St. Anthony Mary Claret

THE CONSOLATION OF A SLANDERED SOUL

El consuelo de un alma calumniada

From the Spanish of the first edition (Barcelona, 1864)

English translation

Contributed to Mind of the Church by a friend of the library who wishes to remain anonymous

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About this translation

Translated from *El consuelo de un alma calumniada* (Barcelona: Librería Religiosa, 1864). The translation is complete.

The notes give the references to Claret's sources and the notes he printed himself; the modern editors' commentary and the translator's own remarks are not reproduced.

The Consolation of a Slandered Soul

Prologue

A person much persecuted and slandered[1] occupied himself in reading the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Fathers, and from this reading drew such consolation that, in the midst of the blackest and most atrocious calumnies, he considered himself very happy. He gave thanks to God because He made him worthy to suffer something for His divine love,[2] and at the same time he commended to the Lord all his persecutors, regarding them as his most useful benefactors, because they provided him with such fine occasions to suffer and to merit.[3]

Hence it is that, during the long time that he was persecuted, he never complained, nor defended himself, nor excused himself, but left himself completely in the hands of divine Providence, without ever asking it to free or defend him from such persecutions and calumnies, since he was quite content with them, rejoicing and delighting in them[4] more than worldly people delight in hearing praise and flattery. Here are the words that were found written by this person who so rejoiced in persecutions and calumnies.

Persecutions and Calumnies

Notes to encourage myself to suffer in silence, with patience and with resignation, persecutions and calumnies

Chapter I. God Is Persecuted and Slandered

First of all, my soul, you must remember those words of the holy Gospel: *The disciple must not claim to be more than his master, nor the servant more than his lord.*[1] Well then, if God was and is persecuted, slandered and offended, why will you not be willing to go through the same?

Just look, my soul, how God was persecuted, He who is the supreme Lord.

In the beginning God created heaven and earth.[2] In heaven He created the angels, so that they might know Him, love Him, serve Him, praise Him and be happy with Him for all eternity; but a great part of them rebelled against God Himself, and from angels they became devils, who persecute the very God who gave them and preserves in them the being they have; they blaspheme Him and make others blaspheme, persecute and offend Him.

God created men on earth so that they might know Him, love Him and serve Him, and afterwards might go up to heaven and be happy with God Himself for all eternity; but men were and are unfaithful to God and disobedient to His precepts; they offend God by their evil thoughts, words, deeds and omissions.

And God, though it would be so easy for Him to exterminate them, provoked by such great ingratitude and wickedness, nevertheless bears with them and favours them; He makes it rain on the fields of the just and of sinners, and every day makes the sun rise on the good and on the wicked.[3] Since God is your Father, imitate Him as a good child: bear with patience and kindness all your enemies, do them all the good you can.[4] God, holy, all-good, all-wise, almighty, by every title deserves to be loved and served; and yet He is offended,

blasphemed and cursed, and He bears it; and you, my soul, who for your sins ought to be in hell, will you not bear it? Besides having well deserved these persecutions and calumnies, there is one thing worth bearing in mind: if you bear them with patience, they offer you the occasion to make satisfaction by them to divine justice for the faults of your past life, and the opportunity to gain great merits for the present life and for the glory of heaven.

Blessed be You, my God. Give Your holy blessing to all who persecute and slander me; give them, Lord, every kind of prosperity, spiritual and bodily, temporal and eternal.

And to me give humility, meekness, patience and conformity with Your most holy will, to suffer in silence and love the pains, persecutions and calumnies that You permit to come upon me.

Chapter II. Persecutions and Calumnies Are Inevitable: Natural Reason, the Evidence and the History of the Old Testament Prove It

All who wish to live piously and holily in this perverse and corrupt world must suffer persecutions and calumnies.[1] Darkness cannot be made a sister to light, nor water to fire, nor God to Belial. \[The Spanish *hermanar*, "to make brothers of, to pair," is the verb used for all three pairs.\]

The wicked are wicked and want to go on being wicked. By their deeds, more than by their words, they say to God: *Recede a nobis, scientiam viarum tuarum nolumus.* "Depart, go away from us; we do not want the knowledge, nor to know Your commandments";[2] we do not want to know how to do good; we want our understanding to remain drowsy in the sleep of ignorance, so that our heart may delight in pleasures, injustices and crimes.

"We do not want anyone to wake us from this sleep with his words of wisdom and goodness. But what irritates us most is the example of goodness, fairness, justice and piety that the good give us; this example makes us frantic and furious, because it shows up our wickedness; it dazzles us with its light (that is why he who does evil hates the light);[3] the light that the good give us shames us, confounds us, humbles us and takes away our ease in our criminal pleasures. Yes," they say by their deeds, "we are wicked and want to be so, and for that very reason we must hate, persecute, slander and do away with the good, so that we may remain masters of the situation."[4] And so they have always done from the beginning.

Abel was persecuted by Cain, his brother. The latter was a wicked man, and his works were evil; Abel was good, and his works also good. That is why he was persecuted and killed by the infamous Cain.[5]

Noah, a just and perfect man,[6] was persecuted, slandered and treated as a madman, a fool, a fanatic and a visionary by the antediluvians. Why? Because he was good, and they wicked, and above all proud and lustful. That is why the Lord finally punished them with the flood.[7]

The prophets of old were persecuted, slandered, scourged, crucified and killed, as we read in the Gospel;[8] and the cause was that they were good, and the persecutors wicked, so wicked that it is said to them: *Serpents and brood of vipers, how will you escape the judgement of eternal damnation that awaits you?*[9]

Chapter III. Jesus Christ Was Persecuted and Slandered

No one has had to suffer so much from the wicked as Jesus Christ, who was set up as a sign of contradiction;[1] and He suffered this contradiction and persecution in His divinity, in His humanity, in His person, in His doctrine, in His works, in His miracles; in everything He was persecuted; throughout His life, from the manger to the cross, He was persecuted by kings and commoners, by priests and laymen, by the learned and the ignorant, by small and great, by soldiers and civilians, by fellow countrymen and strangers, by natives and foreigners.

He suffered heat, cold, hunger, thirst, nakedness; He suffered weariness, fatigue, anguish, scourges, thorns, the cross, nails, pains and the most shameful death. He suffered calumnies, false testimonies, contempt, the most atrocious infamies. After having died, risen and gone up to heaven, He has remained in the Most Holy Sacrament of the altar, where He is offended by very many; heretics deny Him and bad Christians do not respect Him; some despise Him and pay Him no heed, others outrage Him with irreverences and sacrileges.

O my Jesus and my Master! By words and by deeds You teach me how I am to behave towards my enemies. You say to me and to all Christians: *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute* and slander *you.*[2]

O my Master, how convincing are Your words, for You practise what You teach! You command us to forgive our enemies and to pray for slanderers, and so You practise it. From the chair of the holy cross You teach this heavenly doctrine by practice when, praying, You say: *Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.*[3]

O my God! I love all my enemies with all my heart; I wish them every good and happiness.

O my Father! Forgive all my enemies; grant them grace and the glory of heaven, which is the greatest good I can wish them.

For myself I ask of You what St. John of the Cross asked for himself when he said: *Domine, pati et contemni pro te*, "Lord, to suffer and be despised for Your love."

And like St. Teresa of Jesus: *Pati, aut mori*, "to suffer or to die";[4] or like St. Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi: *Pati, non mori*, "to suffer, not to die yet, so as to be able to suffer more, for what I have suffered is very little."[5]

Chapter IV. Words of Jesus Christ Contained in the Holy Gospel, by Which He Lets Us Know the Persecutions We Shall Have to Suffer and How We Are to Behave

"Blessed are those who suffer persecution for justice' sake (for being just), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy shall you be when men, for My sake, curse you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you.

Rejoice then and be glad, for very great is the reward that awaits you in heaven; in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."[1]

"You will be handed over to the courts, and they will scourge you in their synagogues.

And for My sake you will be led before governors and kings, to bear witness to Me before them and before the nations; but when they make you appear, do not be anxious about how or what you are to speak, for what you are to say will be given you in that very hour; since it is not you who speak then, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks through you.

Then brother will deliver brother to death, and the father his son, and children will rise up against their parents and put them to death.

And you will come to be hated by all for My name's sake; but he who perseveres to the end will be saved.

Meanwhile, when they persecute you in one city, flee to another. Truly I say to you, you will not finish converting the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.

It is enough for the disciple to be treated like his master, and the servant like his lord. If they have called the father of the family Beelzebub, how much more those of his household?

Therefore do not fear them. For nothing is covered that will not be uncovered, nor hidden that will not be known.

Fear nothing from those who kill the body and cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can cast both soul and body into hell.

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing \[Spanish *cuarto*, a small copper coin\], and yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's disposing it?

Even the hairs of your head are all numbered.

You have no need, then, to fear; you are worth more than many sparrows.

In short: everyone who acknowledges and confesses Me as Messiah before men, I also will acknowledge him and declare Myself for him before My Father who is in heaven.

But whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but war.

For I have come to set a son against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

And a man's enemies will be the people of his own household.

He who loves father or mother more than Me does not deserve to be Mine, and he who loves son or daughter more than Me does not deserve to be Mine either.

And he who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.

He who keeps his life at the cost of his soul will lose it, and he who loses his life for love of Me will find it again."[2]

"You must know that a time will come when nation will take up arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be plagues, famines and earthquakes in various places.

Yet all this is still only the beginning of the evils.

At that time you will be handed over to the magistrates to be put to torture, and they will put you to death, and you will be hated by all peoples for My name's sake, for being My disciples.

Whereupon many will then be scandalized, and will betray one another, and will hate one another.

And a great number of false prophets will appear, who will pervert many people.

And through the flood of vices the charity of many will grow cold.

But he who perseveres to the end will be saved."[3]

Yes, he who is faithful and persevering, without being deceived by the impostures of charlatans, without letting bad examples pervert him, and without allowing the ardour of charity to grow cold in his heart.

Chapter V. The Apostles, the Martyrs and the Other Saints Were Persecuted and Slandered

In the sacred book of the Acts of the Apostles we read of the many and great persecutions and calumnies that the apostles suffered.[1]

We also read of them in ecclesiastical history and in the lives of the saints.

Fourteen million martyrs, all of whom were persecuted.

Very many confessors who were persecuted and slandered; and, for my instruction, I will dwell on some in particular, following the order of the centuries.

St. Ignatius the martyr, after having been a prelate esteemed and venerated by all, was arrested and led to Rome to suffer martyrdom; on the way he received nothing but insults and ill-treatment from the soldiers, and then he said: *Now I begin to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.*[2]

Third century. How persecuted was St. Athanasius! He was called a sorcerer. \[Claret's dating is followed as printed; Athanasius lived c. 295–373, see the note.\]

St. Macarius of Alexandria, a disciple of St. Anthony Abbot, was ordained priest by the bishop of Alexandria and placed as parish priest in a village where there was a young woman who had a sweetheart, and her lover dishonoured her. When her parents noticed it, they asked her who had done it, and she, to excuse herself, said that it had been the priest Macarius, who had forced her, having threatened her with death if she did not consent. The parents, with all the relatives, with no further inquiry than the word of the deceived girl, went to the house of the parish priest Macarius and, without regard to the fact that he was a priest and their pastor, with diabolical fury dragged him out of his house, led him through the streets of the town crying aloud, "This false man forced our daughter," and dealt him the hardest and most terrible blows.

He would certainly have died at their hands if God had not intervened. The Lord arranged that a monk should pass through that village, and, seeing the ill-treatment they were giving their priest, he opposed it with the greatest energy; but they paid no attention to anything that good monk said to them, until at last they said that they would not stop tormenting him unless he gave them a guarantor who would bind himself to support the woman and the child that would be born.

Hearing this, the monk and the priest Macarius called a friend of theirs, and, as if he were a criminal guilty of some offence, without excusing himself, he begged him with great humility to stand surety for him; and, this done, those peasants stopped punishing him.

Macarius, with this new obligation, exhorted himself, saying: "Come now, take heart and work, for you have a wife and child to support!" So he worked double, making little baskets, hampers and other things of the kind, which he handed over to his guarantor, and the latter sold them and supported the false woman. And since God is judge and witness of all things, seeing the patience, humility and silence with which Macarius bore such a shameful burden, He willed to free him, permitting that, when the hour of childbirth came, the woman could not give birth; and the woman, recognizing that this was a punishment from God for her very grave faults, begged God for mercy and publicly confessed the false testimony she had raised against the innocent and most virtuous priest Macarius; and she said plainly that the one who had deceived her was the young man living next door, with whom she was secretly in love; and, seeing that she was dying in childbirth, she asked them to go to the house of Father Macarius and beg him to forgive her for all the ways she had offended him.

And when the guarantor, in the company of other persons, went to give him this news, he heard it without any disturbance, showing neither joy nor sadness. At once he began to pray for the poor woman, and the Lord granted him the grace he asked, so that, before he had finished his prayer, the woman had already given birth safely.

Seeing this wonder, all recognized the virtue of Father Macarius and celebrated his heroic humility, his meekness, his patience and charity; but Macarius, to flee the esteem and the visits they paid him from that day, venerating him as a saint, secretly left that land and went off to the desert.[3]

Fourth century. St. Basil was falsely accused of heresy before Pope St. Damasus.[4] St. John Chrysostom was slanderously accused of unchastity.[5]

Fifth century. St. Cyril of Alexandria was condemned as a heretic by a rump council \[*conciliábulo*, an illegitimate assembly\] of forty bishops and at the same time deprived of his bishopric.[6]

Tenth century. St. Romuald, at the age of more than a hundred, was accused of a crime so enormous that there were those who said he deserved to be burned alive, though he was entirely innocent.[7]

Fourteenth century. The persecution and calumny of St. Catherine of Siena.

A *beata* of the same Third Order, named Andrea, fell ill with a cancer in the breast. \[A *beata* is a laywoman living under a religious rule, here a Dominican tertiary, the *Mantellate*; *zaratán* is an old word for a cancer of the breast.\] The foul smell it gave off was so great that no one dared to go near her. St. Catherine offered herself and served her faithfully. Satan, envious of this, sowed suspicions in Andrea's heart against St. Catherine. She began to raise false testimonies against her, and to discredit her she said that she sometimes left her to go and amuse herself in shameful love affairs. Since the sick woman said this to everyone who came by, the other sisters soon learned of it, and they were greatly grieved by the great scandal that followed from it, for everyone in the city was talking about Catherine.

Before proceeding against Catherine they went to ask the sick woman whether what she said was true, and she not only confirmed the lies she had told to defame Catherine but added others, greater still, and painted her deceits and calumnies in such vivid colours that the *beatas* believed them to be undeniable truths.

All the *beatas* gathered before the prioress and had Catherine brought before them, and with the severity that so ugly a crime would have called for if she had committed it, the prioress gave her a most bitter reprimand and a very heavy punishment. She heaped the most shameful insults on her, calling her a lost woman, a disgrace to the habit, who had so basely sold the irreplaceable treasure of virginity; and then the others accompanied the words of the superior with many threats and taunts.

Catherine accepted the punishment and heard the chapter \[the community's correction\] with indescribable meekness and admirable silence, and to the shouts they then raised at her she only answered: "In truth, my sisters and ladies, I am, by the grace of Jesus Christ, a virgin. I have offended neither God nor religion in the matter of chastity." She did not say that they were lying, nor that these were testimonies made up by someone who wished her ill; she did not cry out to heaven nor ask God for justice against her accuser. She did none of this, because she held her honour and her life in the hands of God. When the gathering was over, Catherine went to the sick woman's house and, without opening her lips in any complaint or showing any resentment in her face, went on serving her with the same pleasantness and care as before.

Catherine prayed. Jesus Christ appeared to her with two crowns, one of roses and the other of thorns, and Catherine took the one of thorns. Jesus Christ said to her: "Persevere constantly in your charitable care of the sick woman and leave to Me the care of your reputation, for I give you My word that it will have a most happy outcome."

Finally, Andrea was converted and begged Catherine's forgiveness, and Catherine answered her: "My beloved mother, I know well that the enemy was the inventor of this false testimony and scandal, and so I lay the blame on him alone; I have always venerated you with the same respect and love as a mother."[8]

Sixteenth century. The persecution of the Venerable John of Ávila.

This great apostle preached with great zeal and fruit for souls, but some impenitent persons, sick men raving against their good physician, accused him before the tribunal of the Inquisition of Seville.

They imprisoned him until the case could be investigated, and so he lost the good opinion in which he was held. The holy man behaved with such rare patience, meekness and confidence in God that the officials

themselves were astonished. The defence he made was to leave the case to God, trusting that in such hands his innocence would not suffer. They advised him to challenge the witnesses \[*tachar los testigos*, the legal term for objecting to witnesses as disqualified\]. But he answered that he would never do so, that he was quite confident in God and in his own innocence, and that He would save him, for He has said: *I am with him in tribulation; I will deliver him and glorify him.*[9]

His enemies, finding no resistance, made a great deal of headway against him every day; but the Lord consoled him greatly and gave him a great knowledge of Jesus Christ and of the grace of the redemption.

When the case was well advanced and going very badly for the Venerable, one of the judges said to him: "Father, your business is in the hands of God." This was a proverbial way of saying that it was in a very bad state. \[The Spanish idiom *estar en las manos de Dios*, said of a case or a sick person, means that nothing human can be done any more.\] And the Father, with great confidence in divine providence and mercy, answered with a cheerful face: "My business has never been in a better state; until now men have acted; now God will act." In fact, within a few days his virtue and the holiness of his life came to light, and the truth and soundness of his doctrine, and that everything had been a conspiracy and a calumny.

The tribunal declared him free and ordered him to preach on a feast day in the same church where he was accustomed to preach, which was that of San Salvador. Hardly had he appeared in the pulpit to begin the sermon when trumpets and shawms sounded, signs of victory, and amid great applause and to the great consolation of the city.[10] \[The Spanish sentence is elliptical as printed.\]

Seventeenth century. Calumnies against St. Francis de Sales.

They said that he had illicit relations with a lady. There was a Protestant who had such skill in writing that he could perfectly imitate any handwriting. Imitating, then, the Saint's handwriting, he wrote a most obscene and criminal correspondence, which he took good care to show and display to one and another, even to the Saint's closest friends, who said: "It is his handwriting, there is no doubt; he has us all deceived with his hypocrisies." The Saint knew everything that was being said about him and, nevertheless, kept the most complete silence for three years. The slanderer then fell ill, and before dying revealed his calumnies.[11]

Chapter VI. Maxims of the Saints That I Keep Before Me in Persecutions and Calumnies

1. Virtue without trial is not virtue (St. Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi).

2. When you receive some \[affront\] ..., do not go searching and inquiring who said or did it; and if you ever come to know, do not reproach him, nor ever complain, nor look for someone to defend you. Let the first person you commend to God be the one who persecutes and slanders you (St. Liguori). \[The ellipsis is in the source.\]

3. The time of calumnies and persecutions is the time of the harvest of virtues and merits; it is the time to get out of debt (Álvarez).

4. To bear pains and calumnies well, one must look at Jesus and remember the words of Jesus Himself contained in the holy Gospel.

5. All who wish to live piously in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Tim 3:12).

6. One day, when a certain religious who was held to be a saint was being spoken of, St. Bernard said: "He may well be a saint, but he lacks the best thing, which is to be held to be wicked."

7. Fr. Torres, writing to a person under his direction, said to her: "Believe me, among the principal graces the Lord can grant you, a most principal one is that of making you worthy to be slandered by everyone, without finding even one person who believes in you."

8. In trials, calumnies, persecutions ..., if they are borne well, the virtues are exercised, very many merits are gained, one's neighbour is edified; the Lord pours out many and great lights and consolations. \[*Conocimientos*, literally "knowledges," in the spiritual sense of lights or insights given in prayer.\]

O happy and blessed persecutions and calumnies, which bring me so many graces and heavenly consolations!

Blessed be God!

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[1] Cf. *Aut.* no. 798.

[2] Cf. Acts 5:41.

[3] Cf. Tomé de Jesús, *Trabajos de Jesús* \[Barcelona 1726\] vol. 2, pp. 522, 605.

[4] Cf. *Aut.* no. 494.

[5] Mt 10:24. To Mother Antonia París, 21 July 1869: *EC* II p. 1410.

[6] Cf. Gen 1:1.

[7] Cf. Mt 5:45.

[8] Cf. Mt 5:44.

[9] Cf. 2 Tim 3:12.

[10] Job 21:14.

[11] Cf. Jn 3:20.

[12] Cf. Wis 2:10–20.

[13] Cf. Gen 4:3–8.

[14] Gen 6:9.

[15] Cf. Gen 6:17; 7:17–24.

[16] Cf. Mt 5:12; 23:34; cf. *Aut.* nos. 214–219.

[17] Mt 23:33.

[18] Cf. Lk 2:34.

[19] Mt 5:44.

[20] Lk 23:34.

[21] "Lord, either to die or to suffer" (St. Teresa of Jesus, *Book of Her Life*, ch. 40, no. 20: *Obras completas* \[BAC, Madrid 1962\] p. 176).

[22] Cf. J. Croisset, *Año cristiano*, May, day 25 (LR, Barcelona 1853).

[23] Mt 5:10–12.

[24] Mt 10:17–39.

[25] Mt 24:7–13.

[26] Cf. Acts 4:1–20; 5:17–41; 12:1–5.

[27] *Letter to the Ephesians* III 1; cf. *Letter to the Romans* IV 2; V 1, 3: D. Ruiz Bueno, *Padres Apostólicos* (BAC, Madrid 1950) pp. 449, 447–448. J. Croisset, *Año cristiano* \[LR, Barcelona 1853\] vol. 2, p. 8.

[28] Cf. J. A. de Ceballos, *Flores del yermo... San Antonio Abad* (Madrid 1783) pp. 117–119.

[29] Cf. J. B. Scaramelli, op. cit., p. 398. On St. Basil the Great (330–379) cf. J. Quasten, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 224–260.

[30] Cf. J. B. Scaramelli, op. cit., p. 398. On St. John Chrysostom (born between 344 and 354, died 405) cf. J. Quasten, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 471–537.

[31] Cf. J. B. Scaramelli, op. cit., p. 398. On St. Cyril of Alexandria (born c. 380, died 444) cf. J. Quasten, op. cit., pp. 126–154.

[32] Cf. J. B. Scaramelli, op. cit., p. 400.

[33] Cf. L. Gisbert, *Vida portentosa de la seráfica y cándida virgen Santa Catalina de Sena* (Gerona 1804) pp. 148–155.

[34] Ps 91:15.

[35] Cf. *Vida y virtudes del venerable varón el maestro Juan de Ávila*, in *Obras del venerable maestro Juan de Ávila, clérigo, apóstol del Andalucía* (Madrid 1759) vol. 1, pp. 32–36. On St. John of Ávila (born at Almodóvar del Campo \[Ciudad Real\] c. 1499, died at Montilla \[Córdoba\] in 1569) cf. *Obras completas* (BAC, Madrid 1970–1971), 6 vols.

[36] Cf. M. de Marsollier, *Vida de San Francisco de Sales* (Zaragoza 1835) vol. 1, pp. 126–132. *Ex libris.* On St. Francis de Sales (1567–1622) cf. *Obras selectas* (BAC, Madrid 1953–1954), 2 vols.