Rectitude
RECTITUDE

ANTONIN SERTILLANGES, O.P.

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*JOHN J. MITTY
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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.

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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.

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**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 manoeuvres 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.
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 some-
how into his external activity, loses himself in the crowd, dis-
sembles 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 inten-
tion 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.

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**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 plentitude
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 rar-
ity. 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 coter-
minous 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 charac-
teristic 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
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 esteem 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.”

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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 de-
nounced 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 main-
stay 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 linger-
ing 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. More-
over, 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.
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 re-awakens 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.

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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.

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**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 unstentatiously 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.
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'Aurevilly 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 Tabor of time for the land of Transfiguration whose tents are eternal!

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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?
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 remon-ness. 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
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 Ruysbroeck 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 supernaturally put 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 Riviè re, “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 placentary 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!

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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 degrade 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.

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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 glori-
ous 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 over-
coming 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 manhunt; 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 maneuvering 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.
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-Areopagite. "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.”

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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; tomo-
row ambition will have outrun 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 neces-
sity 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 with-
out, 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.

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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 lightsomeness, 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.
UNIFYING CHARITY

Charity, with God for its principal object, expands and overflows, following every trend of God’s love, embracing His objects, creations, invitations, solicitudes 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 confere? 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?
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.

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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 “greedily,” 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.
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 clear-sighted, 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 Ruysbrock, “he who renounces self and loves God finds therein his peace.”
Work and Leisure
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.
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 unfortunate 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 oppor-
tunity to say to them: Devote a part of this new leisure to in-
culcating a taste for the nobility of work, its human meaning
and,—if you have not yourself relegated it to the realm of fan-
tasy,—its divine significance.

When the worker, tool in hand, shall have a sense of his con-
tinuity 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 esti-
mate. 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.

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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 meritorious 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
lapse into oblivion, while time is a sovereignty, unbroken and harmonious.

It follows that, in relation to our legitimate ambitions, becoming "somebody" is not the essential thing, but rather becoming oneself, fulfilling one's task, keeping one's place, supplying a good link to the chain, a good rung to the ladder, a good element of concord and progress, an overflowing vessel, however tiny its capacity, of loyalty and happiness.

Such is the duty of one's state; it is self loyal to itself and freely committed to an order greater than itself. It enters with full liberty into the whole being; it has indeed the right, as navigator of that ocean, to inhale its aromas. There is no pride in so doing; on the contrary, it is a source of strength. Life is burdensome for all and sometimes with an obscure burden that does not even impose the feeling of its weight, refusing this evidence to the bearer and seeming to despise his courage. "Two or three times in a lifetime one has a chance to be brave," wrote René Bazin, "and almost every day that of not being a coward"—not too glorious a chance is the former, nor one that pays. The renunciation is obtained by a re-ascent to the primary origin of all duties, great and small, brilliant and dismal, to the origin moreover of the distribution of tasks among the co-workers. That is the property which belongs to all, which all may enjoy, thanks to our brotherhood, either in themselves or in others.

What difference does it make, brother, what I do or what you do? We are doing the same thing, the only thing, for in God and in His truth destiny is all one. The supreme engineer has set up the work; you draw the plans; others twist the cable; I work the shuttle; and the work of all belongs to each. In making a success of it and skimming off the share in the product which pertains to each, talent and ability are less important than one might
think. They do count; but what counts even more is fidelity, devotion to one's task and a persistent effort to fulfill it well. By this means, in the course of a lifetime, one may overcome both personal inferiority and the vicissitudes of fortune.

Having expressed the wish to be a poet, may we at least be permitted to dream for humanity of a future which these considerations seem to render possible to us? Work appears to separate men on account of the problem of distributing their respective employments and their rightful share in the products; might it not just as well unite them through the ideas it sets in operation and the attitudes it arouses? Technical knowledge is becoming more and more generalized; in spite of set-backs inflicted by nationalistic self-sufficiency, labor is being organized along international lines; it would be normal with the further spread of the human significance of work for humanity to become transformed little by little into a working body with its functions and its unity, the soul which corresponds to this body contributing to the perfection of human solidarity.

Our individual soul is born after its body, in its body; may we not hope, then, that it will be the same with the soul of the human race which is still in limbo? Like the personal soul this one will be a blossoming, a humanization. In place of the old anarchy during which consciences have long been adrift in an inorganic human matter, we shall see the birth of a real human-kind such as God must surely have dreamed of and which must therefore come forth some day, unless man is totally corrupted.

In any case, the duty of state tends to unite and forthwith to adjust the situations of men in the realization and sense of each being where he should be, doing what he ought to do, and thus cooperating, almost on an equal footing, in the collective task. When we consider that occupations in themselves refer only to time and that duty has an eternal character, does not the near
equality of which I speak become equality pure and simple?—
unless it reverses matters entirely by setting in the highest rank
the man who accomplishes with the noblest disposition of heart
the most insignificant task.

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THE DUTY OF STATE A FORM OF WORSHIP

It should be all the same to a Christian whether he is at his
work bench, office, factory, farm, or in heaven, since he finds
God everywhere. A Christian worker is an adorer—I was about
to say, a priest. A woman sewing with uplifted heart represents
for me Destiny putting together the pieces of eternal duration;
and should her scissors happen to fall in the prayerful silence, I
am reminded of the moving tones of the Office bell in some
church during the course of the ritual. Once the soul is attuned
to what is lasting, one has only to live in the present, entirely
devoted to one's occupation, to be also living in eternity.

It is an aberration of infinitely dire consequences to dissociate
religious life from domestic or professional life. All that pertains
to a man is religious, or should be. I like that note in the Cahiers
of Barrès; gazing down from a hilltop on the strips of cultivated
land, he observed: “They are long rugs, prayer rugs. The prayer
of each family: Give us this day our daily bread.”

Our classical authors have been reproached with systematically
divorcing within themselves, so to speak, the writer, the man
and the Christian. Whether the reproach is well-founded or not,
we should ourselves deserve it more than they if, in fact though
not by system, we were to separate the everyday living being,
the Christian, and the practitioner of any craft whatever. The Christian concept of the duty of state is the antidote for such dismemberment. It recognizes the professional spirit which presides over works but not over men; it yields place to the humanist spirit of an Erasmus or a Montaigne which rules the man but not the Christian; it keeps intact the religious spirit which encompasses nature adopted and purified, with the supernatural; and thus it is in a position to direct the whole.

What tremendous strides our mutual understanding would make, what a heap of objections would collapse were we to assure ourselves that religion has no intention of taking anything out of our lives or changing anything that does not mislead or endanger it! Why should it alter one thing in it since it alters the whole of it? The change is a transfiguration, uplifting its motivation and raising the final object of its pursuit to infinity.

The Hindu sage long ago remarked that: “A man satisfied with his function, whatever it might be, is approaching perfection. Yet hearken to how he approaches thereto. It is by honoring through his works Him from whom creatures emanate and by whom this universe has been unfurled that man attains to perfection. It is better to fulfill one’s own function although not so elevated, than that of another, however superior; for in performing the work which derives from his nature a man commits no sin.” Is a believer, instructed by Christ and surrounded by the Church with its teachings, to show himself less wise?

All the areas of our life should be evangelized after those portions—if they have been provided for—which we consecrate to religious worship. The duty of one’s state is also a form of worship, the worship of working days; it is the continual prayer which Jesus Christ asks of us when we labor in His name.

The Christian who, without respite, leads as well as he can
the life God designed for him, who plays his part in the home, at the workshop, study or business office, the barracks, or editorial room, at social gatherings and even in the athletic stadium or playing field, who does everything in a religious spirit, that is, to honor his Creator and draw nearer to Him in company with his own, with all men whom he encounters in the course of his life—such a Christian prays always. To him the proverb may be applied: “Whoever works prays”; although he should also remember at the appropriate time the converse: whoever prays works.

Life is one and it abides in God. It is given to us by Him who gives Himself in the interior of the heart and desires to give Himself one day in His fullness. No progress seems to be more necessary nowadays than this: setting in full light within our souls the exigencies of the Christian life as applied to our daily pursuits, our human vocation and the place which each of us occupies here below.

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DIVINE INTIMACY IN THE DUTY OF STATE

Since the duty of state is a form of worship, it thus puts us in contact with the being we adore in action and serve, so to speak, by proxy, the proxy of our works.

The priest handles God; sacramentally, he creates Him; with him the believer “communicates,” that is, unites himself to God, to the priest, to the Christian congregation; and the laborer at his task, the man and woman in house, field, factory or office
are associated with them, with God, as long as their labors, by means of intention and direction, have managed to become metamorphosed into a religious rite.

Climbing into heaven is not reserved for those alone who have set up the ladders. The priesthood is great; but every human being participates therein if he so wills. It was not to clerics that those magnificent words were dedicated: “You are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people: that you may declare his virtues, who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

Our God draws us to Himself, in so far as the spirit of our life is concerned; as for its form and occupations, it is He who comes to us, performing with us what we are supposed to do according to His providence. His heaven does not come closer to an altar than to a millstone, a spade or an anvil. What produces nearness is the heart. Just as the horizon is equidistant from every point of the land, each instant of work or prayer may be in the same relationship as every other with the eternal.

What is required that the contact between God and ourselves at work may be established and drawn closer is, first of all, for us to feel Him present. By presence here we mean thought; if I do not think of God I banish Him and, although He is still with me, I am no longer with Him. Then our will must adhere to His, negatively by admitting nothing evil, positively by accepting our lot, our present action and our future, thereby testifying our loyalty and confidence.

Work demands of us an act of faith, of filial submission, of adoration, of love. A little task—they are always little—ennobled by a great heart; the avocation of an ant fulfilled with the sense of having nothing on earth more important to do: such is our duty of state, for by its means is accomplished the desire which our Christ bids us to express in union with Him: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”
Taking everything into account, only one situation becomes me—my own. When all the circumstances are weighed in the scales of eternity, one single action conduces at this moment to my salvation and God's glory in His universe: the one which I am performing. Otherwise it ought not to be done. But provided I do it with an intention that is upright—or rectified if need be—it is good. Its value is, in a sense, infinite, since for the time being it represents the infinite will. Whatever would pretend to usurp its place would be inimical, would constitute an obstacle between God and myself; I need have no qualms about anything else—moral achievement, apostolic conquest, heroism or martyrdom,—secure in the thought that I have done or am doing what should be done on the spot.

Oh how good it is to feel thus held in the hand of God, united to His heart, collaborating in His vast, mysterious work! The lowliness of the task enhances its sweetness. See, O my God, I lift this straw for love of Thee. I know that one day I shall see it shining, transfigured, in the invisible Temple. Thy universe, too, is composed of little twigs, Thine ocean of drops and all the Niagaras of tiny trickles. Its grandeur is a result of order. The real value of the universe is measured by its progress toward the Perfect. By Thy grace, Lord, I, too, am advancing toward the Perfect and, by loving Thee, obeying Thee, I also am in order.

Glory be to labor whereby God abides with us and we with God. Glory be to the little happenings which we produce or to which we adapt ourselves, if they tend in the right direction and cause us to swim in the current of providence without deviation or haste, presumption or violence, impatience or fear, adapting ourselves to the motion of the wave.

Our life has an aim; so, too, has each of its actions: to unite us to Him who is already present in time with all the magnificence and joy of His eternity, to Him who is already ours.
Personal Development in the Duty of State

All that serves God serves and elevates us. If the slavery of men is painful and likely to degrade us, the slavery of a task is always salutary and invigorating when that task is expedient and according to right order.

A poet remarked that the most powerful spur to his muse was not what is known as inspiration but the urge to finish a work once it had been undertaken, once the die was cast. Thus when the dies of Providence have been thrown for us, the numbers read and our lot accepted with self-possessed courage, the occasion is always favorable for an expansion of ourselves and our progress.

Every line of work has its output and more often than not this is all that we consider, all that we aim at; but our aims are always surpassed by the actuality; divinity is prodigal. What I set before myself as a task, when compared to the movements of my interior personality, is only a kind of alibi. The soul overflows its function and this latter, because it stands between the public and myself, disguises my inner life but cannot destroy it.

What better consolation for those instances when the output is apparently nil or even when one has acquired—if it can be called an acquisition—precisely the contrary result of what one had been seeking! Yes indeed, one has acquired something, made a profit, if by a generous effort to overcome self with regard to external affairs one has managed to raise oneself in dignity and moral worth.
It frequently happens that the land does not yield to the farmer what he was expecting; rarely does it give him cause to regret his labors. What is not gained in one way is gained in another. Nature is not ungrateful. But in the supernatural, the prodigality of hopes exceeds all conception; nothingness has a value for infinity; littleness creates immensity and even negative values become positive through the action of Him who “calleth that which is and also that which is not.”

I am not speaking here of reward but of formation. Basically, they are the same thing; but it is possible not to think of subsequent flowerings. The seed of immortality which is in us and identifies itself with our moral personality is developed in our duty of state more than anywhere else, regardless of the nature of the activity or of any visible effect. “Do we not all have moments, in these days of excessive bustle,” M. Jacques Madaule asks, “when we suddenly feel that it just doesn’t matter, that we are not getting at the essential thing, that we are only skimming the surface?” Of course; but the hidden reality of things is always there waiting for us. It is up to us to grasp it, or rather, to allow it to seize us, for it is at the price of completely possessing us that it fills us to overflowing.

Beyond this, it must be admitted that a calm mind and well-balanced soul with reference to our duty of state demand more or less of success in one’s own eyes and of satisfaction rendered to others. But success depends on us in a measure which is all the more evident the more serious and faithful we are to our task. As we develop we take confidence, just as by taking confidence we develop. Accidents will happen; but, on the whole, reverses are nearly always due to a want of reflection, to forgetfulness or neglect of the conditions essential to one’s acts, to a dependence upon luck or chance in a case where well-directed effort and perseverance would produce results. We have an
innate tendency to desire the effect without supplying the cause. Instead of giving generously, we are parsimonious, expecting a maximum of flour for a minimum of seed. Nature is not amenable to this arrangement, thus rendering tribute to the morality inherent in its laws and censuring our indolence.

Moreover, this is a reflection on our imprudence and impulsiveness. Not only do we want the product without the labor; we also intend, without sacrificing aught, to avoid all risks: like the person who hangs about his doctor’s neck, yet refuses to follow the most obvious rules of hygiene. Under this twofold circumstance one can imagine what improvements the devotion to one’s duty of state will effect if it neither represses passion nor exerts any courage.

A contemporary writer is not afraid to acknowledge: “I have never had to safeguard my pen; it has always safeguarded me.” Delacroix sets down in his journal: “Sluggish painting is the painting of a sluggard”; and he congratulates himself on having at last found his happiness in what had formerly seemed so far from being its source: in his daily task. In the long run,—and Delacroix remarks this, too—even the very difficulty resolves itself, along with the preliminaries and the tiresome retouching and the boredom. “There is no such thing as a long piece of work, except one that you do not dare to start,” Baudelaire observes; and in *The Faraway Princess* there comes to light the verse: “We end by loving all that toward which we row.”

Let us row toward God in the everyday boat where He places us. He has set us there out of love; plying the oar through love, on our part, will make us love it better, if only to come to the end of it.
THE SOCIAL UTILITY OF THE DUTY OF STATE

"Our occupations are limited," writes Bossuet, "but the scope of charity is infinite." We feel the wing poised for flight and how, in speaking as Christians of social utility, it is an effort to reduce our statement to the confines of time. Nevertheless, remaining within these frontiers, let us affirm that the duty of state of citizens constitutes for any country the firm basis of its hopes and,—should the devotion to this duty flag,—the best-founded motive for its fears.

The stability of a nation does not rest upon the intrigues of politicians, the hue and cry of newspapers or the daily agenda of congress; it depends on the unpretentious fidelity of little people to their jobs, on the vigilant integrity of officials and administrators of every rank, on the brave discretion of fathers of families, their sons and daughters, and, most of all perhaps, on the silent sovereignty of wise, valiant mothers of the home. Such is the backbone of a country; the rest is only swagger and show.

Work, taken in the aggregate, is designed to implement humanity with new organs, the intellect with new means of expression, the ends of creation with new resources. But this collective result is only produced by the perseverance of each member in the task assigned to him and the virtues of every sort which he therein exerts. Is this a mere platitude? Unfortunately, the most self-evident truths are the most unknown, or at any rate, the least appreciated and applied.

People complain about one thing and another: public affairs are not functioning properly; the machinery creaks; everyone
is dissatisfied and protests noisily; the blame is laid on the Constitution, on the majority, or the minority, on partisan groups that are too active or too inactive, on the forefathers, on a neighboring nation, on a remote continent. When you get to the root of the matter, you will nearly always find a slackening of moral and occupational energies, an unconscious desire to be carried along by the collectivity, instead of being each at his post ranged among those who assume their responsibility before putting in a claim for the profits.

The one who complains the loudest is generally he who contributes the least. A good workman has no time for recrimination; it rarely enters his mind. The man who is fond of his own task justly expects to draw from it all its potentialities even amid the general confusion; and he has no intention of adding to the latter by his impatience. Every man at his post! That is the most effective by-word in troubled times, as on a ship threatened by a storm. In calm weather, the same motto insures progress and the avoidance of pitfalls. Everything else is mere chatter, emotion and harmful agitation.

Let no one say: My activity is of little consequence; what can I do? But so and so could do something. So and so is made of the same stuff as you; as long as your task is not accomplished, what right have you to dictate his duty to him? We complain about the powers that be; but would they be what they are if we were not what we are? “I consider that one has a more legitimate right to be greedy of one’s time when one has done what was necessary to serve it,” Renan wrote in a letter.

Each one stands accountable before God, his own conscience, and the common conscience. Every man must answer for himself. The brook irrigates the soil according to its quantity of water and is not dispensed from so doing on account of the river. It has nothing to do but brim over; let it pour forth and water
its banks; that is all that will be required of it. If each stream were to do the same—which is its own affair,—the irrigation of the land would be perfect.

We said earlier that within the scheme of providence, each person is indispensable to the whole universe; we likewise are justified in saying that within a social group each element, however small, is indispensable to all. *There is no such thing as a silly trade.* The humblest artisan, the lowliest housewife, sustain the powerful and encourage the renowned thinker. The collectivity is indebted to such and, from time to time, it takes cognizance of its debt by rendering public tribute to an old servant, a devoted schoolteacher, a Sister of Charity, a laborer who has won his stripes for long service, or the skipper of a Breton fishing smack.

But the utility and dignity of the duty of state depend on its being loved. Lukewarmness and negligence spoil everything; still more do envy, and the susceptible, censorious spirit which concerns itself only with other people’s obligations. Address your admonitions to yourself, O Christian; there alone are they effectual. Do you think it is smart to get blue in the face over the one thing which you can do nothing about? Reform your own life if it needs it; if it is upright, let it go forward and do the work of two; just as, at the time of a disaster, people very quickly fall into the category of either men of mettle or cads.

I have witnessed catastrophies. There were men who yelled, women who wept, rascals who got out of the way, and, here and there, rescuers who restored lives that had been imperilled and strove to limit the extent of the calamity. All honor to those who possess such an understanding of their duty and so broad a concept of its extent as to make no distinction between their own and that of the weakling or the coward. But honor as well to all those who face their task humbly, neither attempting to complicate or to restrict it, but merely fulfilling it each day, and
that to the very end. To these, too, it will be said as in the parable: “Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter into the joy of thy Lord.”

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THE BEAUTY AND UNASSUMING CHARM OF THE DUTY OF STATE

We have recently been reminded of the work performed in ancient India to the accompaniment of song, of those delicate epithets bestowed upon a veil of gauze or a carpet after the joyous task had been completed, of that labor in the fields which was preceded by the weaving of garlands to decorate the horns of the oxen. Where is that spirit of innocence nowadays, where that high-minded playfulness testifying in so striking a manner to the simplicity of hearts and so conducive to lightening the strain? Manners change and we no longer expect to find wheels festooned with garlands or rose petals strewn upon the brooks; but could we not develop a greater appreciation for the beauty of labor, especially that hidden labor whose lustre is entirely of the moral order, that poetry whose essence is quite interior, which the angels must gaze upon since it is turned in their direction?

“If you want children to conceive great things,” says Mme. Marie Fargues, “you must always show them little ones.” Will not the child ever present in man grasp the nobility of duty if he is shown, embodied in the smallest work luminous with infinity,
one of those nothings included among the "superlative works" which, according to the poet, "demand much love" that they may rise to the glory of the spiritual heaven?

How often in our best moments do we not ask for great tasks! Heaven replies to us: make your own task great! Your honor, O man, lies within yourself; by bending down to so-called lowly things you can communicate it to them instead of losing it; if your crown is well fitted to your head, it will not fall.

The man who does his duty and keeps his place on one or other rung of the ladder may look anyone in the face, as the tiniest star twinkles placidly in the vast firmament. Such a man has a right to peace and experiences it, for a love of duty goes hand in hand with a love for the rights of others, for order, for sacrifice, if need be; and peace is the recompense of these.

Many people are forced to suffer; no one is forced to be patient; it is when a man freely submits to his suffering that he merits. Since the duty of state gives him frequent opportunity for it, he is quite sure of finding greatness therein. How splendid is that acceptance of constraint, that faith in the inevitability of what nothing forces upon you except your own self-imposed law!

A noble heart is bound faster by its loyalty than a prisoner by his chains; but what a difference! The latter is degraded by all that is taken from him; the former is exalted by all that he exacts from himself for the sake of the ideal. Ostensibly riveted to his fate, the servitude he derives from it is finally transformed into the richest and most unconstrained harmony between them.

Men seek for the definition of happiness; in a sense it does not exist. I mean in this life. If there is an approximation to it, an obscure form which only greatness of soul can recognize, it is in the daily task unrebelled against that it can be found. Success is not demanded; in its place is the certainty, tranquillizing in quite another way, that, come what may, one has done what
had to be done. Joy of conscience, a detached joy, a pure joy compatible with many griefs, but one which for the honor of God and the fulfillment of justice turns to perfect bliss after this earthly trial.

A pope once said that, without any further investigation, he would canonize a Religious who was entirely faithful to his rule. The austere rule of the duty of one’s state has a right to a similar declaration. There is no distinction between a rule chosen for the sake of God and one which God imposes in His providence. With the same good will the same merit can be garnered from either, and we, imperfect ones, find in both the same reason for praise and imitation.

The Bhagavad-Gita puts this beautiful sentence into the mouth of the supreme God: “He who unrelentingly fulfills his task while aiming at me attains by my grace to the eternally immutable abode.” The Christian Gospel would applaud such an anticipation of its message. It would add—and the noblest Hindu thought is in agreement—that the abode of eternal immutability is open to us even now, that the kingdom of heaven is within us, and that we can rejoice in hope as the elect in heaven rejoice in their final peace. *Spe gaudentes* is St. Paul’s formula, expressing in two words all the unassuming charm of duty.

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**The Daily Grind**

There is much variety in the duty of state. One of its least recognized, most neglected aspects is the accumulation of acts which form, as it were, the connecting tissue of life, those
“fillers,” unsaleable by-products of activity, the shavings, scraps, and so-called offscourings which can be so valuable, if we will, for eternal life.

Do not science and economic efficiency already repudiate the notion of waste products? It is even more extraneous to the spiritual life. The particle which falls from a rocky cliff is as important as the whole mass, in the eyes of the mineralogist, chemist or physicist, who are intent upon the essence of matter. Likewise, a heap of actions animated by the same spirit reduces its elements, large and small, homogeneous and apparently incongruous, to equality by virtue of the fact that each one contains the whole in so far as its real value is concerned.

Great things are done by those who have a sense of little things and of their nameless relevancy. Napoleon at Austerlitz thought about his soldiers’ mess and the buttons on their gaiters. Hemmed in by littleness, one may still dream of greatness and be of service to it; whereas attention to what is great to the neglect of the small renders even the great thing morally suspect. In truth, all that God has made is great with the grandeur of God; all that He confides to us is a trysting-place between Him and us. It behooves us to respond by making our slightest gesture an indication of our faith, a rubric of our love.

Watching a workman arranging his tools one already discovers a great deal about his steadiness and ability. One need only observe how a woman dusts her furniture to surmise how devoted a helpmate she will be to her husband in his career, how she will fill if necessary a public position. The things that do not count borrow from those that do all that gives them value and they declare the fact to anyone capable of understanding. There is no grandeur in creation which cannot be contained in the heart of a child poring over his schoolbooks that the will of God may be done on earth as it is in heaven. It is in God Himself that
we must seek the equivalent of a will humbly and so clearly identified with the supreme good. Instinctively one sets up against it so many false values created by hypocritical self-love, counterfeit coins which purchase nothing, least of all the kingdom of heaven.

St. Francis de Sales speaks of a poor widow of Annecy whom he saw at a procession of the Blessed Sacrament and who fittingly symbolized, he observes, the lot of unpretentious deeds. “Whereas the others carried large wax candles, she held only a tiny taper which she had made; and it was even extinguished by the wind. This neither led her nearer nor withdrew her from the Blessed Sacrament; she did not fail to arrive at the church as soon as everybody else.” Moral reality is not known to us; its world is veiled from the world of men; but there are, doubtless, such hidden wonders of which even the protagonists are unaware and which are expressed in trite phrases as commonplace as the dispositions they conceal may be magnificent!

The fact that habit becomes automatic is irrelevant when habit itself is judged from a superior viewpoint and rightly oriented. Like and unlike, new and old are differentiated morally only by their motivation. Facility and difficulty are similarly judged. The talent demanded or expended is of little importance if the guiding spirit is there. So, too, are disinterested actions and those which admit of a utilitarian object, even the most ordinary, judged by their inspiration. “One’s own bread is a material pre-occupation;” writes Berdiaeff, “other people’s bread is a spiritual one.” But this is only a half-truth. One’s own bread is just as sacred as other people’s, as sacred as the universal bread when the soul dwells in universality and considers self only with reference to God and to all men.

One sign of the greatness which we lend to our actions “of no account” is the following. Let a man die and his most insignifi-
cant past rises up and assumes a kind of majesty. But the nobility with which he is then invested is not death's creation; death merely manifests it. The mystery of life appears indifferent to the magnitude of that which reveals it; and we should remind ourselves that the immensity into which death initiates us even now envelops and deepens the perspective of what living beings are and do.

God records our trivial actions all the more favorably to the extent that we are careful about keeping them within the beam of light shed by our moments of prayer. "A single occupation fixed at a determined hour in our life," remarks Delacroix, "organizes the rest of that life; everything begins to revolve about it." What he said in reference to the writing of his Journal is much more true of our hours of divine worship. Having established our soul in God, we thereupon depart from God only in appearance; He Himself follows us through the routine which henceforth becomes devout; He listens, welcomes and answers in His own way the mute prayer of our smallest actions.

Duration is then invested for us with a solemnity which renders it, so to speak, immutable. Time no longer glides by; at any rate it neither flows along too slowly nor too fast; that becomes a matter of indifference, for each instant thus consecrated is linked to the Unmoved and the flight of succeeding moments takes nothing from us that is essential. What is worth retaining is still ours. Our souls soar above the occupations of our hands, even those of our minds, whether speculative or practical. Within the limitations—unknown as they are—of ourselves, we move about as in a space rendered infinite by the dimension of height which we have given to it. We have a right to contentment, to peace; and the philosophy of life, which, according to St. John Chrysostom, consists of simplicity joined to supernatural prudence, finds in us its full satisfaction.
Man should not be the victim of his labor. In every sense of the term, work should enable us to live; and would it be living to acquire by our toil only the means of working some more?

This grievance on the part of the proletariat is perhaps the most serious argument in the system of Karl Marx. You pay the worker, he claims, just what it takes to enable him to continue serving you; never enough so that, partially resuming the mastery of his own life, your prey might escape you.

There is no reason why labor should have a larger place in the life of man than in that of a bird. The true life of man is closer to nature than our "civilizers" imagine. The arduousness of work is a penalty for sin; but the expiation is not devoid of mercy. Even chain gangs rest occasionally, and under Christ's regime we are not convicts. The old dispensation instituted the sabbath; the new one, proclaiming the spirit of freedom and love, calls for even more.

Remy de Gourmont makes these more than daring assertions: "We have reached that degree of imbecility which considers labor, not merely as honorable, but as sacred, whereas it is only a sad necessity." "Leisure is the greatest and finest conquest of man." "The man of action is a drudge. The least spinner of yarns creates a greater stir than a conqueror." "Thoughts are made to be thought, not acted upon." This is all by way of paradox; it certainly is not conspicuous for exactitude or moderation. But its deeper meaning should nevertheless be retained.

True enough, man is made for thinking and consequently for leisure, if leisure is contrasted with servile work. We must tend
toward the acquisition of leisure, provided that it be human in
the full sense of the word and thus participate in the divine
leisure which constitutes eternal life. Thought is only secondarily
made to be acted upon; it is intended above all for thinking,
and ultimately action will be reabsorbed into pure thought. Is
it because of a vague sense of this truth that idle hands enjoy a
reputation for distinction and aristocracy, so to speak, among
human beings? There are other reasons derived from the social
order; but I suspect that we have here a recognition of the prin-
ciple that our end is leisure and not constraint.

Granted that all of this is valid in the absolute sense and leads
to no precise conclusion with reference to practical judgments.
But the absolute is a directing light. What we must now do is
to approach the facts and discover how the Christian should look
upon leisure.

Sometimes it is confused with inactivity, dolce far niente,
vacancy; at other times with an artificial agitation which is sup-
posed to be a diversion from work. Leisure is neither of these
things; it is a relaxation, a slackening of occupational strain, a
restoring of the individual to his own initiative regarding the use
of his faculties or the relative cessation of their functioning.

The cessation is never anything but relative; moreover it is
secondary. In principle, leisure is activity without a rigidly fixed
or imposed objective, without financial consideration or subjec-
tion to a master. The occupations which it allows or calls for
are free and therefore restful. One rediscovers one’s personality
therein with all its characteristics; one is in full possession of self.
It follows that the free undertakings then pursued may become
the most productive of all. “Ask yourself,” writes M. Abel Bon-
nard, “what Horace or La Fontaine would have done if they
had not first been permitted to do nothing.” La Bruyère had
already remarked that “nothing is wanting to the idleness of
the sage but a better name, the inclusion of meditating, speaking, reading and being quiet under the term: work.”

In addition, pleasure has its legitimate place here. When well regulated it adds to our being and increases our power to act. Good in itself, it is a further good in expectation, and this to such an extent that its dismissal from life would be life’s ruination; for it is nothing but the savor of living.

To some monks who propounded deep questions to him after dinner, St. Louis replied: “This is not the time for debate but for recreation, with jests and *quodlibets*.” In St. Louis’ time, the quodlibet was a spontaneous, amusing conversation; and is not the man who carries on such repartee with ease, bringing his wit into play, really more “serious” than he who lays one stone upon another in the building of a wall? Our best creation is ourself; and leisure is more conducive to it than work when work creates only what is mortal.

Another aspect of leisure is that it may be a collecting of one’s thoughts, a sifting and putting in order, a return to balance, after the obsessions and exertions of a busy life, thus allowing of greater self-possession.

What are we to do with this reconquered self but set it in a more favorable position with reference to the ends of life and the hierarchy of its objects and creatures? Labor may take a vacation; moral obligation never does. The state of the soul on a holiday, that of well-merited relaxation, is but the more akin to the state of the just man, the friend of God, which is “a perpetual feast day.”

Leisure is good, excellent, and worthy of a Christian conscious of the true meaning of things, only when it reflects natural and supernatural beauty, earthly and heavenly life. It is like still water wherein the trees and sky are mirrored.
THE UTILIZING OF LEISURE

Even relaxation demands a program; for all the functions of life have their proper order, and haphazard is to the advantage of nothing at all. Order in this case is much more elastic and subject to change, but it is not nonexistent. The body’s share in walks, sports, and open air excursions; the intellect’s share in conversations, reading, lectures, concerts and art exhibits; God’s share in everything, but especially in prayer and attendance at church, will be necessary or wisely provided for.

Some people like to potter about, that is, to do odd jobs after their own fashion and thus loosen the tension of the inexorable, steady grind. Jacques Rivièrè found therein “that wonderful obliviousness which one enjoys by being someone through whom something very material and very unintelligent is done.” Others prefer conversation and linger over it, sometimes to excess; for the sense of emptiness very soon makes itself felt in the course of a long palaver without any definite objective and without any limit.

In reading one may find a combination of utility and diversion, the joy of acquiring knowledge and the feeling that a gap is being filled;—how many they are and how distressing to a keen mind, however solid and careful its education! Work gives us a certain kind of training; but because of its specialized field it leaves many regions of the soul lying fallow. To round out and enlarge one’s horizon freely is a great benefit and by no means prevents relaxation if one is vigilant.

Everyone chooses his reading according to his bent; the wise
man, however, would like all his reading to tend toward the growth of wisdom in him. This by no means signifies a stilted mind, hostile to anything amusing or light, but rather a high sense of life and of its hidden links with the invisible. A book or a discourse is of no value except for the associations it procures to the mind, the stimulation arising from them, the interior visions awakened. The more these convey life and promote our destiny, the more the reader is justified in his selections and rewarded for their discretion.

Most of the novels with which some people gorge themselves in their leisure hours are put together like knitting; they deserve to be read the same way, or rather not read at all. Can such fashion-plates present life to us and substantiate its meaning? I should prefer to see people reading the account of an ascent of Mont Blanc, a tramp along a flowering river bank, a forest glade or a path in Brittany.

Nature is, I believe, the friend par excellence of leisure. It is the source of health and also, for many, of sanity, simplicity and strength of soul. We scatter in town what we gather in the country; we consume at home under the lamplight what we have taken in from the fresh air. Getting out of the daily harness to wander delightedly among the free creatures, the trees, the brooks, the wild life and the flowers is what Kierkegaard calls "the divine distraction." Temporal cares vanish there; the mind dilates and the heart becomes peaceful, without any adverse reaction such as is brought on by attendance at certain exciting forms of entertainment.

One realizes then that air and water are not given to us solely to be imbibed, nor the stars for candle-ends, nor plants and animals merely to furnish us with clothing and viands; beauty and sublime significance abound; their charm captivates us
gently; the soul is awestruck, elevated, and many a lesson of
life steals into this effortless contemplation.

"The more intimate our relations with nature are," writes
Henry de Montherlant, "the nearer we are to the supernatural." There
is a true sense to this statement, although the contrary
sometimes happens. At any rate, that is what must be aimed at:
the impulse toward nature terminating in God and consisting
only in stretching out to Him, through the "forest of symbols,"
our hands, our minds and our hearts. At the same time, other
associations are also necessary. Leisure plays a religious role
precisely because it enables us to forget the worker for the sake
of the man. It is the man who is a "religious animal"; the worker
is such only by virtue of his craft, and we can never weary of
maintaining that the man is greater and higher than what he
does.

Hence the Christian enjoying a respite will realize that his
essential rest is in God, host to the repose of heaven. Certain days
are consecrated to that God by His own initiative, Sundays and
holy days. But since the spirit of leisure is a holiday spirit should
it not look upon every day as Sunday? Our times have profaned
the Lord’s Day through avarice, over-eagerness for temporal
gain and contempt of the divine law. It behooves the man of
faith to remind himself that every day is the Lord’s day and,
when the exigencies of duty permit, he makes ample provision
for prayer, happy to find rest in God and make amends perhaps
for so much forgetfulness and neglect.

By animating one’s leisure with prayer, not only does one
sanctify it, one confirms it in its own nature; for leisure restores
a man to himself, and the business of man ultimately is that of
a blissful contemplative, an ecstasy,—a divine business.
TRAVEL

A prolonged vacation easily invites one to leave home either for a change of residence or for a trip from place to place at the beck and call of curiosity or caprice.

Traveling is the fashionable thing to do at certain seasons; the yachtsman and the globe-trotter start off at any time of the year to satisfy their yen for ostentation or notoriety. They send postcards from Harrar or Balaklava; they cart their luggage from station to station in order to show off the labels on their return. They gather material so as to dazzle their hearers by the account of incidents and the description of marvels which perhaps did not arouse the least admiration when beheld. They avail themselves of experiences and enlargements of the truth which sometimes only increase or expose their ridiculousness.

How much wiser it would be in that case to stay at home! The Imitation suggests as much by a consideration apparently naive but pre-eminently sagacious: "What canst thou see abroad that thou does not see here? Behold the sky, the earth, and all the elements: that is what all things are made of." The sedentary man is often a great traveler and self-sufficient; the inordinate gad-about is always an impoverished soul, incapable of living within himself.

A profound thinker soon realizes that life is ever and everywhere the same, that the really new is what is always happening, and he is quite willing to admit that the advantages of travel are to be had on the spot by merely rejuvenating our eyes. He who gazes out of his window with a fresh outlook, the glance of a poet, an artist, or a contemplative, sees the world renewing
itself for him every day. It is as in the case of love which re-
creates its object every instant and has no need of departing
from it to be gladdened by the sight of it once more.

Moreover, when one has seen a great deal in the past one may
become a secret traveler, thanks to one’s memories, while exter-
nally keeping to one’s solitude. At best, life is composed of these
two complementary elements: interior richness, contact with
nature at home or abroad and with humanity.

This is to say that travel is valuable when undertaken for the
sake of enlarging our horizons and human sympathies. A journey
is a change, it is education and self-development, it is looking at
the world with new eyes, under other aspects, in relation to dif-
f erent souls; thereby it vanquishes routine, verifies our judg-
ments, bestows the sense of proportion of which habit and self-
love would deprive us.

Not only do new vistas speak to us of deliverance; they offer
us broader, more disinterested attachments, less demanding as
to similarity and utilitarian advantage, nearer, therefore, to pure
humanity. If we are reflective, they may inspire us with a
philosophy of existence which books alone do not teach. “To
compose one’s soul with alien beauties,” in the words of Barrès,
is an advantage not to be scorned; the Christian appreciates it
all the more in that every uprooting is for him a symbol and an
effort at detachment, every new experience a portent, every un-
expected association animated by charity a foreshadowing of the
communion of saints wherein the unknown brother seems to
represent the whole of Christendom.

The condition upon which this advantage depends is a sin-
cerity which avoids exclusive conformity to the guidebook itiner-
ary and refuses to undertake one of those galloping American
style tours which leave no impression on the tourist where cen-
turies have made their mark and whole civilizations have de-
posed their sediment. It implies, furthermore, a judicious compromise between the attitude of the tourist or landscape-painter on the one hand and the humanitarian spirit on the other, concerning itself with the labors and sufferings, the struggles and victories of civilization. Is not this a good quality in a heart and mind? The man who is a friend of man is never far from becoming or being a friend of God.

I should like to point out one mistake which often spoils the impression left by our travels and impairs the benefit derived from trips planned with even the greatest care. We expect certain sights, cities, masterpieces or celebrities to live up to the ideal we have already formed of them, to reproduce the pictures of our imaginations, to verify our dreams; as a consequence we fail to perceive and enjoy the authentic values which these objects offer to us. Thence arise in large part those disappointments which travelers do not usually admit but which dampen their enthusiasm, however vociferously it may manifest itself amid the exclamation points of their recital. Another cause for the disillusionment of ardent wayfarers arises from the fact that the unknown is invested by our minds with the character of infinity, that infinite which we pursue unwittingly and which no created reality can yield to our desires.

Finally, travel is profitable on condition that the wanderlust does not bewitch us, that we do not lose our taste for home life, family ties and the old familiar tasks. On the contrary, a brief respite from the daily round ought to render it dearer to us and enable us to return to it with new courage and fresh resources. It is only the eternal voyage which will not summon us to return. That journey is entitled to corner us and hold us fast; every other allows to escape its grasp, in the soul of the wise traveler, whatever is most intimate and most highly prized.
TEMPTATION
SNARES TO RECTITUDE

What we call truth in our case amounts to an elimination of errors; what goes by the name of virtue is only a minimum of deviations and falls. We know that we are all sinners. Hence, after enumerating the elements of our integrity, it behooves us to discover its pitfalls and acknowledge their delinquency, while awaiting the moment to consider preservatives and remedies.

The snares, unfortunately, abound everywhere and always; their name is legion and they multiply like the objects of life, the products of nature, the instincts of the soul. Sometimes they are absurd, but that does not improve matters, for we are absurd enough ourselves to allow them to affect us; and sometimes they are tragic.

At Valladolid there is a silver tabernacle on which the Garden of Paradise is depicted; Eve offers the apple to Adam with her left hand, and in her right, which she holds behind her back, she conceals two other apples. This Eve, as subtle as she is audacious, represents temptation. But why call it a woman? Let us give to it all the names of creation, for the whole created world, designed for our perfection and joy, has played us false.

Evil hovers over innocence as over a prey. Innocence itself unwittingly lies in wait for a willing accomplice to victimize.

"... Lilies are white;
Lilies are proud and pure, but lilies are disturbing,"

we read in the Faraway Princess. And in Measure for Measure:
"O cunning enemy, that, to catch a saint,
With saints dost bait thy hook!
Most dangerous is that temptation that doth goad us on
To sin in loving virtue."

Would one not suppose that Shakespeare, who has said all there is to be said, had borrowed those lines from one of the profoundest Christian moralists, a Father of the Church, a mystic? He is more than right. But if goodness is a snare to good, what can be said, with regard to extent and frequency, of the action or the threat of evil?

The most difficult demons to conquer are those which M. Gabriel Marcel calls "the radiant demons": love and pride of knowledge. But there are others. They are legion, and their horde rises up everywhere, pointing out the wrong road.

All great souls have groaned at this situation. They have sighed over it secretly in the presence of their Master, even in the state of requited but ever fearful love. A sigh—the consolation of a soul that cannot otherwise be delivered of its pain and does not, at times, even wish to be so! But what is the use of sighing? Perhaps it might be better to play the stoic? "Never!" replies generosity when faced with evil. Only too often, never means tomorrow; hence tomorrow is for virtue a lurking anxiety.

The worst of it is that the principal snare is within us. It is ourselves. "Were it not for myself, I should get along quite well," Alphonse Karr was wont to say. He was being funny; but it is not a laughing matter. For man to be man's enemy to that extent; for man not to die but to kill himself; in the moral sense, for him not to be knocked down but to rush headlong, is a sorry thing. The surest means of effecting our ruin is to combat our external enemies without bothering about our vices; but when the vices are the enemies we fear, concentrating on the outside for our defenses is more often than not a mistake in tactics. The real battle is within.
Sometimes our interior flabbiness assumes a ridiculous air in our own eyes. We jeer at ourselves inwardly more than we allow others to do. External irony embitters us; interior irony consoles. Just the same, we rarely go as far as we should in this direction. It is hard to acknowledge oneself for what one is. But wouldn't it be better than being blind? Does not voluntary blindness lower us even further?

Let us admit it frankly: we are children. Yes; childishness is puerility, that is to say, instability, frailty, incapability of resisting an impulse, thoughtless desire for the first passing object, love of change, sudden impatience or unreasonable stubbornness, and God alone knows how many traits thus identify us with childhood even at the age of grey hairs and very decided pretensions to wisdom! The child is already a man, but not very much a man. The man is still a child and quite a child. Hence the education of each one is always in process. If this is true in every respect, it is particularly so in regard to the spirit, for the spiritual Christian surpasses the man and even were we sure of ourselves with reference to all the rest, we should still and always be children here.

The remedy, to which we shall have to apply ourselves at length, is already apparent. We must be in constant attendance at the school of God, ever in His vicinity, like the child at the side of his mother. Walking before God is preserving the sense of His presence, calling upon His spirit, interiorly seeking His help, returning to Him promptly after our follies and asking Him for the antidote which is Himself under all the forms wherein He gives Himself. This is the means of maturing gradually according to the measure of our generosity and His grace. At any rate, it is the way to insure ourselves against the most perilous effects of that puerility which exposes us to every risk, including that which is no longer a risk but the ultimate disaster.
THE INEVITABILITY OF TEMPTATION

"It is beastly," says Claudel, "to have to endure the heavy machinery of the body when we know we were made to command it." It is indeed "beastly"; but it is inevitable because of a second piece of "heavy machinery" geared to the first, of which the first is only a part.

Nietzsche expresses the same fatality under another figure: "The outer world plays upon our strings; is it surprising that there should be dissonances?" The objects of sense are all about us; they provoke emotional reactions from near at hand; while reason is ever more or less remote. We have been dealing constantly and from the beginning with the sensible world, more rarely and recently with reason which awakens late and spends only brief moments on duty. What is sensible is more absorbing, more exciting whether on account of its attraction or of its torment. The spiritual has to be sought out, and often is not discovered.

Oh the dangers of engulfing the soul in the abyss of the body! The peril, the perpetual menace of that "slough of fire" of which Barbey d'Aurevilly speaks, and the menace, too, of a proud, insubordinate spirit, shut in and intoxicated by its own breath!

Our passions are all the more dangerous to us in so far as we all share them. They produce a kind of mutual incitement, a contagion; and if at times there is intervention and, as it were, a partial extinction of the noxious fires, there is much more often reciprocal stimulation and fusion of the blaze. The flames spread from us to our neighbor, from him to us; how can we make our way through them, and that continually, without being burned?
Represent to yourself the interior of a soul, the meeting-place of a thousand and one actions undergone, accepted, heightened at times, complicated in every case, and as anarchistic as a nation in revolt, in place of a unified, self-possessed personality. "Every soul is a secret society all to itself," writes M. Marcel Jouhandeau. This impression of mystery on the verge of an eruption, at least in the offing, is indeed presented by the interior of the average man, of individuals taken in the mass; and each of us recognizes therein more or less his own experience.

We emerge from one dangerous fancy, escape one obsession, only to fall into the power of another obsession or fancy. It is possible to avoid by flight or diversion the blow with which certain objects strike us; once the heart has been hit, how can we help feeling the hurt, how can we help suffering all the more in our Christian conscience because of our secret enjoyment of the thrust?

"Delectable fount with miseries o'erflowing"—each of us may thus characterize whatever charms, whatever titillates sensation. The wound opened by the senses is enlarged and constantly re-opened by the imagination; the danger threatens anew at each attack.

There is no such thing as a wise man; there are only men capable alternately of wisdom and of folly. The opportunity and temptation to do evil are not wanting to the virtuous man any more than the chance and desire of doing good to the vicious. No sinner is established in wickedness; no hero is pledged and, as it were, condemned to goodness; the outcome trembles in the balance.

Having admitted this risk, we must acknowledge ourselves to be at one and the same time faced with a splendid prospect and with grave danger. We have the choice between victory and defeat; we do not have the choice between war and peace. When
the venerable old man, Job, warns us that “the life of man on earth is a warfare,” he implies that the acceptance of the challenge is demanded of cowards and brave men alike; but how different are their respective conditions! “Evil is our enemy,” says Leonardo da Vinci; “but would it not be worse to have it for a friend?” The danger may be mortal; yet it is the danger which gives life. All the grandeur of man consists in the effort he makes to overcome his infirmity. By fighting shy of oneself, one outstrips and surpasses oneself. My strength lies in the victory over my weakness. Well, then, what’s the odds!

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THE UTILITY OF TEMPTATION

If one could perceive the concept represented by a storm to the mind of an able seaman, one would discover that it is not recorded therein as a danger, but as a series of manoeuvres to be performed, as a “yo-heave-ho!” Standing before his lions, a good tamer does not quake, but makes his calculations. In any case, calmness is a protection and, of itself, a value.

Danger is a splendid thing. The man who confronts it with manly prudence has beforehand the reflection of victory upon him. How can we conquer without enemies? The fighter in our make-up would then have no more function. Goodness is better in him who has risked the worst. The exercise of our strength consists only in disciplining our weaknesses and surmounting the external obstacle; would it not be disastrous to exonerate ourselves from such a duty?
Temptation does indeed "try" us! We have no conception of the weight of our bodies until we have climbed a hill or scaled a dizzy height. The heaviness of our soul and its instability,—so necessary for us to experience in order to induce the impulsive turning toward our only recourse,—are only felt by us on the slopes of the mystical mountain, confronted by its precipices. A temptation is profitable if self-knowledge is increased thereby, our humility deepened and if, by an escape which is really an ascension, we are drawn toward the sole purpose of existence.

That is what is called progress; and the decisive progress to which theologians give the name of final perseverance, the last leap casting us into the arms of God, is only a kind of all-out victory reabsorbing into itself the temptations of a lifetime.

Only the temptations? No; the falls as well, in so far as they form an almost inescapable penalty with reference to the usefulness of temptation. The lines of the Parthenon are not straight. The contours of the Gothic are ribbed throughout and gain therefrom in richness. Our nature being what it is, the thread of a life will always be somewhat thin and colorless if the connection between the beginning and the end is drawn along a yard-stick. Fluctuations contribute the value of enrichment, of expansion, provided that, always and more so each day, the end draws us back again.

Sometimes a temptation deals gently with us at first and then lays us low. Sometimes, too, it lays us low to begin with, then deepens, broadens, elevates us and increases the stature of all our deeds and powers. A great soul, which may be surprised into evil as a mediocre soul into good, is measured by what it draws forth from the abyss. How many golden nuggets there are at times at the bottom of a precipice!

Realize, O Christian, that all that is in you as a starting point
of your spiritual effort is a grace. That is true of your original nature; it is true even of the pitfalls you may have dug out for yourself, providing this bad job is repaired so far as you are concerned and thus reasserts the aspect of a divine work. All fear of self, as long as you abide in God, is fear of God. Should you fear your own Father? Abandon yourself, not of course in complete passivity, but with that surrender of the whole being which exalts its active virtues to their maximum development. Abandon yourself thus and nothing will any longer prevail against you.

After the redemption of Jesus Christ, if we participate therein by faith and love, everything is a grace to us. We must receive the heritage of Adam as that of Jesus Christ since it now is in Christ. Temptation as well as the rest is a means proposed to our virtuous acception. Is it redolent of slime? Does it reek with the original corruption? What matter! Is not a manure heap a treasure on a farm? The farmer does not roll upon it; he heaps it up, processes it, and derives from it by an alchemy which laughs at our fastidiousness the wealth of golden sheaves.

Surely, we must not expect to find this art in ourselves; only God possesses it. But precisely on that account, because we do not hope in ourselves, let us not fear the misery in ourselves. He who gives strength can overcome weakness. Our graces are not intended to enable us to escape danger, but to pass through it unscathed. Let us not ask God for lazy graces.

God has no better servant than Satan. Was not Satan, in company with Judas, the most efficacious agent of the Passion? The most active of the intermediaries whom God employs to induce us to conquer our inertia and our defects, to bring our resources into play, is this “roaring lion” described by the liturgy as “seeking whom he may devour,” an enemy to the slumber of the soul, a stimulant to its vigor and, hence, the instrument of
its peace. For true peace, in the spiritual order, is not to have had no enemies or obstacles or even delinquencies; it is to have vanquished them, with God, vanquished by the victory of God. And the more absolute God’s victory is with us, for having been put to the test, disputed and regained after every perilous vicissitude, the more profound is the peace.

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VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION

It is not so far-fetched, that picture of M. Marcel Jouhan-deau’s which represents each human being flanked by an angel and a devil with identical wing-spread. According to each man’s stature is his angel; likewise his demon. The victory of the one or the other is in the hands of our counsel.

As a matter of fact, our counsel is not alone; nor is it pure light. The conscience is a warning signal and a power; the religious soul is both an autonomous agent and an instrument of God. To be fully equipped in the face of temptation four conditions are therefore demanded: the enlightenment of our perception, the exercise of our prudence, the putting forth of our powers of resistance and counter-attack, and the summoning up of our resources.

St. Paul observes that God causes our means for enduring temptation to spring from the temptation itself. He is implying that God has a hand therein; but furthermore that the temptation is the ringing of a bell and that our spirit of faith, once it is
awakened, can confront the evil with a light which is the enemy of its darkness.

We love the good. The moral order bears witness to itself within us; God thus commends God. It is not through complicity with our sinful tendencies that we depreciate the good and at times come to hate it. What provokes our sinful tendencies themselves if it be not our infinite hunger coupled with a lack of discernment regarding what can really satisfy it? It is because it speaks a divine language that nature tempts us against God; image or vestige of perfection, innocent plagiarist, it deludes the uncontrolled heedlessness of our hearts. Wherefore, salvation lies in knowing that we are never further from what tempts us than when we have obtained it; that the object of our passion throws a shadow on the universe, but first of all on itself; that under all the flattering titles with which sin decks itself, its name is Lying.

It is the spirit of faith which holds on to such wisdom. Let the spirit of faith be aroused and everything sets itself in order; the hierarchy of values appears; God reigns on the summit in the plenitude He professes, which so easily carries off the victory; and the miserable objects of our temptation flee.

Our prudence plays its part here by warding off a surprise attack on the senses, the invasion of the imagination by the object swarming within it, and that formidable, insidious, gradual ascendancy against which all Christian moralists have enfeigned. They show it to us terminating in a kind of fatality, after beginning with an attack that would have been easy to avoid had we acted at the opportune moment. "First a bare thought comes to the mind," says the author of the *Imitation*, then a strong imagination; afterwards delight, and evil motion, and consent. And thus, little by little, the wicked enemy gets full entrance when he is not resisted in the beginning."
A temptation is a stream which we can leap across at the source; further along it is no longer possible. "If I had only known!" people sometimes say. You are excused; but do now and henceforth what you would have done, had you known. We know nothing about tomorrow; nothing about today, which is quite new and cannot but surprise us. That is why we must reflect the night before to insure today and tomorrow. Where, in fact, am I, in what realm of duration or of affairs? We are never in the place where we believe ourselves to be at the hour we suppose. The interior life is a perpetual alibi, a constant running adrift; he who does not remain ever at the helm and under the stars is lost.

Again it must be admitted that there are sudden paroxysms on which preventive wisdom has scarcely any hold. It can only attack from a higher vantage point. It must get a grip on things not where they begin to manifest themselves but at their root. Situations do not create our frailties; they give evidence in our behalf; it depends on our prudence to elicit a favorable verdict. "The decline of the senses is the dawn of truth," says Henry Suso. The battle against the senses before they begin any offensive is therefore a pledge of future security. Hence every lover of virtue has been relentless in waging it. Our body knows what it wants; our soul is none too sure. We must reverse the roles; that is to say, we must organize our interior life in conformity to that sort of derived necessity known as acquired virtue, which is opposed to the quasi-necessity of nature.

To this end, moreover, should we not welcome and utilize, for the preservation of our souls, those providential helps which we term sickness, discomfort, infirmity, deprivation, humiliation, conflicting occurrences, obstacles of all kinds? They contain the means of establishing equilibrium in our unregulated appetites,
provided we accept them freely with a view to rectification and beneficial treatment. Perhaps there is great depth in the drunkard’s remark: “I am happy when I no longer know myself.” Ceasing to know our lower self, renouncing it, rejecting all that part of us which is a sinner or favorable to sin, that is for us the height of prudence.

Furthermore, as we have already observed with reference to charity, this prudence can only come from a higher virtue. A flame has many tongues but only one mouth; all the alluring passions proceed from a single hot-bed: inordinate self-love. Hence one remedy alone suffices; a single stream of water quenches the fire—that of which it has been said that it springs forth unto life eternal. The remedy for all temptation, whether it has its source within us or through us from without, is divine love.

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TWOFOLD PLEDGE OF VICTORY

“In vain will the enemy present you with his display and his merchandise”; says Ruysbroek, “if you buy nothing with your affections, none of it will remain in your possession.” We know, however, that the “affections” perform unexpected somersaults; no matter how far in advance we set about managing them, there are cases wherein the most alert wisdom is ineffective. How astonished we are at times by what rises up within us all of a sudden. How often we are surprised by a spontaneous allegiance or rejection without any visible roots! Is it really we ourselves? Perhaps it may be yesterday’s self whom we gave ourselves for
ancestor; or else perhaps it is a remote forebear, or the body, or nature. Then is the time for courage to intervene.

Our tendency is to invite peace and, when we fall asleep therein, to hate being reawakened. In the spiritual as in the temporal sphere, however, there is no valid peace except one possessed of the virtues of war. “Peace is not the absence of war,” writes Spinoza, “it is a virtue born of strength of soul.” Being strong is not a question of muscles or nerve impulse, just as in a nation, strength does not consist merely in men and munitions; in both cases there must be the courage to commit oneself to fixed objectives and to cling to one’s resolutions.

Reason and experience are not enough. If men had no other guide but reason, humanity would long ago have perished. Reason must become a deeply rooted instinct, a force; that is what we call character. Character it is that saves us in sudden or overpowering danger; it is that hardness of substance which, in the soul as in the diamond, combines so well with brightness and limpidity, a triumph of light in each of them.

A firm will pacifies the soul torn by passions. When truly resolute, man is stable, anxious only with a prudent anxiety, that of the officer on the poop-deck watching the movement of the sea. Like the wave, temptation is recurrent, but so is its subsidence. Overcoming it once is learning to do so a thousand times, and here we are better situated than the mariner; for the recommencement takes advantage of the previous victory. The tide does not form a habit; the soul does. The conqueror will achieve his conquest with growing facility, whereas weakness vitiates good inclinations and opens the way to perverse ones.

“The patient man is better than the valiant,” says the Book of Proverbs, “and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh cities.” It is good to hear our strength lauded by Him who offers to sustain it. Holy Writ thus sets its seal of approval upon what
we have just said about courage; but this does not mean that courage is to be put foremost. In all things He stands first who created these relative primacies. We can do nothing without God; with Him we can do everything. Together with the Psalmist and with the afflicted who dogged the footsteps of Peter the Apostle under Solomon’s Porch, the brave Christian asks of God only the blessing of His shadow to achieve the victory.

The shadow of God! At once light and power in the direction it indicates for us, the pacification it effects, and the mysterious vibration which is known as grace. Whatever it may be that threatens or assails or coerces me, I have the means of rendering myself independent and even of subjugating it. The mere facility of returning to my God after every contact or solicitation on the part of the creature saves me from the latter. Yield you must, base, insidious, deceiving world, when the light shines forth and the power is revealed of Him who said: “Have confidence, I have overcome the world.”

There is within us a force which, to a certain degree, can break down the violence of temptation: that is, pride. The stoic thus steels himself. But for the Christian, this is an even worse downfall and between the two he may indeed have a bad time of it. When one refuses to be the slave of either the flesh or pride, one may estrange them both; their individual malice combines before an impotent refusal.

Whence can help be expected unless it be from a power above the attack of either, above the soul and its enemies as well as its false friends? That power is grace. Prayer obtains it for us. Our faithfulness renders it firm. The work of God in us does not belong to us; simply as cooperators, we are not to take sole charge of the affair. Let God defend His achievement together with us! We may ask it of Him; He wishes us to do so, even to
the point of "importunity," according to the expression in the parable.

We are justified in affirming that temptation derives its force, not from its own violence or suddenness, nor from its craft or any circumstance through which it exerts itself, but from our own previous imprudence, the consequent inconstancy of our intellect, the failure of our will at the instant, and, more than all, from our lack of dependence on God.

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THE PASSIONS

Temptation finds its principal strength in the passions, so that we cannot omit a consideration of them in dealing with the dangers that threaten integrity. Nevertheless, these "maladies of the soul," as the Stoics called them, require to be viewed in a separate light; they demand a judgment and a rule.

Maladies of the soul the passions are, in fact, only too often; their misdeeds sadden the man of character and fill the world. Some there are as violent as cholera, the black plague or typhus; some as insidious and tenacious as tuberculosis, anaemia or consumption, nor are their effects any less tragic except in appearance. Each one is not an isolated scourge; after the fashion of those insects which lay their eggs in the bodies of other insects seemingly destined to receive them, our passions entrust their progeny to other passions which prolong their lives and increase their power.

From this to a condemnation of passion itself as inimical to
life and destructive of the moral order was but a step, and the Stoics traversed it learnedly and pompously. The Christian moralist, forewarned by the Incarnation, enlightened by the miraculous experience of his Church, does not fall into this excess. The rule of morality is reason; supernaturally it is faith; there is neither rectitude nor perfection outside of them. But being a perfection is not everything, it is also something to be a force. Without passion, duty itself would be an unendurable drudgery, a life held at arm's length no longer appealing to heroes.

Reason and faith render our lives righteous; will and character make them determined; passion alone renders them ardent. The intensity of life depends on passion as the vigor of plant life on the summer sun. To escape the aberrations of our instincts, must we wish for their insensibility? "It is by the same appetite, the same power to desire," writes Spinoza, "that the soul acts and that it is subject to passion." To extinguish passion would therefore be to devitalize action; the soul would have nothing but counsellors and guides,—no more executive agents, no more the daring of a conqueror, no more of the breath of life. What would you rather have, after all,—saints aflame or saints of dry wood?

An admirer of reason may deplore the fact that it is so feeble in us, so lacking in motive power, that of itself it cannot sustain life and start on its flight the destiny of the individual, society, history or civilization. But everyone recognizes this to be true. Men of strong passions have always carried events along, whether for good or ill. The world progresses thanks to honest folk, but not to well-intentioned molly-coddles. Life does not prosper, on any level, except at the high temperature produced by passion and which mere reason would leave but languishing. We may even assert with Nietzsche that the civilizing effort, like the moral effort and the mystical impulse, reaches its peak at the "melting-point of unreason," that is to say, where passion makes contact
with its law and has not yet had a chance to cool; at a lower degree, mediocrity appears.

How can we anathematize the powers of the soul God has made for us, the flesh God has created, the senses He bestowed on us! Are we forgetting that through Jesus the passions have become common to God and man? Noble passions of the Man-God which stirred the world and encompassed eternal serenity in blood that was inflamed!

In its own sphere, passion is always right. Where it goes wrong, when it does so, is in the sphere of man, of the superman that is a Christian; then let it not be a question of destroying or weakening passion, but of deflecting, sublimating and transforming it.

The torrent which devastates everything in its course may be diverted to irrigate a meadow, become a reservoir for “white coal,” or an artificial lake bringing life to an entire region. It is all a matter of dams, embankments, canals and turbines. In the development of the soul, will the engineer consider it simpler to dry up the source completely?

Some people content themselves with stemming the tide; they blindly resist the pressure which others submit to and assuredly they are right in not yielding to it. But mere repression sometimes only increases the danger and, in any case, deprives itself of a potentiality. Ask yourself what your predominant fault is: you have discovered, in a misguided but clearly identified state, your greatest resource.

The first effect of an ardent passion is to disengage life from all that is artificial and useless, but even more especially to nourish its vitality, on condition that it finds the right spot at which to apply the energy thus furnished and ward off the risks involved. It may be said that this regulation is the essential thing: indeed, we shall not forget that truth. But at the same time, it must be recalled that the accessory is often to the essential what
the indispensable is to the art that makes use of it. Our passions are the terrible material proposed to our moral art, its tragic wealth of which it cannot be deprived without the danger of rendering it, as it were, useless. Our passions are wild beasts; but men have seen the chariots of divinities drawn by lions.

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Utilization of the Passions

When Joubert was asked if talent demanded passion, he replied: "Yes, a great deal of repressed passion." The same thing is necessary to strong virtue. But perhaps "repression" is not exactly the right term here. It would be better to say "utilized." How? Plato informs us in his definition of prudence, the queen of morality: "that supreme force which, instead of giving in to the passions, controls them by retaining in herself the energy of them all." Control is not repression, and retaining for oneself the energy of one's adversary by constraining him to serve is a policy worthy of a manly soul.

The will commands in us and, as chief executive of a government which is largely democratic, it requires the consent of its subjects, that is to say in this instance, the obedience of the passions and their orderly arrangement; otherwise, not only is the will's authority set at naught, but the disorder recoils upon it so that it no longer obeys its own command. "Willingly I went toward what I did not will," St. Augustine confesses, referring to the epoch when the passions were untamed in him. However, to utilize these forces, once they are brought under subjection,
one must enter somewhat into their action, not adhere rigidly to
a blank refusal, imitating the engineer who yields to the move-
ment of his machine while he guides it.

The aim of the passions is to fulfill in their own fashion the
objectives of life, in other words, to make us happy. They all
have this pretension, nor can they make boast of any other. The
unfortunate thing is that by yielding to them absolutely we arrive
at the opposite result; that is to say, they are themselves betrayed.
What else is to be done, but to enter into their policy to the
extent of adopting their objective while passing judgment on
their means, reserving to ourselves the right to accept, correct or
reject them by the most determined resistance? This is what their
blindness will not concede; hence our obligation to constrain
them. The fact remains that there is no will to destroy them, but
only to rectify and utilize them rationally.

Ill-regulated passion divides us against ourselves and does not
permit of a reunion; it ruins our assets; it robs us of the use of
our being. Once reason intervenes and God rules by its agency,
everything is linked together, everything is coordinated and re-
stored to us, including the vigor of the passion reduced to serf-
dom.

There are cases in which wisdom dictates a diverting of the
mind from the objects of the passion, lest one be caught and
enthralled by them; that is Descartes’ advice. At other times con-
tempt and the cool analysis which deflates is to be preferred to
flight; this is the tactic of Marcus Aurelius: “It is nothing but
this; nothing by that . . .” A third prescription is often still more
effective as being more conformed to the nature of things: dig
even deeper on the very ground of passion itself, deeper, that is,
than its immediate pretensions and frenzied cravings, sufficiently
deep to expose its childishness and at the same time reveal its
connection with our authentic aims.
What are you after, passion, and where are you leading me? To joy! That is the answer I receive, whether it refers to pleasure, to rest, to glory, power, love or revenge. Joy? Oh yes, I know the way, which you in your blindness only hit upon by chance, and which the violence of your capering may cause us to miss until we have withdrawn from it by an eternal flight. I bridle you so as to impel you along your own paths, which you do not recognize, yet they are yours and mine, and moreover divine.

If passion allows itself to be curbed, we become strong with its strength and right with our own righteousness. If it rebels, that is the time to break its mouth, were it leviathan or behemoth.

Yes, indeed, there is a moment when main force must be applied in this struggle, after wisdom and even craft have first been tried. Passion kicks; passion champs the bit; it may throw its rider into the brambles or over a precipice. He who does not know at once where he must saw its mouth and how to keep a tight grip with his knees at one time or another is bound to be unhorsed and thrown to the ground.

The ancients maintained more nobly and profoundly that the conflict with the passions is really an uneven battle between a human being and the forces of the universe, so that victory and steadfastness in wisdom is a triumph over the stars: “Sapiens dominatur astris.” That is a splendid thought and the effort is worthy of that rationality which defines us in our highest nature, worthy of the Spirit which guides us as Christians and may rightly be said to dominate the stars, for the heavens are naught but His effulgence.
THE BODY

Our body is a case for that invisible jewel, the soul, and a receptacle for God who dwells in the soul and, therefore, in the body.

As a matter of fact, the relationship would be maintained in a less imaginative, more nearly correct order by declaring that the body is in the soul and the soul in God. At any rate, the body, only bond between the soul and the universe, is by nature an associate, an invaluable servant of the soul, just as the soul is by nature an associate and servant of God.

A false mysticism would prefer to disparage this mortal partner, pretending to see in it worse than a negligible element,—one escaped from the lower regions. Yet the body, too, is a child of God; it likewise heard the Creator's fiat, the summons to life relating all its objects to uncreated Life. It listened, on the sixth day, to the verdict that "all things were good" and even "very good" that God had set in being.

Even before it becomes the temple of God, the body of God, the body is already nature's temple, since it is the rallying point of natural forces that they may worship in spirit and in truth; for nature adores by the prostrating of our bodies as the body does by the devotion of our souls. But has not the human body become God's through the Incarnation? Did not God unite it to Himself substantially in order that all flesh may return to Him?

This assumption of flesh into unity with God is a matter which concerns each one of us; we are sons of God corporally in a new way as brothers of Christ, forming spiritually with Him but one immortal body.
The Christ is myself, although not myself alone; I am one of His members. My body, too, is myself, but not the whole of me, for the flame of the spirit soars above this molten matter perpetually burning with the fire of life. This cloudy form which envelops my soul and is rendered visible to me and to others by the sun,—I shall not disown or ignore it. I must go to God with my whole being, for God loves the whole of it with the love He has for His Christ, for the terrestrial image of His Word, for the vestige which is called creation.

What illusion there is in contempt for the so-called gross, corruptible flesh! Its sublimity is beyond all composite creation. It is basically incorruptible, for it will put on incorruption as a garment. What is there in nature to compare with it? The pearl, the ruby? They are only its remote symbols; of itself, seen from within under the form of blood, it inspires a sort of sacred terror by the mysteries of life which it evokes. What shall we not say of the services it renders, of the future which these services insure to it! A man becoming spirit is also a spirit becoming flesh, working for the glorification of the flesh, whether in this world or in the next.

The body animated by the Spirit "passes into the rank of celestial things," says Bossuet. Its functions and gestures are holy as long as they are accomplished in union with its Animator. Its sufferings are meritorious; so are its joys. It awaits the day when, after having served the soul, having been its visibility and its agent, it will again be its visibility, but this time its happy beneficiary, its imponderable, angelic form, its reflected beauty, its shining divinization in the heart of a transformed universe.

It is surprising that the Church which preaches such a doctrine should be accused of despising the human body, and precisely by those who hold that it is destined for annihilation once it has
mingled with the dust of earth. It is also astonishing that the same objectors should condemn in the name of the spirit the corporeal aspect of religion, external worship, the sacraments, the resurrection of the body, and should plead on behalf of the physical passions against the strictness of Catholic discipline.

The Church is severe toward the body only because she respects it. She restrains its puerility for the sake of its maturity and its immortality. She sees in it an element of superhuman life even now, of incorruptible life later on. She presents it as a tabernacle to the Eucharist, to the Trinity, as well as to thought and to noble earthly love. Only on this account does she steadfastly and maternally set herself against its blind or hypocritical defenders.

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The Spiritual Destiny of the Body

Bossuet censures those "who have no mind except for their body and in whom, so to speak, the purest thing about them is breathing." That is the extreme offense against the Catholic spirit.

My body is myself, as I have just been saying; but that does not mean that my authentic self is the carnal self, the creature entirely inclined toward the flesh, devoted to it. This diabolical reversal is rather the negation of selfhood. The essential self is the spiritual self transcending the merely human, revealed to the poet, the artist, the hero, the mystic, the saint; for these latter two, that is, for the Christian, it is a supernatural self in the true sense of the word, a divine self.
How could one recognize the human essence in that which begins and comes to an end? The spirit does not end. The "animal body" terminates together with its objects because time carries it along and after having raised it like a faint ripple on its flowing tide, obliterates it with the gentle tremor of death. But the spirit and all that it associates with itself, outside of time, has no cause for coming to an end because it is forever commencing, attached as it is only to the unfailing Source. That is the self God has conceived for me, the self I must regard as genuine.

The spirit in us strives to manifest itself in the flesh and to dominate the environment wherein the flesh moves; but this is for the spirit's own service, not for the purpose of submerging itself in the elements which carry it. What is this service of the spirit but the seeking after truth, beauty, and,—conjointly with what accrues to it from creation, in itself so elevating,—that contact with the creator Spirit to whom the conscience bears testimony. God inhabits the depths of the soul, whose surface only the body occupies. Our soul is nearer to God than to its own body.

But this body, which is naught without the soul and should only serve the soul in the service of God, is capable of hampering it frightfully. In God's name, let it be watched over, kept within bounds and mortified! When vigilance is relaxed, even when one proposes to grant to the flesh what is strictly within its rights, one runs the risk of every danger both to soul and body. What a deal of wrangling! There is a regular lawsuit between the soul and the rebellious body; each one presents its arguments, pulls the strings in its own direction. Free will is the judge; that is to say, the soul itself resolves upon its triumph or its ruin.

St. Thomas affirms that the subjection of the body is beneficial to the memory and conduces to keenness of intellect, strength of will, and character development. Hence he assures us that chas-
tity is eminently favorable to contemplation, "as regulating that 
which draws us most vehemently toward the life of the senses."

Is not good judgment closely allied to such tranquility? Objects 
are not clearly reflected in troubled waters. As for the mystical 
life, it depends upon interior harmony because it depends on 
grace; and the harmony of nature is itself a condition necessary 
to grace. Therefore does St. Paul invite us to live "always bearing 
about in our body the mortification of Jesus, ... that the life also 
of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh," that is to 
say, by a perfect life.

Since the mad passions are automatically inclined toward sin, 
they must be opposed by contrary automatic action; hence Chris-
tian asceticism, more or less accentuated depending on one's 
state of life and personal initiative. It is based upon this Cartesian 
observation, which is moreover a matter of universal experience, 
that the will attacks the passions through the medium of the 
body; and, further, upon the truth affirmed by Pascal that when 
the "machinery" has been inclined toward virtue, it transports 
us "from humiliations to inspirations," that is to say, spirituality 
and grace.

We may conclude that the involuntary sufferings of the body, 
its illnesses and mishaps, have a spiritual value which the Chris-
tian should appreciate and garner with fidelity. He is instructed 
by them; he learns his limitations; he realizes his dependence; he 
is forewarned regarding the perils to which he is exposed, above 
all, that of death. Frequently his thinking becomes keener, his 
conceptions of the soul and of existence become more profound. 
At the utmost point of his acceptance, if he has the courage to 
attain it, he comes to prefer a suffering of whose benefit he is 
aware to pleasures that yield disillusionment. He understands 
that audacious epigram of Tertullian: "The greatest pleasure lies 
in a contempt for pleasure."
In short, the body is a friend, but a dangerous one, a boon companion against whom one must be constantly on one's guard, a guest with whom one must ever be coming to terms and ever be breaking off. A state of war or of peace? Both, in fact, and this ambiguous situation lasts as long as time itself; for our individual demise neither extinguishes the mutual sympathy nor finishes the fight. The body deserts at its last gasp; the soul regrets and yet blesses the defeat of the body. Only at the resurrection will these two parts of our being be fully reconciled, satisfied and attuned to one another.
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Sin

The world is in God; hence every creature is with God; through Him it subsists, operates, and fulfills in a greater or less degree the destiny which is its own. But evil is excluded from this embrace of infinity. Evil stands alone. The evil of the rational creature, namely sin, throws him into an isolation which ought to leave him aghast were it not that unconsciousness is the greatest of his ills, the sardonic screen of all the others.

"It is not within the power of God Himself," says Bossuet, "that there should exist a greater misery than sin." Obviously; for by it, without perishing, one turns one's back on Being. Once we recognize that everything is good on account of God and only in God, should it not be rendered useful to us through the hands of God and in conformity with His will? To grasp a thing without God is to snatch at a shadow, but a shadow like one of those legendary phantoms leading to their ruin the souls they have seduced.

A creature cannot be ultimately beneficial to us outside of Him who creates it and who does so, no doubt, for the ends of the creature itself, but also for His own ends, that is, for an order wherein the purposes of the rational creature, of its objects and of the Creator are harmonized. All things are intended for us with God; nothing is for us without or against God. With Him we possess all that belongs to Him. Without Him we have the sham blandishments, perhaps, and the final hostility, assuredly, of what we insist upon tearing away from Him but which He will not let us take.

Whoever seeks order finds order and his own place in it, that
is, happiness. Whoever seeks only himself finds himself in interior disorder and in the exterior disorder he creates. Finally, order, which always triumphs, will effect the triumph of its defender. Its violator will be like a soldier in a marching company who refuses to advance or to keep in step; his regiment jostles him and he is liable to be trampled to death under foot.

Thus the environment into which we are born offers us the most opposite possibilities: possibilities of enrichment and salvation on the one hand, of disillusionment and ruin on the other. Virtue consists in nothing more than choosing the former, what Péguy calls “consenting to the rules of happiness.” The sinner lapses into the latter possibilities thereby depriving himself of everything and becoming reduced spiritually to the state of a corpse.

One wonders what can be the source of such blindness. Nevertheless it is so widespread that the Apostle John might well write: “The whole world is seated in wickedness.” Can it be that men lose the consciousness of sin by dint of committing it? That is indeed what happens, not merely to individuals, but even to civilizations. Today, for instance, when the decline of consciences seems so glaring, who even mentions the problem of responsibility?

Moreover, this hardness of heart is not so much as necessary. Our nature is sinful in Adam; in his race infancy itself is not younger than sin. It was enough for Mary to be fully innocent to surround her in the world with a vacuum of solitude such as her love alone could circumvent. Sin has become so natural to us that it would seem to be only by it that we are definable. Which sinner are you? And you? And you? That is how we are differentiated, and grouped together, too.

We are sinners, and because we are such, as it were, essentially, we are so from beginning to end, old as well as young,
young as well as old. We change form in the course of our existence; our movements, objectives, interests, and conversations change; but our madness does not change. The infant slumbering in his cradle does not yet know sin; yet it smoulders within him. The corpse with closed eyes no longer knows it; but he endures its physical effects in the gnawing of the sepulchral worm, while his soul trembles before its judge. Why awaken to this guilty trepidation? Why not rather weld it into a wise tranquillity? We can do so and, with the grace of God, it is our duty to hope for it still.

External nature gives us the example, ambiguously, it is true, as being subject to various interpretations. “Nature has taste,” Renan observes, “but does not go so far as morality; it does not go beyond love.” Nevertheless, who can help admiring the innocent life of a flower, a tree, a bird, a beast of the field, the curve of which has no deviation unless it be imposed from without? Does not every natural agent follow its bent faithfully? Are we not assured of what it will do by the very fact of what it is? “O thou first Cause,” Leonardo da Vinci cries out, “thou does not permit any force to fail in the order and quality of its necessary effects.” When science is in control of the cause, it expects the result with certainty. There is no gap. But our freedom creates a gap; in both good and evil it oversteps the bounds—but why especially in evil?

Better endowed than either spontaneity or instinct, liberty is capable of obtaining and securing effects that are immeasurably more elevated, more varied, more enduring and better distributed among its beneficiaries. It prefers to abuse its gifts. That is its way of acknowledging the Creator’s bounty which places it at the summit of created beings. Better still, summoned unto the supernatural, human liberty is in a position to rise infinitely above itself and hence, in the same proportion, above all things. Will
she decide to cast herself down from even this height? That is the whole drama of life. It is the choice offered to us. Thanks to such an option and to its already manifest effects, this world that is being born presents the aspect attributed to it by the poet of “La Fin de Satan”:

“Mere outlines above; below naught but debris.”

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THE DISORDER OF SIN

Universal order presents the moralist with a threefold object for consideration: the interior order of the moral subject, composed of a multitude of elements like a nation; the order into which this moral subject is introduced, which may either serve or disturb through the action it exerts; the divine order which the economy of the universe and of its inhabitants is responsible for accomplishing by adapting itself to the will of the Creator.

Interior order is what is known as a good conscience. When the body is subject to the soul, the senses to the reason, the reason to truth, we are set aright and procure our own “edification.” In the opposite case, we work havoc upon ourselves; for every action is either constructive or destructive of the being who performs it.

Rimbaud saw sinners as “more terrifying than monsters.” This is strictly accurate. Sin as a vital disorder and a spiritual upheaval is monstrous in the deepest sense of the word; it destroys the man in us.

There is within me something abiding, withdrawn from time, that is, my duration as a spiritual substance; something extrane-
ous to physical nature, that is, my fundamentally spiritual nature; something alien to what we call created beings, that is, my own intrinsically spiritual being. All of this is jeopardized by sin. It renders me subject to time, which bends my will in opposition to the eternal law. It makes me the slave of nature, which overcomes me by imposing its fascination. It depreciates my being and reduces it to the level of the irrational, the unconscious. “Man when he was in honor did not understand: he hath been compared to senseless beasts, and made like to them.”

The external order is that of the creation in which I am involved and for which I am jointly responsible, that of the human society in which I have membership, and of the various groups composing that society, as a field is divided into plots, such as the family, friendships, professional connections, and those chance associations which have only a slender hold upon me, but are none the less the expression of one moment in my life, one portion of its responsibility before Providence.

All of this is upset by sin, to a greater or less degree, it is true, but always and necessarily upset, by reason of human solidarity. A network of interlacing threads, some more closely woven than others, never broken off, binds all human beings together in God, their only Father, forming a single strain wherein whatever concerns one has more or less effect upon all, and with still greater reason in the close contact of those related lives which, so to speak, compose but one. If I poison a spring, the ocean will be affected thereby; but all along the course of the stream, how many victims there may be, how many unrecognized indispositions which will not be attributed to me!

“The universe,” according to M. Paul Valéry, “is built on a plan the profound symmetry of which is somehow present in the inner structure of our intellect.” This statement is a help to the realization that our interior state is of vital concern to the whole
work of God, although, of course, on a graduated scale and only at close range under visible form.

Our universe should terminate in soul; the law of the soul is naturally its secret. If I were aware in what spheres my life produces a repercussion, in what measureless duration it beats out the seconds and marks the speeding hours, would I still dare to sin? Would I have the audacity to load the present moment with my maladministration, as a plane is freighted for a flight to the end of the world? Time for sinning, God’s time, the time of the divine universe, moment of mysterious eternal duration!

By my sin, something is compromised in the rhythm of time, in the order existing between me and myself, between me and all things. Above all, there is something disturbed, with an almost infinite disturbance, about the order of relationship between myself and God which infinitely surpasses all the others.

The universe is acquainted only with the effects; God sees the inner causes and weighs them in the scale of His own judgment, measures them by the yardstick of His own goodness, which is the infinite Good, independent of the participation in it vouchsafed to creatures. Before men, action determines innocence or guilt; before God it is thought and final intention. “Whether a man is to be classed with the good or the bad,” writes Nietzsche, “does not depend on his actions, but on the opinion he has of them”; let us add, beyond this judgment of his conscience, the opinion God has of them. It is possible to have hell in one’s life and heaven in one’s heart; it is also possible to have heaven in one’s life and, in one’s heart,—hell. What passes judgment and one of primary importance is the state of our relationship to God, all alone, independently of all the worlds.

That is the terrifying thing; for then one is no longer among creatures more or less equal in their being, in other words, in their nothingness, but face to face with Being itself, whose right
is absolute and against whom an offense is well nigh beyond measure. It is no longer the "divine," in the Greek sense, against which the delinquent has betrayed the laws of harmony composing its essence, the laws of beauty; it is God Himself in His living, thundering person. What is more terrible, what would be devastating to the point of lunacy were the sinner able to conceive it, is that he has absolutely no way of escape from this infinitely unequal encounter. There is no flight. If he could elude God, conceal himself in some interior darkness from the infallible eye of God, the sinner in question would manage well enough to extricate himself "honorably" from all his other obligations. But here, there is no dissimulation, no loop-hole; all is clear. And it is this clarity issuing from divine knowledge which establishes the act in its eternal setting.

An essential disorder, ever known and universal, striking at God and the things of God: such is sin, that monster in act of which the so-called monsters of nature are merely a puny symbol.

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THE HORROR OF SIN

"I pity God, relegated to me in my soul," writes M. Marcel Jouhandeau. Oh, the humility of this God who does not deny us the power to offend Him! But is it not appalling beyond human expression that this power should be used against Him who in granting it to us bestows upon us an almost infinite mark of His trust as well as of His goodness and affection?

The sinner constrains God to accompany Him by His presence into the abyss of evil. This soul, prospectively damned, obliges
God to inhabit hell and to lodge hell in His heaven. Of course, God is not thereby contaminated; but what a theatre for the operations of Divinity, what an environment! The sinner sets up his own paradise, scorning the paradise of God, his own throne in opposition to the throne of God. Sacrilegious reversal and upheaval!

Some people cannot understand how it is possible to offend God while making use of His gifts, to offend Him without wanting to, as they say, merely by living one’s life without being concerned about either service or offense. But is it conceivable that God should offer us His universe, confide to us His children, including ourselves, enter the lists Himself for a glorious, beati-fying intimacy, while leaving to us the faculty of overthrowing His work and yet not of making any choice with regard to Him? Would not such ignoring, such disdain of the Infinite be a crowning outrage?

God by His very nature as God is faced with this dilemma: either to offer us nothing and thus fall short of His munificent bounty, or to present to us all things and Himself, requiring of us a choice which safeguards His honor. That is the meaning of the words: “He that is not with me, is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.” You scatter, O sinner, because your anarchistic independence can only upset the order designed by love; you are against God because you offend Love in person, the Love which is God, His very definition; and this love cannot be despised with impunity.

We are not present in our being, in the universe, and in God as a sovereign in his domains: we are there in the house of God and of His intimates. It is by reason of God’s arrangements that we enjoy our pleasures and are in a position to relish our pride. Culpable or innocent, our satisfactions are a gift from our Father. What an abuse to turn everything against Him, rob Him,
in a sense, of what He gives us, and oblige Him to confer a benefit upon us in the very act by which we offend Him!

"There is nothing more shameful," writes Cicero, "than to wage war against one with whom you live on terms of familiarity." This censure applies to no one so aptly as to the sinner. What is astonishing is that God tolerates it; what is incomprehensible is that He allows the sinner to go on existing, as the sun does the cloud which obscures it or the ocean the monster that ploughs through its waters. The ocean and the sun, it is true, are always the victors.

If we now think of the incarnate God, of His humility in the Virgin Mary, of His manger bed, and of His cross, does not the horror of sin become far more striking? Jesus subjected to humiliations and insults, man given over to sin, and God enduring, as it were, both of these abasements; this threefold relationship resolves itself, so to speak, into one. Love is the bond between them. It is out of love that God comes to raise the sinner; it is out of love that our brother God takes the outrage upon Himself and consumes it; and it is by reason of love that God is at once offended and, as it were, punished by the insulting defection of the sinner.

If God could suffer, hell would be His pain more than ours, and the myriads of celestial beings would not console Him for the loss of Lucifer. But God was able to suffer in Jesus Christ, and instead of gathering up, like the weeping angels of primitive art, the blood flowing bounteously from His wounds, we take it upon ourselves to cause our share of its outpouring in the course of His perpetual Passion. "I shed these drops of blood just for you." And I am bleeding Thee still, my Lord, as the cost of my guilty pleasures!

People often refer to the deicide nation and are quite willing to unload on to the Jew their own responsibility. Every one of us
is the Jew. In the spiritual sense, the deicide nation is no more God’s murderer than any other. The real deicide is man, and he, too, is the beneficiary of the Redemption.

It is the understanding that Jesus, and He alone, had of the horrible malice of sin which caused Him to bleed in mortal terror during His agony. The impediment to God, impediment to His love, the opposition to love almost as great as the love itself, demanding in reparation the intervention of living Love, its suffering and torture: that is what Christ saw, that was the atrocious object presented for His acceptance. He accepted the whole of it, undertook the responsibility for it all. He Himself was “made sin.” That is our salvation, but also our lesson as sinners. Yet we shall not understand the cost of our purchase price and the final evaluation of His motive until we reach heaven, or perhaps purgatory or—God deliver us!—even hell!

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THE MADNESS OF SIN

That the horror and disorder of moral evil is further complicated by insanity should be evident from this very simple definition: “Sinning,” according to St. Thomas, “is an immoderate turning toward a perishable good to the detriment of an imperishable good.” The formula is by no means melodramatic; probe it further and it will evoke the picture of a madman turning his back on life to rush with delirious joy toward his grave, a lover of non-existence in preference to being, of nothing as opposed to all, which is an exact translation of that other equally simple formula: sin is against God.
Sin is opposed to God and, since it obviously has no hold on God, it can only fall back upon its perpetrator. It poisons the incautious chemist, wounds the inexperienced swashbuckler. Sometimes the wound smarts; or what is worse, it is hardly perceptible, producing only an impression of dull despair. "I live in constant, mortal sadness," wrote Sainte-Beuve in his *Cahiers intimes*, "without a shadow of joy or a smile. Is it because I am no longer permitted to hope for love? Or is it not rather because I have blighted virtue within me?"

"Heaven oft determines effects by their causes," Corneille's Pompey declares. Sin which sets us against God and His order cannot but set us against ourselves; for we, too, belong to that order, and the repercussions of our acts have, even now, a thousand ways of assailing us. But that would be nothing at all; what is really important is what comes afterwards. "He that loveth iniquity hateth his own soul," says the Psalmist. "Come to your senses or you will be brought to your senses," is proverbially true.

Oh, the irony of death for that sinner who "had his fling," who insisted on "living his life," and made a mock of gloomy scruples. His glamor is all gone; his arrogance has collapsed. His corpse is as ill-smelling as any other; but it is the odor of his soul that staggers one. "Ergo erravimus!" So then we were mistaken—are the words the sacred writer puts in the mouth of the sinner who crosses the frontiers of this world. Destiny is determined intrinsically; those who do not determine it for themselves or do so wrongly will be determined by it according to its own laws. "We have embarked," and on the fateful river we always come to port.

Whichever way the sinner turns, if he opens his eyes he cannot but see both deaths staring him in the face: the one we call such, and the other one. How can anyone sleep with his own
damnation in his heart? How can he come and go, enjoy life and have fun when sudden death, which occurs so frequently about us, can hurl him into the eternal abyss? What is the fruit of sin? The seed of regret, fuel for the furnace, as Thomas a Kempis calls it. What is its threat? The appalling obsession of regret and the fire. But we do not consider this, and therein precisely lies our madness. In every sin there is an error; in every sin there is a lack of faith which, in the light of persistent affirmation of the faith, becomes insanity. On the day when reason and God should have convinced us, we should no longer be able to sin.

Admittedly, there is a kind of vicious circle here. If sin presupposes an aberration it also produces it. The mind accepts an error when triumphant passion disguises it in trappings that satisfy. Isn't it self-evident that one must enjoy what is pleasing? I am thirsty, therefore do I drink: that is obviously logical. "He who gives himself up to the intoxication of the senses," observes the Hindu philosopher, "soon finds his intelligence carried away like a ship borne over the waters by the wind."

Everything begins in us through the senses; and there are more people who begin than those who finish. We ought to rise to the life of reason; instead of that we get bogged down. We refuse to be ourselves up to the hilt. We have no more understanding of life than a stray bird, flying in through an open window, has of the flooring, the framework and the mirrors against which he beats, bruising himself in his frantic efforts to escape. Everything allures us and disappoints us; we persist and thus consume the whole of our existence.

For what utter trash we are willing to risk our eternal patrimony! It makes one shudder to think that we can pay for all that tinsel at the price of real gold, at the price of our eternal life. The infinite shines upon us and we stupidly persist in projecting its radiance on nothingness. One might imagine that a
disgust with pleasure once experienced would come from satiety; it actually proceeds from a bad mistake: it is not what one was looking for after all. Well then, this thing that you are seeking throughout, which is everywhere concealing itself, O sinner,—will you never come to recognize it in the depths of your conscience? Is not conscience designed to render us an account of the hierarchy of values among our instincts? How unexplored is that conscience which does not make us sensitive to the call of infinity in the foremost rank of those instincts all of which excite us!

Oh the blindness of human beings! How understandable is that remark of St. Augustine's: "God relinquishes the false goods to His enemies for fear lest they seem great to His friends." For the latter, everything appears small that is passing when it must be paid for with that which abides. The foretaste of true joys procures for them more happiness than the deceiving joys of sin. One may take delight in one's destiny, present and future, punishments and rewards, when one has adopted the course of the just steward, the prudent man of business. The wise man contemplates the merits of the saints like the dreamer lying under a tree. The roots are down below, hard and black; the fruits hang down from heaven.

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EXCUSES FOR SIN

Both sinners and indulgent people find many excuses for sin. Some are valid; others are an illusion. There are also some doubtful ones by reason of those half-way houses known to moral
life. In any case, this must be observed: as far as we are concerned personally, we ought to excuse the sinner to the utmost limit of his actual or possible rights, in other words, as long as his fault or its gravity is not absolutely manifest. The sinner on his part should reserve this requirement of certitude and validity for the excuse itself.

Another consideration is still more important. We must remember that good and evil are not determined in the sphere of what is visible, although this may be its matter and evidence. Some kinds of matter are abandoned by the forms of art; some evidence is suspect. Our external life may appear to be irreproachable and our soul be abominable before God. Our soul may be pleasing to Him and our life open to a good many criticisms. It is possible to live and die very respectably and yet fall into the abyss. On the other hand, the divine Master has said: “The harlots shall go into the kingdom of God before you.” Once this has been understood, there still remains the question of excuses, valid, frivolous, or doubtful.

Some people would not hesitate to excuse themselves, in fact, to pride themselves on their faults or misdemeanors, glossing them over with the pretext of some point of honor borrowed from the prejudices of a particular class or environment which pass current in social life. To these it must be said: there is an honor attached to sin, but it does not save the man who can only allege his subjection to empty customs or, at best, a certain noble side of his nature. This might be an extenuating circumstance, a palliative, a glimmering hope of conversion or of improvement on the morrow,—what you will; but it is not an excuse.

Even less does the term apply to the interior jugglery of a bad conscience. It is an understatement to say that, when confronted with what tempts us or incites us to react, we deceive ourselves;
rather we employ pettifogging methods the subtlety of which does not even depend on our intellect. Carnal selfishness has more wits all to itself than Voltaire and Rivarol rolled into one; a burning passion takes the place of culture and prudent application.

We must also mistrust so-called surprises. They do exist, but they do not always lurk where they are supposed to be. There are some faults which are not premeditated from the standpoint of the calendar or the clock, but which are so with reference to interior duration subject to entirely different measurements. How much can transpire in the soul between the beginning of the briefest occurrence and its end, between the lifted arm and the blow, between the first word uttered and the completed sentence! The whole development of a resolution may be concentrated there: the statement of the case, the objections of conscience, the replies of the impassioned heart, like the rapid fire from two barrels of a machine gun. It may be said that there is a momentum that carries one along. Yes; but there is also a safety catch; and God alone knows the proportion of the one to the other; only He can measure their bearing on the personality.

Let us not be inclined on this account, to deny the possibility of a surprise pure and simple such as excuses good people every day and makes their lives, however exemplary, suffer a temporary eclipse. Light today, shadow tomorrow—such alternation is inevitable; it corresponds to our earthly condition. The whole point is to prevent a slight shade from becoming black night. The sin of a just man is a virtue he has forgotten, just as the humdrum life of a noble soul is poetry that slumbers. "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body," the Apostle warns. It is ever there, alas, but at least may it not rule over us!

Furthermore, account must be taken of persons and circumstances. Some souls are more exposed precisely because they are
responsive and undertake the most repellent tasks. In every order of things, the penalty paid for leadership and daring is taking a risk. Flight from the world is a good thing; but serving the world is better and likewise more dangerous. Censorious people ought to consider this truth, even if the contrite sinner may not take advantage of it.

Finally, there are those hidden snares, so difficult to track down, concealed by quantities of foliage, like the ones that are set for unsuspecting animals. They demand the ability to dodge one's own thoughts and those of other people when harmful, in the same way that one slips through a teeming mob. But one can scarcely avoid being jostled in a crowd, nor committing faults in the harassed soul.

A writer has asserted his determination to "mount guard around his shadow." He is fully justified, for enemies lurk in our shadows. But even his careful watch will not insure his safety; it can only render the alarm less frequent. Besides, who knows whether it is a good thing for danger to move out of our way, or misfortune either? That is a question; in fact, not even a question, since it is written: "To them that love God, all things work together unto good," to which St. Augustine, who was an authority on the subject, adds: "even sins."

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THE EVENTUAL BENEFIT OF SIN

Sin's antagonist is love. The law by itself is a "law of sin," as St. Paul reiterates more than once, for it formulates the rules of life without conferring life and thus only crushes the sinner
by its incrimination. But love gives life; and, then, sin is no longer comprehensible even to itself.

It does not understand itself; yet it persists. The best souls bend under its weight. They love, and they sin: what, then, does love do for them? Assuredly, it is not inactive. Through its work in such souls sin is reduced more and more as to number; it is pared down, so to speak, diminished in thickness, hammered like gold leaf which covers a large surface and weighs scarcely anything. It is said that “the just man sins seven times a day”; he himself would admit to even more. He is continually sinning by imperfection; but the love which lifts him up dedicates even that misery to God along with all the rest. Give all!—the Spirit urges him, and that Spirit, cognizant of his heart’s desire, exculpates him in secret before the Father.

It does not suffice, however, for sin to be lessened and excused; it must be put to use. This applies not only to sins of frailty but to malicious, stubborn sin and crime as well.

When our Lord says that harlots will precede us into the kingdom of heaven, He, of course, does not mean while remaining harlots. They must be converted. Nevertheless, by their conversion they may cover in one leap more ground on the path of goodness than innocence has traversed. Innocence is intrinsically better; in our case, after it has happened, sin may show itself of greater assistance!

Hence, when we said of love that it was the enemy of sin, this was no assurance that love would always and everywhere overcome sin. More often than not it does so; occasionally it is vanquished or preceded by sin. But when it has not succeeded in eliminating sin, love still has the power of covering it. “Charity covers a multitude of sins,” according to St. Paul; and what love thus covers it incorporates into itself, transforms somehow into itself. Out of Peter’s triple denial love made a triple attesta-
tion and a triple spur. A stream of tears poured down the apostle’s cheeks and, flowing endlessly, contributed more to the fruitfulness of the soil than his former impulsive ardor would have done.

Sin once atoned for leaves in us the sense of our weakness; together with grace, this disposition is our most precious safeguard. It carries the conviction of our earthly enslavement and increases our desire for liberation. It advances our justice by means of humility; have we not said that humility is justice? Finally, it moves us to be merciful. Mercy, like the love of which it is a mark, like the almsdeed proceeding from it, also “covers a multitude of sins.”

“The notion of evil and of its cure,” writes Amiel, “is the best criterion of the profundity of a religious teaching.” On this score, Christianity is twice and even thrice divine; for it exposes the evil at a depth no philosophy, no other religion has managed to reach; it heals it by penance and makes of it, through love, a power for good.

It is Jesus who provided us with this wonderful transformation by His merit and His brotherly assistance. Jesus willed to be alone in Gethsemane to overthrow sin and submerge it in the blood of His whole being, in order that we might not be alone when, once overcome, we should have to become conquerors by that very fact. We should not have been able without Him; with Him, we can. His Spirit, which is a fire, consumes sin while preserving and uplifting whatever there was of life in the very act sin had modified, and, above all in the soul. The Spirit of Christ is living love; it enfolds in the burning Trinity, not indeed evil itself, but the good which sustained the evil and which is susceptible of the transformations, nay even of the apotheoses of love.

In God, who is perfection itself, kindness and justice should
meet and be reconciled; but justice does not take the first place there; kindness precedes and commands. It is kindness which creates, assists and receives; justice rectifies, if need be. Were there no sin, justice would slumber eternally; when sin is present, kindness refuses to die out on that account; it offers its services under the guise of mercy and makes use, if we consent thereto, of sin itself for the victory it has prepared.

Thus, although we have said and are on the verge of repeating that sin equals damnation, here we have been led to endorse that other surprising equation: sin equals redemption and, by redemption, by the love which is reunited to it, sin equals grace—equals glory. Eternity has its ways that are unknown to time. There is a supernatural interpretation of M. Eugenio d’Ors’ words: “Even shipwrecks manage to lead the fortunes of Ulysses somewhere.”

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THE TEMPORAL SLAVERY OF SIN

To the same extent that sin, once repaired, may become our benefactor, sin itself, unatoned for, is our enemy and worse than an enemy. For the soul vanquished by it is handed over into its power. Every captive does not become a slave; but in this case slavery follows because the defeat is voluntary so that the very power which ought to have destroyed the enemy passes into his hands.

Liberty is made for the good; when it consents to evil, it abdicates. Being a faculty of growth and enrichment, when it relinquishes true values in exchange for miserable satisfactions,
it declines and is henceforth dominated by what was the material of its labors; in other words, it is in servitude. Man is “sold under sin”, as St. Paul says, and that is a slavery indeed. For the sake of false goods, we become subject to the yoke; and only from God can our deliverance come.

The evil choice is a kind of interior plunge precipitating us from the height of contact with God down to the very antipodes of God, in the camp of the dominant hostile forces. God is liberty, independent of all things, master of all things, welcoming His friends to share in His reign. Withdrawal from God throws the sinner back into the conflict of creatures and their inherent antagonism; for they cannot simultaneously serve God and Satan, whose henchman the sinner becomes.

Tolstoy compares the wrongdoer to a carriage horse that refuses to move or will not walk straight ahead; the harness, the carriage and the coachman all become immediately antagonistic to him. He was free to walk properly or otherwise; he is not free from the consequences. He will be drawn along in spite of himself, pushed and pulled in every direction. God’s universe is no less tyrannical toward him who would upset its order. The interior universe concurs as well; it, too, inflicts upon the sinner the constraint of its powers, now deranged and rendered inimical.

The sinner rejects his law without suspecting that his law is himself,—himself, I mean, in his interior order, in his perfect and happy state, so that in violating that law he violates his being and surrenders to the sinister forces that have seduced him. These forces cannot but oppress him, *bite him again*, in the original expressive sense of that now hackneyed word: remorse.

No doubt the phenomenon may be delayed, yielding for the moment to its opposite. The sinner may experience joy, lose himself in a very delirium of joy; but that does not alter his condition. Pascal interrogates him: “Are you any less a slave for
being loved and petted by your master? You are indeed well off, slave; your master pampers you. He will beat you shortly." It is a strange thing that we have a keener sense of our liberty when we are abusing it and losing it thereby. It may be exciting to get out of a rut; what matters is where it lands you. Enjoy your freedom of choice, but consider that you have chosen a prison and listen to the gates clanging behind you.

Nor is that all. The slavery of sin is immediate and grave with the gravity of sin; furthermore it is progressive. At each relapse the habit grows; and it is not within the power of the sinner to break the early links of that chain which grows unceasingly longer and stronger. The will can do what it will for the future; it can do nothing with the past. It can do what it has not yet done; it is incapable of undoing what it has done.

Habit renders our faults more grave in two ways: by the enticement from small things to greater, the inch and the mile of the proverb; and by the ever deeper, ever more complete involvement of the will, unless repentance disengages it.

St. Augustine represents the habitual sinner as behind a wall with every gate closed and no means of escape. Pleasure has made his vice lovable; habit renders it necessary to him. He "gave himself up" to pleasure, as the expression is; pleasure has taken hold of him and will not let go. He indulges in spite of himself; he is constrained even while consenting, and it is a free, unhappy slavery.

Fortunate will he be if the bondage of the will does not lead to that of the intellect as well. This can happen. The wisdom which directs our actions is also the result of them; and contrary acts extinguish it. The extreme state of sin consists in erecting it into a system and inventing false doctrines in an attempt to justify one's disorders. There are well known instances of this all about us. At bottom, the perpetrator is not unaware of the ruse;
but he refuses to listen to the voice of conscience and summons to the rescue convenient arguments to stifle it and, if necessary, provide it with accomplices.

What hope is there for a soul thus warped and perverted? Where could a worse condition be found, unless it be the state of exulting thereat as in a liberation and a victory? This, too, is to be met with; in fact it is a normal consequence of the case in question, its final stage. Habit produces facility of act, rendering it connatural, making it a second nature to us; and all that is natural is satisfying. We thus accept a false happiness, turning our back on the reality, developing a dislike and hatred for it and, at the same time, an ever more passionate and inevitable craving for the former. Our slavery has taken the form of expansiveness and joy. This is the culmination of derangement: joy, the criterion of life, becomes the mark of death, the alleged expansion is but the bitter end of doom.

Humanly speaking, there is no longer any hope. “A broken vase can be mended if it is unbaked,” says Leonardo da Vinci, “but not after it has been fired.” Fortunately, miracles are always possible.

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The Responsibilities of Sin

Our destiny is involved in each of our acts and the divine order is entirely bound up with the destiny of each of us. How formidable, then, is man’s responsibility; how great is that tiny creature!

Heinrich Heine was wont to say that he had seen in front of
the cathedral of Cologne a spectre cloaked in red who was, so he declared, "the executor of our evil thoughts." It is a profound symbol. Even our thoughts are put into execution somewhere; first, within ourselves, then beyond us by repercussions, visible or hidden, by inferences, open or concealed. With still greater reason do our acts create a circle of ripples in the human and universal environment, as the stone does when cast into a pool of water.

Does anyone suppose that there is a limit to the effect upon the ocean of the smallest pebble cast into it from its shore? Certainly not. The movement may indeed die away or be diverted by contrary impulses, but the component remains; on its account the integral is changed and, in a thousand years, a perfect mathematician could still detect it.

What else is a material universe but a system thus bound together and closely identified from end to end? What is a moral universe but an analogous economy, a network of influences, whether distinguishable or not, operative in spite of all and through all, whether for good or evil, throughout the span of time which is transposed into permanent duration? Some day we shall be told: on such a date, at such an hour you performed such and such an act; see its results! On the horizon the stone that was dropped produces a diminutive swell imperceptible to the human eye. But God perceives all things; and the immutable horizon records the human deed in the knowledge of providence.

Does it not seem to be demonstrated by experience that all the impressions endured in the course of a lifetime, even what are apparently the most insignificant details, are preserved and may one day encounter one another, quite renewed in a mind jarred by some violent shock? What a terrifying pitfall for our responsibility toward each other! While chattering indiscreetly I have caused some picture to rise up before you; ten years from
now it may reappear and incline you to evil. Obviously the same thing is true of a happy thought; that is why such interdependence is a consolation to the virtuous man who is thus constantly sowing good seed. At the same time it gives him even more cause to be anxious; it overwhelms the perverse and menaces the negligent who does not take care to judge his acts.

Nor does equality exist here between good and evil. The latter breeds more rapidly; it is more readily accepted and by a greater number, for it demands no effort and flatters the most sensitive instincts. Fortunately, there is to be found deeper down in humankind a zone which is accessible to what is better; that is what gives us reason to hope.

"Man is destined to be a father or mother in one sense or another," writes Nietzsche. It is to the advantage of spiritual posterity, he adds, that one is at the same time both father and mother and that the child, once born, enters immediately into the world to shift for himself. Thus sin must take its chances once it has left the arms which rocked it.

Can one suppose that the world would be what it is, "seated in wickedness" generally, as St. John says, if an accumulation of depraved, ambiguous, disordered, absurd acts had not produced a thick alluvial deposit, a succession of strata each hardening in its turn and becoming a shelf for the next? Falsehood and aberration have so been welded into the lives of men that, should sincerity and uprightness suddenly become the rule, one wonders whether it would not destroy the world. We should no longer recognize the state of affairs. Readaptation would require almost a miracle. But that is because another miracle has already occurred, that of our blindness and persistent malice.

What part each one bears in all of this, God alone knows. We shall all know some day and each will receive his just share of retribution, down to "the last farthing," as the Gospel warns us. Were we possessed of a keen awareness of such an outcome,
could we go on living? Yet we should then deserve life and be in a fit state to live it in all its truth, instead of the distortions our depravity imposes upon it.

We should at least take cognizance of the proximate effects of our daily actions. But do we? Rather do we not fall under the censure of Bossuet’s accusation: “No one is satisfied with being insane all by himself; each one strives to infect others with his madness.” A gentleman would be ashamed to wrong his neighbor. Does he realize how much wrong he does by deviating from his own law which, as the law of all men, is also the common safeguard?

People complain about how bad the times are; who brings them about but every one of us, each on his own account? During the calamities of the sixth century, Gregory the Great wrote: “We ally our misdeeds with the forces of the barbarians, and it may be that we shall turn the scale toward the ruin of the State.” A terrifying thought which, far from being fanciful, bears a weight of truth deserving of every consideration both in secret, for that is where everything is worked out, and before God, the master of all results.

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The Penalty of Sin

One enters into happiness by the door of duty; from duty one passes on to happiness, one day; for basically they are one and the same thing. Likewise, one enters into unhappiness by sinning and departs from this secret woe to enter into the eternal woe; for these, too, are one and the same thing.

The punishment of sin is in the sin, because sinning consists in separating oneself from God, that is, from the good which is
the source of all good by virtue of being the supreme Good. From another aspect, sin offends against order, and a disturbed order must turn against the disturber: an equivalent action, as well, like every return shock, the voice and the echo. Finally, sin disrupts us internally and this disorganization, transported to the level of the eternal, is a kind of mortality, a death, so that damnation is known as a “second death,” as it were, a living annihilation, an interior dissolution, analogous to the death of sin to which it bears witness.

Virtue is its own reward through hope. As Bossuet says, that is “the grand State motto of the politics of heaven.” But the motto has a reverse side. Sin also bears its sanction within itself by reason of the condemnation inscribed upon the tablets of the heart, what theologians call reatus poenae, an interior hell lacking nothing but its outbreak, like a powder-magazine before the spark.

Moreover, these two truths are not merely parallel; they form but one. Hell is of the stuff of heaven; it is its wrong side. The same divine Good satiates here and tortures there by its withdrawal; the same fire produces effulgence in one place, burning in the other. But the universal sphere is thus divided in two by our own action. It is we who create hell; God only creates heaven, for He creates in His own likeness and God Himself is heaven.

When the thought of hell scandalizes me, I am therefore on the wrong track. I reproach God with it because I forget to look into myself. Let me do so and I shall find the weight of God—His weight, not a superimposed will—in each of the movements of my heart. The weight of God measures the destiny toward which I am advancing, whether by doing good or by sinning. Included in that weight is my own and that of the creature which add nothing to Being itself. My worth is in terms of the Being possessed or lost. The sum total of my action, which God
computes and my death winds up, is of value with reference to Infinity, favorable or adverse. As a sinner, then, I have within me hell and all its elements: the absence of God, internal disorder, the hostility of the universal order manifested in reactions which are already apparent and which, raised to the absolute, are nothing else but that “fire” whose mental picture haunts us. Hell takes the form of the soul and the soul is its measure. That is what constitutes its monstrous greatness.

Could the disappointment of God by a complete frustration ever be an eternal issue? Can one conceive of God’s humiliation in me and in His handiwork as a state that is conclusive? All of that demands stabilization and, unless I balance the account by means of grace during this time of grace when all is in my power, the time must come when I can no longer do anything and stabilization is effected by the final downfall. Having been rejected, God will allow me to see in a flash of light the bliss of His presence and the appalling void of His absence. The universal order will bear down upon the soul made for the universal but a traitor to it. The bewildered, tortured self will no longer find, even within, anyone to cling to, because it has not known how to recognize itself truly, in its celestial essence, in its affinities.

It is impossible to make the just man unhappy; he is happy by reason of his justice. Except by converting him, it is impossible to render the sinner happy; he is unhappy “in the blade,” so to speak, but really so in as much as he is a sinner. The just man cannot escape his joy; wretchedness stalks the sinner across the universe. Scripture has well said that our works follow us; it further suggests the reason which is that our works are ourselves and an old self, a self hidden from mortal eye and disguised from its own possessor, is not, for all that, anybody else.

What M. André Suarès said of Nietzsche may be said of every sinner: “God punished him by condemning him to himself.”

If virtue did not pay, of itself, it would never be paid, for
nothing is equivalent to its nature and value outside of what it exhibits in its own unfolding. But if sin in its turn were not paid in its own coin, paid for by hell, whence would justice come to it? We have discovered in sin a kind of infinity; surely God does not think of taking advantage of this against His unfortunate creature. But things as they are must be recognized even by God. Sin excludes God, excludes internal and external order; all that this exclusion has to do is manifest itself for justice to be done. The Sovereign Good need not exert itself otherwise than by existing.

"The power of sinning and the power of dying seem to keep pace with each other," St. Thomas Aquinas remarks. There are various depths to that statement. In the absolute sense it is strictly accurate and the seeming can be eliminated; moreover the term "death" should be taken in its secondary signification meaning eternal death. Then, indeed, the power of sinning is precisely equivalent to the power of dying, that is, of damning oneself; and each and every one of us has that awful power.

"Men themselves choose their own ills freely," was already the conviction of Pythagoras in his Golden Verses. In His eternity God sees me as a luminary in heaven or as a firebrand in hell: which is it? In that realm beyond time, who am I? I am that which I have willed, do will, shall will throughout the course of my earthly span.

Consider this well, O Christian, consider it in the depths of your heart. It is every man,—"all sorts," as the man in the street vigorously expresses it,—who is involved here and must question himself severely. Heaven and hell are not collective states, except secondarily, "accidentally" as theology would say. If one of us were all alone, heaven and hell would be for him exactly what they are now; the difference is negligible.

Jesus has said: "In my Father's house there are many mansions." As a matter of fact there are as many as there are in-
dividuals; for, as to the judgment and the essentials of its outcome each one stands alone; each is at a measureless distance from his nearest neighbor, as they say of the atoms in the interstellar spaces. There are no two destinies alike or truly allied, for each single soul before God is a kind of universe; each has its weight, its form, its incommunicable characteristics. Wherever there is a conscience—consider this again, O Christian, think back upon it, O sinner!—there is for that conscience and according to its own measure an abode of eternal felicity or an eternal dungeon.

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CONVERSION

“Sin,” St. Thomas Aquinas tells us, “tends toward two terms: toward one by itself, and that is damnation; toward the other by the merciful providence of God, and that is salvation. For God permits the fall of certain souls that they may recognize their fault, humble themselves on its account, and be converted.” This strictly technical formula nevertheless casts a penetrating light upon the tenderness of God toward His sinful humanity.

God comes to us by means of everything. He makes use of sin in order to meet us as He does of virtue and heroism. One would say that He grants some indulgence to the sin which He hates because He finds in it an opportunity for pardon. At any rate, He propels it and obliges it to “tend” toward the salvation of His child. For, if our own soul can forget its inherent greatness by sin, God, its Father, does not forget. Even if we be criminals, His eye sees farther and deeper. He envisages our resources and our secret good intentions; He anticipates the day of our re-
pentance which He, of course, foresees; and He holds, with His Angelic Doctor, that, once it is repaired by penance, "every sin becomes venial."

Oh the clemency of the Most High! The kindness which once stooped to the Incarnation and Redemption, and which henceforth considers not so much the sin as its remedy, not so much our guilt as its metamorphosis by love! Penance is the centurion's lance; the heart of God when struck pours forth water and blood, purification and affection, with the resplendent cross behind it; and heaven's bliss forms its aureole.

Fear not, sinners; it is an understatement to say that you are expected: you are, in a sense, preferred. Do you doubt it? Read the parable of the prodigal son, of the lost sheep, of the groat. The conclusion is astonishing,—but especially consoling as one could wish: "I say to you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance."

Do not say that it is too late. It is only a question of making contact once more with the eternal realities. The time of repentance, with reference to that of sin, is not a new time; it is eternity resumed. Are you afraid of arriving too late for eternity?

If you feel within yourself some slight inclination to return, that is because God is already at work in you. Help Him and ask Him to help you. It is hard to become converted, harder still to remain so; but why should man be capable of transforming all things around him and incapable of transforming himself? It will surely not be by his own power; but do we ever accomplish anything entirely by ourselves? The laborer with his pickaxe takes advantage of the law of gravity; the soul that rises up makes use of the strength of God; but that strength is truly his. The victory of God over us is our victory, just as the reward will one day be ours, although God never does anything, as St. Augustine says, but crown His own gifts.
So let us have confidence. God is constantly creating us; at any moment He can re-create our innocence. Our sinful past does not embarrass Him in the least. A broken piece of porcelain may never be perfectly mended; but even physical life may come forth renewed from a mortal illness. As for supernatural life, the even more miraculous revulsion it entails is all the more likely; out of a confirmed sinner may issue a saint.

Father de Foucault had been a high liver. The term makes one smile as applied to him. It is quite a contrast. But how encouraging for those lovers of the absolute who would hesitate before an about face which doesn’t seem very hopeful! It is possible to save one’s former life by one’s future life. Time is all ours because it is all God’s. If our acts escape us by reason of having happened in the past, by reason of God’s receiving them into His eternity they may be restored to us, no longer sordid as they once were, but brilliant with that wonderful light which shines forth from repentance and love.

There are sinners who think they hate God because they no longer dare to love Him. They have offended Him and, because of this, they offend Him again; and, while offending Him they consider that they are bound to justify themselves by an attitude of hostility. In the bottom of their hearts, they love Him. That love, aware of a greater love which yearns to requite it, must finally burst forth in its truth, heretofore suppressed, and inspire a return.

O sinners, hearken not to the paralyzing voice of remorse, but to him who says: “I will arise and go to my Father.” The remorse which softens one is a good sign and hopeful; but beware of the old hardened remorse. When the body suffers it is defending itself and nature’s defense aims at a cure. Much more does God desire that your regret shall bear the character of convalescence and not of stagnation in evil.

It may take a little time. What God asks of us, He does not
always demand at the very moment. The orb revolves; one star is born, then another, and soon the whole sky is aastem. It is possible for remorse to hasten the rotation; do not allow it to cause a halt.

As for the absence of remorse, that would mean obstinacy, an even worse misfortune. God save you from the supreme woe of being the calm witness to your own perdition, perhaps even of vaunting yourself upon it! Death will overtake you, O sinners, and make it impossible for you to maintain that cold indifference forever. We are all suspended over the abyss. Nay rather, the abyss is within us; for life, while it is an ascension, is also a continuous fall. At every moment our heart is beating out our birth and the knell of death.

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Delayed Conversion

It is never too late to be converted; but, at the same time, it is never too soon. Reestablishing contact with eternity is the function of every instant of our lives; therein alone do they assume value and gain assurance. He who is converted, even late, and perseveres, is saved. Will he who delays his conversion, however young he may be, save himself?

In a famous sermon, Bourdaloue denounces sinners who take possession, mentally, of time which doesn’t belong to them, offering God the future, His own exclusive property, and refusing Him their own present. Sometimes they omit death from their calculations; sometimes they assign a place to it, make arrangements for it; death becomes part of a system of forecasts and precautions which they believe to be secure. They do not perceive
that mocking face ready to loom up before them regardless of their schemes, "like a thief," as the Master has said.

The lesson applies to all of us. Nor is it even a matter of certainty, as some people assume, that it concerns young people most particularly. There is, of course, the ridiculous proverb: "Youth must have its fling." But a high-minded youth is quick to grasp the truth that every age is equally near to eternity, that one does not become wise for having long been foolish, but by having long been a little wise, and that, finally, wisdom is not a belated, but an abiding fruit of life.

It is not, then, a lack of years but of courage that matters. We are afraid of goodness because of the sacrifices it demands. We fly before grace like a frightened bird before the storm. Suppose this great gust were to carry us off! Then such and such satisfactions would no longer be possible? Thus did Augustine argue with himself; thus was he impelled to say: "Cras! Cras!—Tomorrow, tomorrow!"

By putting off our conversion until tomorrow we make an admission: that conversion is necessary. Should necessity be left to chance? The man who is always procrastinating is like the traveler who perpetually returns to his home for something he has forgotten. Will he be off again tomorrow? Who knows? At any rate, that is how the beating about the bush becomes worse and worse, the desire for improvement dies away, and our course is set. By not taking hold of the reins, we relinquish them to the habits of passion; where will they lead us? The speed at which we are going invites us to close our eyes; some day they may close for good.

Throughout this affair, what are we doing with God? Can we pretend to have Him as an accomplice? Is His providence at the disposal of one who goes to sleep, buried, as it were, under his delays? God does not say, like Louis the Fourteenth: "I
almost didn’t wait.” He waits, and sometimes His waiting is even appalling. He grants the sinner all the delays he wants, for His sovereign power is not hurried; with it there is always an opportunity for meeting again. As to how long He will be patient with the careless,—He alone knows. One day He may become urgent and that may coincide with the soul’s day of greatest “sport,” of its absence or its deafness. “Hear how loud is the knock on the door,” exclaims Bossuet. “It will soon be broken down if it is not opened.” But the absent conscience does not open; the benumbed or inflexibly hardened conscience does not hear. Then perhaps the prophetic cry will resound: “An end is come, the end is come, it hath awakened against thee: . . . I will pour out my wrath upon thee, . . . and I will judge thee according to thy ways.”

No, it is not to tomorrow that the sinner must look, whatever be the category to which he belongs, whether the depraved evildoer menaced by the prophet or the tepid soul called by grace to necessary progress. The sinner who has understood rises up with the determination to act today! “Now I begin,” as the Psalmist suggests. It is time to begin, for it is always time since we are ever in that permanent duration and the day which now partakes thereof may not be followed by another. “Tomorrow is an uncertainty,” says the Imitation. “Who knows if you will have tomorrow?”

Should one be unable to uproot sin from one’s soul all at once, one should at least begin right away to sap its roots, to undermine it with good desires, most of all to detach oneself from it, to rise out of it, so to speak, by means of prayer. He who promises to be converted and does not stir is like the debtor who is willing to pay the whole amount soon but refuses to give a cent on account. A little effort lends some credit to his assurances; without it they are of no use at all.
It is better to say to oneself: I shall make an attempt now,—if I fall again, so much the worse, rather than to act on the thought: I shall definitely get on my feet, but just this once I’ll give way. The present victory might have led to an ultimate victory; defeat only assures one of a more complete downfall. The temptation before which you declare: not today, perhaps tomorrow, recognizes that its power is at an end or, at least, waning; try it just once! But the one that you consent to while adding: and no more after that, is not at all worried; you will say the same thing tomorrow and the day after, until you no longer bother with any protestations.

Oh the trickery of our poor hearts! They make use of all the artfulness of frailty, perhaps the most dangerous; and they employ the perverse wiles of hypocrisy as well, so habitual to our passions. Let the sinner then, whether he be weak or conscious of his secret malice, make up his mind to settle his conscience. Let him not count upon an uncertainty, I mean that future penitence which perhaps is no such thing, for it may be identical with what Racine describes:

“The belated repentance
Of the inconsolable dead.”

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REPTENCE

Conversion is not all. The man who says to you: I won’t do that again, is not thereby exonerated from his previous offence. Accountable to God and to the order of things, the sinner is
obliged to make reparation. One might say: but love suffices! That is true; but love must prove itself; it proves itself, when there has been no injury, by generosity; when there has been one, by repentance.

Repentance is love in tears, love which would raise a summit above the abyss that it has dug. More modestly, it is, in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, “a sorrow for one’s faults together with the will to destroy them.” This is not a question of a divine requirement. God is infinitely tactful in His pardons; we should be so in our confidence. There is nothing more beautiful than the sinner’s trust in the love that raises him up, just as there is nothing greater than a love disposed to welcome such a return and to tender, as it were, an infinite forgetting. But it is to our own interest and that of the order wherein our interest is bound up with that of every creature. Having been excessively prodigal toward ourselves voluntarily over-indulged, we must make compensation and subject our will to some restraint. By whom? By ourselves; that is what constitutes the nobility of that “tribunal of penance” where there is no accuser but only the delinquent who accuses and condemns himself.

Let us not fear to have recourse to it, bringing thereto the proper dispositions. Penance is not merely a rite; it is a spirit. First of all, a spirit of humility becoming to one who presents himself as a culprit. To be filled with confusion would be unworthy of us, for shame would indicate the absence of a generous reaction against evil. Where that reaction is present, humility is the proper attitude, that great humility which, as we have said, puts us in our rightful place within the divine order, namely, today, that of a magnanimous, redeemed soul for whom the only shame would be not to go down on his knees, not to recognize his guilt, or, while admitting his indebtedness, not to pay what he owes.
When this humility, once tested before God, is turned upon our brothers, it should result in a fraternal forbearance and pardon. The forgiveness of God is, in a certain sense, conditional; it requires us to be forgiving. This disinterested demand is all the more exacting because God loves sinners more than He does His own rights. His pardon is in the nature of an agreement: Pardon, and I shall also pardon you. Our only reply must be: I entrust all my claims to Thee, my God; pardon me my offences as I pardon such and such a one that has offended me.

To the spirit of humility in the penitent must be added a spirit of renewal. That is what we mean by a *firm purpose*, which is indeed an indispensable element. St. Augustine tells us that sin, especially when habitual, can only be vanquished by “the violence of repentance,” an impulse which projects us into the future above the occasions that lie in wait for us. Such a resolution is, of itself, but momentary; it is reduced to a point of duration. But this point is coextensive with the whole span before us within the range of our foresight. God’s estimate of this value of extension is what determines the worth of our penitence. It behooves us to offer a broad basis to His infallible judgment.

After that, a spirit of reparation, of “satisfaction” as theology terms it, will translate into actual living what the *sacrament of penance* symbolizes while realizing it only with regard to a very small segment of life. It should not be difficult, given my good will. I have only to accept what God sends me; trials will not be wanting. Even without any initiative on my part—and such initiatives are always, in fact, added to a generous acceptance,—I shall have many an opportunity of saying to God: Thy will be done, against my will which has so often been opposed to Thine.

Moreover, this spirit of penitence will not only be a reparation; it will be a preservative. My sin is not far from me; the enemy is behind me and I still tread upon his shadow. If I desire to
escape future sins, I must get in training for a battle which, like warfare, will not succeed unless it comprises a series of manoeuvres. At the time in which we live, such manoeuvres are not popular. People justify their cravings and pamper the flesh; when invited to choose between the wounds of vice and those of the Crucified, they are determined to reject the latter and so make of the former an adornment. The truly converted sinner has a horror of such a perversion. He masters the flesh and, above all, is eternally vigilant.

This is not a demeaning of self; it is self development. One is “mortified” for the sake of a higher life. When the human plant is cut back it grows better; the nipping of certain buds will cause the sap to rise, and all that is precious in both soul and body will be all the better preserved. “Mortification,” says M. Paul Valéry, “is an effort, by hard and even painful means, to erect, to build, to raise oneself to a state which one recognizes to be superior.”

Finally, by what seems an apparent contradiction but is really in profound harmony with the spirit of penitence and regret, the converted sinner yields himself up to a spirit of joy. To have any doubts on this score would be to misunderstand divine love and deprive God within us of His fairest attribute which is mercy. The sins of the repentant man no longer belong to him; they have been transferred to Christ who covers them, dying them with His blood. They have become part and parcel of Calvary. The penitence of man and the pardon of God are on both sides a form of love, and love is joy. Jesus means it to be so, since from His tribunal to His table this loving judge has made the interval no longer than the aisle of a church and He invites to the Eucharistic kiss the vilest sinner who repents.
Our AIDS
Our Aids

The program we have outlined for the Christian, virtuous or sinful, is strictly superhuman. To expect to realize it by oneself would be madness, far madder than to expect to reach the stars in a captive balloon. Humanity is tethered by nature; even were it capable of freeing itself, like the balloon that breaks its moorings, it would still remain a created thing and hence powerless to rise to the supernatural, which is the habitual plane of Christian activity.

By baptism one is made a Christian and therefore lifted to the level of heavenly life, divinized within somehow, become "god of God, deus Dei," according to the daring expression of St. Thomas Aquinas. The whole problem lies in not falling from this dignity, in confirming it freely, on the contrary, in maintaining elevation by one's action, as an airplane carried by its velocity, and in avoiding fatal accidents.

God sets down a condition for His gifts: that we be faithful to them and make use of them. We ought to do so and it would seem, consequently, that we are capable of doing so without further superhuman intervention. But no. "Without me you can do nothing," Christ tells us—not even respond to the call within us by a change of heart; for the response and the change are the same in essence.

This initial or regained transformation, baptismal or penitential, is what we call sanctifying grace. It corresponds to the necessity formulated by the unknown Philosopher (Claude de Saint-Martin) when he says: "Man, do not hope for anything unless
you have divinized your heart.” But in addition to this first
outlay of grace, the man who wishes to maintain himself and
make progress in Christian living has further need of what is
known as actual grace, that is to say, a help which expresses
itself in activity and terminates in acts.

This grace of action is promised to us in all circumstances; we
can count upon it in the face of dangers, efforts to be exerted,
progress to be achieved or sufferings which threaten us. We can
rely upon it much more than upon ourselves; our very confidence
proclaims it to us, for God Himself has placed that confidence
within us.

Nevertheless, God wills that we ask Him for that grace which
He offers and is all on fire to bestow, because asking, on the part
of the creature, is already receiving by reason of putting forth
one’s powers; moreover whatever God grants us as a consequence
of this often painful effort is in a sense our own work, and we
may share the honors with God.

Here, then, we have a secondary help: prayer, calling down
upon us the primary assistance of grace. There is a third aid
wherein we are equally cooperators although God plays the
principal part; I refer to the sacraments of which the Eucharist
is the focal point, for it contains the Author of the other sac-
raments and thus unites them about itself.

The sacraments foresee all the principal phases of life and
adapt themselves thereto. The Eucharist provides for the basic
need of nutrition; hence the Bread of the Eucharistic table is
called the bread of life, without designating any particular func-
tion, without distinction of scope or time, since it is given “for
life eternal” comprehending all ages.

The sacramental aids are conferred upon us, not individually
and separately, but in the Church and by her ministry. The
Church attaches other actions of a more remotely sacramental
character in harmony with the former to sustain and extend them and multiply their effects. Thus the Church is a kind of collective aid, a social aid, the power of which we have already suggested.

At the head of the Church is Christ, distinguished from it only by His preeminence. Besides this sole chief, this King of souls, there is also a Queen who participates to some extent in His power. Jesus, Father of the family; Mary, its Mother: in varying measure they are our support. Having extolled the former, we should also invoke the latter.

Finally, our brothers the saints, all our brethren of the communion of saints dispersed across the centuries and the worlds, come to the aid of our good will in the bonds of charity, that is, of supernatural friendship, of unity in God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, through the realization of that prayer of the Cenacle: “Father . . . that they may be one, as we also are.”

Under such circumstances, the Christian cannot lack for anything necessary to him, or even beneficial. He is encompassed by miracles. As a matter of fact, God loves nothing but miracles. It is legitimate to say that the humdrum course of nature, human or cosmic, does not interest Him; it is a basis of action, but not His particular action. The activity of God consists in producing the elect, the “gods of God”; and that is certainly a first class miracle. There is nothing surprising in the fact that its accomplishment calls for other miracles. God performs them. It is up to us to make use of them, so that in His kingdom ours may also come, our humble reign as creatures utterly absorbed by love in their Creator.
GRACE

The just man is like a crystal interiorly illuminated and not drawing his light from himself. When he reflects on what is happening within him, he feels that he is being led and guided, with his consent and cooperation but not on his sole initiative. Like the inspired composer, poet, orator, or dancer carried away by the rhythm, he experiences the operation of the "Muse." Nor is the autonomy of the action thereby disturbed, for the influence thus comprehended does not come from outside; it derives from that divine Interior which incessantly creates and sustains our own, more intimate to us than we ourselves, fulfilling the poet's desire for

"Someone who within me would be more myself than I."

The man looking on is not deceived. He praises the virtuous, admires the saint; but in the presence of such he does not believe himself to be face to face with a mere man. He perceives through the crystal the flame within; he senses the possibility, at its contact, of being enlightened and enkindled in God.

Each one of us is well aware that our good deeds, even our ordinary ones, are not entirely our own, nor for that matter, our thoughts or aspirations or anything at all. That which comes to light suddenly in our souls—whence does it come? I write this and, whatever I may think of it tomorrow, I am sure not to recognize myself therein, sure to ask myself: How did that ever happen? Is it I, or another? The ideal were for it to be that holy Other whose intervention is invoked not without fear. For the authentic, active personality in us is none the less bound to
a primary Reality whose influence animates and sustains it, and whose highest favors are known as graces.

There are some graces which, aiming at the interior, yet manifest themselves externally, such as a happy turn of events, a sudden trial, an illness interrupting one's evil course, a piece of advice, good example, an earnest request or the cancellation of some order. Interiorly one might receive a clearer light on the supernatural, an increased sense of one's needs or faults, an apprehension of danger which, like a dart or hidden flame, enforces a modification upon our internal order, a more upright, unwavering demeanor upon our activity. Furthermore, from God proceeds that "spark" which Peter Lombard and Ruysbroek mention, shooting forth spontaneously from the soul in the direction of good or in opposition to evil.

All of this disposes the soul to receive an infusion or increase of that transforming grace which we call sanctifying, which, under the direction of Christian prudence, sets us on the road toward our final end and even fulfills it by introducing us into the burning light of love.

Grace is God before the soul seeking admission; it is God within the soul to promote and divinize every form of life; it is God linking the soul with its neighbor by that very love which unites the soul to Himself, and thus it is God leading us all, with our consent and cooperation, to life eternal.

Needless to say, we have in this truth a tremendous source of hope; it contains also cause for fear, since, as Corneille observes: "Heaven's graces once rejected open the way to the thunderbolt." At best they render useless all that one pretends to accomplish without them. "Whatever God has not effected in thee, He counts as nothing," writes Tauler. But this is not a reason for losing hope. Let us despair of ourselves, and in far greater
measure let us hope in God. He who does not despair of himself has the best possible reasons for despairing. The Christian is saved therefrom; he has within him, as he well knows, a Spirit stronger than his weakness, able to overcome all, for He it is who creates all.

A soap bubble in the atmosphere supports a crushing weight; it is none the less light and free because the atmosphere is also inside of it. Thus the soul wherein God dwells feels free and light amid hazards and snares which also come from God; and as the bubble increases thanks to the air within, so does the soul grow spiritually by means of grace in spite of all that God allows to beset it.

Ah yes, there is a mystery in those permissions, in those opportunities, often capable of profiting us and just as well of causing our ruin. But is it necessary that we should understand God? That He understand us and that we let Him have His way is quite enough. It will not always be to our liking; it will assuredly always be for our good. King Duncan’s remark to Lady Macbeth is to the point: “The love that follows us sometimes is our trouble, which still we thank as love.”

Moreover, God metes out all things. Nature and mankind strike us without any concern for our powers of resistance; God supports within us His own blows. There is an equality, we must believe, or rather a preponderance of aid over danger; and the severest proddings of providence correspond to assurances of a higher life.

Let us then beware of ever setting up against grace our astonishment or of greeting it with a face of gloom. Let us wait until we understand it; let us welcome it trustingly, with friendship, gratitude, and entire faith. Let us receive in the same spirit its seeming abandonment, those desertions which are at times our worst trials. When Jesus lays His hand on our shoulder, we no
longer feel the other burdens; when He departs and is silent, everything weighs upon us and the steep road ahead no longer seems passable. Let us hope on! Grace is as mysterious as God, as the soul, as life. Within the mystery itself, the human and superhuman work may be wrought, the result be effected and consummate joy engendered.

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PRAYER

We have explained why the assistance of prayer is indispensable to our spiritual life. It wells up spontaneously when a profound need or some wave of enthusiasm moves us; but it also responds to our personal effort and good will.

What is our aim? To escape the monopolistic hold of the temporal so as to raise ourselves to a spirit of faith; to detach ourselves from the paralyzing or alluring facts in order to live consistently with that faith whose effectual dominion in us is life eternal. Becoming aware of our eternity: that is the primary object of the interior ascension known as prayer.

A true Christian—in other words a saint—lives in this world like a great eagle, earthbound through some misadventure. He moves about, adapts himself as well as he can, but never becomes acclimated. As soon as he is able, he soars upward. He has his hours of flight, that is, in the case of the Christian, of mental prayer or, in the language of mysticism, meditation. At such times he is no longer weighed down; he is carried upon wings; in an instant he traverses distances littered with objects which he spurns, to fly beyond. He moves into another universe. Dis-
regarding frontiers, he contrives to abolish by ignoring them. "Hide your appearance from yourself," writes M. Marcel Jouhandeau, "and you will discover your real being. Hide your being, and you will discover the Being of your being." That's it. One must attain to one's true reality so as thence to rise to the sovereign Reality whereby one ought to live. With this in view, the appearances of self and of things must be cast aside; the hands that grasp the world must be opened, letting fall whatever is unreal, holding on to the true and the useful alone.

God has set creation before His face and it conceals Him from us. Contemplation cannot lift that mighty mask; but by dint of gazing thereat and purifying its glance, it comes to perceive that for it the mask has become transparent. Only illusion and faithlessness render it opaque, for they produce blindness in us. Prayer is a striving to overcome the blindness and glimpse the mystery. Should we succeed from that little corner of the universe wherein we have taken refuge—the depths of our soul—we command a view of the whole and of its sublime Principle.

Nay, more—at the very tip of every soul there is a frontier that meets God, a point common to it and God, whereby it springs from Him. Through it, in return, the soul can resume contact with God and, as it were, merge with Him in one loving thought. The highest prayer of the contemplator, once fixed at this point, would consist in becoming aware of self and of everything, no longer within himself and the mere actuality of time, but in the very creative thought, in the creating love which we are one day to share. Even short of this sublimity, many degrees of ascent remain possible to us.

Infidels fancy that it is the imagination which creates for us that great beyond to which prayer seeks access. As a matter of fact, it is the imagination which hides it from those who know it not and veils it from the others as well. Sense perceptions,
first experienced, then re-created internally and perpetually haunting us, conceal the fundamental realities. Poor unbelievers who tell us:

"I write, alas! I write, no longer knowing how to pray!"

(François Porché)

They write, they think, they act, create, move about, and bestir themselves in this cellar called the universe, and have lost track of the open spaces. Our era knows every direction on the dial of the compass: except due north. The man of prayer often forgets what he knows and where he is aiming; but he comes back to it. He makes an effort; for it is an effort and one which, at times, may seem to us heroic. To stand before heaven in our nakedness, strip ourselves of self as it is and as our heart of flesh would have it remain, that heart which always exerts a downward pull while the spirit mounts on high—what a severe decision! There are so many things that must no longer be seen in order to see God, so many that must no longer be willed in order to will God. Later, God gives them back; later: that is to say, they must be snatched out of our hands so that we may receive them from His. This is hard. But there is precisely the benefit of prayer. It is God who, through my prayer, triumphs over me. When my soul is dry and insensible, prayer reminds me that it has been said: "The stones will cry out." It is a miracle worth the trouble. I cry out. I ask God to draw me and in the very asking, so as to ask from nearer at hand, I myself climb upward. I want God to re-create me in Him and I create Him within me; I give Him life and ask life of Him. It is an effective interplay of both parties; for God always answers, and praying, as we have said, is already to receive.

Thus the spiritual edifice is built up, constructed only of right thoughts, good desires, and affections divinely approved. It is erected in secret, in silence, like the temple of Solomon in which
“there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard.” The construction is too delicate for such sounds. Secrecy and silence are almost the whole of it, combined with intensity of desire, love and relentless perseverance.

Prayer, while repeating itself, must preserve its freshness and be quite new each time, like the gaze and the feeling of an artist. What sustains genius is an admiration unceasingly renewed for the inexhaustible resources of nature; what gives support to the religious contemplator is even more ennobling. He adores that which surpasses him infinitely and aspires toward what is to him an infinite treasure. From the depths of his ignorance and nothingness, whatever his previous advances may have been, he may always leap forward, as if for the first time, toward Him whose glory lies in the fact that He forever eludes complete capture. We saw yesterday as if not seeing; we have arrived as if not arriving; we are always, like the Magi, traveling in a far country; and the star will lead us only eventually into the blessed Presence.

Even when that day comes, we shall not exhaust our reasons for astonishment and loving adoration. God, being seen, will not always be understood. An infinite distance irremediably separates us—little creatures in our borrowed existence—from Him who is Being itself in inaccessible oneness. But a plenitude of life ever at our disposition, constantly offered, forever experienced and never exhausted—is not that happiness? Prayer anticipates this bliss so as to attain thereto finally; it strives to taste for fear of letting the prize escape through its own fault, through the fault of those spurious goods that attract it and which it therefore intends to get clear of by upward flight.

In short, what prayer aims at, considered from this primary aspect, is a wise eclipsing of the earthly, a happy manifestation of the mystery. It is what Mallarmé referred to, at the end of a
very stirring organ recital, as "a lifting of the shadow." Blessed lifting which extinguishes the false luminaries, dispels the phantoms that would pass for realities, and like a beneficial storm cloud, causes to flash between the soul and God, as lightning between earth and heaven, the splendor of truth.

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PRAYER AND LIFE

By setting us outside of time, abolishing for us past, future and even present to the advantage of the eternal, will not contemplation cut us off from communication with life? Will it not wall us in, cloister us, make us quite useless? So we are told and, although this verdict strikes directly only at contemplatives by profession, people are but too anxious to extend the criticism to the Christian who prays, regarding the time spent in prayer as wasted so far as activity is concerned, which in their estimation coincides with life itself.

But it is this twofold judgment which lies. Action is not life, and prayer, far from being of no use to action, is an essential condition for it. We begin by thinking and thinking aright; we finish by thinking once more, even here below, and with still greater reason in eternal duration. Between the two there is action, still directed by thought; hence that action is triply blind which disregards at once its beginning, its rule and its end.

Prayer disposes for action by providing it with its ultimate standard. To make a prudent use of things, must we not estimate their value? But created things are only evaluated correctly with reference to their Creator. Each is worth just what it is worth in
God's estimation, from God's point of view, in Him, and for the purposes of the journey toward Him. This is what prayer teaches us. Our conscience derives therefrom its watchword, sets up its program for life, avoiding evils and futilities, rectifying its intentions, and concentrating its energies. In return, at its next prayer, it will remind itself: what have you done with your light, O Christian? Would you dare stand before God with a conscience heavy-laden? That presence is a judgment; the mere notion of duty is a command here: have you done what you meant to do? There is nothing like it for establishing uprightness in our life, utilizing its values and making everything count which might become either useless or even harmful.

In prayer, too, God speaks to us. Not only does He speak to us, He helps us to understand and supports our efforts to put into practice what He has said. A current is transmitted from heaven to earth. The praying soul is its conductor and first beneficiary; the effect spreads toward those who do not pray. Multiply the number of these points of contact, these zones of radiation: will the earth not assume something of the aspect of heaven?

Prayer gives the soul its unity by connecting it with its center. At the same time, it gives it universality because once the center has been reached, one may radiate in every direction with it. When I pray, I join my hands as if to enclose God therein; but I also extend them, for instance at the altar or in the catacombs, as if I desired to touch the very ends of creation.

Once action has been undertaken in the proper spirit, prayer accompanies it; and it would be a mistake to suppose that it abates or that it constitutes a hindrance. The Lord recommends praying always, that is to say, acting in the spirit of prayer. That spirit animating the whole no more distracts us from work, conversation, or application to one or other of our tasks, than does
attention to the meaning of a sentence distract from its pronunciation, or desire from a work in which that very desire finds its fulfillment. Continuous prayer has precisely the character of a desire, and desire conformed to God is the soul of every prayer.

We have said that it is in God only that one becomes aware of self and of one’s deepest desires; this is a commendation of prayer which alone establishes the contact and thus rectifies desire by leading it back to its proper source.

We have also said that our relationships can only be judged in the light of God. This is why prayer inaugurates between us and our brethren a truly common life, genuine associations, the exchange of good will and of service. One cannot approach men with coldness when one meets them steeped in heaven’s light. United with God, we become magnanimous as God, expansive and accessible toward everyone as the nature that created him.

The wild flower does not have to be bought nor to be asked for permission to pick it; it is given beforehand. So is God given, and the man who is in union with Him is at your service together with Him. An incessant outpouring within and without: such is God; and prayer is conscious of the fact. The contemplator who sees the Trinity flowing forth, creation looming up, providence extending its beneficence, enters spiritually into this current and, in imitation of his God, himself becomes a well-spring. He is also a channel for the return to God of all creation; thereby he sanctifies it and enables it to worship. The man of prayer united to his brothers and to nature inhales the world and exhales it in God.

Will it be said that this is all quite futile? Then the whole supernatural order must be denied, for we are only presenting its formula. We are not speaking to those who do not believe; we are addressing those who do, or at least are willing to accept the viewpoint of faith, but who err by condemning, in the name
of activity, the spirit of contemplation and of prayer. Action, action!—and what for? God is sovereign act in Himself and in His creatures; but He is also repose and beatitude in those depths of His being wherein He possesses and enjoys Himself in an inactivity that reabsorbs His sovereign action. And to this, too, He invites us.

Beyond all activity, even the most virtuous, even beyond all thought, however sublime, there is a sphere of rest and silence belonging to contemplation and to love. Love cannot remain there, for it yearns after progress and service; but it reascends after having grown and served, to serve and grow still more and then resume its ascent, that is, if it has ever left off mounting.

In short, prayer is so far from being useless to life that it regulates the whole of it and reveals its meaning to us. Perhaps we know, before praying, the essentials of what prayer teaches: we are convinced of many things when we come to think about them; but we don’t think about them enough. If prayer were not there to remind us of our duties, our bonds, our real aspirations and our ends, what wastage there would be in our lives! And if, thanks to prayer, God did not support us interiorly, how weak we should be! God comes to us at the appeal of prayer as He came into the world in the person of Jesus and for the same purposes: to teach us to live and help us to do so. Moreover, it is always through Jesus that we pray; can He help but make us wise, He who is Wisdom in person and renders even God wise? How shall He not make us strong, He into whose hands all things have been entrusted,—and brotherly, He who is the Son of Man?

When people speak, then, of uselessness, of superfluity, of non-productiveness, in short, of wasted time, in this connection, they are misguided. To anyone who recalls that God is the principle and end of our being, its ideal, its law, and that prayer is the normal link between God and the soul, it is the time spent on activity devoid of the spirit of prayer which is time wasted.
PRAYER OF PETITION

Contemplative prayer is disinterested; it is nevertheless eminently efficacious. Petition is only included in it so to speak, as an extra. Hence the divine Master, while recommending it, advises that it be brief: “Speak not much, ... for your Father knoweth what is needful for you.”

The more we are united to God, the more faith we have in His solicitude; and it is that faith rather than our merits which insures the efficacy of prayer. Hence its character at once magnificent and familiar, the greatness of God being thus accentuated and humanized by the touching quality of the creature’s confidence. Even a vigorous importunity is not out of place here; the Gospel approves it. Some ardent believers would not be afraid of going still further and adding violence to their petition. “I pray,” writes Léon Bloy, “like a robber asking alms at the door of a farmhouse to which he is ready to set fire.”

But this is not the important question. What do we ask? Sometimes, the reply is not to be trusted. In 1830 a French abbé said to some ladies with Legitimist leanings: “Pray, ladies, pray very much; but beware of telling God what you want.” Our desire has no right to be heard merely because it is keen, but only because it is noble. To ask God for what pleases us, for what corresponds to our feelings of the moment, without regard for His will, occasionally even in direct opposition to it, is to deserve to hear with the buyers and sellers in the Temple: “My house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves.” Is it not stealing from God to presume—and through Him!—to obtain what is repugnant to His will?

When Jesus Christ pledges Himself to answer every prayer
made in His name, are we to believe that He has put into our hands a talisman for the satisfying of our every whim? Many people only pray that they may be confirmed in their present state, chained to their mediocre, mortal existence. Actually, Jesus is speaking of prayer made in His name; that phrase suffices to safeguard it against the abuse of His promise. Would it be in the name of Jesus Christ that we should ask for what contradicts His desires, hampers His work or sets up an obstacle to our own salvation?

The name of Jesus Christ is holy; prayer in His name should be holy and have a sanctifying object, at least in its ultimate effects. All that God gives to human beings is destined to lead them back to Him from whom they proceed; contemplative prayer is aware of this reflux, and the prayer of petition is in harmony with it.

Furthermore, prayer, even when it asks for gifts, is not primarily and principally demanding; above all, it is friendly intercourse, a filial affection; and a friend, a son, does not think first of himself. Is the dignity of prayer to be like that of the swans on Lake Leman, haughty but gluttonous? Their neckline is majestic and their white figure well-turned; but they are interested in nothing but breadsops.

Prayer has every right to seek favors of God. However, that prayer which seeks without obtaining is efficacious beyond its hopes if in place of the gift it receives the Giver. The most perfect, most efficacious of prayers, that of Jesus in Gethsemane, was not answered because at heart it did not wish to be.

How delicate is the balance to be maintained here between confident beseeching and generous self-forgetfulness! Chamfort used to say he had quarreled with two of his friends; with one, he would explain, because he never spoke to me about himself, with the other because he never spoke to me about myself. The
divine Friend might well often address both these reproaches to us. We neglect speaking to Him about ourselves and our needs; still more do we fail to show an interest in Him. His work in souls and in the world leaves us unmoved; His sovereign perfection is foreign to us; and, with regard to ourselves, the connection between our requests and the divine friendship is the last of our considerations, if indeed we think of it at all.

When God refuses us, our soul is disappointed, our confidence wavers; it almost seems to our disconcerted, beggarly imagination that the Most High has failed. Gratitude for all that God bestows upon us constantly is not sufficiently lively to prevent us from grumbling at the want of anything. Our judgment would be better, did our mind overlap somewhat the material world, and our prayer obey its own upward impulse. Prayer is a flame; a flame rises high only if the boughs of firewood do not impede it too much. But as a matter of fact, it manages to make its way through them. Likewise, those who pray imperfectly should not be discouraged; they should only be advised and shown the way into loftier regions.

It is precisely when prayer becomes at once disinterested and trustingly urgent,—and not in its selfish, passionate insistence,—that it is efficacious. Does not friendship delight in sharing? By treating God as a friend inasmuch as we concern ourselves with Him first, we incline Him to interest Himself in us. “Think of Me and I will think of thee,” Jesus said in a vision to Catherine of Siena. United to God the Creator, we participate in His dominion; together with Him, our prayer organizes the universe, influences the world of souls to produce therein the effects of grace, the world of bodies and the conflict of events to bend them to our will in the measure demanded or permitted by the good.

Prayer can obtain everything, for everything is due to it by the claim of friendship which it puts forth and exemplifies. The
friend of God shares in His counsels not merely in an advisory
capacity, but with power of debate and even, if necessary, of
decision; for it has been said: "God does the will of those who
fear Him." Prayer does not change God; it changes him who
prays by elevating his soul; and it also changes the world in its
relation to the praying soul. For the world is the work of God in
His eternity, where the prayer of His friends and His children
find Him. The Japanese have a saying that "a taut will pierces
the heavens." A praying will pierces the heart of heaven, the
heart of Being, which is God in His own loving will.

This does not mean that prayer is expected to take the place
of action. We must act as if not praying and pray as if we did
not act. The two things go together. It might almost be said that
they are one and the same in the sense that they both derive from
the same interior act which is an upright desire. Desire seeking
its result directly in action; desire which detours through God to
achieve itself is prayer. Thus the complete activity of the Chris-
tian comprises the interior edification of self, the assistance of
one's neighbor and, by prayer, a collaboration with the divine
government in souls and in the universe.

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SALUTARY DISTRACTIONS

We have repeatedly urged the unity of life and decried the
sort of divorce established by so many Christians between their
so-called secular life and their religious life. There is no such
thing as secular life; everything falls within the eternal, of which
time is only the fleeting symbol and the herald. In the continuous prayer—in other words, the spirit of prayer,—recommended by the Gospel, we have discerned a corrective for the evil thus proclaimed. I should like to indicate an effective complement to this remedy, no longer by going from prayer to life so as to sanctify the latter, but by bringing life itself into the heart of prayer, to bathe it in prayer and thus sanctify it once more. With a little pious ingenuity, we can utilize for this purpose those traditional enemies of fervor in prayer known as distractions.

We are not about to pronounce a eulogy of distractions as such! The attention of our mind, which is already prayer, is a primary condition that the loving will may in its turn enter into contact. “Watch and pray,” the Savior tells us. We must watch and pray, but also watch to pray, guarding the soul against whatever dissipates and estranges it. The colloquy with God assumes its perfect form, insofar as we are concerned, by love and by giving; but it begins with a presence. Let the soul, then, be present to God and not depart from Him. In that light we are not going to entertain ourselves with our own dark dealings.

Nevertheless, observe what happens at the moment of what is called a distraction. What is it that distracts me, that is, which draws me more or less violently or suddenly away from my religious intent? It is life and nothing else; life itself and life in its natural or social framework. Whereupon, the question arises: is it life insofar as it is tempting, perverse or dangerous which thus presents itself to me, invading the sanctuary of my soul? In that case, there is no room for hesitation: upon the clean, stationary screen of prayer, I shall not permit an unwholesome film to be projected. I expel the idea, the importunate representation or the odious suggestion. The enemy must yield; there is no room for argument with him!
But very often, what thus becomes mingled with our meditation is the innocent, good life, the life which is incumbent upon us and blessed by God in its own sphere. Here, it may be looked upon as indiscreet; it was not invited and this is not the time for it. But are our tactics in its regard to be, on that account, those of an enemy? When a child tugs at his mother’s dress, in church, the mother does not thrust him aside violently; she joins his little hands and gently turns him toward the altar. We, too, are children of God; have not our childish thoughts—at times so serious momentarily—a right to the same calm indulgence?

God sanctions our being, in His presence, just what we are, on condition that we aim at being better. Our life is not an obstacle between Him and us; it is a thoroughfare. Through it grace comes to us; through it we reascend to the author of grace. We do not want prayer merely to border on this life; but to be its very soul. Here is an opportunity. Out of a distraction in thought, can we not make a point of communication in the heart?

Realizing that life comes to me from God and that it goes to God, I may look upon it as an element of my prayer, as prayer itself, which is nothing else but an exchange between God and myself. My God, I receive this life from Thee; I give this life to Thee. This worry, this event, person, circumstance, flashing across my prayer—I welcome them in Thee, unite them to Thy providence, conform them to Thy purposes. When I meet them again, I shall know that they are Thine before being mine, that they must serve Thee before serving me and that, by this means, they will serve me truly as well as themselves.

Such a distraction is no longer distraction, but contemplation. May we thus be distracted a little more often to guard against the vacuity of so many prayers during which we are merely threading words upon a string! To bring before God a torrent of ideas or of words, even pious ones, is sometimes a convenient
way to avoid listening to God and attending to His service. God has no need of our speeches. Talking to God does not commit us to anything; but listening to Him and setting our life before Him is quite another affair!

Obviously, discretion must be used in the matter; there is no need of lingering over it stupidly. When the mother has put her little one’s hands together, she returns to her prayer. Let us, too, resume our own, without however emptying it of its practical content. We shall thus have worked toward our unification; out of the house of God and the house of man, the sphere devoted to religious activities and that wherein our concrete realities swarm, we shall have made a single whole, as there is a single destiny, a single Kingdom of God.

Mr. Georges Goyau has given this ingenious and profound definition of the Rosary: “a long distraction toward God.” It is indeed that. One recites the words, burns incense, fingers the beads, bows in salutation, like a devout censer-bearer who, in the course of his fragrant swinging, might think of his Savior and open to Him his soul; thus the soul devoted to the beads tosses his Ave while allowing his heart to escape and meditate on the twofold, heavenly life which the Mysteries tell off to him, so that he is telling off the whole firmament, as Francis Jammes expresses it. He has his chaplet of linked beads, his chaplet of verbal salutations, his chaplet of visions; and all are synchronized.

But if the life of Jesus and Mary may thus constitute a most salutary distraction, why should not our own life, given the desire on our part, which I presuppose, of conforming it to that of our models,—why, under the auspices of such a desire and with a view to accomplishing that desire, should it not assume a like function? Distraction? Yes, but still “toward God” and, therefore, recollection and prayer.

May our distractions all be such! May they be close to adora-
tion, helping us to make of life itself an adoration, realizing the union of our being with God, introducing the animating presence of God into our humble days!

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THE EUCHARIST

Jesus Christ has said: "Come to me, all ye who are weary and heavily burdened, and I will refresh you." That tender invitation covers more than a particular reference to the Eucharist; but it undoubtedly alludes to It as the most intimate, most effectual and efficacious tryst between God incarnate and the creature.

By His incarnation, Jesus gave Himself; by His passion, He sacrificed Himself; here in the Eucharist, He renews both the gift and the sacrifice; and we have, together with His fraternal humanity, His divine Personality, His Being, which is the very Being of God.

What He once did for all and for each, He wills to do again for each and all, with the same object in view: resurrection and life,—eternal life. Mount Sion was the theatre of the institution, and we know that Sion is the figure of the heavenly City. In the cenacle, the attitude of St. John was symbolic of the intimacy which Jesus offers to us forever; here the event is renewed with even greater significance. In fact, the roles would seem to be reversed between the first supper and the second. The breast of Christ on which St. John rested is today ours where Jesus reposes. But it is in order that the original attitude may be resumed and resumed by all.
Above all, in the presence of the Eucharist, let us not involve ourselves in futile, indiscreet questions about the metaphysical aspect of the mystery. Let us not imitate poor Tolstoy who says it was the stab of a knife to him to be taught as a child that he must believe in the real presence of Jesus under the appearance of bread. Rather let us accept Pascal's self-reminder that God can do more than man can comprehend and that man is too small to know whether or not God can elevate man to Himself. Since we are coming to understand less and less about the normal states of matter, is it astonishing that its supernatural states should escape us?

By converting bread and wine into spiritual food, God does no more, after all, than complete their creation. Is not matter made for spirit and in the direction of spirit? Thus, by the incarnation, God achieved man and achieved him in Himself. In the same wise, God will one day finish the universe by bringing to an end its "groaning" and seeking. Has He not achieved Himself eternally, if we may dare to say so, by the Trinity? Mystery is never anything but the fulfillment of reality, outside of which everything retrogresses and falls back into its oblivion.

Let us leave that subject. Instead of the mystery wherein the mind holds its ground but gives no light, let us revel here in the prodigy of love. This gift surpassing every gift, since it contains the infinite which is the very Giver! This fire which flashes upon us each morning and, over the earth, from hour to hour, from meridian to meridian, is unfailingly rekindled. This living bread with the taste of heaven! This food of the emancipated soul, antidote to the poisons of this world, remedy for its hunger pangs, assuagement of its disgusts, restoration of its perpetual decadence and scourge of its mortality!

When the communicant returns to his place entirely capti-
vated, he cannot help but withdraw into himself, curling up into a ball as if jealously guarding his treasure. It is his instinct which impels him; but reflection would only render his attitude the more intense were he truly aware of what he thus takes hold upon.

Like the wise man who asked only for light and bread, the Christian soul is content with the sacrament which includes the fullness of spiritual goods and with the treasury of all truth: the Gospel. The good Book is the mirror of life, and the Author of life presents it to him. The tabernacle then offers him all the secrets of spiritual nutrition and hygiene, of growth and of joy. What more does he need? We, too, live on light and bread, clear-sightedness and strength. With the Sacrament of sacraments and the Gospel creed, we walk in faith and love with confidence and certainty.

“How wretched,” St. Francis used to exclaim, “what a pitiful infirmity, to have Jesus Christ close to you and to pay attention to anything else in this world!” How willingly Jesus would give Himself in the Sacrament, even if one of us were alone in all the world; so ought we to offer Him our adoration, our gratitude, loyalty and zeal, as if He could receive them from us alone.

After that, it remains for us to enter into His views and advance toward His ends. He gives Himself only that He may take possession of us. He is a fire that would consume all that is dead in us, to make us live. He wills to substitute Himself with all His goods for our indigence and evil. He ambitions infinity for us. The whiteness which conceals Him is the dawn of eternal life. United to us all in divine charity, He leads us along the path from the place of His sacrament to the place of His perpetual abode, where the sheep His Father has given into His care, whom He has contrived to feed, shall forever know His voice.
The Effects of the Eucharist

Belief in the Eucharist has truly been called the generative dogma of Catholic piety and, thereby, of all the other virtues. We have said that the presence of God in us is the opposing force antagonistic to the forces of the world intent upon our ruin, and that the increase of this force, balancing and annulling the adverse powers, accelerates our progress, if we so will. Certainly it is undeniable that God has a thousand and one ways of achieving that very beneficial presence in us; but what other way is comparable to this one? Is it not a kind of invasion, a tidal wave, a breaking down of every barrier? What heart of a man would resist it, once the invitation was understood, reparation accomplished and desire heightened?

Such a disposition of Providence is overwhelming: what a grace, that the very Author of grace should give Himself visibly so as to render grace tangible to us and procure it for us! Is it not enough to set a heart on fire, unless it be utterly impervious to the supernatural? And once the heart has been captivated, nothing threatens any more, it seems, nothing any longer resists. It is possible for the body itself to be transformed, restrained and at the same time lifted up, electrified yet held under strict control, so that it is more docile and better adapted to the impulses as well as the resistances of the soul.

What a sedative that presence is for a heart filled with the agitation of the passions and the deadly ardour inherited from a thousand generations! A mother, a friend, an affectionate sister, a brother—are they not wont to cool our fevers by a word, a
silent look, by the influence of their mere presence, in short? They represent to us a world at peace, where life circulates close to its source, where its selfishness and fury are no longer current. But Jesus is all of these to us Himself alone; He has told us so, and His mystery here increases still more the pacifying effect of His reception.

For our sufferings, too, a friendship which can pledge so much is no less advantageous. There are in our lives difficulties and anxieties which nothing seems able to overcome, which leave us gasping and exhausted. But let the tiny host shine forth and you will see how flagging courage revives and desperate tension relaxes into composure.

Obviously, sin must be removed for the specific to take effect. Before absorbing the medicine, one must eject the poison. The tribunal of penance is the ordinary vestibule to the altar, for the kiss we give to Christ must not resemble, even remotely, that of Judas Iscariot. But what is accomplished by penance is confirmed by the Eucharist; it completes the purification and reparation; it increases confidence; it reinforces security; it takes us into safe-keeping.

All of this is the effect of love. By means of love, too, the heart, henceforth directed to the good, will advance toward it with firmer tread. The Eucharist is the support of beginnings in virtue, the always timely means of breaking off troublesome habits. It dilates the heart, opening it to progress, binds it ever closer to God from one contact to another, and also unites it to its brethren by requiring that it look upon them in God and lay aside its rancor at the altar.

What more profound inspiration for our fraternal obligations than that which emanates from the banquet where Jesus gathers us all together, where not being at peace with all would mean not
being at peace with anyone, especially with the divine Host Himself. Indignation, anger, hatred, discord ought to find it impossible to resist that gentle, hidden glance. Returning from the table where we have communicated, shoulder to shoulder, are we to engage in bitter dissensions?

The interior aid of the Eucharist is compatible with many weaknesses; but it condemns them so powerfully, its reception is so out of harmony with them, that they ought to diminish in proportion to the efforts made by the faithful Christian. One might stumble and set off again, fall back and stand erect once more; but how could one go astray and be lost?

Before the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus said: "I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way." We, too, might faint; the Eucharist restores us. It is up to us to be in condition. Against our ever threatening vices, our lethargy, our indolence and torpid slumber, the tonic and preservative of the altar are offered to us.

This sacrament, at once visible and invisible, is ideally designed to train us in the sense of the invisible and to mark the transition from the seen to the unseen while assisting us to take the step. It is called the sacrament of faith, not only because, by reason of its mysteriousness, it especially demands faith, but because it, in turn, stimulates the spirit of faith, because it places before us, under its symbols, the very object of faith, inviting us to pass from symbol to reality, from the mysterious Christ to the triumphant Christ, from the altar abounding in unseen presences to heaven all dazzling with enraptured myriads.

Moreover, the Eucharist is not a mere evocation of heaven,—the heaven on high and that which is enthroned in the soul; it positively brings it to us. Yes, its fruit is charity, that is to say, union with God which on His part, has no limit; its essential act
is known as *communion*, mutual inherence and fusion—intrinsically abiding—in love. Is that not heaven itself, actually attained, or in its first fruits?

**Pledge of eternal life:** that is one of the titles of the Eucharist. It is thus presented to us as the supreme viaticum, a remedy not only for passing ills, spiritual or corporal, but for life, that incurable malady, that conquest which is at the same time a self-enforcing condemnation, that pretended health foreboding naught but death. “The doctors will not cure you,” Pascal used to say to himself, “for you will finally die; but it is God who renders soul and body immortal.” That God is given to us under the form of the bread of life; and that bread is to the human being borne along toward death a guarantee of perpetuity quelling his alarms. It is a promise of ascending and dwelling where He abides who loves us, whom we receive at once far from and close to His eternal throne.

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**Frequentation of the Eucharist**

Before an invention such as the Eucharist a temptation might arise which is all the more formidable because of its assumed air of humility. That is beautiful, one might say; but who am I? Could an infinity of holiness and a soul that is still sinful be made for such a terrifying association as that of food with hunger? But the insidious argument turns upon itself in view of the munificence and tenderness revealed by this institution. It is because we hunger and because He alone can satisfy us that God gives Himself; it is because we are sinners and sick with sin that He
would heal us. "Those that are in health need not a physician," He has Himself said.

Is it not on this account that access to the Eucharist is rendered so easy for us? "If this most holy sacrament were only celebrated in one place and consecrated by only one priest in the world," observes the author of the Imitation, "how great a desire would men have to go to that place!" And behold it is multiplied to meet the convenience of the most exacting requirements. The fact that the Host is thus cast before every comer, so to speak, proves that its frequentation is not made difficult. Come, ye sinners! To abuse it would be detestable; but an accessibility precisely measured to your good will is what corresponds to a prodigality that willed to be measureless.

Good will presupposes preparation. But, assuming the requisite repentance, what constitutes this preparation unless it be the very desire itself? "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it," says the Psalm. To him who desires, God gives; especially does He give Himself. Let the communicant, too, give himself to the extent that he possesses himself; may he thus bind himself and be carried along. Let him concentrate upon his Eucharistic meditation all his sentiments of faith, loyalty and love, imperfect as they are; and let Jesus Himself be charged with making them perfect.

Jesus asks more of us than we have; but it is He who renders us solvent. He wants from us our human infinity, that all which we do not possess, but which alone can respond to His advances. By His action upon us He intends to steal it away from us, that is, to draw us up little by little to the height of giving it ourselves until He is enabled to crown our gift. The Eucharist is a food which assimilates the hungering soul instead of being transformed into its substance; its function is to extract us from ourselves and dissolve us in God.
Hence it is apparent that one well-prepared communion ought to serve as preparation for another. A first contact with Christ predisposes for a new one as one light attracts another brighter one. Between two communions, the soul should feel itself to be under a twofold influence: that of memory inviting its gratitude and faithfulness, that of hope inflaming its desire and zeal. Let him be like the clapper of an electric bell between its two poles, and let his heart vibrate constantly.

“A Christian,” says Father Ollivaint, “should always be ready to die or to communicate.” That is a precious and profound maxim. But if the disposition to communicate is active, in other words, if it constitutes a preparation and a longing, it is already a kind of communion, what we call a spiritual communion. “Every time one thinks lovingly of the Beloved,” says Ruysbroek, “He becomes food and drink anew.” He adds, however, that those who do so are more eager than others to communicate really; thus they develop in both directions, anticipating within what they expect from without and receiving from without the complement of what they anticipate.

Such a chain of links is, of course, the case of a purified soul which needs only to maintain itself and grow. But let it not be thought that spiritual communion is forbidden to the sinner not yet absolved. Even if prevented for this reason from communicating sacramentally, he may do so spiritually in the sense that, by the charity of the altar, he asks of Christ purification and strength, so as to be enabled soon to partake of that charity himself. Is not the utterance of such an appeal already a disavowal of evil? It may become its reparation, even before the penitential rite, which will then be no more than a guarantee and an obedience.

At any rate, since there is no such thing as perfect spiritual health until the next life, and since the Eucharist is intended
precisely to conduct us thither, the attitude of each of us in the presence of this sacrament should be as humble as it is confident, as confident as humble. If our communion does not represent perfect health, let it at least be a convalescence, and a convalescence which daily becomes stronger. This growth in strength, as we know, is measured in terms of the ejection of our false self and the dominion, in its stead, of Him who is charged, as creator, redeemer and sanctifier, with giving or restoring us to ourselves.

In the face of any created being whatever, one may remain in possession of self; for no element of this world is capable of annulling another and eclipsing its proper, inalienable value. But before the Divinity offered in this sacrament, conjointly with the sacred Humanity which is holiness itself, one can only cast oneself down without fear of perishing, die to self the better to live; and it is this desire of love which is the whole of the Eucharist.

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Christ our Model

The Christian life is a work of art and a superhuman achievement: it demanded a model and that the model, too, should be more than human. More than human, I say, but on that very account profoundly human, human in utter perfection, evil alone being excluded as inimical to humanity, just as it is everywhere destructive of being.

In Jesus there is realized, but with a plenitude undreamed of by its author, this line from Menander: "Man is a very attractive being, when he is truly a man." Thanks to this ideal type of the
race, we may take heart again when too many experiences, too many trips to the end of the night, have exhausted or terrified us, made us despair of man and of ourselves.

What bliss, what reassurance, at sight of that white figure, its grandeur, its nobility, at the summit of a history, otherwise so sorry and, at times, so hideous! Above and beyond all that wretchedness, the claims of beauty and righteousness are reestablished through Jesus; above all of that death which daily digs still deeper the grave of a perishable humanity, He lifts us to soaring life: “He that believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live: And every one that liveth, and believeth in me, shall not die for ever.”

Yes, indeed, man is sufficiently great to be represented by Him who, being God, willed to call Himself the Son of Man; and our humanity is, in spite of all, an honorable host, captained by such a leader.

Jesus shows us man in all his dimensions, terrestrial and celestial. He has assumed flesh, as son of Mary and son of nature.

“A drop of blood drawn from the artery of the world.”

(Lamartine)

With this flesh He has assumed its infirmities and the nobility that relieves them, its needs and the labor that provides for them, its sufferings and the heroism that renders them sublime. He found everywhere, in earth and heaven, the impress of His Father and delighted in it, thereby consecrating human poetry. On the shore of the Lake, among those solitudes where, today, silence preserves the recollection of the divine outbursts, He sang the song of life better than all the lyrists, because He did so with a simplicity which concentrated the effect of grandeur.

In the opposite direction, Jesus opened to us the world of the spirit. He taught us how to be “reborn,” after having shown us,
in the God wherein we have our rebirth, a kind of humanity (benignitas et humanitas) of which His own humanity is the symbol.

By reason of His very perfection Jesus could veil the Father for us, as Greek humanity, set upon Olympus, had formed a screen between the lower humankind and the divine. But He has taught us to penetrate the dividing wall. "He enabled us to see," says M. Olier, "through the curtain of His flesh, what is the hidden beauty of His Father." That which was greater than man in Him appealed to that which was greatest in man.

He never ceased to direct our gaze upward to that God with whom is our perpetual abode, to draw our hearts thither as toward the object of our true aspirations, the goal of our original calling—forgotten calling, aspirations sunk into oblivion as to their genuineness, yet ever undying. And not content with speaking, with that spoken word before which all other speech is stilled, He went before to point out to us the way. His death is a supreme excess, a desperate stroke, as it were, to manifest heaven to us. It is a Beatitude in action; an exploit confirming the divine paradoxes of the Sermon on the Mount: death itself is life, death and all that is akin to it—poverty, inferiority, hard-fought virtue, sacrificial love.

It took the death of Christ to impress upon us this strong conception of heaven. His life was already in heaven, inviting us thither; but we were unaware of it. His death, by thrusting aside this earth, spurning it, so to speak, under the impact of the cross, has imposed the obligation of an ascent upon us. Henceforward the dwelling-place of true life invites us.

This is not a disintegration of humanity, but on the contrary its integration at the highest point, as is proper to all being. The plant begins in the root, but concentrates upon the flower; the animal is more present in his gaze than in his visceral chemistry. Christ, by marking the separation between body and spirit, earth
and heaven, time and eternity, and, politically, between the immortal individual and the mortal group,—Christ, I say, has seemed to dissociate man. Every brand of paganism takes offense at this. As a matter of fact, He has unified him in his center, close to the spirit toward which even the body should tend, reaching its own culmination while it seeks to serve. The body is not to blame if our infidelity resists, if between the two alternatives—the pagan way urged by the flesh and the Christian way embarked upon under the breath of the spirit—humanity is more irresolute than Hercules.

There is a divine plan of our life. There is an ideal trend of events parallel to the actual one and providing it with its rule. To achieve entire coincidence between them would be superhuman; to aim at it is virtue; to reach it ultimately, each one, by imitating Christ, but in the form of one's own life and in the measure prepared by one's graces, is beatitude. These three questions are identical: What does God wish from me? What would Christ do in my place? What is my duty?

Christianity strives painfully to conform thereto; it succeeds only in its saints. But is not a phalanx of saints, spaced along the course of time, something of a permanent illumination, in the spiritual sense? In spite of everything, the procession of human-kind is studded with torchlights. In the clamor that rises from it there are sohs, gnashing of teeth, and cries, but there are also hymns of glory and benediction; and the wonder is that the former should be blended into the latter. A cluster of grapes is a delight; its wine is more of a delight. Jesus living among His brethren fomented joy by virtue and love, thus producing a handful of elect souls. But by treading the winepress of the cross, His followers in His wake, Jesus created the joy of the whole world, and it behooves each one to taste it.

The cross in each of its directions, in all of its dimensions, is
life itself. It unites earth and heaven, east and west, heights, breadths, and depths. It embraces all sorrows and all blissful exaltation, all innocence and every sin redressed, the whole of humiliation and of the glory that crowns it, all our humanity and all the Divinity that the Son of Man united to it.

To complete the world there had to be a Bethlehem, to lead it to its destiny a Calvary and an ascension from the Mount of Olives, as from the brink of the earth. That is why they who refuse to be reborn and to die spiritually in Jesus renounce their destiny, departing from the divine world only to fall back into the satanic abyss. Ordering one’s life conformably to Christ is carrying one’s cross and attaining to one’s resurrection. Accepting suffering in union with Christ is the same thing; for life has two aspects: action and passion; and Jesus undertook them both. Both resemble Him, both are at His command; for all things obey the word of Christ, even tears and death.

Once that word has penetrated the heart, one hears naught else amid the noises of the world. When Jesus speaks or silently lets Himself be seen, petty realities themselves are silent; little hopes vanish and give place to the tremendous hope proclaimed by Him, realized in Him; ordinary thoughts fade out or are sublimated to the level of the thoughts of God, reverberating through the Gospel; abandoning the dense, swampy paths that lead nowhere, we enter upon the high road whither our Brother has preceded us.

Seeking to resemble Christ in a humble way is already to resemble Him somewhat. Here, too, Pascal’s observation applies: “Thou wouldst not be seeking Me hadst thou not already found Me.” But we must urge ourselves on ever further in the search, pursue after the likeness, imitate the virtue, accept the pain, bear the cross in its every implication and in all its forms, dying, ostensibly, that we may live. It is to be expected, after all, that a
man should die in the making of a God, as it was to be expected that God should become man and experience death, in order that man might become God.

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THE VIRGIN MOTHER

We have but one model: Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, in a certain sense, we have two, just as, looking on a calm sea, at nightfall, we have two fields of stars.

There could not be born among men a man more perfect than Jesus; nor could there be born a woman more perfect than His mother. Jesus, who, as God, created her who gave birth to Him according to the flesh, created her in His own likeness. He made her utterly pure and all aflame, as if He willed to find in her a second heaven; He filled her to overflowing, as if to achieve in her first the impossible ideal He would propose to His disciples: "Be you perfect, as also your Heavenly Father is perfect."

Mary is to us, then, a faithful mirror, but a mirror conscious of its function, consenting to it, powerful for it, knowing and loving the light reflected and them who are illuminated thereby, with a capacity for communicating that light and opening the eyes of those upon whom it shines.

It was Mary who gave Jesus to the world; spiritually she is able to generate other Jesus', because her maternity is a spiritual relationship and not a physical role only. By asking her consent, God associated her in the plan of redemption. Replying with her fiat, she herself negotiated our peace with God. Having called down salvation upon the whole of humanity, she has the power
of applying it in the same capacity wherein she appealed and obtained it: as an agent. Of herself, she is nothing; by her ministry, she is involved in all things. Between the Father of Jesus and His mother there is a bond, and that bond concerns us. In approaching mankind, it was she whom God met first; in approaching us, too, it is but fitting that He should encounter and make use of her. She who gave birth to the Word can give spiritual birth to the world and present it to the Word; that is to say, in short, she can be the mother of the Son of Man whole and entire, the mother of God incarnate according to the flesh and according to the spirit in the human race.

It is the unity of the spiritual body which allows of such reciprocity, calls for it, with the assent of our souls. Sister to us in our humanity, our spiritual mother, our model by reflection, secondary cause of our salvation, our hope as the road leading to hope: what could be more reasonable or better?

In one form or another, woman is always necessary to a human work. The success of any life requires this cooperation; why should not the accomplishment of the incarnation follow the same course, that is, if it does not rather point the way? Yes, indeed, woman is thoroughly capable of helping a man to be lost; but under the guise of motherhood, of spiritual motherhood, she can help us to lose ourselves in God.

This is what happens in the person of Mary: a tender intimacy toward souls and toward God, a holiness "which had no predecessor equal to it and will never have a sequel," as the liturgy sings. Hence that same liturgy puts into the mouth of Mary the words of the Book of Wisdom: "I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope. In me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue."

Once again, this is all by way of ministry. It is the secret of
the communications and hierarchies of persons or of graces. As Jesus said to Philip: "He that seeth me seeth the Father," so Mary can say, at her level: he that sees me sees Jesus. For she represents Him to us and leads us to Him, she renders it easier for God to win us through Him and for us to win God.

What one does for her is always done for God. Whatever one does with her or in her, that is to say, in her spirit, or by her, that is, under her guidance, is always done according to God. By pouring out our thoughts into her heart we give them the form of God. By loving with her, because we love her, herself, we make of our filial love a love of God; nor is it even as intermediary, for she retains nothing. All of it is handed on and, in passing, becomes fragrant, enhanced, elevated and joyous.

Hence devotion to Mary is a "secret of sanctity," as St. Louis Grignion de Montfort declares. It is also the unpretentious hope of the frail Christian, the refuge of the human soul in every condition of its existence. From age to age they come to her,—the sighing, mourning, weeping dwellers in this vale of tears; the exiled children of Eve look up to her in her heaven, the afflicted turn to her on Calvary. The tempted call upon her spotlessness, the weak her smiling, tranquil strength, the guilty on her gentle mercy, the troubled and timid on her calm serenity.

In our day as in every day much can be expected from Marian devotion, provided that it be serious and strong, tender yet vigorous, sensitive but wisely realistic. Who knows but that this secondary likeness of Jesus may not capture hearts that resist the original, and that remoteness from the Spirit, fear of the Father, may not be overcome by the mother with the Child in her arms!
Mary is our model in this respect: that all her life is an assumption, as ours ought to be. The Immaculate Conception at the start and the final coronation in heaven obviously constitute incommunicable privileges for her; but presupposing these pre-eminences, she comes to rejoin us. The cycle we have described: humility to charity, charity to all the virtues, to the imitation of Christ, the exclusion of sin, the utilization of grace, prayer and communion in God, such was her program perfectly accomplished which she proposes to us as our spiritual teacher and patroness.

Mary’s humility was perhaps even more justifiable than ours; for the disparity between the dignity of daughter of Eve and that of Mother of God is manifestly greater than between our characteristic nonentity and what God permits us to become. That Mary was cognizant of these relative differences is evident from the testimony of her words at the Annunciation and in the Magnificat. Her humility is proportioned to what God is and what He does, to the authority of Him who reigns and ordains, to the bounty of Him who gives Himself and whom she agrees to receive: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word.” “He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid: for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me: and Holy is His Name.”

For us, too, humility consists in accepting things as they are, including our own nothingness, by an initial surrender to Him who is. But when sin befalls us, we are invited to pass from proud rebellion and frustration to humble hope. Back to charity, too,
we are guided from our sinful state. In this respect, Mary does not resemble us; but as Refuge of sinners she comes to our assistance and as Mother of fair love she gives us courage.

When one is not with God, where, indeed, can one be? St. Augustine asked himself this question and was terrified to have been in such a state without even being able to define it. Mary has no need of being thus terrified except in our regard. She does not know sin except through us. It was on Calvary that she was obliged to face it; it is by the suffering of her Son that she gauges it; and it is in the same school that she learns penance and cauterizes the wounds of our souls, when necessary, by means of the cross.

The *Ave Maria* is often, for the sinner, a prelude to the *Pater*. "God’s beggars," as St. Augustine calls them, may extend their money pouch before the Queen, for an alms. Like Blanche of Castille at the court of St. Louis, she is there "to grant favors." Even the slaves of sin, those who have grown old in its servitude and become, as it were, benumbed by it, can have recourse to the power of her virginity, to her free, be-winged soul. They need only be ready to rise, like Peter in prison at the touch of an angel, when the gentle hand rests upon their shoulder or is laid in blessing on their brow.

But once on their feet, they must walk and go on farther. Penitence removes an obstacle; love alone is the goal. She who died of love after having lived by it—will she not teach us how to love? To give all, to suffer all, that is what she accepted. She devoted her heroism and her infinite anguish to her Son’s executioners: maybe that isn’t a lesson in generosity; and hasn’t she a perfect right, when the sacrifice of Jesus is renewed and applied, when He comes by way of the altar to meet souls,—a right to urge us to unite ourselves to Him and not render vain that twofold and most precious holocaust!
It is Mary who gives Jesus to us in the Eucharist as she did in the manger and on Calvary. He is her Son everywhere and everywhere He associates her with Himself, everywhere He intends that we shall come through her, even unconsciously. But we should do so consciously. A ritual and its effects, proceeding from the Incarnation, and which are an extension of the Incarnation should express for us the Incarnation such as it was and is, with Mary as instrument in relation to the spirit as well as to the flesh.

Artificer of the Incarnation, intermediary of grace; in the mind of God they are one and the same thing; may they be so in ours as well. The sacrament which gives us life and promises it to us eternally must evoke,—thanks to a force hidden in things,—the moment when Mary herself gave life to Him who gives it to us, was identified with the purpose of that life, associated with its enduring consequences.

Mary follows us on all our pathways by following after her Son. She accompanies the Church in its peregrination, thereby assisting us socially as she does individually. She pontificates at the administration of all the sacraments, carries all graces, shoulders every grief, presents all prayers to heaven after increasing them twofold with her own. Every Christian may say, as Barac the warrior said to Debbora, the prophetess, inspiring her people: "If thou wilt come with me, I will go: if thou wilt not come with me, I will not go." But we need not fear a refusal. Mary is always there. Sometimes Jesus gives her to us when we have recourse to Him first; sometimes she gives us to Jesus when our confidence has first called upon her. In any case, whether her charm begins the work or her solicitude completes it, our salvation will forever claim her as its cause after Him who is its first cause, and as the perfect exemplar of what it was given us to obtain.
By living in the midst of the crowd one comes to despise man. But it suffices for one man to restore our view of humanity to make us forgive the crowd. The saints thus induce in us optimism and human benevolence because they represent to us sanctified humanity. They manifest the current of grace circulating in the Church, as the fire smouldering in the heart of the earth flares out in the volcanoes.

We are urged to seek God within ourselves, and rightly so for self has the advantage of allowing itself to be more easily penetrated, and the impress of God can appear there under the form of infinite desire, secret appeals and solicitations of grace. But in the person of another, if he is virtuous, we are offered a more disinterested, objective experiment, as the scientists say, and the example which stands out in relief serves us as an intermediary to the evaluation of that of Christ or of His living mirror, our Virgin Mother.

What a light is a holy soul in our midst! It is not easily perceived against the crude glare of this world; it is the pure flame of a spirit lamp before the sun. Nevertheless, a fraternal sensitiveness detects it; the fellow-feeling known as charity recognizes and takes comfort in it.

The effect is all the more vivid when that sanctity, having been proclaimed by religious authority, is invested with a social character, assuming an official role and thus involving God Himself. The holiness of the Church is discerned in the canonized saint and placed at our service. The posthumous nature of the model is an additional excellence in so far as the departed saint is at
once a witness to two worlds: ours, in which he lived and shone, the other where eternity crowns him.

Our deceased friends speak to us in purer language; they are nearer because all that keeps us apart has vanished: the delusions, the little clashes resulting from prejudice or momentary whim, the accessory element in life which so often supersedes the essential. Our spiritual friends, the saints, possess this superiority in an eminent degree and the collective form assumed by devotion to them rules out even more completely all pettiness, every mark of human weakness.

The saints had their faults; but, who knows, perhaps their defects would suffice to make up our virtues, like those spots on the sun, a thousand times more luminous than our earthly fires. Moreover, what we are invited to consider in them by their cultus is not so much their personality as their spiritual significance, their role as witnesses, their quality not precisely of models but of mirrors, wherein the excellence of the Saint of saints is reflected for our benefit. Imperfect or not, the saints offer to the attentive soul a mystery. Apparently just like everyone else, they direct our gaze higher and remind us of something neither theirs nor ours, but assuming, in them, a radiant aspect which we know to be divine Wisdom.

The wise man is the measure of things, according to Aristotle; his thought and truth, his soul and virtue, take on a sort of equivalence. Before the sage, before the saint, one has an impression of what is and ought to be; therein resides a wonderful power of attraction. A law incarnate! The law of life realized in a human being so as to present to us at once and the same time that law and its triumph, that law and its possibility for us, since these were men even as we!

The saints seem to share the moral ideal among them, each attaining to it under but a single aspect: one by his austerity,
another by his zeal, a third by his gentleness, compassion, generosity, patience. However, we know that all the virtues are bound together and that rejecting one would mean repudiating them all by disloyalty to their principle. Only apparently, then, does the hero of sanctity emphasize his specialty; this can be but a dominant note. Behind it there is integral virtue, a complete spiritual organism; that is what permits of devotion and imitation without any secret misgivings. One never goes astray by following the saints. Even by observing their defects, such as they are, we should arrive at their virtues which adjoin and relieve them. But once again, it is neither the one nor the other which is actually proposed to us; it is the authentic reflection of Wisdom.

The saints encourage us by their splendor and attractiveness; they also console us by their happiness. They have arrived: so then virtue does arrive and our moral striving is not a matter of interminably marching on. Having reached the goal, they are the natural auxiliaries of those who are just starting or are on the way; for we are but a single body and all the members are united. They feel obliged to help us as we do to honor them; and just as we render honor to God by honoring them, so, by aiding us, do they cooperate in the work of God, which is the function of heaven more than of this world, indigent yet already indebted and solvent.

From heaven, the saints protect those who have misunderstood and persecuted them. (God knows that there is no lack of such!) It is their function, as it was Christ’s, to clear their own executioners, if they were willing, and to atone so to speak, by their death, for that very death in so far as it involved a frightful injustice. Innocence and love look upon themselves as beholden to those who strike them and in so doing elevate and distinguish them.

To the oblivious, too, this guardianship of the saints extends,
to the negligent, like ourselves, to the laggards. Only we should remind ourselves that of themselves alone they can do nothing. They must have our cooperation and effort. One is not saved by substitution or proxy. My adherence to truth is a matter between truth and me; my fidelity concerns virtue and myself. A third party may be able to influence me, if necessary, by persuasion or example; but the relationship itself is entirely personal. Each one exercises it on his own account, within the inviolable secrecy of his conscience, alone before the face of heaven.

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THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

The thought of the saints spontaneously draws our attention toward a doctrine which is invested with the authority of their name, enlarges and at the same time concentrates that name by applying the term "saint" to everyone united with God and "communion of saints" to the union in God of all these individuals.

The communion of saints is an essential note of Christianity which has no meaning other than the brotherhood of all men under the adoption of the heavenly Father, or, if you will, the intimate union of all men with the heavenly Father, as a whole. Our destinies are inextricably bound together. We really form but one; and the unity of the material universe, ever more precisely revealed to science, is only a symbol of the unity established in the moral universe.

The absence of a star in the heavens is strictly impossible; so, in the spiritual world, is the absence of a single soul. The smallest
one—if there are small ones—would leave a void which it would be forever impossible to fill, not merely on account of the sum total of spirituality foreseen for the whole, but also because of its differentiation, since every soul has the value of a species.

Each thing in nature is occupied in being different from all the rest and being united to them; nature as a whole is occupied, in its turn, with rendering each thing different and uniting it to itself. It is the same in the realm of the spirit with souls and with Providence. At least, that is the plan and our life is as it should be in so far as it adapts itself thereto.

It is the stars which indicate for us the positions, the guide marks that locate our globe and locate us, too, "somewhere on that atom." It is the community of spiritual luminaries, the spirits, which determines the place of each one of us, making us beings necessary in our situation, responsible for a task, eternally called by our name. To the harmony of the spheres, spoken of by the ancients, corresponds the murmur of souls which each one would hear if he entered deeply into himself. Alone, I am not alone; I am the subject of infinite relationships; I feel or ought to feel universal ties; for I am bound to God and all things are bound to God as to a center unifying the sphere of Being.

It is beautiful to think about; it is more beautiful and more important to draw the logical conclusion. Such solidarity bestows rights upon us and also imposes duties. Rights: because it is by a disposition of Providence in our regard that, at no matter what point in the spiritual world, a pure soul, a generous soul, a praying, suffering, acting soul should radiate in our direction and confer a benefit upon us by reason of its graces and the use it makes of them.

It makes little difference whether that soul thinks of us or not. If it does, its charity will doubtless be more lively. But apart from all particular circumstances and intentions, the mere rhythm, the
calm, habitual course of its interior respiration, already contributes to the atmosphere we breathe. It is like the precious ointment of Mary Magdalen; destined for Jesus, it does not confine itself to Him, but fills the whole house, gratifying even the pharisee himself.

Nor is it necessary that the soul be a superior one. So much the better if it is; its influence will then be more far-reaching. But in this order of things, the little may support the great, the ignorant enlighten the scholar, the sinner assist the saint, the unhappy bestow happiness, the weak shoulder the burden of the strong, the child carry the man. And in return, to these agents are imparted effects of fraternal actions emanating from elsewhere. Influences are interwoven, like the threads of an intangible fabric. No one escapes it; one can only choose between nullifying or freely multiplying the result.

It behooves each one of us, under the circumstances, not to be negligent, still less a desecrator, and not to be content with the role of beneficiary. Let us be on the alert to seize the graces that are in circulation. Let us show our gratitude toward so many unknown benefactors whom we look upon as indifferent, perhaps as enemies, and whom God has selected to communicate to us the choicest favors. Then let us feel ourselves bound to radiate in our turn, not evil,—appalling responsibility the horror of which we have estimated—but goodness, virtue, courage, joy. The divine is all around us; we must have it within us and, manifesting it in our turn, reinforce its dominion.

When we pray, let it be always in union with the whole Church, with the absent members everywhere and of every age, with all souls. A congregation about us is never more than a symbol. The communion of saints should surge unceasingly in the depths of our hearts, stimulating them to masterful generosity. I am not a full-fledged Christian so long as others are not. One
member is never in good health while another is diseased. However happy one may be, can one be utterly so while the happiness of another is wanting?

People often complain of their environment: it is dull, colorless, or even hostile; and it never occurs to them to enliven or rectify it rather than just endure it. A lamp doesn’t complain because it must shine at night. How many does it take to reduce the darkness or even light up the whole place? Would not a single one suffice?

“What can I be good for?” someone asked. “At any rate, for being good,” replied Prince Ghika; and we know that to be adequate. In every order, being is acting and making progress is acting even more. While apparently doing nothing, it may be that one cooperates in good far beyond some strong personality that carries another along by an almost animal impulsion, from brain to brain, not from soul to soul or grace to grace.

The Word who carries all spirits is the principal agent here; pure spirituality is His chosen servant; action, even virtuous action, only comes next; and the intoxication of misguided zeal does not count at all.

It is true that one only plumbs the depths of oneself by communicating oneself to others. But it is reciprocally true that in plumbing those depths one always communicates oneself; for goodness has no barrier, recognizes no check beyond the arc of a perfect sphere. Sphere of the created spirit, sphere of the supernatural diffused, how great thou art! So great that each of us may regard himself as thy center and feel radiating toward him the vast army of souls, as the heavens let fly upon us the mystery of the nameless stars.