true even of pious zeal. Everything ought to be measured, provided that we use an eternal yardstick. Nevertheless, presumption is one thing, confidence another. The nothingness of humility becomes the strength of its hopes. We are never so well provided for giving as when our hands are empty. Who was ever so bereft as Jesus on the cross? His "indiscretion" had spoiled everything. And yet He said: "It is consummated"; the work is done, for He was judging from the viewpoint of eternity.

Spiritually, humility places us in the same position. It sets a man in his nonentity only to enable him to find being. The nothingness of the creature without God is but the reverse of

God, so to speak; the one cannot be touched without the other. Were one to attempt to do so, the resulting nirvana would no longer be humility, but rather a cowardly withdrawal or a satanic pride.

If each one of us is not great, our associations at least may be so, and above all our associations with God. It is the sense of our nonentity which attaches us to the first Being by the strongest bond, arousing the highest hopes. One entity would link itself to another entity; nonentity cries out to God as if in infinite despair, and in this utter despair, through God, lies invincible hope.

Compared with this, of what avail is reliance on ever limited resources, inevitably failing powers, necessarily uncertain external possibilities? With God one possesses all; but this does not become apparent until one has gone out of self, and given up calculating one's alleged treasures, weighing in a fluctuating scale one's possessions or chances, one's store of mental or physical vitality, one's prospects for the future.

In vain does pride simulate self-sufficiency; its pretension does not satiate its need. Humility, by recognizing its deficiencies, establishes the first condition which will enable liberty to blossom forth. The divine generosity is not, for it, an object of ambition but of worship. Having surrendered self, it believes and loves; who can separate hope from faith and love?

Sometimes we imagine we can force God by proudly cornering the resources reserved to His providence. But if we want God to help us, we should not begin by robbing Him. Humility is so wary of doing so, that it is even willing to have God take from it what it does not possess, that is, increase its nullity by inflicting humiliation and trial. Even this raises its hopes higher; for he who complains of the trials and exigencies of God is like a man

confronted with a magnanimous benefactor and refusing to enlarge his house or his coffers.

Fundamentally, is it not because he is secure and great in his union with God that the humble individual does not feel the need of ceasing to be little? A passenger on a great ocean liner which is taking him where he wants to go does not suffer because of his stature or his insignificance; he rejoices in them. What an intoxicating disproportion! The dwarf steers the giant, and the sea makes way for them. So does destiny before the Christian, and so does God Himself; for "God will do the will of them that fear Him," we are told in the Psalm.

As for me, full of the pride of self,—where would I be if the glory of God did not color my false glory with some reflection; without this mirage which deceives me, how could I bear the sight of myself? But I have no further need of being great or strong when I know that God is for me and that it is my abdication which gives Him to me. Oh, may I willingly renounce the Tabernacles of time for the land of Transfiguration whose tents are eternal!

— 15 —

THE PEACE OF HUMILITY

We wish for many things here on earth, but for none perhaps more ardently than for peace, solid peace, imperturbable and sure, peace within and without, guaranteed on all sides; whereas we experience only danger and anxiety. We forget that peace is a conquest and that conquest demands the heroic gift of self.

Humility comes in for its share of this and its share is a large

one. Peace has been defined as the tranquillity of order and, as we have already repeated several times, humility is order. The creature in his proper place within the divine order is more secure than if he were in a position to choose for himself among all the goods of this world and the next. He is at the very core of reality and possesses it entirely, so to speak.

Whatever is elevated draws security from its greatness; but what is elevated cannot remain stable otherwise than through humility, for stability is only found by each being at its own level and in just relationship with all beings, especially with God. That itself is humility.

At this price, the vastness of creation and the constant risks of our destiny are incapable of disturbing anyone. The swimmer in the sea who knows that he has miles of water below him is no less tranquil than the bather in a diminutive tank; likewise, the man who is carried by the far more terrifying ocean of affairs lives in peace when he feels that heaven is above him and swims according to its law.

There is danger from within; but has not a sincere humility anticipated that? The man who practises it cannot be carried away or misled by any situation,—he is above that; nor overwhelmed by any grief or humiliation,—he is below that. The experience of his nothingness defends him from being surprised in this latter peril; the greatness of Him to whom he is united in the former.

Above all, humiliation will not manage to astonish humility; it lives by it, or rather, ignores it, knowing only justice before God. If, on the human plane, an unjust odium is inflicted upon it, one glance in the direction of God suffices to restore it to its place in truth.

“Let a man walk without desires, without greed, without pride,” says the Bhagavad-Gita, “and he walks toward peace.

This is the divine resting-place. The soul who has reached it is no longer troubled; he who perseveres therein until the last day goes to burn himself out in God."

Moreover, he works for the peace of men among themselves more effectively than the international experts or the pacifists. If all renunciation is profitable to peace, considering that conflicts scarcely ever arise except as a result of partitions, humility as we have characterized it is more conducive to peace than anything else, for pride also comes in shares and is darkly involved in all other conflicts.

Humility pacifies and disarms; it allows rancors to die out by not enkindling them; it acts as a shock-absorber in relation to the clamor with which our quarrels resound; it is that small rain which, according to the proverb, lays a great dust.

Nothing can disturb humility on its own ground except that hunger and thirst after justice recommended in the Sermon on the Mount and which ever remains unsatiated here below. But no, even this is not a matter for disturbance. Physical hunger and thirst are a weakness and an anxiety; they tend toward death. The hunger and thirst after justice are the state of health itself, for by themselves are they satisfied. Is this not affirmed by the Master when He says: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall be filled?" Nor is it only in the next world that the promise is realized; it is here and now, under the auspices of hope.

What, then, can disturb our peace? United with God, thanks to our repudiation of self and reliance on Him, our anxiety is necessarily ignorance, forgetfulness or blasphemy. As a matter of fact, would it not be a want of faith?

— 16 —

THE HUMILITY OF THE SAINTS

The humility of the saints is the very same as we have been extolling; otherwise, our praises would have been false or else these so-called saints would not really be so. But in practice, the humility of these spiritual heroes assumes qualities which seem surprising and which must be considered in order to grasp in all its truth the attitude we are describing.

The saints look upon themselves as the least of men; they declare that they are miserable sinners, unworthy of the regard of heaven or earth. Nor do they rest until those about them are convinced of this. Certain it is that in their case there is some evidence of what is known in medicine as self-accusation, although its nature and motivation are far different!

In the absolute sense, the saints are right to see in themselves great sinners. The distance which separates them from sin is measurable; they are always somewhat contiguous to it; they often graze it. And their distance from heaven is infinite.

The saints are men of an ideal; the empire this ideal exercises over them increases with their virtue so that, the nearer they approach to it, the farther off they consider it to be, since they do not scan its proximity but wistfully accentuate its remoteness. The higher one's evaluation of what ought to be done, the more one despises what has been done. Aspiring beyond self, it is natural always to believe oneself below the mark. Longing after the impossible, one reproaches oneself for not accomplishing what is possible.

Furthermore, it should be observed that essentially, when

they are truly established in the soul, pride and humility are limitless, for they involve the absolute in both cases: God or Satan, the two poles of the eternal city. Hence the importance of the choice and the kind of frenzy with which the saints, striving to avoid the satanic absolute, plunge into its contrary.

“There is no danger,” says the author of the *Imitation*, “in setting thyself below all; there is great danger in setting thyself above even one.” The holy trepidation of such souls can be felt. Should they be raised despite themselves to some honorable office they take warning in the words of the same author: “No one is elevated without peril who would not gladly abase himself; no one commands without peril who would not be pleased to obey.”

Does not Shakespeare himself make a point of this danger, allowing one of the characters in *Troilus and Cressida* to say: “When one praises self otherwise than by one’s actions, the praises devour the actions.”? The saints indeed desire to perform actions worthy of praise; but they do not risk praising them or wish them to be praised for fear lest the praise devour them.

The final pitfall in the struggle against the vices is the credit for having overcome them. In fact, the last snare in the battle with pride itself is the pride of having conquered pride. Ah, how subtle is self-love, and how understandable it is that the heroes of goodness should seek to extirpate its last remaining roots!

Beethoven admonished himself in one of his notebooks: “First perform miracles, if you wish to reveal them.” Noble words, but far from measuring up to the sentiments of a saint. The saints work miracles and do not reveal them; they reveal their faults or what they believe to be such; they create artificial abasements to defend themselves against artificial renown. Humiliation is their friend, for they see in it the antidote to presumption and

arrogance. Indeed, since the nullity of the creature is, as it were, the reverse of God, they even hope, by thus burying themselves in their own nothingness, to attain "through humiliations to inspirations," as Pascal says.

Finally, therein lies the truth, which we forget but which is ever present to the saints. Compared with others or with myself, I am; but compared with God, I am not. Compared with others in contact with God, in God, according to what they are in God, I have no more existence than they, I am the least of all and may not prefer myself to anyone; for the very thing which might give me the advantage comes to me from God alone and hence annuls my pretensions, forcing them to loose their hold.

It may be said that my neighbor is in the same state. True enough: therefore he, too, should have the same attitude; but that is his affair and does not dispense me. It only means that all of us, sharing in the same infirmity, should feel our brotherhood precisely in our quasi-nonentity before God. "In humility, let each esteem others better than themselves," St. Paul advises us.

We shall not find the saints succumbing to that tendency which Pliny the Younger denounces and which consists in extending one's glory rather than deepening it. The saints always deepen, not their glory exactly, but what, in spite of them, renders them worthy of it, until the day when it bursts forth.

Yes, it does burst forth, do what they will to prevent it. By very reason of their ponderings in self-disparagement, God shines forth in them. God occupies the soul which has become empty of self and made entirely available for the invasion of immensity. In vain is the firmament unlimited; it fits into our eyes, and its vast expanses all pass through a tiny point before extending themselves in the mysterious spaces of our soul. Thus God takes up His abode in the hearts of His saints and may do so in ours.

When this is achieved, there follows an exterior expansion of this interior God, a spiritual flowering of which the soul, attributing none of it to herself, is nevertheless a joint cause. May she have the glory of it one day, if God deems it to be well; but may the secret be preserved now for the sake of a richer flowering. "Being magnificent without self-consciousness"; writes M. Abel Bonnard, "is not that just what is meant by 'flowering'?"

CHARITY

— 17 —

THE SPIRITUAL CROWNING-PIECE: CHARITY

Humility was a foundation; behold the roof. Humility prepared a dwelling; here is its guest.

In a striking comparison, St. Catherine of Siena depicts the spiritual life as a constantly developing sphere of which these two virtues are the poles. The more the sphere increases, the more does the lower pole descend and the upper pole ascend. Thus charity grows and rises in the measure that humility becomes deep-rooted in the heart.

Humility, by thus preparing the way for love, establishes in us the fullness of the divine upon the repudiation of the satanic. What is immortal takes the place of what is mortal. Eternity reabsorbs time into itself.

It is evident that a peculiar primacy is reserved to each of these virtues, although in opposite directions. Charity is first in dignity and should hold first rank in our intention; humility, first in the sense of a starting-point, will be the permanent condition for achievement. The admirable Ruysbroek thus explains it in a letter to Margarete van Meerbeke: "Above all, seek after God and love Him; after that, take the last place so as to scale the heights."

Turning toward God to love Him and recognize His totality; turning toward self to despise and reject self in all that is not a divine communication, a divine appeal: such is the twofold movement which a correct, vital spiritual life comprises. It is like breathing: one inhales and exhales, draws in a life-giving air, casts out waste products and toxins. In this way, life is a perpetual exchange between the human creature and a fostering

atmosphere which, by penetrating his being, expels whatever would be detrimental to him.

The superiority of charity thus shines forth and with still greater splendor in so far as it is charity which creates humility and so establishes its own base. Through humility one forgets self; but one never forgets self except out of love—could one, without aspiring after anything consent to a void? It is therefore by love that one becomes humble before God and submissive to His order. Let us say, if you will, that there is reciprocity as in all circular action, of which life is the type; but even in such action there is, nevertheless, something primary; in this case, it is love.

As a matter of fact, does it not stand to reason? Is the whole of the Gospel anything else but the “glad tidings” of God’s love for man and the appeal for man’s love of God in return? Such is charity in its two-fold object which forms but one, and such is Christianity. The law of love is our whole morality. The rest, the detail of the commandments, is only the service and safeguard of love.

Thus charity is promoted not merely to the rank of queen but of mother of the virtues. She requires them and brings them forth, nurtures and guides them, stimulates and impels them toward their end, where she takes precedence more than ever, for this end is loving knowledge in joy and peace.

The loving knowledge of God has even now the value of eternal life, since it is eternal life, according to our Master. But this life must be expanded and protected in the course of time; that is the service performed by the progress and contest of the virtues, of which humility is the principal one.

It is apparent that the whole of this program, the conception of which as well as its accomplishment surpass the powers of man, presupposes a divine intervention and, first of all, a divine word.

All is united in love and love is all; but love recognizes its beginning which is faith, and surmises its end,—a blessed peace. Of itself it animates the faith and permeates the peace; but it is none the less preceded by the one and followed by the other. The origin of its mystery implies communication, the term of it repose.

— 18 —

CHARITY, MOTHER OF THE VIRTUES

Virtue means strength and, in this sense, Christian virtue is indeed deserving of its name; not only is it a force intrinsically, but in its perfection, it is a universal force. Through it the obedience of man takes possession of the power of God.

According to the strict meaning of the word, virtue is not a mode of action, but an interior principle of action, a felicitous disposition acquired by habit or grace, the result of cultivation or of the intimate operation of the Spirit; consequently, for virtue thus conceived, it is a question of establishing the structure of the soul in order to regulate its movements. It was in this sense that Novalis defined a character as “a completely cultivated will.”

For the Christian, who considers the interior life only under the supremacy of grace, virtue cannot consist primarily in SELF-cultivation, but in allowing himself to be invaded by the spiritual current which Jesus inaugurated in the world. Chiseling one's soul as if it were an art curio, hammering it with great blows after the fashion of the superman, or straining its every fiber in the manner of the stoics would be of no avail for eternal life, and for us henceforth nothing matters but eternal life. I am not

speaking of renunciation in time; I am speaking of the impregnation of time with the influence of eternity. For this reason being virtuous consists principally, from the viewpoint of the Christian, not in belaboring ourselves by our solitary effort, but in opening ourselves to heaven.

It is by union with God that everything begins; God takes the initiative in the relationship and the soul offers its faithful cooperation. Union with God, that is love; for love alone has the power of uniting beings. This is why we speak interchangeably in Christian terminology of the supernatural order and of the order of charity, of the law of grace and of the law of love.

A threefold love is here involved wherein consists the whole sacred action of common life proposed by God to man. There is a love which surpasses us, coming from God to us; it is the eternal Spirit which God communicates to us by His grace. There is a love at our own level, proceeding from us to God by virtue of grace; and there is a love which descends from us, spreading over all other beings.

That is charity: the love of God in us and our good will receiving it cause it to act within us and to spread it abroad. Between God, ourselves and our brothers, it is one single Spirit of love. It can well be understood that the virtues of supernaturalized man can have no other origin.

In order that we may do good and advance toward eternal life, that we may have within us, for such action, means proportioned to the effort involved, the Spirit of God must, so to speak, consume our spirit, or at least, raise it, animate it; thus, united to God in the depths of our soul and by all our powers, we may be in a position to conform ourselves to the divine will and to carry into effect the generous purposes envisaged for us all by the providence of the heavenly Father.

Whoever is in charity is, in the same measure, pure and per-

fect. Whoever is pure and perfect is, necessarily and in that same measure, animated by charity.

To the Christian, charity and virtue are, therefore, basically one and the same thing. He gives himself to God, opens himself to the action of God by acting, refraining, suffering or enjoying in conformity to the providential order whereby God likewise gives Himself. Thus the bond of love determines holiness of life, manifests itself by holiness of life, and the development of a holy life increases this love.

As for the various virtues which combine to form our interior harmony or what I have just referred to as the structure of the soul, they result when love follows its bent within us in every direction which life suggests to it. Both interior and exterior life present appeals which love must satisfy, dangers which it must avert; and it has need for this purpose of a set of tools, so to speak. But fundamentally it is never anything but a question of love. That God should be loved in all things and that His love should triumph and achieve its end in all: that is the Christian moral life and there is no other.

Everything is contained therein, everything is determined by it to such an extent that no virtue can survive separated from the others. For if we perform an action through virtue, that is, through love of good,—in other words, from the Christian standpoint, as a result of charity—in all other instances we shall act similarly, our motive being the same, and all the virtues in us will be attained. Were it otherwise, it would mean that we acted from a motive of selfishness or pride, in our own interests or those of another, but not through virtue.

“He who possesses one virtue,” says St. Francis, “if he does not offend against any of the others, possesses them all. He who offends against one does not possess any but injures them all.” That is the prodigy. Above the virtues, which are manifold,

variable in form, complex and at times hazardous in application, there is the unity of simply cleaving to God; there is the reciprocal love whereby God furnishes the influx of grace which is expended in the virtues and in return, beyond every virtue and grace, receives the soul into His joy and repose.

If the Christian considered these things, would he manage to elude so much sublimity, such prospects, such forceful gentleness? "Once one has understood the meaning of truth," writes Jacques Rivière, "one is no longer capable of lying." When one has once understood love, can one help but love?

— 19 —

CHARITY, MOTHER OF THE RELIGIOUS VIRTUES

It is unnecessary to review in relation to each virtue what we have just said of them all; but a brief survey of their principal groupings cannot fail to have some interest.

First come the religious virtues, that is, interiorly, devotion and the spirit of prayer inspiring, exteriorly, gestures of adoration, pious sacrifices, the use of sacred objects rendering honor to God and consecrating us to His service.

In vain has the epithet "devout" been sneered at; its greatness is inescapable. It reminds us of those heroes of antiquity, such as the Decii in Livy, who "devoted" or "vowed" themselves unto death for the welfare of their people. With us, devotion is ordinarily less tragic but more comprehensive and elevated. It annihilates us in spirit so as to render to God the being which pertains to Him and which is all being, including our own. We acknowledge what God is and we are not, what we are only

through Him and would not be without Him. We magnify Him by the whole, vast destruction wrought before Him for the sake of His glory, which we love and make our own. Thus, at the last instant of sunset, the earth allows herself to be encompassed by darkness that the heavens may be set alight. But this flame which plays about her becomes her diadem; far from withdrawing, it lends its glory to her. When you, O Christian, lose yourself in God, you likewise secure to yourself the divinization of your being; such happy nonentity, such a wondrous void attracts the All, and with still greater power in so far as you are not solicitous about doing so.

In the eyes of the theologian then, the virtue of religion has the function of insuring the prompt accomplishment of whatever concerns the service of honor due to God. This, he would add, proceeds from love; for it is love which renders one prompt in the service of the beloved, just as, on the other hand, it is service which sustains or rekindles love. Hence St. Thomas speaks of worship as a "protestation of love," observing that one is always on fire for the honor of what one loves; that love induces "ecstasy," that is to say, the projection of the soul into its object; that one wishes well to this object, which signifies—since God wants for nothing in Himself—willing that God should be God, that He should be so wherever His creation extends and His kingdom is constituted. Thus, if the virtue of religion is not identical with charity it is in contact with it from below, as a mountain peak meets the clouds, as the intellect in its highest reaches borders on the angelic.

In the *Summa Theologica*, however, the virtue of religion is attached to justice. It is, in effect, an act of justice. But with God as well as among human beings, justice is only a minimum of love. It is the initial bond. It results from our association,—let us say, our friendship,—with Him who offers us His fellowship.

Surely we shall not deal with God according to the strange tactics of friends who do not consider themselves bound by the amenities when it is a question of those for whom, so they think, there is no need to put oneself out.

Ibsen's master-builder teaches us a lesson when he builds, first churches, then dwelling-places for men, and finally castles in Spain. We do not lack for castles in Spain and, goodness knows, there is no need to decry them; for utopias, like mirages, are only misplaced truths, yet capable of instructing us. The homes of men, too, have a right to abound; one might only wish they were raised a little further out of the mire and built with more stability. But as for the church, that citadel of the homes clustered about it, that prototype of all our dream castles,—has no one any enthusiasm for it? Some reject it as not worthy of them; but they themselves are unworthy. They are looking for influential friends, prominent and advantageous acquaintances. But where do they find them? "Religion," writes Novalis, "is morality raised to its supreme dignity"; why does the moral man of today forget its practices?

In contrast to such neglect, Bossuet conceives of devotion and describes it as a complete "abandonment." Not passive abandonment, by any means, but ardent and as active as necessary; for in surrendering self one also surrenders one's active powers. This yielding up of the soul is fraught with charity, for charity inspires it, and what is best in the ardor inspired from above attains to the ardor of what it draws from that source. Charity, which inspires religious justice, devotion, pious self-abandonment, does not desert them.

We do no injury thereby to the primacy of love. Love creates unity; religion acknowledges and consecrates subordination; but it is subordination to Him who is at once the sovereign greatness, the sovereign principle and the sovereign good, proper object of

love. Can religion ignore this, can its worship disregard what necessarily predominates? Love encompasses religion; by itself, religion would not imply love. There are religions based on fear. Ours is the child, the companion, the magnificent stimulus of love.

Hence our religious virtues are a particular instance of that *Return to God* which the whole of antiquity could only outline but which the Gospel carries out to its fulfillment. Everything derives from love; everything returns to it by means of appropriate actions, with those of religion in the foreground. We proceed from God perpetually and we should revert to Him in spirit by adoration, prayer, the ecstasy of devotion and of faithful love. It is a manifestation of what Paul Claudel calls "the sense of one's lineage, the mysterious placental bond." Moreover, it is a source of joy, like all that pertains to love, with a nuance of gladness which corresponds here to "promptitude"; for joy in the deepest and most interior sense remains the prerogative of love in its secret dwelling-place.

— 20 —

CHARITY, MOTHER OF THE PERSONAL VIRTUES

Our virtues are nothing more or less than our allegiance to God and to the kingdom of God. When it is a question of the individual or personal virtues, we find therein the sign of an allegiance which also manifests itself personally, not only with regard to its motive and intention, but also in its matter.

What is involved is the rediscovery of ourselves, pure and

whole, in the friendship of God, and the safeguarding of all the values represented by our person, since He has care of them. The initial gift of life, first of all, to sustain all the rest; and together with life that which makes it precious in the personal sphere: the goods of the body and of the soul in its individual operations.

One might be led to believe such a preoccupation alien to divine love which is disinterested and implies self-surrender. But we know that disinterestedness thus understood would be a grave offense. Our possession of self is only the enjoyment of a usufruct. Again the fruits of life belong in the first place to the Creator of being. Would not a failure in respect for our soul or body cast an aspersion upon the love which gives them to us and which intends to govern them with us by a rule of growth, accomplishment and joy?

It is for our own sakes that our personal integrity is a matter of interest to God, our Father; but it interests Him also as universal artificer, since each person, as well as every being however infinitesimal, is an element in His work, a medium of His designs. If charity, then, creates a union of wills between God and us, its first task should be,—once the honor of God has been duly acknowledged by adoration,—to cultivate the soil of that self with regard to which we have more access and control than anywhere else.

We must do so out of love, as love requires it of us. To the sovereign love we are to give this pledge of laboring to consolidate its reign in our being under the form of the particular virtues which achieve it. "To whom will he be good," asks Holy Writ, "he that is evil to himself?" Will he claim to honor his brothers, to honor his God, who, while forming part of the whole with God as its center, yet dares to despise himself? The personal

virtues taken together, are only a manifold love of oneself which, in turn, united to the love of one's neighbor, is a love of God by proxy, so to speak, a single, individual case which universal charity envelops and consecrates.

There are no strictly individual virtues for the handiwork of God is all of a piece and involves us all. But there are virtues which are primarily and immediately individual, which insure the safeguarding and fortuitous development of that fragment of humanity which has been labelled with our own name. So-and-so, a friend of God and God's quarry for an interior piece of work with wide reverberations, with far-reaching effects beyond measure: does not this characterization suffice to impel respect and a right-minded devotion for ourselves?

To the same extent that the cult of self when egotistical, is hideous, when referred to God it is noble and attractive, like the care the bride takes to adorn herself for her bridegroom, all devotedness and attention.

A soul should be a Holy of Holies. A body is a temple where the creator Spirit, who displays His art therein until He conveys matter to the frontiers of thought, wills to assume a representation worthy of this miracle. Our virtues are the ideal vesture for the purpose; they offer themselves to love enabling it to shine forth, ply its craft more thoroughly each day, and radiate abroad.

"Some things are to be enjoyed; others to be made use of," says St. Augustine; "sin consists only in inverting this order." We should enjoy God and spiritual goods in God; we should make use of ourselves in behalf of these spiritual goods referred to God. In this use, supernatural prudence is our guide; strength of soul, temperance, chastity, modesty, the spirit of sacrifice, mortification of the senses, moderation with regard to sleeping

and waking, work and rest, diversion and seriousness, the whole of our personal behavior sustains us. For all these virtues whether auxiliary or principal, charity which dominates the whole has but one message, addresses a single admonition, utters only one watchword: take care of love!

— 21 —

CHARITY, MOTHER OF THE FAMILY VIRTUES

The domestic hearth is an intermediary between the individual and society. Hence, what charity confers upon personal life and what, as we shall see, it supplies to social life, finds here its middle ground.

Married couples and their children are at the same time separate individuals and a single unit, the former being somewhat more true of the parents, the latter of the children on account of their physical dependence on their parents. An American described French home life in the following terms: "It is an environment where the whole family is found completely in each member." A beautiful tribute which one would wish might always be deserved. But wherever this ideal is realized, one cannot help wondering how it could be maintained unless love, the bond of so perfect an association, possessed some guarantee superior to the whims, the selfish impulses, the individual vices which would make short work of sowing discord in even the most united of groups.

Our attachments—especially at such close range as here—demand a detachment held in common; detachment from self,

detachment from tempting, transitory fancies in favor of higher, moral values. An ideal shared by all is a powerful consolidator of love; but only when this ideal is limitless can it withstand so many domestic enemies, for each participant in the common love is capable of summoning up a host of them on his own account. It has become a commonplace that love terminates as soon as one has discovered the limitations of what one loves; but there is only one way of not finding a human being limited in every respect, namely to unite with him in his ideal.

Women are wont to say that men spoil love. "They love us for our faults," one of them writes, "for the very faults with which they reproach us; and they love us, too, with their faults. That is what is set up passionately in common." This is often only too true, and the partnership indeed languishes as a result; for the "reproach" which is added to a false love has soon devoured its substance. Love vanishes; the reproach remains, and conjugal life gradually disintegrates.

This is even more true when there are three, four, five or more members in the family. The interplay of love with its nuances of respect and solicitude, obedience and devotedness, gratitude and giving, will hardly resist the friction set up by sinful inclinations, whether instinctive on the part of the child, or assented to and perhaps even cultivated on the part of educators incapable of educating themselves.

The common foe in the family is evil. The enemy of evil we have found to consist in that disposition which is a love of unconditional, universal good rendered so by its identification with the supreme Good. This is the connecting-link for family attitudes as well as for all others. There is, however, this peculiarity, that, on account of the special love and objective pursued, namely the development of immortal beings, the family is an institution

of unlimited, eternal value. To conceive of it as merely temporal, depriving it of its infinite aspiration, would be to debase it; moreover, it would be exposing it to every danger.

Peace, that priceless treasure, that essential condition to the generation of new lives, to the restoration, expansion and progress of others,—will it not bear a relationship to the virtue which is highest of all, best adapted consequently for avoiding collisions, just as the airplane defies the congestion of traffic jams in the city streets?

It is elevation of soul which insures peace; it is its elevation to the highest summit, unto God and the love of God, which secures it against every fear. All the efforts of superficial urbanity cannot conceal those “more than civil” wars described by Jules Romain, those frightful household quarrels which remind one of nothing so much as the familiar crab-vendor’s basket; but the slightest operation of charity can avert them.

When God dwells in the home the family increases twofold; He brings all the members together in Himself. He serves as mediator of all attitudes, confirms good will and allays all bitterness. Such a home is the abiding-place of brethren, as the Scriptures characterize it, for God is their Father. On the other hand, a group more or less withdrawn from the love of God is in constant danger of dissension, even disintegration and frustration because, basically, it has withdrawn from love itself.

It is God who is substantial love. Outside of that center, one cannot participate in what emanates from it and reverts to it. Either one loves God, even if it be unknowingly,—that is possible, fortunately, and even frequent,—or one really does not love at all.

Do we hear a protest from the true lovers, the “absolutists” who make their God of the object loved, or perhaps of love itself? Let them reflect more deeply and they will allow us to

affirm that: they do not owe themselves to a created love; they do not owe themselves entirely to one another. Their immortal souls are unique and free. They may love each other, depend upon each other; but they are one only in a certain sense, with a unity of order and of mutual inherence which permits the autonomy of the person to survive. In the absolute sense of the term, they do not belong to one another. However, if together they give themselves to something higher, this is not that they may love less; for the fountainhead of love is then still more active; they receive a greater infusion of it; and in this overflow of the absolute imbibed with a single heart, all bonds are drawn closer.

— 22 —

CHARITY, MOTHER OF THE SOCIAL VIRTUES

In the category of social virtues we include: patriotism, respect for authority, the mutual civility which is proof against the spirit of contention, the veracity which inspires reciprocal trust, the liberality which encourages association, and, above and beyond all, justice. Without some measure of charity, would not such a combination of demands be a snare and a delusion?

The triumph of charity is to cause us to love our enemies, since a force is proportionate to its obstacle and enmity is the greatest which opposes itself to the common life. Furthermore the intervention of any power is all the more manifest and glorious in so far as no other is able to take its place; but where shall we find, apart from charity, a unifying force capable of overcoming hatred?

Aside from enemies, love is confronted by natural associates known as fellow citizens. In their regard, the least to be expected of it is justice. The least, I say, and yet, according to St. Thomas, justice is, of all the moral virtues, the one "in which the splendor of virtue shines forth supremely." This is because it creates order, achieves that good which is superior to the good of the individual, that collective or social good which the Angelic Doctor declares to be higher and more divine: "majus et divinius bonum." Aristotle had already affirmed that "justice is an eminently beneficent power"; and the sober philosopher waxed enthusiastic when he added: "Neither the morning nor the evening star is so admirable."

However, in spite of what lukewarm Christians or unprincipled mentors would have us believe, justice is based upon love. Beyond their rudimental brotherhood, what prevails among men is the struggle for existence becoming when necessary, a man-hunt; but not justice. Moreover, if justice is to be done between man and man within the group, if it is to permeate the relations of each man with the group taken collectively, all the virtues must come into play: individual and family virtues whose dependence upon love has already been pointed out.

Love everywhere, love always. It is the cement of society as well as the cement between souls, as it is the bond of interior unity. If the source of love is on high, in primary love, then charity must indeed take society under its wing as it protects the family and the individual.

When we refer to patriotism we evoke a causality which holds a place in our regard between that of the family and the prime Agent, between our parents and Providence. A derivative of devotion to God, an extension of family devotion, it therefore is subject to the same conditions and must be declared similarly dependent upon love.

What about respect for authority? Men laugh at it, and how many Christians succumb to the world's influence in this regard! But they are only nominal Christians, or else they forget themselves. The theologian would remind them that a citizen owes to those in power the honor befitting their rank, the obedience due to authority, the gratitude owing to service rendered. The heedless egotist always considers himself badly served; the servant of God does not wait until he is well served to be of service himself; he does not insist upon having his opinion prevail before obeying, nor his desire satisfied before rendering honor. He refers all to God and thus is brought back, through whatever may intervene, to the supreme love.

The same thing applies to all the social virtues; they all have the same connections because they make the same demands and experience the same dangers. "No one is truly the friend of man," writes St. Augustine, "unless he is first the friend of the primary Truth," that Truth which not only teaches, but inspires and attracts. The "primary" nature of this effective Truth produces in that charity which enters into union with it a universal character. Charity modelled according to such a pattern is capable of imitating God's benevolence toward all creatures, since it imitates His infinity.

Otherwise, what can be expected from a social organism a prey to greed, jealousy, unfair demands on the pretext of justice, or refusals of justice on the pretext of order and prosperity? The mere manœuvring of selfish interests is fatal so long as self has not been raised to the level where it meets all the other selves and willingly adopts them. Loving one's neighbor "as oneself for the love of God," one may consent to another's will as to one's own, without evincing any other partiality than that of the good considered as higher in itself or better adapted to the present providential case. On the contrary, by preferring oneself above

all or choosing arbitrarily merely because of not finding a first choice, one is in the midst of the fray; elbow, tooth and claw come into play. Still less is one willing to yield a free gift or to accept suffering inflicted by another or for another's sake—dispositions without which no real peace can exist.

Hell consists in not loving, and such is a social order wherein a higher love does not create reciprocal loving and the virtues it demands. Society represses certain actions and rewards others; it does not get to the root of anything. The root lies much deeper in the essential preferences of the heart, the primary impulse which sets all the rest in motion. Hence, after having characterized justice as the supreme social virtue, St. Augustine adds: "Justice is love in the service of God alone"; that is to say, by serving God from a motive of love one is led to deal justly with all one's brethren; for if justice is the "guardian of the rights of others," as St. Thomas observes, charity is the guardian of justice. He who possesses charity and allows himself to be possessed by it satisfies his neighbors' rights and goes them one better; justice, even based on love, does not suffice him; he looks on the free gift of love as a debt and thus he intends, with Jesus addressing St. John, "to fulfill all justice."

When you come right down to it, everybody more or less agrees about this principle. When anyone denies it he is deceived about his own ideas and the time will come when they must assert themselves. "Justice is born of love," writes Edgar Quinet; "it alone has wrought this miracle." With every deep student of human affairs he grants that this *greater good*, this *diviner good* which is the good of all, termed the social good, only those are capable of serving generously and constantly who devote themselves intensely to the divine good. This is obvious if the social good is the highest fulfilment of the designs of God on earth, if it is He who brings to perfection man, the lover of heaven.

— 23 —

CHARITY, REGULATOR OF THE VIRTUES

The rule of the virtues is reason and, in a sense, there is no other. "The good of man consists in being in accord with right reason," St. Thomas often repeats, concurring with the pseudo-Arcopagite. "The light of thy body is thy eye," the Lord tells us Himself in the Gospel. Nevertheless, reason is only a secondary rule; it derives from a light and a decree which precede it. The primary rule is creative Reason; the first rule is God Himself; and God assumes the position of rule increasingly in proportion to our union with Him through faith, of course, but even more especially through love. What is loving but willing what the beloved wills when his will is good? And since reciprocity is essential here, does not loving become willing the same things in common?

Furthermore, virtue is only the striving after good under various aspects and diverse names; how should its rule not be the primary Good, containing and justifying all the others, so that it becomes in their regard what the evidence is to science, embodying its conclusions, evaluating its processes?

He who loves God wills for His sake, ultimately, whatever he wills and rejects on His account, in the last analysis, all that he rejects. This is a form of willing which pervades the entire will. Hence theologians refer to charity as the "form" of the virtues; that is to say, at once the impulse which moves them and the superior viewpoint which guides them.

Such guidance and regulation is exercised through an intermediary. This is prudence, residing in us after the fashion of eternal Wisdom in God,—love's board of directors, as it were.

All that God does is done in the name of love. In whatever we ourselves do, God sees love. In all that we do with heart united to God, we see God and His love. Thus do the interchanges continue between our bountiful Infinite and ourselves.

All the grandeur of such relations would vanish if the regulation of charity were not sufficiently attentive, explicit and vigilant to uncover and evade every snare. There is an inordinate love of virtue; there is a pursuit of virtue which takes on the aspect of a vice. To be wise, knowing where to go does not suffice; one must also know at what pace to proceed and again where to stop.

How does spiritual progress make headway in us? What we call acquired virtue is the fact of having been virtuous in the past. We must make a beginning. We must persevere patiently, combining light and action and increasing the one by means of the other. For we only find the road by taking it; we must set to work in order to ensure our spirit and discern it. Little by little, in its own good time and not ours, there develops sureness of action, facility, and even delight. Any attempt to invert this order only makes way for disappointment and defeat.

"The angels on Jacob's ladder have wings," St. Francis de Sales observes, "and yet they do not fly; they ascend and descend in orderly fashion from rung to rung." It might be added: what makes Jacob's angels ascend according to the order defined by obedience is precisely their wings, the wings of love. God bless those wings, which are, at the same time, regulators and tranquillizing curbs! More power to that waft of the wing which does not come from our unaided strength, like the pretentious heave of a muscle, but is produced thanks to the celestial atmosphere, the tempered cooperation of the Spirit!

Admiration is often expressed for strength of character, and rightly so; and yet, it is sometimes easy to slide from character into the stubbornness of the headstrong man, the mind that is

dead set. Nothing is more inimical to real character which involves reason as well as strength. Such an eventuality is prevented by a pliant, unreserved adhesion to the divine will; and is it not from the virtue of charity that this will be drawn? Only at such a price is character "the good genius of a man," as Heraclitus would have it. Natural character rouses and strengthens us; but it takes another genius to conceive a right idea of life, evaluate it, and regulate its rhythm in unison with our higher being which is divine by participation and final destiny.

It is particularly in the realm of the spirit that the maxim of one of our learned men applies: "There is less need to seek for what is lacking so as to supply it than for what exists so as to enrich it." What exists is the state in which God places us, the graces He confers on us; our love for His will draws therefrom every rule of enrichment and progress. As for what is lacking, we expect it from the future, if it so pleases Him; we relinquish it to Him if He denies it to us. This is the real prudence whose guardian is celestial charity.

"Let us love charity," says the wise Contenson; "it gives organic form to life, inflames the heart, vitalizes actions, rectifies excesses, stabilizes manners; it is worth everything else together and without it nothing is of any worth."

— 24 —

CHARITY, VITALIZER OF THE VIRTUES

Virtue is not something cut and dried, doled out once for all; it is a growth as well as an acquisition; it is a conquest. Great or small according to the outlook from which it is judged, today

it may meet the demands of the ambition which attains it; tomorrow ambition will have outstripped it while still continuing the pursuit. What is the wavering virtue of a poor scapegrace to a man of solid character? What is the virtue of such a man to a saint? If a saint were to forget his leniency would he not consign both our vices and our virtues to the same sordid heap?

St. Paul would have us rise from virtue to virtue as from light unto light. This is a program which might seem presumptuous and which may be so as we have said; but, kept within the will of God, it is absolutely normal; admitting that life itself is an unfolding and the wing-tip indicative of the wing. Re-building one's life each day on a higher rung, propping it up, is a necessity so inherent in human existence that its abandonment can only mean the failure of the life principle itself. And what is that? Once more: it is love. Thus love is a vitalizing principle which should always be discerned working in the service of the virtues and for the benefit of their effects in the world.

This is indeed the case among those who have been spurred on by the goad of love. The saints know no rest, within or without, as long as they see a remaining possibility of growth toward that synthesis of the virtues which we call integrity, rectitude, toward any one of the elements composing it, in a word, toward the good and all its effects.

One might be tempted to say to them: What a fuss! What a deal of noise! They would reply: I hear within me the voice of the prophet,—“Cry, cease not.” Do ye prefer to urgent shouts, O mortal men, the silent death disintegrating all that is immortal in your souls?

Would that this cry resounded far beyond what it does! Too many nonconductors muffle it. But it is none the less abiding in the Church whose collective role is identical with that of the saints, preceding and inspiring it. The Spirit who is the soul of

the Church is a beguiling love yearning to renew from day to day, by the increase of all the virtues combined, the whole face of the earth. This is the "immortal Fire" of which Bossuet speaks; its action does not stop even with humanity,—the simple rallying-point of forces still more vast,—but tends also to renew through it, by means of love, the universal creation.

The Church is not merely human, but cosmic; it links the constellation of men to all the constellations of heaven. There is a flame in the depths of the astral seas as in the depths of our ocean, as in the heart of the earth, a flame unconscious of itself, but known by charity, that point of concentration and awakening,—of consciousness.

The stars wait upon man to enable them to love; man wills to love by them. Charity animates not only human virtues, but those *virtues of the heavens* referred to in the Psalms, since "all things [are] for sake of the elect" and should therefore obey the same fundamental impulse, the same movement.

Wherever the sovereign love reigns of which charity is the sole universal expression, not one iota is lost of that love which vitalizes the world's life. Every power is employed rightly, every tendency is fulfilled, every quest uncovers a treasure; for it searches in the proper place, where the Creator has set down the elements required for the rearing of his handiwork.

Alas, how we find ourselves at cross-purposes here! The world struggles amid a hostile, oppressive disorder; the elements overpower man and men jostle one another in unspeakable chaos. The key to the whole has been lost. The real objectives and, consequently, the real means, escape us. Where is the custodian of the true end to be found unless it be in that sovereign love which encompasses all and is capable of transforming the confusion of our realm into a blessed harmony?

Love is everything. The principle of universal animation

springing from the heart of man is humble, magnificent charity. When it shall reign, we shall have souls, we shall have groups, we shall have a civilization, a Christendom complete and self-possessed, a Church catholic in the full sense of the word, a universe.

— 25 —

CHARITY, THE LIBERATOR

Virtue is essentially an unfolding of life, an expansion, like the exercise of our limbs or senses, like art or sport; it should never suggest to us the idea of constraint. Had nature not been warped, it would be as natural to obey reason as it now is to obey the senses. Nature, the choice of the better with a view to nature's ends, the normal way, alacrity in the response to this way: these are all related ideas. Virtue is not a yoke, but a wing.

Yet, the fact is undeniable. A virtuous life demands a sustained effort, heroism frequently; this is why philosophers erroneously attempt to measure the merit of virtue by the effort expended, its commendation in terms of its constraint. Aristotle does not share this view. They are called virtuous, he maintains, who delight in performing virtuous acts, not those who find them repugnant. The greater the art of a virtuoso the more apt he is to execute his technical flourishes as if they were child's play.

But it still remains to be seen why and under what conditions the virtuoso makes sport of difficulties, the virtuous man delights in good works. Would the former be so much at ease were he not attached to his art, devoted to it heart and soul? If the latter did not love virtue, its objects, the models who represent it to

him, the leaders by whom it is recommended, and above all the sovereign Master of human achievement, would his relish be such as it is?

Thus love makes a return to free from constraints virtuous labors in every domain, once they have been stimulated, clearing and levelling the way before them.

Whether in its conquest, its maintenance or its growth, the virtue of Adam's descendant is painful to him. But Augustine is by to assure him that: "Where there is love, there is no pain, or if there is, it becomes lovable."

One may act from fear of punishment, temporal or eternal: then the liberty of the soul seems precarious. If such is the case, love again liberates the moral man by transforming this servile fear into a filial fear, a dread not of suffering but of displeasing the object loved and being separated from it. This is a fear of an altogether different kind; it no longer has anything of fright in it. For fright is a reaction to force or malice, this fear to majesty and affection.

It is true that love itself takes us captive; but let those who love tell me whether they do not find in that captivity an exhilarating freedom, a deliverance from all things, a lightness, a feeling of being on the wing which, seemingly must lift them to the stars. Oh no, love is not fettered, and if it is bestowed on the limitless Being, the Being possessed of all that is, who offers to share it with us at the price of love alone,—where then is the chain?

To be free, in this world, means for the Christian, to be free from self and of all things in order to become God's captive, captivated by love, that is, and therefore free, much more than free, since the happy chosen soul is thus assured of a glorious power over all things.

One may dread falling short of love and consequently of what

it bestows: we are all sinners. But hope united to love not only assures us of the end, on the condition that we supply all requirements; it promises us assistance, thus freeing us from a frightened trepidation about ourselves. Prudent mistrust is right and proper; it should persist, safeguarding us against the surprises to which we are ever liable. Such fear is good; love that is on the alert would not advise against it. A loving wife said to her husband rather ingenuously: "How grieved I should be if I ever began to perceive that I was less in love with you!" Such apprehensiveness is really love; the fear of ceasing to love proves that one loves. Nevertheless, love preserves confidence in itself, the more so as it leans upon the potent Love which never fails us.

Thence derives what is called in mysticism "the liberty of the children of God"; it is the interior state of the just man; it is the basis of his serenity. The just soul given to works of virtue is not crushed by virtue's weight; he is superior to what he does, aware of why he does it, and this awareness is a source of more liberty to him than his labor is of constraint. At one and the same time, in the very same instant, one may be arduously employed for the sake of God and rest peacefully in God, as God Himself does. God is at once eternal act and eternal repose, because action demands no effort in Him in so far as it encounters no obstacle. He shares with His friends this twofold quality reconciled in His essence.

One is not a good workman unless one dominates one's task sufficiently so as to feel free in the face of it. Working for love one is twice free: with the freedom conferred by sublimity of soul and with that which the heart invaded by a single longing reaps from obliviousness to the universe.

— 26 —

UNIFYING CHARITY

Charity, with God for its principal object, expands and overflows, following every trend of God's love, embracing His objects, creations, invitations, solitudes and hopes, in other words, all things. Since God is spirit, reducing everything to spirit, our love of all things in Him is essentially a brotherhood comprising rational creatures, but with prolongations and relationships as extensive as being itself.

The love of charity thus manifests itself as unifying in the highest degree. Nothing escapes its grasp; it reduces everything to unity because it sees God in all, God's creation, His work, His tenderness, His attraction, His eternal intimacy which is consummation and beatitude.

It is great thoughtlessness on our part to neglect so completely at times this implication of our creed, so fraught with beauty and inspirational power. We are one, yet divided; we form a single whole and one would imagine, observing our actions, that we are those brother enemies, all the more eager to rend each other because exasperated by the unforgivable oneness of their lives. We feel that the material universe is hostile to us: a cruel mechanism, we call it, a dispensary of poisons, a jail, a vast slaughterhouse, a graveyard. And yet, is there a distinction between man and man, a conflicting interest or disparity of mind or heart which can rival in importance the simple quality of being human, of being Christian, that is to say, a child of God, an eternal confrere? Is there any comparison between what the universe allegedly contrives against us and the infinite bounty of its promises?

Oh, the madness of hatred, envy, ambition, of rivalries, of all the exactions imposed by private and social dissension! The absurdity of our complaints against a nature which "groans" as we do and "brings forth," destined as it is to bring forth naught but our happiness! What an odious tendency to consider ourselves wronged by someone else's joy when ours has vanished! The baseness of those comparisons which cause us to forget the joy and honor dispensed to all!

What need have we of being great when there are great beings all belonging to us, when there are heroes and saints, Christ and the triune God in whom we are admitted to a participation? What need have we of being individually happy during this time of journeying toward the happiness which all await, possessing only an earnest of it here,—a proximate happiness, for life is very short, a happiness which we must win together by the very fact of the union we acknowledge, love and serve?

Before the destinies which love holds out to us, nothing can be wanting to us but love alone; all the rest is inconsequential and should be looked upon as futile. Confronted with great objectives and great beings we are only small and underprivileged if we fail to love them.

When someone whom you love inflicts suffering on you, O man, imagine that you are implanting a kiss upon the brow of his corpse. When someone causes you to suffer to the point where you dare not to love him, consider that God is kissing the brow of each of us out of that immense charity which He pours forth on all; think of that Hand of God in which a great artist has depicted our humanity curled up like a single object of tenderness and care.

A soul that shuts itself to others, separates from others, or curses things and events, is nearly always a soul who believes it has opened itself and confided in others uselessly, to its own dis-

advantage, at the risk of being deceived or made a laughing stock. Just one more degree of understanding would have enabled it to realize that egotism is the only dupe, absurd the division of what forms a single whole, and senseless the breaking of that bond which attaches us to humanity by way of God Himself.

In regard to those sudden friendships which sometimes carry us off our feet and cannot endure absence from one another, Mme. Swetchine wrote: "How can one be impoverished to such an extent by the loss of what one did not possess the day before? It would be inexplicable were there not a bit of eternity in certain moments." But is there not something eternal in all our moments, and does not this eternity coursing through time gather together all beings indivisibly and inevitably?

God is a living, fertile unity wherein nothing that emanates from it and returns thereto can fail to discover the basis of unity. Creatures are there in the bosom of the Father, without themselves yet with themselves, deriving from Him their unity and their distinction, their personality and their parentage, both of them undeniable. All is but a single life in God, although it is from God that those differences come which are, in His decrees, not motives for separation but reasons for cooperation.

Charity should link us together by the very thing which divides or distinguishes us. Out of our varying shades of thought, feeling, aspiration and movement, all complementary in His eyes, God wills to compose a single white beam in the light of which the colors of things are also fused. Thou light of love, enriched by every variation, unified in the divine ray which thou dost flash upon creatures so amazingly manifold and kaleidoscopic, wilt not thou open our eyes and our hearts that know thee not?

— 27 —

GENEROUS CHARITY

Charity loves to lose itself in God; but that it may act in conformity with God, it finds itself again. It dies within and lives without—a life animated and guided by love.

Love is not faint-hearted; it is lordly and generous, makes demands and requites them, desires all and yields all. The love of God, infinite in generosity, is also the most avid; it brooks no limitations, imposing none either on love's attentions or its returns. It claims our whole life, but gradually and by degrees which His mercy gauges and with the sole view to rendering us happy and perfect.

In us, too, generosity is necessary to love. "For us to be able to love God," Novalis writes, "He must have need of assistance"; and since He does need help in His universe, since He recognizes Himself in our neighbor and invites us to do so, we have no lack of opportunities for being generous.

We are not so, naturally, to any great extent. Generosity has roots in us, but selfishness has many more, and greed and envy. Within ourselves we hardly permit others to exist. We are not very sympathetic; we are easily roused to jealousy, even though we never know what suffering or need is being endured by the one whose lot we envy. This is why Lacordaire could look upon charity as a "reserved virtue." It presupposes that God is very much to the fore in one's heart.

The first generosity to be practised toward God is undoubtedly the accomplishment of duty and, toward one's neighbor, justice. I know of married couples, brought back to God by the War of 1914, who promised Him not rosaries or novenas, but children,

fulfilling at one and the same time their religious, personal, domestic and civic duty.

This is very fine; but the height of charity goes further. It demands extravagance and is not phased by extremes. In fact, as Stendhal observes, "a great action is always an extreme at the moment when it is undertaken." Here, the extreme is the gift of one's all, which by no means signifies, as some people imagine, the casting off of responsibilities or holding aloof from the world. It is untrue that the Christian disdains the concerns of this life for the sake of God; his love for God includes a virtuous concern for this life. But it is true that he has no concern except for God in the sense that, to him, an interest in the world is not outside of this. In so far as it were, he would reject it.

Furthermore, giving all does not necessarily consist in making magnificent gestures. The things we prize so much—health, fortune, joy, expectations,—it is enough to allow them to be taken from us lovingly and gently. A sudden impulse might be somewhat inhuman; it suffices to be a man, in the Christian sense.

With regard to our neighbor, charity is generous when it easily gives what it has, when it goes beyond what is asked, beyond what is indispensable, when it senses the needs of others before seeing them and supplies them tactfully, when it renders assistance rather than reprimanding or reminding one of one's catechism lesson. The Schoolmaster's lecture to a drowning man is amusing to the reader but causes a man to reflect. Inviting a starving person to seek the kingdom of heaven would seem to be an insult; it is one if he is not fed.

Fraternal generosity is prudent. It should be so, for Flaubert is right in saying that "generosity toward scoundrels is almost a want of delicacy toward goodness." Yet it is not afraid of taking a chance. In spite of disillusioning experiences, it does not im-

mediately suspect evil and make it a pretext for refraining as do so many self-styled mind readers who are egotists fundamentally. One who loves God must open a rather large credit account to His poor humanity.

Further on the generosity which risks making a mistake also runs into the chance of experiencing those annoyances which it invariably brings in its wake. One is not generous enough if one is not willing to endanger anything of oneself. An upright man must expect to be thwarted, misunderstood, calumniated by reason of the very detachment he manifests; thus he may embellish his disinterestedness with magnanimity and patience. There is something detestable about the oriental proverb which says: "He whom you will not let die will not let you live." I prefer the confirmed life-saver who thinks: What's the odds! A life for a life, a soul for a soul, among men who are but one.

Even this is not the hardest form of generosity. To act, even at a risk, is exciting; but to endure, to "hold on" with a heroism unrewarded and unsung! That is where it is difficult to measure up to the requirements of love!

Away with presumption! Facing the pain and coming to grips with it, so to speak, is too imprudent; one would run the risk of defeat. It is better to make a little room for oneself within the ordeal close to God, get used to it little by little, and not squirm about too much in the thorn bush. But at all events, generosity must hold out! The acquiescence of the feelings is not essential. Love of God and neighbor need not be perceived by the senses; it suffices for it to be sensitive to God. What the generosity of love expects is the very thing that we have received from a creative, providential, redeeming and assisting generosity. Gift for gift, love for love, without calculation, hesitancy or reserve.

Lord, I love this gift that Thou hast given me.—Now give it to Me in thy turn.—Here it is, Lord; it is just that I should give out of love what I hold from love, which is asked of me only

through love.—Hast thou lost nothing then?—No; I have twice found love, and with love all things.

— 28 —

DISINTERESTED CHARITY

Among the unpublished manuscripts of Victor Hugo the following sentence appears: "Love is a tremendous egotism possessed of every sort of disinterestedness." The definition is open to dispute; but applied to charity it assumes a very deep meaning. In comparison with the human desire which charity implies and satisfies, what we call egotism is faint-hearted. The soul is made for infinity, and the love of charity, far from urging its renunciation, proposes this as exclusive objective. Only with regard to the rest, that is, to what does not really matter, charity advises, asks, or even demands of the soul disinterestedness.

We are, therefore, infinite egotists if we are willing to apply the term "egotism" to that vaulting ambition of desire which constitutes the very essence of a human being. Made in the image of God, could the almost divine soul bestowed on us propose to itself any other end than God Himself?

Have you ever observed that in the sermon wherein He intends to dispel all our worry about earthly cares and to excite our confidence in His Father, Jesus begins with these words, seemingly so alien to the subject and at the same time so severe: "No man can serve two masters . . . You cannot serve God and Mammon." As a matter of fact, this is the very crux of the matter. If money is one's master, one becomes very much disturbed about money and all that it represents. If one has God for master, one is concerned about God and the things of God.

But in detachment from worldly goods, thus motivated, a security is to be found to which no ambition would ever dare aspire. In drawing our craving toward Himself, God finds the means of transforming it into a wonderful hope. The abandonment which He asks of us is in truth a surrender, a shifting of responsibility; by no longer seeking aught, we shall find infinite riches.

Self-seeking? If you will, but not on our part. It is God's self-seeking for us; it is the inheritance of our superhuman sonship. None the less it remains true that charity gives all, that it is "possessed of every sort of disinterestedness," as the poet declares. It cries out with St. Augustine: "That soul is indeed avaricious whom God does not suffice!" The addition promised by the Gospel to those who seek first the kingdom of God and His justice is precious to them because it comes from their heavenly Lover; of itself it is unimportant. Does a millionaire get passionately excited about someone's owing him a nickel? Five cents is five cents and one might make a point of collecting it from sheer business acumen; but one does so with a smile. Likewise the Christian possessed of the kingdom of God looks down on the kind of wealth symbolized by Mammon and is not subject to it. He always has more than he needs. Or rather, he has all; for by renouncing this world for God's sake he acquires it in God and henceforth possesses it with a free soul, a soul sufficient unto itself when this world seems to fall away, and yet alone with God while this world remains to him.

This is not serving God "graciously," as Rimbaud styled it, but with love and filial confidence. We assert that God suffices; we cannot prevent Him from being what He is and showing Himself, with regard to His disinterested friends, even better and more spontaneously magnanimous.

When we come to our neighbor, the altruism of charity is henceforth unrestricted; and how easy it should be for us if we realize that our neighbor, bereft and powerless as we are our-

selves, can do nothing for us. Neither can he harm us. Whatever he might perpetrate against us would ultimately hurt no one but himself. Are we not aware that everything transpires between God and ourselves?

Confronted by an enemy, charity desires the cessation of hostility; it keeps itself in readiness for a reconciliation; it prays, but not for itself. "Love those who do ill to you," St. Francis said to one of his sons; "love them such as they are, without desiring solely for your own advantage that they should be better Christians."

As for friends and those to whom we are indifferent—if indeed charity will accept this latter term—disinterestedness would have us seek in our dealings with them only an opportunity for mutual spiritual progress and for giving. No insistence upon a return. None of those complaints about a pretended ingratitude which often evince in the benefactor only a selfish hankering after thanks out of all proportion to the services rendered.

Disinterestedness requires that we do not make love and its benefactions depend upon the good behavior and worthiness of those who are its object as if, cut off from our spiritual community by the severity of our judgments, such and such persons no longer had a right to share our inheritance. This pretentious idea is tainted with conceit. As Christians, God's family is ours. God loves those "undeserving" members; His Christ wills to heal them. Even in the face of incorrigible baseness, should we not say with Amiel: "It is because humanity is not worthy of the sacrifice that the sacrifice is so great, the martyrdom so noble."

It is splendid to love one who does not merit being loved, to love out of love for love, out of moral integrity and self respect. But what is still more magnificent, what alone suffices the Christian soul, is to bestow charity on all in the name of the unity which embraces all of us, while at the same time not allowing anything or anyone to come between God and ourselves.

— 29 —

CHARITY, SOURCE OF JOY AND PEACE

There is no joy except in love, at least in a sufficiently wide sense of the word. There is no peace except in the repose of desire, once the object of that desire has been attained. Hence the Christian is not slow in arriving at the conclusion: true joy, secure peace are to be found in charity which binds us to God and to all creatures, which procures for all, if they so will, their perfect fulfillment.

Our pretensions do not see things in this light. We have our passionate desires, our impulses, our immediate purposes, and we are not easily reconciled to having them disturbed. When Providence dares to do so, we are not far from looking upon it as an enemy. It is really our clearsighted, imperturbable friend; we need only yield to it to acquire joy.

Those who are preached to in this wise but who have little taste for such heights, still more those in whom partiality of desire disturbs the impartiality of intellect and of faith, do not fail to misrepresent the issue. They pretend to believe that one is pleading the cause of blind optimism or obliviousness. But this is reducing the debate to far too low a level. It is a good thing to be capable of anxiety; it is better not to have any, thanks to our faith. It is a blessed thing to grasp the reasons for mistrusting events, yet to trust the events that God determines—on account of our love.

The birds of the air, whose carefree spirit moved the Lord to admiration, are devoid of worry because they live in the present moment and are unaware of the future; that is a deficiency. Man becomes anxious because in him the sense of the future

surges back into the present so that he dominates both. But if the capacity for anxiety increases man's stature, the anxiety itself lowers him, because his power to soar over time is only a consequence of his faculty for conceiving the eternal, and in the coinage of eternity anxiety is no longer legal tender.

God reigns, and man united to God, united to his brethren in God, united to the universe, God's work and His servant, escapes the treachery of time. He alone succumbs to it who drags the past along as if a God had not redeemed it, who peers into the future as if it were not to be ordained by love; and this is no longer wisdom but only a lack of faith.

Deprived of this or that, disappointed, suffering, burdened with labors or with battles for the right, haunted by memories or tormented by fears, what does it matter? There is always a road open toward the heights; I may always take refuge with my Father. Cervantes wrote: "Fortune always leaves a door open to misfortunes, in order to come to the rescue." What the poet attributes to Fortune—shall I deny it to Providence, the loving Fortune of the Christian?

It is God who gives to those who have much and to those who have little, who supports the strong and the weak, who consoles and who permits us to be tried. Without Him, everyone would have cause for being worried; with Him, all have reason to be at peace. The difference between one man and another is only temporary; it implies neither preference nor rejection; it merely expresses in a variety of terms the problem of existence. The solution is always the same for those who can bring to it the same disposition of heart.

When Jesus invites the rich young man to sell his goods and follow Him, what He proposes is not that he shall resign himself to poverty, but that he shall accept a higher form of wealth. "If thou wilt be perfect," if thou art willing to accept the full-

ness. Whether this despoilment is accomplished voluntarily or not, whether the curtailment of life assumes one form or another, the case is not altered; the result is always perfection, plenitude, and therefore peace and joy.

There is a lesson here for spiritual persons. The virtues they strive for might be just as capable of troubling them as the desires of the worldling, the trials of all men. The work of acquiring virtue is strenuous; it, too, has its disappointments and its cares. But, as we have already said, virtue which is not joyous is imperfect since it is a forced virtue. Imperfect virtue in itself, if it is not joyous, is imperfect in another way, for it fails in confidence. Filial confidence accompanying imperfection corrects the imperfection whenever good will prevails; the want of joy and peace in self-styled perfection proclaims its very defect.

Virtue is only intended to liken us to God by conforming us to that image of ourselves in God which is Himself. This assimilation in turn is only meant for the sake of love and repose in love. The more we resemble God by virtue the more we shall enjoy a loving repose later on; but under the pretext of working at the means we must not forget the end. In fighting a battle one must keep before one the sense of anticipated victory; this is also the way in love, the brother of hope.

A truly spiritual man possessing repose in God nevertheless pursues Him by works of virtue and of zeal; and even when occupied in zealous labors he yet possesses this repose. Perturbation in the exercise of good tends to prove that one is not sufficiently in contact with Him who asks it, that one is more attached to the work done for Him than to Himself; it is a deficiency in charity under the pretense of greater service.

Finally, whether spiritually inclined or not, the Christian animated by charity should find therein the essential peace which love contains, the joy it bestows. He should find it under all

circumstances, throughout all and in spite of all. It is possible to suffer without, as it were, any longer suffering because one suffers; to be deprived of something, yet not be affected by the deprivation; to be imperfect and find perfection in thus being imperfect; to be disappointed, over-burdened, threatened, led to the edge of despair, but still hope by that very despair because one has contrived in the depth of one's soul, thanks to love and self-surrendering trust, a harbor of tranquillity. "Whatever love wishes to give or take," writes Ruysbroek, "he who renounces self and loves God finds therein his peace."

WORK AND LEISURE

— 30 —

WORK

Work is the true lot of humanity on earth. It marks the stages in its progress more effectively than any of the events which history is wont to set in the foreground. Wars and revolutions are basically nothing else but industrial accidents, more often than not; sometimes they interrupt output; sometimes they stimulate it. At any rate, labor is living, and it is astonishing to find the majority of Christians cutting off so important a phenomenon from their spiritual life. Few errors are so pernicious. Is it possible to carry out an action demanding clear-sightedness and efficiency without asking oneself what it is essentially and where it leads; and in order to arrive at its decisive meaning, its ultimate efficacy, will it not be necessary to comprehend in our glance the whole of reality as it concerns us, to foresee and organize the whole aggregate of movements in which labor has its place but by no means an isolated one? It is spiritual life which thus establishes us in the heart of reality and makes us capable of dominating in all its phases the activity which is ours.

Let us be as realistic as you like; by that very token, admitting the existence of the spirit, we must be realists animated by spirituality; we must undertake a program of tracking down external reality through all its labyrinthine ways, kept in contact with that which dominates and measures it, without ever losing sight of its first principle and its final end.

This attitude does not alienate us from one thing or the other, neither from men nor from ourselves; it brings us closer to all things with respect to what matters; it utilizes all the resources

of our personality; it puts us in contact with all souls of good will; it insures our eventual instrumentality in all that is not dedicated to nothingness or worse than nothingness in so far as it leads to eternal loss.

Outside the spiritual life, one knows not what significance to attribute to work, nor how to carry it on, nor at what cost the work attains to a sanction which justifies it. Work is intrinsically a joy; creation, even in pain, links us together; as for its immediate usefulness, we have no need of being reminded of it. But what then? Christians and conscious of our immortality, are we willing to let such a large part of our existence fall into the night of time? The Spirit which animates us would bring the whole to fulfillment. It is by means of the spiritual life that the cog wheels of this unit mesh together, that destiny becomes organic in all its parts, that the sickle and hammer, the pen, brush and chisel, the prayerbook and missal become the tools of eternal life.

The Gospel has been accused of extolling the surrender of effort: "Why are ye fearful, oh ye of little faith?" But the royal unconcern of such a text is far above what distinguishes for us between leisure and labor; it may condemn both or demand both according to circumstances; its sublime preoccupation is to maintain in them the sense of their mutual relationship without which, in spite of their opposition, they are equally capable of deluding us.

Just as self-forgetfulness impels us to come to the assistance of our neighbor, just as community spirit replaces the cupidity of the individual in favor of the group, so evangelical detachment, withdrawn from selfish avidity, is none the less removed from indolent neglect and slothfulness. Throughout, it is our eternal selves that must be saved and saved together, with the collaboration of all the realities of God's creation: materials, forces, lower forms of life associated with our own, or machines.

I mention the machine, which it is the fashion to denounce, for the express purpose of rehabilitating it spiritually, regardless of its economic significance. It is too easy to assert that the machine condemns man to brainless labor. Brainless labor is that which is done brainlessly. There is no reason, after citing sublime shepherds and noble-hearted peasants, to suppose that greatness is denied to the man in charge of a machine tool or stationed somewhere along the line of moving-band production.

The essential thing is not to reverse the order of values, not to imagine that man exists for the machine when the machine exists for man, that the intellectual values of which the machine is the expression and the triumph are directed toward that conquest alone, whereas their real conquest is independent of all utility, autonomous and free.

The man in the street thinks that science is intended for the construction of airplanes and adding machines; the philosopher and the Christian realize that, on the contrary, our mechanical inventions, employing the intellect momentarily, have the function of subsequently procuring its liberation, restoring it to its destiny which is the disinterested association of all human beings, spiritual intercourse with oneself, one's fellowmen, and with God.

Machine labor or manual labor, by hand or by head, men work to create within themselves and about them beauty and utility, vital activities whose final end is spiritual life. There is no point in advancing civilization except for the sake of *culture*, that is to say, the development of the spirit, the progress and salvation of the spirit. Work, in the wide sense of the term, even when the object of the work is insignificant, consists in obeying and causing lower creatures to obey the law of the world, namely ascension and spiritualization, thought, love and joy in their eternal form. Working is driving things before one in the direction of the soul and God.

— 31 —

THE QUALITIES OF WORK

The sun is life's balance-wheel; it represents providence to us; encompassing both leisure and labor in its course, it invites us to include both in the divine order so as to impress them with a decisive importance.

The Angel of Chartres was beautiful at its first appearance, poised on the edge of its stone promontory; by its glorious youth, its virile smile, it already proclaimed man's supremacy over time. Three centuries later, an unknown genius set the meridian in its hand, and behold it, master of the temporal span, in behalf of all the passersby whom the cathedral receives into its protecting shade.

We know that all the crafts are represented in the spiritual edifice which symbolizes, at the same time that it serves, the complete life united to eternal life. The sun-dial in the hand of a smiling angel becomes, then, full of significance. Mortals!—he seems to say—Do not become feverish over your task in the course of your labors; work with dignity and calm; remain self-possessed even when hurried and hard pressed; preserve a free, tranquil soul in spite of your burdens.

Therein lies perhaps the most profound quality of work. Its primary origin indicates it to us. Work is the continuation of the creative act, the *fiat* which formed man and now wills to bring under his control, by his own effort, the forces of nature. Should not this human sequel to Genesis unfold itself in the spirit wherein it was initiated? Creative Wisdom is represented to us as

“playing in the world”; human wisdom must also play, that is, do a work of freedom and joy amid the sweat and toil.

There is no contradiction here. The Apostle who “super-abounds in joy in the midst of his tribulations” was doubtless not sad as he sat at his tent-making. One can easily imagine him singing, unless his “solicitude for all the churches” or the grief of a neighbor presses and afflicts him. One recoils from the picture of him rushing feverishly, overtaxing himself, degrading the sane enthusiasm with which God has endowed us, consenting to the deterioration of his strength, which cannot fail to be destroyed by over-exertion, when God is counting on it. “He who finds repose in action and action in repose is wise among men,” says the Bhagavad-Gita.

The quality which complements this first disposition, seemingly antagonistic but so closely related, is that zeal which is not opposed to a noble serenity, but to indolence. Tranquillity links time to eternity; laziness wastes it. Should not the wasting of time, in the strong sense of the term, be considered a criminal profanation? The loss of time and the loss of self,—an atom swept along by time,—amounts to the same thing. Thus is destroyed the one chance given to us at each instant to gain access to eternity; and if it continues, it is enough to lead us astray forever.

Once again, this only holds true when carried to the extreme. It is not easy to waste time to that extent. Vice itself is hard-working, and there are forms of good the activity of which is scarcely perceptible. Nevertheless, sloth is a capital sin, a sin and the father of sin, a curtailment of living, a snare to life. The intensity of the zealous worker is at the other extreme .

Between the two, related to work without persevering therein and to idleness without succumbing entirely, there is inconstancy. I apply the term, on the one hand, to work which is full of

ardor at the beginning but soon flags and, on the other hand, to that work which is never serious, always slipshod, so as to earmark its practitioner as an "amateur." In this sense, the inconstant are greater enemies of labor than the lazy; they not only slow down their industry, they sabotage it. Like all appearances unsupported by reality, their pretense is a betrayal, a hypocritical desertion amid dreams of victory.

Let the neophyte at the start of his career consider well: to assume the air of an ostentatious dawdler, buzz about like a gadfly, or give up before the end, yielding to moral tedium or the sway of passion is at once a sin against self, one's neighbor and God. The Christian worker is of quite a different stamp.

Finally, there is the kind of work which cannot be qualified with reference to man because it is inhuman, work which is alien to the spirit of work because it eludes the spirit plainly and simply; I mean that automatic drudgery, that sort of systematic stupefaction unenlivened by any moral beauty. So does the beast of burden labor; the ass or the dog thus tread the waterwheel, the elephant drags his massive logs. There is here a real debasement of personality; and that is what makes social-minded Catholics detest all that tends to force poor unfortunates into such a condition where, for the sake of a bare minimum of bread, they are deprived of their human dignity. But at the same time we turn to the laborer and urge him, should he be a victim of such toil and, with still greater reason, if he has chosen his lot: Free being that you are, be free! Spiritual creature, do not submerge yourself in a soulless occupation which identifies you with the tool you handle, which degrades you as a human being, as a Christian, as destined along with other men, for an immortal life!

There is a movement on foot to organize men's leisure time; important officials are appointed for the purpose and we wish

well to their enterprise. But we should be so glad of an opportunity to say to them: Devote a part of this new leisure to inculcating a taste for the nobility of work, its human meaning and,—if you have not yourself relegated it to the realm of fantasy,—its divine significance.

When the worker, tool in hand, shall have a sense of his continuity in relation to the forces of the universe, to the creator Spirit, to the souls of scholars, poets, inventors, heroes and saints; when he shall think of his workshop as annexed to the city hall and the parish church, his song as harmonized with the liturgical psalmody and Sunday Mass, his soul in the communion of saints, his body in the visible Church, his whole being and all being in God: on that day the worker will be a complete man, the admirable man his name suggests to the mind of the Catholic thinker. He will be the greatest value that it is possible to estimate. The possible lowliness of his occupation will make no difference, for a man's worth is not measured by what he does but by what he is. To be great is to do anything whatever greatly, little things by rendering them great and great things by elevating oneself to their level.

— 32 —

THE DUTIES OF STATE

One would like to be a poet to extol adequately the duties of state. If labor is life, rendering it great by the relationship it establishes between us and the eternal forces, that variety of labor which constitutes the duty of each state enhances the dignity of the species by reason of the fact that it is labor

measured out to fit the man as exactly as possible, not only in quantity by consigning to him a portion of the common effort, not only under the name of a craft making a definite contribution to human endeavor, but also thanks to a perfect coincidence between the activity of each person and the role he fills in the design of providence.

It might be said that the duty of state is a designation of the person himself and that its meritorius acceptance is an act as simple and normal, but at the same time, as great as that of existing as a moral being.

It is a mistake to picture humanity as a monochrome containing only a few highlights—the great ones of the race. That is a possible view; but how much more real and profound is the concept of an assemblage of conscious beings each endowed with its own significance, responsibility, originality and importance. It is not true, as the Latin proverb would have it, that the human race lives by only a few individuals; that is only a superficial impression. The human race lives by all men, and each may take unto himself the joy and consolation, each may claim the glory of being a precious element therein.

Genius is only secondary in importance; the leading roles are mere servants. However decisive these exceptional situations in life may seem, and even be in certain respects, their worth is dependent upon the support given to them, the source of renovation prepared for them, by a host of more modest situations. Hence these extraordinary cases become susceptible of a much higher explanation when considered from the point of view of our common existence.

With reference to duration, exceptional deeds represent the chosen moment; the collective task denotes time, and time is the stuff of human life. The rare *unforgettable* moments quickly

