



St. Albert the Great
of
Cleaving
TO GOD
+

Mowbrays
Fleur de Lys Series

OF CLEAVING TO GOD

The *De adhaerendo Deo*, attributed to
Saint Albert the Great

Translated by DOCTOR ELISABETH STOPP

The author of this fifteenth-century classic himself calls it a compilation, made for his own use, of various passages connected by their subject matter; he quotes freely from early and contemporary writers, among them [Saint John] Cassian, Saint Bernard, and Saint Thomas Aquinas. The book is in fact a personal anthology of a widely read man, and the passages are bound together by individual comments of great vigour, single-mindedness, and beauty. It has been called a supplement to the *Imitation [of Christ]*, and indeed shares its spirit.

From the earlier Blackfriars Publications edition:

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OF CLEAVING TO GOD

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F L E U R D E L Y S S E R I E S

Of Cleaving to God

DE ADHAERENDO DEO

Translated from the 15th-century Latin MS attributed to
SAINT ALBERT THE GREAT

By ELISABETH STOPP

Revised and annotated by
STEPHEN PLUSTWIK

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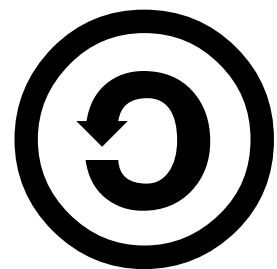
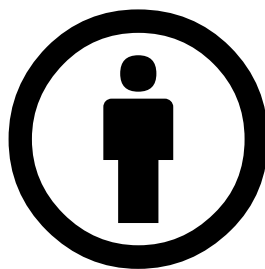
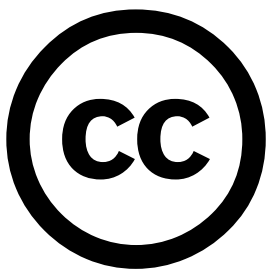
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PREFACE

THE LATIN text of which we offer a new translation was written at the beginning of the fifteenth century and was formerly attributed to Saint Albert the Great. The master of Saint Thomas Aquinas was a man of such prodigious learning and output that in the easy manner of the times he was inevitably saddled with the authorship of all kinds of works that he might have written but did not, in actual fact, write. One of the reasons why this tract has been attributed to Saint Albert is probably its strong dependence on the teaching of Dionysius [i.e., Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite], on whose works Saint Albert wrote a commentary.

In the nineteenth century the Dominican scholars Heinrich Seuse Denifle and Pierre-François-Félix Mandonnet had expressed doubts of Saint Albert's authorship, and in 1920 Professor Martin Grabmann of Munich discovered three manuscripts of the tract, containing seven additional chapters, and signed by a Benedictine monk called John of Castel. John also wrote a number of other as yet unpublished works, some of them of a mystical nature. In 1926 Dom Jacob Huijben, OSB, of Oosterhout, published a new edition of this complete text, together with a scholarly and exhaustive index of sources.¹ During the past twenty years new evidence has come to light which has caused Professor Grabmann to revert to the traditional view and to attribute the text, now greatly altered and amended, to Saint Albert in the first instance. A new edition is at present in preparation.

But the controversy concerning the authorship need hardly concern us here for our concern is practical: to provide a new translation of a spiritual work which has stood

the test of time on its own intrinsic merits, and is still beloved quite apart from any considerations of authorship. The index reveals the large extent to which the author has drawn from earlier or contemporary works (Cassian, Hugh of Saint Victor, Saint Bonaventure, Saint Bernard, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Blessed Henry Suso, Blessed John of Ruysbroeck, Rudolph of Biberach, etc.). Whole long passages, sometimes almost complete chapters, have been taken from these and other writers. The most concentrated use of quotation, mainly from the *Vitae Patrum* 3: *Verba seniorum*, occurs in the seven additional chapters discovered by Grabmann. It may well be that the compiler drew freely on Saint Albert the Great himself, on passages of texts or sermons which were still extant at the beginning of the fifteenth century but are now lost to us; and that this accounts for the association of his name with the work. Saint Albert died in 1280, so the dates of the other works drawn upon prove conclusively that he could not have been the author of the tract as it has come down to us.

But the fact that it has been proved to be full of quotations need not diminish the quality of the work in our eyes. It merely shows it in its true light: it was a compilation, for the writer's own use—as he expressly states at the beginning of the first chapter—of various passages connected by their subject matter. It is a reader's personal anthology strung together by individual comments of great spiritual vigour, of single-mindedness, and sometimes of beauty. Devotion and custom have sanctioned and welded into a whole the first sixteen chapters of the tract and that is why the translation has [excluded the seven chapters of Grabmann's discovery and] kept to the traditional form. There is much repetition even in some of the earlier chapters, which vary considerably in merit; but the monotony of the

last seven chapters is such as to make them useless for general reading. Nor is their approach, subject matter, and style in harmony with the rest of the work. The sources drawn upon for quotation are of a markedly different, and certainly not mystical, nature. It is as though some copyist of the tract had been concerned to add ascetical instructions to the mystical doctrine set forth in the earlier chapters.

In its traditional form the tract has been beloved for many centuries. It has been called a supplement to the *Imitation*, and, indeed, it shares its spirit. Félicien-François-Désiré-Joseph Cardinal Mercier thought very highly of the work, and said of it that it contained the whole substance of the spirituality of the Gospels. For English readers [the Blackfriars edition instead has 'English Catholics'.—Ed.] one of the most interesting testimonies in this connection is the introduction by Sir Kenelme Digby to his translation, or rather paraphrase of the tract, which dates from 1649.² Digby was pursued on account of his religion and had to flee the country. In his introduction, dedicated to his mother, he describes how he arrived at Calais, alone and deprived of all personal belongings. What he felt most keenly was the loss of his books: 'I was now reduced to have none other by me but a short discourse of Albert the Great concerning the perfection of a spiritual life; which at my setting forth from London, I had put into my pocket; invited thereto by the dignity of the subject, the excellency of the author, and the smallness of the bulk of it. I read it over with much delight; and judged it so profitable a work, that I desired to impress the contents of it as deep as I could in my memory: and indeed to convert the whole treatise into the very substance of my soul as hoping it may one day serve me for a rule to govern my poor devotions by; as far as my feeble eyes may be able to see by the light of so dazzling a sun.'

Some further words from Sir Kenelme Digby will also serve as an apology for a translator, and we should like to make them our own: 'I confess the work is much impaired and enfeebled in its change of habit. For to express the author's sense with full weight, requireth alike knowledge as he had, of the matter he writeth of. And this is not to be acquired by human industry, or dint of wit: but is an effect of the unction of the Holy Ghost. . . . And in this, Mystical Divinity differeth from all other sciences, that the right understanding of it, dependeth on the precedent faithful practising it. To converse familiarly with the kingdom of God that is within us, requireth a total abstraction from the hindring objects that are without us. And the various course in the world, that I have run myself out of breath in, hath afforded me little means for solid recollection. Therefore it cannot be expected that I should otherwise comprehend this holy Bishop's notions and express them in my language; than as men use to frame apprehensions upon hearsay of countries they were never in; and afterwards deliver them to others. They who have been there will soon perceive great mistakes in the other's discourses and descriptions.'

ELISABETH STOPP, TOSD

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OF CLEAVING TO GOD

1

OF CLEAVING TO GOD WITH A NAKED MIND AND HEART,
OR OF THE FINAL AND HIGHEST PERFECTION TO WHICH
MAN MAY ATTAIN IN THIS LIFE

WHILE WE are tarrying on this earth as wayfarers and exiles, we find it hard to describe the state of the soul's complete detachment from all earthly things. Nevertheless, I have felt moved to write down for my own use a few last thoughts concerning this matter. We enter upon such a state with the help of our Lord God alone when we readily, firmly, and nakedly cleave to Him; and the charity which thus unites the soul to God is the end and aim of Christian perfection.

For the sake of his salvation every man must persevere in this union of charity, which consists in observing precepts and in conforming to the divine will. For the keeping of God's laws forbids all that is contrary to the essence and habit of charity, and consequently, all mortal sin.

Religious are bound to evangelical perfection and to those rules which are voluntary and of counsel; and by this means they more speedily reach their final goal, which is God. By observing their rule they are guarded from matters which might hinder them in the act or the fullness of charity, and which might keep them from their renunciation of all things, whether of body or of mind, that follows once profession has been made and accepted.

Now because the Lord God is a Spirit, as is written in Saint John 4, ‘and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth,’³ we must adore Him by simple knowledge and by love, in our heart and understanding stripped of all sense impressions.

Thus, too, it is written in Saint Matthew 6: ‘When thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber’⁴ (that is, into your own innermost heart), ‘and having shut the door upon thyself’ (that is, the door of your senses), enter in with a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned, and so ‘pray to thy Father,’ in spirit and in truth, ‘in secret.’

A man can best do this when he turns away from all other affairs and thoughts, and casting them off, withdraws wholly into himself. When he has shut out and forgotten all creatures he dwells with Christ in stillness, he lays open the desires of his heart to his Lord God in a spirit of perfect trust; and summoning up the whole bent and power of his love, he pours himself into God with all the strength of his inmost soul, is absorbed in His being, is warmed and kindled by Him, and melts in His embrace.

2

HOW A MAN, SPURNING ALL ELSE, MAY CLING TO CHRIST
ALONE AND REACH OUT TOWARDS HIM

NOW IF any man wants to fulfil his desire to reach and enter upon such a state, let him shut his eyes and bar the door of his senses. Let him avoid every occasion that might in any way entangle or disturb him, make him anxious or careful. Let him rise above earthly things and learn to see them as unimportant, harmful, and pernicious. Let him withdraw wholly into himself and fix his gaze upon the image of his wounded Saviour, Jesus Christ. Let him strive to find God through God Himself; that is, to pass by the Manhood into the Godhead, by the wounds of His humanity into the depths of His divinity. This must be his one intent and aim. There let him commit his cares one and all, and without question, promptly and trustfully to God's ever watchful providence, according to Saint Peter's words, 'casting all your care upon Him'⁵ for He can do all things. And again: 'In nothing be anxious,'⁶ and further: 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall nourish thee.'⁷ And again: 'It is good for me to hold me fast by God'⁸ and 'I have set God always before me.'⁹ And the spouse says in the Canticle: 'I found Him Whom my soul loveth,'¹⁰ also: 'All good things together came to me with her.'¹¹

This is the heavenly hidden treasure, the pearl of great price for which a man sells all his possessions. This is what he must seek with fortitude of spirit, with humble faith, with ardent purpose, in silence and stillness. And he must not

regard the loss of the body's case, of his renown, or of his honour.

For what shall it profit a religious if he gain the whole world and his soul suffers harm? And what profit is his state of life, the holiness of his profession, his habit of perfection, his tonsure, and his outer bearing, without a life lived in a spirit of humility and truth, where Christ dwells by faith in a heart rooted and founded in charity? This is the meaning of Saint Luke's word: 'The kingdom of God is within you'¹²—Christ Jesus is the kingdom.

3

IN WHAT THE PERFECT CONFORMITY OF MAN WITH GOD
CONSISTS IN THIS LIFE

THE MORE the mind is absorbed in what is beneath it and merely human, the further will its hidden ardour stray from what is above it and divine; and the more fervently we withdraw our memory, our heart, and our understanding from all that is below, the more perfect will our prayer be and the purer our contemplation. Two intentions which are as different from one another as light is from darkness cannot both be equally perfect. Now he who cleaves to God dwells in the light; but he who cleaves to the world walks in darkness. Man's highest perfection in this life is such close union with God that he may be gathered into the Lord God with his whole soul and with all his power and strength, becoming, as it were, one spirit with Him, remembering nothing except God, neither relishing nor understanding anything that is not God. And then all his affections will be welded together in the joy of love, and he will find sweet rest in the sole delight of God, their Maker.

The image of God is found in the soul in these three powers; namely, the understanding, the memory, and the will. As long as these are not wholly stamped with God's image, the soul is not like Him in form, as it was in the first instant of its creation.

For God is the form of the soul and He must be stamped upon it as the wax is stamped with the seal, and the sign is imprinted upon the seal. But this does not fully come about unless the understanding is enlightened, according to its

capacity, by the knowledge of God, Who is fullness of truth, and unless the will is wholly fixed upon the love of the highest good, and the memory wholly absorbed in contemplating and rejoicing in the thought of eternal bliss, finding there its sweet and glad repose. And as the glory of beatitude in heaven is nothing but the full development of these three powers, we may say that perfection in this life is nothing but the beginning of their complete unfolding.

4

THAT A MAN'S WORK SHOULD BE IN THE INTELLECTUAL
PART OF HIS SOUL ONLY, AND NOT IN HIS SENSES

BLESSED IS the man who by turning from the images and impressions of earth can enter into God by entering into his own heart. Happy is he who can raise his mind above the welter of his imagination till at last all be blotted out, and by a bare, simple, and pure act of faith and love, he can gaze intently upon simplicity itself, which is God. Cast out of your mind the impressions, images, and forms of all things which are not God; for once you have stripped your understanding, your heart, and your will, your prayer will simply be looking upon God within you.

For this is the end of all spiritual exercises: to draw near to God within your own self and to rest in Him by means of a faith utterly purified and without impressions of external things, by a will wholly faithful, without other ties.

Prayer is not the work of the flesh or of the senses, but a man prays by what he is, and his understanding and will make him what he is. As long, then, as he wastes his time with what he can grasp by his imagination, and as long as he clings to the way of the senses, he will never rise above the limits and changes of his animal nature; that is to say, of that part of his nature which he shares with animals. This part of his nature knows and feels by impressions and by images, and not otherwise, because it has no share in the higher powers of the soul. But in his understanding, his will, and his power of free choice, man is created in the image and likeness of God; and by these he should be immediately, purely, and

barely united to God. He should be utterly filled with God and dwell immovably in Him.

The devil strives with might and main to hinder this exercise which is a kind of prelude or beginning of eternal life, and the devil envies man this heritage. He is always trying to turn man's mind away from his Lord God, now by one temptation or passion, now by another. At one time he fills him with unnecessary care and indiscreet anxiety; at another he casts him among crowds and makes him spend himself in dissolute conversation and senseless curiosity. Then again he beguiles him by the study of subtle books, by irrelevant talk, by rumours and news; or he assails him with hardships and besets him with hostilities.

Although such occasions only seem to entail slight sin, or no sin at all, they nevertheless greatly hinder this holy exercise and work. So they are to be rejected forthwith, even if they are considered useful and necessary, and whether they concern great matters or small. We must resist them and detach our senses from them.

Most important of all, we must receive what we hear, see, do, and say without allowing a deep impression and image to sink into the mind and absorb it. The mind must beware of forming and fostering such impressions by clinging to the memories of the past, to the images of what is to come, and to the thought of what is now happening. For when the memory and the understanding are free of such thoughts, man is not hindered in prayer, meditation, and the Divine Office, nor in any other spiritual exercise or work; nor will he be disturbed again.

And thus commit your whole self in all things, down to the details of your life, readily and trustfully to the unfailing and most sure providence of God. Do it in silence and in peace, and He will fight for you. He will more truly, more

sweetly set you free and console you, than if you were to dream of this very freedom at all hours of the night and day; and than if your own vain, vague, and compulsive thoughts were to toss and turn your mind stupidly here and there and in all directions. Your mind and body will not grow weary, you will not lose time, your powers will not be frittered away in pointless and irrational activity.

Accept everything that happens to you, whatever its cause, in silence, in stillness and with an even mind, as coming to you from the Father's hand and from His divine providence.

Strip yourself, then, of the impressions of all earthly things, as your state of life and profession demand; and then you can cling in utter sincerity to God, to Whom you have so often and wholly vowed yourself. Let nothing remain that could come between your mind and Him, so that you may pass pure and unhindered through the wounds of His humanity into the light of His Godhead.

5

OF PURITY OF HEART, WHICH IS TO BE SOUGHT ABOVE
ALL ELSE

DO YOU want to travel by a straight and sure road to your journey's blissful end, to your true home, to grace and glory? Then strive for constant cleanness of heart, purity of mind, and stillness of the senses: gather up the affections of your heart and fasten them upon your Lord God on high. Withdraw, too, as far as you find it in you, from your familiar friends and from all men, and from all business that might hinder you in your purpose. Seek and seize the opportunity, wherever and whenever you can find the place, the time, and the means of embracing quietness and contemplation. Lay hold of the secrets of silence, steer clear of the shipwreck of this present age, and flee the clamorous strife of the world.

Always put purity, cleanness, and stillness of heart first, so that you can at all times return upon yourself, with your senses hushed and the door of your heart guarded, as far as this is possible, from the impressions of the senses and the images of earthly things.

For purity of heart may be called the highest spiritual aim of every true religious; it is the final end of his life of the spirit and the reward of all his labours.

Free your heart, your feelings, and affections from whatever might hamper their liberty, and do it unflaggingly, disentangling yourself from everything in the world that might fetter and ensnare your soul.

Gather up all the various bents of your heart and the affections of your spirit into one, true, simple, and most

excellent good; withdraw into yourself in some close retreat, clinging always in your mind to the things of God. When earthly frailties are left behind you will know deep within you that your heart is for ever changed into Jesus Christ on high.

Begin to cleanse and purify yourself of earthly images, to simplify and still your heart and mind faithfully in the Lord God. Then you will draw and taste the fountain of divine pleasure in your whole inner life, and by your good will you will be united with God in your understanding. As devotion is itself a teacher, this simple activity will be all you need for all your studies, for reading the holy Scriptures, for loving God and your neighbour.

Your greatest care, aim, and endeavour should be to simplify your heart. This will lead you away from all the images of earth, you will be firmly and peacefully rooted in God within you, as if your mind already dwelt in the Now of eternity; that is, in the Now of the Godhead. You will abandon self by loving Jesus Christ with a pure heart, a quiet conscience, and faith unfeigned; you will commit yourself wholly and utterly to God in all sorrow and in whatever may befall you, always and patiently loving to obey His will and His good pleasure.

If you would reach this state of mind you must often retreat into your own heart, and dwell in it, and free yourself from all things as far as you can. Always keep the eye of your mind pure and still, guard your understanding from the impressions and images of all that is below. Free the inner bent of your own will from earthly cares, and cleave to the highest and truest good, being grounded in it by fervent love. Ever raise your memory to what is above and keep your thoughts unshakably fixed upon this same highest and truest good, the only uncreated essence. Thus will your whole soul with all its powers and strength be recollected in God and

become one spirit with Him. You will find that this is the way of highest perfection.¹³

This is the true union of spirit and love by which man is made obedient to every bidding of the heavenly and divine will, and by which he becomes by grace what God is by nature.

When, with God's help, a man overcomes his own will by casting away from himself all inordinate love or anxiety, and gains courage to trust God utterly in all his needs—when he has done that, he is so pleasing to God that divine grace abounds in him. By this grace he feels true charity and love kindled in his heart, he finds that all uncertainty and fear are driven out, and he hopes trustfully in God. Nothing is more blessed than to trust all things to Him Who cannot fail and Who cannot lack.

Why do you still try to stand in yourself and not in God? Cast yourself fearlessly into His arms and He will welcome you, make you whole, and lead you to salvation.

If you go on thinking over these matters in a spirit of true inquiry they will bring you nearer to a blissful life than all riches, joys, and honours; they will help you more than all the wisdom and knowledge of the present age and of this deceitful and corruptible world and life. Firmly rooted in such knowledge you will stand above all the things of this world in the certainty of your spiritual way.

6

THAT THE DEVOUT MAN SHOULD CLEAVE TO GOD IN
BARENESS OF UNDERSTANDING AND WILL

THE MORE you strip yourself of earthly thoughts and of exterior, worldly, and sensible entanglements, the more your soul will regain its inner strength and power of knowing and tasting the things of heaven. Learn to stand above the images of the material world, for God finds surpassing delight in a mind which is thus purified. It is His joy to be with the sons of men who follow Him with a pure and simple mind held far above their tasks, distractions, and passions, men who are still and cleave to Him.

Do you often find your memory, imagination, and thought fastened upon worldly matters? Then, of course, fresh events, memories of the past and a multitude of present impressions, will ever weigh down your mind, for the Holy Spirit withdraws Himself from thoughts that are without understanding.

The lover of Jesus Christ must be so united in his understanding and by good will to the divine intent and mercy; and he must be so abstracted from all sense impressions and so void of all passions, that he does not notice whether he is being mocked, loved, or whether he is being attacked in any way. For good will perfects all things and is the greatest quality of all.

No harm will come of man's natural inclination towards evil as long as his will is good, his understanding fixed upon God and obedient to Him. It will not harm him even if he seems listless in doing good, or even if the interior man is dry

and heavy in the exercise of devotion. All he must do is to cleave to God in a spirit of faith and good will, dwelling wholly in the bare point of his soul.

A man will dwell in God once he sees that he himself is imperfection and nothingness, and knows that his only good is in his Creator. Let him abandon himself, his own power and strength, as well as every creature, and then, withholding nothing, plunge himself into his Creator. All he does is then directed solely to his Lord God, and he seeks and knows nothing whatever outside Him in Whom he finds all good and all the happiness of perfection.

Thus he is, as it were, transformed into God; he cannot think, understand, love, nor remember anything that is not God; he does not see other creatures or himself except only in God, he loves nothing except God alone, he does not even remember others or himself, except in God.

This real knowledge of truth always makes for a humble mind, judging itself, not others; but worldly wisdom, on the other hand, makes for a proud and vain mind, puffed up with emptiness.

This is the spiritual and fundamental doctrine which leads to the knowledge, the service, and the familiarity of God. If you really want to possess God you must strip your heart of all sensible love, not only of love of persons, but of all creatures; that you may go out towards your Lord God and Creator with simple wholeheartedness and with your entire self, freely, single-mindedly, without anxiety and care, and relying wholly on His providence in all things.

7

HOW THE HEART IS TO ACHIEVE RECOLLECTION

MOREOVER, AS it says in the book *De Spiritu et Anima*,¹⁴ chapter 21, 'to mount to God means to enter into oneself. Whoever enters within and penetrates his own depths, goes beyond himself and in truth mounts to God. Let us withdraw our heart from the distractions of this world, and summon it back to the joys of the inner life so that we may be worthy in some small measure to fix our abode in the light of divine contemplation. For this is the life and the peace of our soul: to be firmly settled in the love of God by our desire, and to be sweetly renewed by His consolation.'

The real reason why we are in many ways shut out from the experience and enjoyment of this inner life and can in no wise achieve a glimpse of it is because the distracted, careworn human mind does not enter into itself by remembering God. Man's understanding is so cluttered up with earthly images that he cannot find the way back into his own inner heart, nor counter his desires and enter into himself by longing for the inner delight of spiritual joy. Thus he is wholly ensnared by the things he can feel here and now, and is not able to withdraw either into himself or into the image of God.

It is fitting and needful for the mind to rise above itself and all creatures by denying itself whatever it possibly can, saying within itself, with a great love of humility and much faith: 'I can neither perceive nor imagine Him Whom I seek, love, yearn for, and desire in all and before all and above all; for He is beyond all that I can feel and understand. I cannot

reach Him with any of my senses, but He is wholly to be desired with all my desire; He is not above apprehension by symbols, but is most perfectly accessible to my secret, innermost love. I cannot understand His greatness, but I may love Him with all my heart, if my heart is pure, for He is lovable and enjoyable above all things, infinite in goodness and perfection.'

And then a dark mist shrouds the mind, it is raised higher into itself and enters in more deeply. This is the way that leads up to the everlasting mystery of the most holy Three in One, Unity in Trinity, to Jesus Christ; and the ascent is the more ardent the deeper is the longing for it and the closer it is to the heart. For experience of the things of the spirit is greater the more hidden and inward it is.

Do not grow weary, therefore, and never rest until you have, as it were, received a pledge and earnest-penny of this future plenty, have tasted it by experimental knowledge, and until you have reaped the first fruits of the joy of heavenly bliss. You shall not leave off running in His wake and in His odour until you see the God of gods in Sion.

Do not rest upon the spiritual journey of your union with God and your cleaving to Him, nor turn back until you have reached the fulfilment of your longing.

Consider the example of the mountaineer. If our spirit loses itself in desire for the things that are passing far below, it is soon caught in a maze of infinite distractions and crooked ways; the soul is divided from itself, dissipated and torn into as many pieces as there are objects of its desire. This leads to an unstable climb, a journey without an end and toil without repose.

But if heart and soul raise themselves by desire and love from what is beneath them and threatens to entangle them in many distractions; and if, forsaking these things, the soul

recollects itself within that one, unchanging, all-sufficing good, dedicating itself to the service of this good, and steadily cleaving there by the power of its will—then this soul will be the more recollected and strong the more its thoughts and desires soar to God. The soul will become accustomed to the highest good until at last it shares this immutability in all things, and reaches without fear of change to that true life which is the Lord God Himself, where the soul may rest for ever, without the succession or the vicissitude of earthly time, reposing in that innermost peace and secret mansion of the divinity, wholly gathered into Christ Jesus, Who is the way of those who come to Him, the truth and the life.

8

HOW THE SPIRITUAL MAN SHOULD TRUST HIMSELF TO GOD IN ALL THINGS

NOW IT is my firm conviction that this analysis will make you realize one thing clearly: the more you strip yourself of earthly images and of all worldly and created objects, and the closer your mind is united to God by good will, the nearer you will come to a state of innocence and perfection. What could be better, happier, and more joyful?

The most important thing is that you should keep your mind bare of impressions, images, and of all attachments, so that you are not anxious about the world, about your friends, about prosperity or adversity, about the present, the past, or what is to come. Not even your own sins should have power to trouble you. Think only how you may live with God at a point of bare thought which lies beyond this world, dwelling with Him in the same simplicity of pure apprehension as if your soul were already severed from your body and living in eternity. Thus your soul will not be involved in secular things, nor worry about the state of the world, nor about peace nor about war, nor about fair weather or foul, nor about anything whatever that is going on at the present time; but your soul being wholly conformed to God, will strive only after Him, wait upon Him, cleave to Him.

Begin a new life this very hour, severing yourself from your body and from all created things that exist now or are to come; and doing your utmost, fix the whole bent of your mind and fasten your spirit barely and immediately upon this uncreated light. May your spirit be so wholly delivered from

all sense impressions, from all bonds, and from the mists of uncertainty, that your body may be as controlled as an angel who is not hindered by the works of the flesh, or caught up in vain and empty thoughts.

Arm your spirit against all and every temptation, annoyance, insult, and persevere unshaken in God in all fortunes.

And when trouble comes, or bitterness, or confusion of mind, do not on that account rebel or grow faint-hearted, nor flee to vocal prayers nor to other consolations; but let your only intent be to recover your equanimity by your good will, so that you may cleave to God in your mind in spite of the body's inclination.

The spiritual man should be so united to God and should have and hold his will so conformed to the divine will, that he is no more engrossed by any creature than before it was ever created. He must live as if nothing existed except God alone and this his own soul. Thus he will always accept confidently and with an even mind from the hand of divine providence all things in general and in particular, ever bearing himself patiently, peacefully, and silently in the Lord.

Therefore the most important thing in the spiritual life is to empty the mind of all earthly images and attachments so as to be united to God in spirit and conformed to Him by good will.

When you have reached this state there will be nothing between you and God. This is apparent—for nothing from without will stand between you, as by the vow of voluntary poverty you have given up all belongings, even to the least; by the vow of chastity you have given up your body; and by obedience your will and your very soul. Nothing, therefore, is left that might stand between you and God.

Your profession itself, your state, and now your habit and tonsure and like things, show that you are a religious; but it remains to be seen whether you are a feigned religious or a true one. Remember, then, that you err gravely and sin against your Lord God and against justice, if your desires are other than God, and if your will and your love go out to creatures rather than to God, preferring what is created to the Creator.

THAT THE CONTEMPLATION OF GOD IS TO BE PREFERRED ABOVE ALL OTHER EXERCISES

WHATEVER EXISTS outside God is the work of His hands. Every creature, therefore, is limited in its possibility and being as well as in what it is and can do; it is made out of nothing and likewise surrounded by that which is in itself nothing and tends to nothing, by that which needs to be conserved and sustained from moment to moment in order to exist. If, then, there is anything in creatures, they hold it from God, receiving it as truly from God, the fountain and well-head of being, as of themselves they cannot suffice for their own needs or the needs of others; for compared with God's power they are as nothing is compared with that which is being itself, as the finite compared with the infinite.

Therefore let us employ our whole contemplation, life, and work in Him only, and about Him, and for Him, Who with one act of His will is able to create infinite new worlds, each of them infinitely more perfect than this which He has already created. There cannot be anything more profitable, perfect, and blissful in the mind or the heart than the contemplation of God Himself, and the fruition of our love in Him, the highest and truest good, from Whom, in Whom, and for Whom are all things. He is sufficient in an infinite degree to Himself and to all creatures, for He contains the perfection of all things within Himself in utter simplicity. There is nothing in Him which is not Himself. In Him is found the cause of all that is transitory. In Him is the unchanging origin of all that changes. In Him dwell the reasons of all that is

rational and irrational, and of all that happens in time. He contemplates all things, wholly and essentially fills all things, and by His essence, He is more intimately and more closely present to each thing than each thing is to itself. In Him all things are united, and in Him they live eternally.

Suppose that now a man's intellect clings more to the contemplation of creatures, be it through infirmity or lack of practice, a time may yet come when his mind and heart may learn this other excellent, true, and fruitful contemplation which is not beyond the reach of mortal man. And then in all his contemplations and meditations, whether they concern creatures or the Creator, love of this same Creator will well up freely, love of the one God, Three in One. The fire of divine love will burn, the fire of his own true life and of that of others, to merit the blessedness of eternal life.

In this may be seen the difference between the contemplation of faithful Catholics and of pagan philosophers; for the contemplation of philosophers is for the sake of the perfection of such contemplation in itself, and thus has its seat in the intellect, its end being intellectual knowledge.

But the contemplation of the saints, which is that of Catholics, is for the sake of love itself; that is, of God, Who is the object of contemplation: thus its seat is not ultimately in the intellect which works by means of knowledge, but it changes its seat to the will which works by means of love.

The saints have the love of God as the chief end of their contemplation: for it is indeed happier to know the Lord Jesus Christ and to hold Him spiritually by means of grace, than to be near Him physically or even essentially, without grace.

When the soul is withdrawn from all things and turned in upon itself, the eye of inner vision is opened and a ladder

is prepared by which the soul may ascend to the contemplation of God. And by this work the soul is kindled and longs for heavenly and divine treasures, looking upon as from afar and despising as nothing all that exists in time.

When we go towards God by the way of negation, we must first deny our conception of Him whatever can be grasped by our senses or figured by our imagination; secondly, all that may be fathomed by our understanding; and finally, we deny Him even the idea of being as it is found in creatures. This (according to Dionysius) is the surest way of reaching union with God during our earthly life.

This is the cloud which God is said to inhabit, which Moses entered, that he might reach the light inaccessible. In the same way we must be content to begin as we rightly should: 'That was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.'¹⁵ We must proceed by the usual order, from the labour of action to the stillness of contemplation, from the moral virtues to the theoretical and speculative virtues.

Finally, O my soul, what shall be your chief work above all others, in which you are ever to remain? Seek and love that one perfect good in which is all goodness; and this is enough. Unhappy is he who knows and possesses all things except this one. And if he knows all things and this one too, the more blessed is he, not on account of all the other things but only on account of this one. Wherefore Saint John says: 'And this is eternal life, that they might know Thee,'¹⁶ and the prophet: 'When I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.'¹⁷

10

THAT ACTUAL AND SENSIBLE DEVOTION IS NOT TO BE SO
MUCH REGARDED AS A CLEAVING TO GOD WITH ONE'S
WILL

DO NOT be anxious for actual devotion, or sensible sweetness, or tears, but let your only care be to remain united to God in your soul by good will. For God delights above all in a mind free of sense impressions; that is, free of the images and likenesses of created things.

It befits the monk to be remote from all creatures, so that his whole bare intent is upon God, dwelling upon Him and cleaving to Him. Deny yourself, therefore, so that you may nakedly follow Christ, your Lord and God, Who is in truth poor, obedient, and chaste, Who bore humiliation and suffering, in Whose life and death many were scandalized, as is apparent in the Gospels.

The soul which is detached from the body does not notice what is being done to the body which it has left behind—whether it is being burnt or hanged or reviled; nor is it afflicted by the insults which are heaped upon its body, but its whole attention is fixed upon the Now of eternity and on the One Thing which the Lord in the Gospel says is necessary. This should also be your attitude to your body, as though you were already parted from it. Think always upon the eternal life of your soul in God, carefully directing your thoughts upon that One Thing of which Christ said: 'But one thing is needful.'¹⁸ If you do this, you will find in yourself a wonderful increase in grace and swift progress in reaching bareness of mind and simplicity of heart.

Indeed, this One Thing is very near to you when you rid yourself of all sense impressions and of all other entanglements in created objects. You will soon experience the truth of this when you wait upon God with a bare and intent mind, and cleave to Him: and thus you will remain unconquered, whatever may be done to you, like the holy martyrs, Fathers and elect, and all the blessed. They despised all things, and only thought upon the safety of their souls and of eternity in God; thus armed within and united to God by good will, they spurned all earthly things as though their soul were already severed from their body.

Learn from them how marvellous is the power of a right will fixed on God. It is as though through the impression which a soul receives from God, and through its virtual and spiritual separation from the flesh, the soul looks on the outer man as from a far distance, as if not belonging there; and so it scorns all suffering that is brought to bear on itself or on the flesh as if it were being inflicted on some other creature, not a man. 'But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.'¹⁹

Never, therefore, foster in your heart, which lies open to God, thoughts or imaginations which you would blush to hear of or notice in other men; and this because your chief reverence should be for God. For it is right to fix your thoughts and meditations solely upon God: that the whole weight of your mind dwells upon Him as though there were nothing in the world but God, and that in this embrace you may enjoy the perfect beginning of future blessedness.

11

IN WHAT MANNER WE ARE TO RESIST TEMPTATIONS AND
BEAR TRIALS

NO ONE who comes to God with a true and upright heart escapes being tried by various vexations and temptations. Now in all temptations mark this: that even though you feel them you are not consenting to them, but bearing them with humility, patience, and long-suffering. Even if these temptations are blasphemous and most vile, cling firmly to this: you can do nothing better than simply to neglect and utterly ignore imaginings of that kind. Even if they take the form of the most foul, wicked, and horrible blasphemies, take no notice of them, neglect them as though they were not there, and do not impute them to yourself, nor let your conscience be troubled on their account. The enemy will most certainly take flight if you treat him and his attempts in this way. For he is very proud and cannot endure being scorned and neglected.

The best remedy is to take no more notice of all such temptations than if they were a swarm of flies buzzing about in front of your eyes against your will.

The servant of Jesus Christ must not lightly be forced to lose sight of his Master by falling into indignation, murmuring, and complaint about one single irritating fly; that is, a slight temptation, suspicion, sadness or detraction, or any other such small adversity; which may be put to flight by your hands lifted up to God in a loving act of good will.

For by good will man commits himself to God's care and ownership, and has the holy angels to guard and protect him.

By good will every temptation may be overcome, as flies are brushed away by a movement of the hand. For there shall be 'peace to men of good will.'²⁰

We cannot offer God anything more valuable than good will, for such a will is the source of all goodness in a soul and the mother of all virtues; and he who is starting out upon this way of good will, most certainly has all that he needs for living a good life.

If you will what is good and have not the power to see it through, God will take into account your good intention and not your failure.

For by an eternal decree God has established with immutable firmness that merit should reside in the will: in bliss or in torment, reward or punishment is meted out according to the disposition of the will. Love is nothing but a great-hearted will to serve God, and the most fervent desire to enjoy Him.

Finally, it is not sin to be tempted, but it is an occasion for exercising virtue, so that temptation may be to a man's great good, according to the words: 'Is there not a warfare to man upon earth?'²¹

12

OF THE LOVE OF GOD AND ITS GREAT POWER

ALL THAT has been said hitherto, and indeed all that is necessary for salvation, is best performed, most expeditiously and safely by means of love, by which the lack of all things needful for salvation may be supplied; for love has all good things in abundance and is not lacking in the highest good.

It is love only that turns us to God, transforms us into God, by which we cleave to God and are united to Him, so that we become one spirit with Him; and by love only do we enter into bliss, by grace from and through Him in this life and by glory in the next.

Love cannot find rest except in the beloved, when it enters upon full and peaceful possession of its treasure.

For this love, which is charity, is the way by which God comes down to man, and by which man ascends to God: God cannot dwell where there is no love. If, therefore, we have love, we have God, for 'God is love.'²²

Nothing has a keener edge than love, nothing is more subtle, nothing pierces more deeply; it finds no rest until it has according to its capacity penetrated and understood the whole height and depth of the beloved's goodness; and if it can see a way, it wants to be made one with the beloved, so as to become the very same thing as the beloved. And therefore it suffers nothing to come between itself and what it loves—that is, God Himself; but it tends so vehemently towards God that it is in a perpetual unrest until it has

traversed all that separates it from God and until it comes to His very heart.

For love has a unitive and transforming power that changes the lover into what he loves, and the beloved into the lover, as nearly as may be. The lover lives in his beloved first of all by means of the apprehensive powers of his soul; that is, his understanding, when he most sweetly and delightfully dwells upon the image of his beloved; remembering all that pertains to his beloved, not superficially, but with deep insight searching into the secrets of his heart.

Secondly, the beloved is said to be in the lover by means of the desiring and affective powers; that is, by his will which is most deeply rooted in the delight and joy of a love of complaisance: and conversely, the lover is in the beloved by his whole desire, by willing and not willing what he wills or does not will, by rejoicing and grieving for the same causes, and by exact conformity with him in all things. For love draws the lover out of himself and makes him dwell in the beloved and settles him intimately there—‘for love is strong as death.’²³ Thus the soul is more truly where it loves than where it lives, for it dwells in the beloved as far as its own nature goes, its understanding and will; but it dwells in the body only in its form, and in this it is not above the animal creation.

There is no other way, then, by which we may be drawn away from outward and sensible things into ourselves and so into the divine secrets of Jesus Christ, than by the love of Christ, than by the desire of Christ’s sweetness, so that we may feel, perceive, and taste the nearness of Christ’s divinity. For only the power of love can raise the soul from earth and bring it to the hidden courts of the highest heavens.

Nor can any one reach the highest bliss unless he be borne there on the wings of desire and love. For this love is

the life of the soul, its wedding garment and its perfection: in which the whole law and the prophets and the teaching of our Lord are contained. The Apostle says to the Romans: 'Therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.'²⁴ And he says to Timothy: 'Now the end of the commandment is charity.'²⁵

13

OF THE NATURE AND UTILITY OF PRAYER, AND HOW THE
HEART IS TO ACHIEVE RECOLLECTION

OF OURSELVES we are not able to do any good and we have nothing of our own before God (from Whom alone flows all goodness) which is not already His, except this one thing in which He deigned to instruct us by His blessed word and example. Let us, then, have recourse to the one thing we can do: in all that may happen to us, let us flee to prayer and prostrate ourselves with the utmost humility, like slaves, like needy poor men, beggars, cripples, helpless bondmen, subjects, and children; and full of grief, fear, and love, yet with a recollected and composed mind, full of true and selfless affection and of shame, yet with vehement desire and ardour, groaning in our hearts in all simplicity and sincerity, let us entreat God and put before Him in utter confidence the dangers which beset us. Let us beseech His help in faithfully abandoning and offering ourselves wholly, securely, and exclusively into His hands, without reserving anything. For we are His in all that we have and all that we are. And then will be fulfilled in us the saying of the blessed Patriarch Isaac, speaking of this same kind of prayer: "Then we shall be one in God, and He alone will be all in all to us, when the perfect love with which He first loved us will have passed into our hearts too. And this will come about when all our love, all our desire, all our intent, all our endeavour, all that we shall think, all that we shall behold, all our words and hopes shall be God; and when the unity which is between the Father and the Son, and between the Son and the Father shall be found also in our

heart and soul. Since He loves us with a sincere, pure, and everlasting love, may we too be joined to Him in an eternal and inseparable love; and be so closely linked to Him that whatever we shall hope for, whatever we shall understand, whatever we shall speak of and pray for may be God.

‘As the goal of all his efforts and desires a spiritual man should set before him the possession, even in this corruptible body, of an image of future glory, and a foretaste in this world of that still distant heavenly life and glory. This, I say, is the end of all perfection—that our soul may be weaned of all the desires of the flesh, and may know daily spiritual growth, until all its conversation, the whole will of its heart may become one unbroken prayer.’

When our soul, rid of all earthly dross, pants for God, in Whom alone should be centred the desire of a spiritual man (to whom the briefest separation from the highest good will seem to be a most cruel death and an awful calamity), provided he is first rooted in peace, and free from the yoke of carnal passions, and he clings to the highest good with a most firm purpose, then the word of the Apostle will be fulfilled in him: ‘Pray without ceasing,’²⁶ and ‘. . . that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.’²⁷ For where the working of the mind is absorbed (if I may say so) with the contemplation of such purity, and is transformed from an earthly to a spiritual or even angelical nature, then whatever the soul receives into itself, whatever it undertakes, whatever it does, will turn into the most pure and most sincere prayer.

And in the end, if you will steadfastly continue along the way that I have traced for you from the beginning of this work, it will be as easy and as ready for you to contemplate God and rejoice in Him in the inner retreat of your recollected heart, as it is for you to live a purely natural life.

14

THAT IN ALL JUDGEMENTS WE OUGHT TO RESORT TO THE
WITNESS OF OUR CONSCIENCE

IT IS of no small avail in attaining spiritual perfection, purity, and peace, to enter silently into the secret tribunal of our heart concerning everything that is said or thought of us, or done about us. Remote from all else and wholly recollected within ourselves, let us come face to face with ourselves in order to find out the truth. There we shall discover and realize that the praise and honour of men do not profit us, but indeed harm us greatly if at the same time the truth of our inner heart accuses us of guilt.

And as it is useless for a man to be praised from without while his conscience accuses him from within, so, too, it cannot harm a man to be despised, reviled, and persecuted while his life is really innocent, irreprehensible and without guile: indeed, he then has reason to rejoice greatly in the Lord, with patience, silence, and tranquillity, for adversity can do no harm where sin does not reign. And as no evil goes unpunished, so no good goes unrewarded. Let us beware of expecting or of receiving our reward from men, but look only to the Lord God, Who will reward us, not now, but in the future, not in time, which passes, but in eternity.

It is clear, then, that the best and noblest thing we can do is to enter into our own secret counsel in all tribulation and accident, and there to call upon the Lord Jesus Christ, our helper in temptation and adversity; and humbled by confession of our sins, to enter within and praise God the Father Who chides and consoles us, then to receive with an

even mind all things prosperous or adverse, whether they befall ourselves or others, and with ready and confident resignation of ourselves, receive them as coming from the hands of His infallible providence and disposition.

This will lead to the remission of our sins, it will deliver us from bitterness and give us sweetness and confidence; grace and mercy will be infused into us, we shall be drawn into familiarity with God and confirmed in it; His consolation will abound in us, and we shall cleave to Him firmly and be united to Him.

But do not let us imitate those who by hypocrisy, and like the Pharisees, want to appear better and other than they really are, trying to make a more favourable impression on men than they know in their hearts to be justified: for it is very foolish to strive after and expect human praise and glory, whether coming from oneself or from others, when our hearts are full of untoward passion and grave sins. And most certainly he who runs after such empty vanities will not achieve the good things we have spoken of, and will be overcome by shame.

Always, therefore, have your wickedness before your eyes, and your inability to do good, and know yourself aright so that you may learn humility; and considering your most grave sins and the evil that is in you, do not shrink from being judged by all men as most unworthy, vile, and abject. Comparing yourself with others, see yourself as dross amongst gold, chaff amongst grain, a wolf amongst sheep, as Satan amongst the sons of God.

Do not wish to be revered by others, preferred to others; fly with all your heart and mind from the infection of this pestilence, from the vanity and showiness of a great reputation, lest, according to the prophet, 'the sinner be praised in the desires of his own soul,'²⁸ and Isaiah, 'they that

call thee blessed, the same deceive thee, and destroy the way of thy steps.’²⁹ And the Lord says in Saint Luke: ‘Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!’³⁰

15

HOW CONTEMPT OF SELF MAY BE CAUSED IN A MAN, AND
HOW PROFITABLE IT IS

THE MORE convinced a man is of his own vileness, the further and the more clearly he can see into the majesty of God; and the meaner a man appears in his own eyes because of his insight into God, truth, and justice, the more precious he is in God's sight.

Therefore let us most earnestly and wholeheartedly strive to see our abject vileness and to hold ourselves unworthy of receiving any benefit; may we seek to please God only and to be considered most vile and worthless by others. Moreover, may we not be moved by tribulation, affliction, and insults, nor be troubled by those who inflict such things upon us, nor entertain animosity and resentment towards them; but preserve an even mind, believing that we deserve all these insults and vile attacks, this scourging, and the loneliness of abandonment.

For indeed, he who is truly penitent and mourns his sins before God, has a horror of being honoured and loved by all. He is content to be hated, loathed, and despised to the end, so that he may learn true humility and may cleave to God with a pure heart and a sincere will.

In order to love the Lord God alone and to abhor oneself above all things and to long to be reviled by all, you do not need any outward bodily labour or physical strength, but rather solitude, inner labour of the heart, and tranquillity of mind: so that your soul is lifted up by this inner labour and

the affections of your secret mind; and casting off all earthly ties, you are raised to heavenly and divine conversation.

For by living in this way we change ourselves into God. To attain this state we must have a sincere wish not to pass judgement, not to condemn or despise our neighbour, while we esteem ourselves deserving of the censure of all men, worthy to be accounted as the scum of the earth; we must do this rather than long for abundant delight, or for honour and dignity amongst men, or for the enjoyment of any bodily ease or transitory comfort. Nor should we long for any of the consolations of our present state of mortality and of our physical existence, but as our only comfort may we unceasingly mourn, bewail, and lament our offences, transgressions, and sins. May we increase in the contempt and annihilation of ourselves, resigning ourselves to the daily falling away of our esteem amongst others, and to the daily lessening of our esteem in our own eyes, vile creatures that we are. May we be pleasing to God alone, and cleave to Him so closely that we may want to be settled in our Lord Jesus Christ alone and in nothing else, having no other object in our heart; may we have no care and anxiety but for Him alone by Whose power and providence all things are governed and all things subsist.

Let it not be your aim to delight in consolations, but to mourn with all your heart.

And if you cannot mourn, then mourn your inability to mourn. If you can mourn, then let your chief lament be that you caused your own sorrow by your grievous offences and infinitely malicious sins. Just as a condemned prisoner does not care what is going on in the world outside, so, too, a man who laments his sins and is truly remorseful, pays no attention to consolations, or anger, or glory, or indignation, or to anything of that kind. And as law-abiding citizens and

condemned criminals live in different kinds of houses, so, too, the situation and rule of life of those who mourn and are obliged to repentance by their sins ought to be different and far other than if they were innocent and under no such obligation. Otherwise there would be no distinction between the guilty and the innocent, between reward and punishment in satisfaction for sins which incurred such grave and criminal guilt. Iniquity would then have more freedom than innocence.

We must abandon all that is not Christ, despise, repudiate, and flee all else, so that with solid faith we may lay a sound foundation of repentance and mourning. We must love Jesus Christ in truth, and sigh after Him, bearing Him in our hearts and in our bodies; have a true grief for our sins and offences, be filled with a real desire to seek for the kingdom that is to come, be mindful in faith of the torments which the last judgement may bring. We must be ever mindful and fearful of our end, though in a spirit of firm, unshaken faith. If these are our dispositions we shall have no knowledge, care, or anxiety for anything else whatever. He who is running towards God and hastening to reach a blessed state of impassibility, will count as lost and utterly wasted any day on which he does not suffer some insult or injury.

As there is no doubt that you must die, learn to look upon yourself as one already dead. Let this be the test whether any thought, word, or deed of yours is from God: does it increase your humility and confirm you in greater recollection within yourself and in God? If it be otherwise, then beware lest what you are doing is against God's will and unprofitable to yourself.

16

HOW THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD EXTENDS TO ALL THINGS

WOULD YOU draw near to our Lord and God with freedom and peace of mind? And would you travel swiftly and safely? Would you be joined and united to Him, and firmly cleave to Him as we have already described? Be of an even mind in prosperity or adversity, in life and in death? Then do not hesitate to commit all things trustfully and most confidently to God's infallible providence.

Is it not most fitting that we should utterly commit ourselves into His hands? For God alone gives all things their being, potentiality, and act; all creatures are full of Him and of His power; they act and think in Him, He determines their way of life and their place in the whole, He allots them their size and importance. Moreover, as the work of art presupposes nature, so nature presupposes the work of God Who creates and conserves, governs and administers His creation. For He alone has infinite power, justice, truth, and charity, is eternally changeless and immense.

For nothing can subsist by its own power nor act except by the power of God Himself Who is the prime mover, the first principle, the cause of all action and Who Himself acts in every agent.

For if we consider the ordered harmony of the universe, it is God Who provides immediately for everything down to the smallest detail. Nothing, from the greatest down to the least, escapes the eternal providence of God, nor swerves from its course, whether in nature or in the acts of the will, or

in events that appear casual and fortuitous, or have been ordained by Him.

But God cannot do anything that falls outside the scope of His providence, nor can He do anything that is not governed by His own laws. So divine providence extends to every single thing, even to man's hidden thoughts.

This is confirmed in various passages in the Scriptures: in 1 Saint Peter 5 it is written: 'Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you';³¹ the prophet says: 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee';³² Sirach 2: 'Look at the generations of old, and see: who did ever put his trust in the Lord, and was ashamed? Or who did abide in His fear, and was forsaken?'³³ And the Lord saith: 'Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? . . .'³⁴

All that you can hope for from God, however great it may be, you shall doubtless receive, according to the words in Deuteronomy: 'Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours.'³⁵ For the measure of a man's receiving shall be the largeness of his heart in desiring, and his possession shall reach as far as he puts forward the foot of his confidence. Whence Saint Bernard says: 'God, the maker of all things, is so abounding in mercy that we shall not fail to receive from Him whatever may be the grace we beg.' Whence Saint Mark 11: 'What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.'³⁶

The stronger and the more persistent our confidence, and the more vehemently, with all reverence and humility, it rises towards God, the more surely, abundantly, and swiftly will our hope be accomplished and fulfilled.

But if a soul, on account of the number and the gravity of its sins, shrinks faint-heartedly from raising its confidence to God, let it remember that with God all things are possible;

that whatever He wills must necessarily come to pass, and that whatever He does not will cannot possibly happen; and that it is just as easy for Him to forgive and wipe out a multitude of sins, however grave, as it is to wipe out one single sin. For we cannot of ourselves as much as do or even think of any good thing, as of ourselves; but this comes from God.

It is, however, other things being equal, much more dangerous for us to be loaded with many sins than with one only; for no evil goes unpunished and every mortal sin deserves infinite punishment; for this is the firm decree of God's justice, as every such sin is an outrage against God Who deserves infinite reverence, respect, and honour.

Moreover, according to the Apostle, 'the Lord knoweth them that are His,'³⁷ and it is impossible for any of these to perish by the storm and onslaught of error, scandal, schism, persecution, discord, heresies, tribulation, adversities, or any temptation whatever. For God has foreseen from all eternity and unchangeably the number of his elect and the extent of their merits; so that for them all things, good and bad, 'work together for good,'³⁸ with only this difference, perhaps, that their light is the brighter and more glorious for their adversity.

Let us therefore confidently and readily commit all things to divine providence by Whose permission evil of whatever kind befalls us. It is good and meant for our good that God allows this; evil would not befall unless God permitted it, nor will it be otherwise or more terrible than He has laid down, for He knows how to change evil into good, and He has the power and the will thus to dispose of things.

For as all good proceeds from Him, so by His permission all evil is turned into good; so that in this His power and wisdom may appear more surely, His clemency in Christ the

Redeemer, His mercy and justice, the power of grace and the weakness of nature, and the beauty of the universe which is founded on the harmony of opposites. So, too, the reward of the good is made more apparent, and also the malice and punishment of the wicked. The conversion of a sinner, his contrition, confession, and penance show forth the meekness of God, His mercy and love, His praise and goodness.

Yet evil does not always turn to the good of those who are guilty; but it is usually the gravest danger and the worst evil, for it deprives the soul of grace and glory, chastises it even in this world and for ever in the next. From which end Jesus Christ of His mercy preserve us. Amen.³⁹

NOTES

[Throughout this new edition and as appropriate, roman numerals have been replaced with arabic numerals.—Ed.]

¹ *De adhaerendo Deo Johannis Castellensis monachi: Cum prooemio et indice fontium cura et studio Dom Jacobi Huijben, OSB* (Bresseo di Teolo, PD: Badia di Praglia, 1926). (= Scripta monastica a monachis Benedictinis abbatiae Prataleensis edita, no. 5 (lat.), 1926; Ser. ascetico-mystica, no. 4, 1926). Grabmann reports his discovery in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Tübingen 1920: 'Der Benediktinermystiker Johannes von Kastl, der Verfasser des Büchleins *De adhaerendo Deo*.' Convincing arguments against John of Castel's authorship of this tract are put forward by Emmerich Raitz von Frentz, SJ, in *Scholastik* 2, 1927. He considers that only the seven additional chapters, which are of inferior quality, are by Castel. The other chapters are not by Saint Albert, but are possibly the compilation of an unknown monk of the Rhineland region.

² *A Treatise of Adhering to God: Written by Albert the Great, Bishop of Ratisbon. Put into English by Sir Kenelme Digby, Kt. Also a Conference with a Lady about Choyce of Religion* (London: Henry Herringman–Blue-Anchor New-Exchange, 1654).

³ Saint John 4:24.

⁴ Saint Matthew 6:6.

⁵ 1 Saint Peter 5:7.

⁶ Philippians 4:6, Revised Version (RV).

⁷ Psalm 55:23, Prayer Book Version (PBV).

⁸ Psalm 73:27, PBV.

⁹ Psalm 16:9, PBV.

¹⁰ Song of Songs 3:4.

¹¹ Wisdom 7:11.

¹² Saint Luke 17:21.

¹³ Up to this point chap. 5 has been drawn from Blessed Henry Suso, OP, *A Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1910), 122–24 (2.22. ‘How one should live an interior and godly life’), <https://tinyurl.com/bdz6x5jd>, who in turn based himself on Meister Eckhart [von Hochheim, OP,] and on Cassian. (Translator’s note.)

¹⁴ Full text in Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 40.779–832.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:46.

¹⁶ Saint John 17:3.

¹⁷ Psalm 17:16, PBV.

¹⁸ Saint Luke 10:42.

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 6:17.

²⁰ Saint Luke 2:14, Vulgate (Vulg.).

²¹ Job 7:1, RV.

²² 1 Saint John 4:8.

²³ Song of Songs 8:6.

²⁴ Romans 13:10.

²⁵ 1 Timothy 1:5.

²⁶ 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

²⁷ 1 Timothy 2:8.

²⁸ Psalm 9:24, Vulg.

²⁹ Isaiah 3:12, Vulg.

³⁰ Saint Luke 6:26.

³¹ See note 5.

³² Psalm 55:22, RV.

³³ Sirach 2:10, RV.

³⁴ Saint Matthew 6:31, RV.

³⁵ Deuteronomy 11:24.

³⁶ Saint Mark 11:24.

³⁷ 2 Timothy 2:19.

³⁸ Romans 8:28.

³⁹ This is the traditional ending of the tract. In Huijben’s edition the last sentence reads: ‘In these and the foregoing reasons and similar ones, may be found the cause of the Incarnation and Passion of our Lord God Jesus Christ.’ (Translator’s note.)

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