St. Anthony Mary Claret

LETTER TO THE MISSIONARY THEOPHILUS

Carta al misionero Teófilo

From the Spanish of the Sermones de misión (Barcelona, 1858)

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 the *Carta al misionero Teófilo*, first printed as the introduction to Claret's *Sermones de misión* (Barcelona, 1858). 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.

Letter to the Missionary Theophilus

Chapter I: The Excellence of the Mission and the Merit of the Missionary

My most esteemed Theophilus,[1] my many and very grave occupations have not allowed me to satisfy your wishes as soon as I wished and you deserved; and although it is true that even now I am not very free to write what you ask of me, nevertheless I shall make an effort, in order to take advantage of your fine qualities and dispositions, reviving them so that they may not come to nothing. I say, then:

1. That the greatest sacrifice you can make to your God and Lord is to dedicate yourself to missions and to the conversion of sinners. According to St. Gregory, so great is the honour of the man who becomes God's coadjutor[2] in the conversion of souls that his dignity is not only angelic but divine, says St. Dionysius.[3] Oh, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace and of the good things of the other life! exclaims St. Paul with Isaiah.[4] They are *especiosos* by their swiftness in travelling through the towns as if they were heavenly spirits; and, like angels, they are occupied in the salvation of souls, with nothing else drawing their attention but the greater glory of God and the good of their fellow men. They are beautiful too by their virtue and fortitude in bearing the roughness, thorns and difficulties of the ministry; beautiful by the purity with which they go about, drawn neither by temporal interests, nor applause, nor honours, nor comforts; beautiful, finally, by the beauty of their most exemplary life and by the sweetness and holiness of their doctrine, with which they convert, attract and enamour souls.

2. In nothing did God our Lord show His love for us, wretched exiles in this valley of tears, so much as in sending us His only-begotten Son to redeem and save us and to be the head and model of the other missionaries: *Sic Deus dilexit mundum ut Filium suum unigenitum daret*.[5] Nor did the divine Majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ have in the world any employment more acceptable to His eternal Father or more glorious than that of Saviour of the world. Well then, this ministry so sublime, so holy and so divine, Jesus Christ has deigned to entrust to the apostles and apostolic missionaries, saying to them: *Sicut misit me Pater et ego mitto vos*.[6]

And He has willed, says St. Jerome, that we too should be saviours of the world.[7] See, beloved Theophilus, whether there is any honour like that which Jesus Christ bestows on us by admitting us into His apostolate and sharing with us the title of saviour of the world. We ought, then, to take great courage in following His footsteps, in working day and night in our mission,[8] in shedding the blood of our veins and lavishing our life in the flower of its years, as Jesus did, if such be His most holy will. I mean to tell you that for nothing must you be daunted or frightened, but always go forward.

3. And so that you may not lose heart at the sight of the difficulties and obstacles that will present themselves to you in this ministry, I shall put forward some motives that will spur you on:

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1) The preciousness of the soul. It is the image of the Most Holy Trinity[9] and redeemed with the blood of Jesus Christ;[10] it is a child of God and destined for heaven; its value is infinite, since Jesus Christ gave all His blood for it; its destiny is eternal, to praise God eternally; and this soul, so noble and so precious, is fallen into sin, a slave of the devil, condemned to eternal death, and with every step it takes it draws nearer to the place of execution. Tell me: if you had a sister and you were told that for certain faults she committed she is condemned to death and is on her way to execution, and you knew that by taking some step you could free her, would you not do it? Ah, most beloved Theophilus! Quicken your faith, and with this holy torch in your hand you will see not a mere supposition but a great truth; you will see many souls, your sisters, in sin and marching to hell; they go blindfolded, and so the unhappy ones do not see the precipice over which they are about to fall, the execution to which they are heading. Well then, since you see it, since you can help them

and draw them out of so unhappy a state, you must do it.[11] Oh, what a great work of charity you will do! Greater than if, being very rich, you gave all your riches to the poor: *Etsi immensas pecunias pauperibus eroges, plus tamen effeceris si unam converteris animam*.

This saying of St. John Chrysostom is certain and evident. It cost God nothing to create the riches of heaven and earth. With a single word, "Let it be,"[12] all was made.[13] But how much it cost Him to save souls! For them He became man, was born in a stable, preached and toiled, suffered calumnies, scourges and thorns, shed His blood and died on a cross. A soul, then, is worth more than all the riches of the world; more than all the crowns of the earth; more than all the stars of heaven. To save it, therefore, is more meritorious before God than all the sacrifices that can be made. I shall tell you, in a word, with St. Dionysius the Areopagite: *Omnium divinorum divinissimum est cooperari Deo in salutem animarum*.

For this reason the Holy Spirit is not content to say that those who teach men the way of salvation shall have eternal life: *Qui elucidant me vitam aeternam habebunt*;[14] but adds that they shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven[15] and shall shine like stars for all eternity.[16] So great was the esteem in which St. Catherine of Siena held priests who devoted themselves with zeal to the salvation of souls that she kissed their footprints, or the place where they had set their feet.[17] St. Teresa of Jesus says frankly that those saints who devoted themselves to the salvation of souls arouse more devotion in her and she has more love for them than for the martyrs themselves. What shall I tell you, beloved Theophilus, of the great St. Ignatius, founder of the Society of Jesus? So great was his desire to convert souls that all the labours, calumnies, chains and persecutions of this life seemed little to him in exchange for winning them for Christ; this zeal made him say that, if it were in his hand and choice, he would rather remain in this life, uncertain of his salvation, in order to convert souls, than die at once with the certainty of being saved.[18] And the Venerable Luis de la Puente made this sacrifice to the Lord: If, in order to convert sinners, O my God, it were necessary for me to go and burn in the flames of hell without fault of mine, I offer myself to them at once.[19] \[Such "heroic offerings" are expressions of fervent love, not a doctrinal claim; no one is condemned without personal fault\]

2) The second motive I put forward to you, dear Theophilus, to encourage you in this holy task, is that in no way will you better show whether you truly love God or not. Love of God consists not only in tongue and words, but also, and principally, in deed and in truth,[20] that is, in doing and suffering; that is why Jesus Christ said to St. Peter: *Pasce oves meas*.[21] Love is known by zeal, says St. Augustine: *Qui non zelat non amat, et qui non diligit manet in morte*.[22] *Non sibi soli vivere, sed aliis proficere, vult Dei zelo ductus*.[23]

3) The third motive is a sign of predestination. *Animam proximi salvasti? tuam praedestinasti*, says St. Augustine. The reason is that the missionary, embracing labours, dangers and privations for love of God, engages His protection and obliges His loving providence to defend him, like another Daniel, from falling into the claws of the lions,[24] who are the infernal spirits. \[On predestination as God's eternal plan of salvation, which does not remove human freedom\]

4) The missionary is not only saved, but enters heaven accompanied by those who were saved through his zeal; so says St. Gregory: *Ibi Petrus cum Iudaea conversa, quam post se traxit, apparebit; ibi Paulus conversum, ut ita dicam, mundum ducens*. And besides, what great praises will he not merit on the day of the Last Judgement? For if bodily works will be so celebrated by the Lord,[25] what must the spiritual works of mercy which the missionary practises be? What a great contrast a perfect missionary will make with lax priests without zeal! Perhaps some consider themselves good because their conscience does not reproach them with anything bad; but they must know that at the tribunal of God account must be rendered not only of evil works, but also of the omission of good works. Woe to him who has hidden his talent! Woe to him who has not traded with it![26] The sin of omission is the sin that damns most priests. On the Day of Judgement, says St. Bernard, a great clamour will arise, saying: "Lord, we are condemned; we know it; but the priests are to blame; they did not warn us, they did not correct us." But the most imposing voice, the most terrifying words, will be those of Jesus Christ Himself, who will tell them that they have not distributed the bread of the

divine word;[27] that they have not clothed the naked[28] with the wedding garment of grace by means of the holy sacraments; and finally He will thunder forth that terrible sentence: *Discedite a me, maledicti, in ignem aeternum, qui paratus est diabolo et angelis eius.*[29] Whoever in time of need hides his wheat or money is guilty of those who die of want; whoever sees a child fallen into the fire and, being able easily to pull him out, lets him die, is guilty of his death; whoever sees another with an artery opened and, though he could easily have closed it, does not do so, is guilty of his death. How many priests who could, by catechizing, preaching, hearing confessions and giving missions, relieve the spiritual needs of their neighbours, do not do it, and let them perish and be damned! Woe to them! *Tot parvuli in oppidulis petunt panem, et non est qui frangat eis.*[30] *Vae, vae, Praelatis dormientibus!... vae Presbyteris otiosis!*

You see, then, most beloved Theophilus, that to free yourself from an eternity of pains and obtain a great glory which will never, ever end, you must devote yourself to the holy missions, according to your vocation, and be persevering in your sacred ministry. Listen, for your own good, to the words of God Himself, who says to you: *Ecce venio cito: tene quod habes, ut nemo accipiat coronam tuam*.[31]

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[1] Cf. Lk 1:3.

[2] Cf. 1 Cor 3:9.

[3] Quoted by St. Alphonsus, *Selva de materias predicables*: *Obras ascéticas* (BAC, Madrid 1954) vol. 2, p. 55.

[4] Cf. Is 52:7; Rom 10:15.

[5] Jn 3:16.

[6] Jn 20:21.

[7] Cf. St. Jerome, *Commentary on Obadiah* 21: PL 25, 1115.

[8] Cf. 1 Thess 2:9.

[9] Cf. Gen 1:27.

[10] Cf. 1 Pet 1:18.

[11] Very similar ideas in the *Autobiography* (nn. 205–209).

[12] Gen 1:3.

[13] Cf. Ps 33:6.

[14] Sir 24:31 \[Vulgate numbering\].

[15] Mt 5:19.

[16] Dan 12:3.

[17] Cf. *Aut.* n. 235.

[18] Quoted by St. Alphonsus Mary de Liguori, *Selva di materie predicabili* (Bassano 1833) pt. 1, ch. 9, § 2, p. 99.

[19] Cachupín, F., *Vita del Venerabile Padre Luigi della Ponte* (Venice 1733) bk. 2, ch. 8, p. 226.

[20] Cf. 1 Jn 3:18.

[21] "Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:17).

[22] 1 Jn 3:14. Quoted by St. Alphonsus, *Selva*, ed. cit., vol. 2, p. 153.

[23] PL 37, 1585.

[24] Cf. Dan 6:27.

[25] Cf. Mt 25:40.

[26] Cf. Mt 25:24–30.

[27] Cf. Mt 14:19.

[28] Cf. Mt 25:43.

[29] Mt 25:41.

[30] Lam 4:4 \[the source reads "Jer 4,4"; the text is Lamentations 4:4\].

[31] Rev 3:11 \[the source cites 3:10–11\].

Chapter II: Important Counsels to the Missionary

Up to now, most beloved Theophilus, I have spoken to you of the excellences of the mission and of the very great benefit and singular honour the Lord has bestowed on you in calling you to this office of teaching; now I shall give you some counsels that experience has taught me, and that will be of great profit to you if you practise them.

1. You must be a great friend of prayer, in imitation of Jesus, who *erat pernoctans in oratione Dei*,[1] and who very earnestly charged the apostles to pray.[2] All missionaries of renown have been men of prayer.[3] He who asks receives.[4]

2. You must always seek retirement, so that people see you only at the altar, in the pulpit and in the confessional. On entering and leaving a town you will go so recollected that all who see you are edified.[5]

3. You will keep all your senses mortified: you will speak very little, and only when there is need, and then you will do so with gravity and affability. You will keep your eyes very recollected, and never, ever let them stray to where there is any woman, for you would be much noticed and criticized; avoid speaking with women, and if at some time you must, I shall tell you: *sermo rigidus et brevis cum muliere est habendus*[6] *et oculos humi deiectos habe*.[7]

You will never eat or drink except in the house where you lodge; your food will be simple and sparing, and the more hidden, the better; the Italians say that saints who eat are not believed. In everything you will be mortified, and as long as it is not very harmful to your health, the more you suffer and keep silent, the more you will edify.[8]

4. One of the things you must most abhor must be self-interest; you must be a very great friend of poverty, and in all things you will always seek for yourself what is poorest, most abject and despised.

5. You must know that the chief vices you have to combat are the love of pleasures, the love of riches and the love of honours;[9] and these must be combated with the opposite virtues; and you will do more by example than by words.

6. You must continually look at and imitate the humility and meekness of Jesus.[10] Humility is the foundation of all the virtues; and just as a tall building without a foundation falls, so you too will fall if you are not humble, and the same will happen to you as to Lucifer,[11] to Tertullian[12] and to others who through lack of humility fell miserably.

7. Humility is the foundation, but meekness is the shield which the soldier of Jesus Christ, I mean the missionary, must always have on his arm; for persecutions await him, and great persecutions, and only by patience are they overcome. Persecutions and calumnies against missionaries are so certain and sure that by this you will know whether you are sent or not; for up to now no one has been exempted. Moses was sent, but he was also opposed by Pharaoh, by the magicians and by his own people. All the prophets who were sent by God were persecuted: *Quem Prophetarum non sunt persecuti patres vestri?*[13] St. John the Baptist *erat lucerna ardens et lucens*;[14] he shone with good example and burned with zeal and preaching. *Fuit homo missus a Deo cui nomen erat Ioannes*.[15]

At first the Jews praised and admired him greatly; but as soon as they heard him rebuke their vices, uncover their hypocrisies and false righteousness, and above all bear witness to Jesus,[16] they began to despise him and even to hate him; and in the end Herod took his life.[17] And what shall I tell you of Jesus, our divine Master? Listen to the evangelist, who says: *Lux venit in mundum, et dilexerunt homines magis tenebras quam lucem; et non venit ad lucem, ut non arguantur opera eius*.[18]

This light is Jesus Christ, who with His example, doctrine and grace enlightens every man who comes into this world.[19] But to all this men have closed their eyes, preferring to remain blind, in the midst of darkness and their passions, rather than enjoy the benefits of this divine light; and, not wishing to depart from their evil ways, neither do they wish to approach this light, which lays bare the vicious inclinations and corruption

of their heart.

The world cannot hate you as it hates me, because you conform yourselves to it, and I by my doctrine and by my works show that its works are evil.[20] The chief priests and Pharisees said to the officers or constables: Why have you not brought him?

These answered: Never has any man spoken so divinely as this man.

The Pharisees said to them: What, have you also been deceived? Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? Only this rabble, which does not understand the light, is accursed.[21]

The missionary should no longer be surprised at anything,[22] seeing what happened to Jesus, who was set up as a sign of contradiction.[23] He suffered contradiction in His doctrine, in His reputation, in His wisdom; He was treated as a false prophet,[24] as possessed[25] and a sorcerer, as mad, as a drunkard, a glutton,[26] a friend of sinners[27] and a seducer of unwary people;[28] in a word, He was held to be so public an evildoer[29] that no trial was needed to condemn Him to death, and finally He died on an infamous gallows between two thieves.[30]

8. Do not think, most beloved Theophilus, that persecutions ended with Jesus, as the persecutions of the old law ended; the opposition continues its onslaught, and contradiction and persecution will go on. So we see it in St. Stephen, whom they cast out of the city and stone to death.[31] That day a great persecution began against the Church of Jerusalem, says Holy Scripture.[32] All the apostles were persecuted[33] and died in fulfilment of their ministry, and in particular the apostle St. Paul gives a clear description of his persecutions in these terms: "I have been," he says, "in very many labours, in prisons, in stripes beyond measure, in dangers of death often. Five times I received from the Jews forty stripes save one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I was as if sunk in the deep sea, on the point of going under; I have been on toilsome journeys often, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own nation, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brethren; in every kind of labour and misery, in many watchings and sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, in many fasts, in cold and nakedness; besides these outward things or evils, there weighs upon me the daily pressure of anxiety and care for all the churches! Who is weak, and I am not weak with him? Who is scandalized or falls into sin, and I do not burn?"[34]

9. Who will pay any heed, most beloved Theophilus, to the persecutions, calumnies and other obstacles that will present themselves to a missionary, seeing that Jesus Christ, St. Paul, the other apostles and all true missionaries have had to pass along that road?[35] For this reason you must remember what the prophet Isaiah says: *In silentio et spe erit fortitudo vestra*.[36]

For your part, try to keep silent, to work and to hope, for the Lord will make that storm pass.[37] And if the persecution is very fierce, you will flee to another city,[38] but you will never forsake or abandon your ministry or mission; for what the enemy aims at is to frighten you like a timid child. Happy are you if you suffer until death![39]

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[1] "He spent the night in prayer to God" (Lk 6:12). Cf. *Aut.* n. 434.

[2] Cf. Mt 5:44–45; 6:9; Lk 18:1; 21:36.

[3] Cf. Mt 26:41; *Aut.* nn. 264–273.

[4] Cf. Mt 7:8.

[5] Cf. *Aut.* n. 390.

[6] St. Augustine, *De modo confitendi in Ps. 50*. Quoted by St. Alphonsus, *Selva*, ed. cit., vol. 2, p. 213.

[7] Quoted by St. Alphonsus Mary de Liguori, *Selva di materie predicabili* (Bassano 1833) pt. 2, instr. 3, p. 153.

[8] Cf. *Aut.* n. 394.

[9] Cf. 1 Jn 2:16; *Aut.* n. 357.

[10] Cf. Mt 11:29.

[11] Cf. Is 14:12.

[12] Quasten, J., *Patrología* \[BAC, Madrid, 2nd ed. 1978\] p. 546.

[13] Acts 7:52.

[14] Jn 5:35.

[15] Jn 1:6.

[16] Mt 3:1–12.

[17] Cf. Mt 14:10.

[18] Jn 3:19–20.

[19] Jn 1:9.

[20] Cf. Jn 7:7.

[21] Cf. Jn 7:45–49.

[22] Cf. Rev 2:10.

[23] Cf. Lk 2:34.

[24] Cf. Lk 7:39; Jn 7:52.

[25] Cf. Mt 12:24; Jn 8:48.

[26] Cf. Mk 2:16.

[27] Cf. Mt 11:19.

[28] Cf. Lk 23:5; Jn 7:12.

[29] Cf. Jn 18:30.

[30] Cf. Is 53:12; Lk 23:33; Jn 19:18.

[31] Acts 7:57–58.

[32] Acts 8:1.

[33] Cf. *Aut.* n. 223.

[34] 2 Cor 11:22–29; cf. *Aut.* n. 224.

[35] Cf. Jn 15:20; Acts 5:41; 2 Cor 11:23–29.

[36] Is 30:15.

[37] Cf. Mt 8:26.

[38] Cf. Mt 10:23.

[39] Cf. *Aut.* n. 651.

Chapter III: What Man Is, or the Knowledge the Missionary Must Have of Human Nature

1. Much beloved Theophilus: just as a doctor who wishes to cure a sick man must first learn the constitution of the patient and the kind of illness afflicting him, so must a missionary, the doctor of moral illnesses,[1] do likewise; he must know, in the first place, the nature of man, and then the moral illnesses and their causes, applying at once the appropriate remedies.[2]

2. Man is created by God in His image and likeness[3] so that he may know, love and serve Him here on earth and afterwards be eternally happy there in heaven with the same God who created him.

3. Man is a compound of soul and body. The soul is an immortal spirit, like God; it is one in essence and threefold in its powers, which are called understanding, memory and will, as it is the image of the Most Holy Trinity.[4] With the understanding it knows the truth, knows God Himself; with the will it loves what is good, loves God; so that God, as infallible truth and as uncreated goodness, is the adequate object of man's understanding and will, and God alone can satisfy both. Moreover, the memory serves to recall past objects and make them present, forming the treasure of the wise man; for a man who remembered nothing of all he had seen, heard and read would be a fool. \[On the unity of soul and body\]

4. God created the soul to animate the body, so that body and soul may form a complete and finished being.

The soul, while it dwells in this world, needs the body in order to know and to act, as an axe, whose steel needs a wooden handle in order to cut; or like an old man, whose poor sight needs spectacles in order to see. In its turn, the body needs the soul in order to live.

5. This is the nature of man. The causes of the moral illnesses, or of the sins and condemnation of so many souls to hell, are chiefly four: original sin; the love of independence, setting oneself above others; the love of the sensible things that surround him; and the distance of the other life.

6. Original sin contaminated human nature, and for that reason it is like a sick man, full of bad humours, covered with sores, so that when one closes another opens. He can hardly walk, and if he walks, he walks little and even limping. Such is human nature at present, and that is why we see such and so many monstrosities in man, which would be entirely inexplicable without the truth of faith that reveals original sin to us.

7. Original sin is not the first cause of moral illnesses or sins, for before the original sin that we contract there was already the personal sin of our first parents. The first cause is the love of independence; it is the abuse of the lordship God gave man over all the animals of the earth, the fish of the sea and the birds of the air.[5] Abusing, then, this sovereignty, man wished and wishes to extend himself and to dominate other men; he does not want to be subject to anyone, not even to God Himself; and in this consists pride, the principal cause of the sins of the angels, of our first parents and of all men, who to foster this tendency, and as an effect of that same cause, seek riches and honours in order to set themselves above others. Here is the root and cause of very many sins of every kind.

8. We have already said that God created man to know Him, to love Him,[6] and in this man rejoices and rests, like heavy bodies, which rest in their centre and are restless as long as they do not rest in it. This same God has created all other things as means by which man may more easily attain his last end; consequently, He wills that man know and love these things as useful means to attain it, directing everything to His greater glory and making use of everything to know, love and serve God better, who is his Creator, his Father and his only end.

9. So that man may know and love God and the means He has given him, which are all other created things, He has endowed him with senses, to know what is present, and with faith, for what is absent or invisible. When man knows, he loves; and when he knows and loves, he feels a special pleasure and joy. This joy is a participation in that which we shall have in heaven when we see and love God with all perfection.[7] Just as the light of the divine countenance is reflected in our understanding and gives us intelligence, so also the warmth of God's love or charity is communicated to our will, gives us love and causes us pleasure. This pleasure does in man what oil does, which greases the wheels of a machine so that they run more lightly and smoothly. God has done this so that man may fulfil the divine will, which is the eternal law itself, and is defined: *Ratio divina ordinem naturalem conservari iubens, perturbari vetans*.

10. God has given man this pleasure he feels in knowing and loving not only as a sample and sign of the pleasure and joy he will experience when in heaven he sees Him face to face[8] and loves Him with all perfection, but also so that it may serve him as an incentive to good, and he may apply himself to attaining it by the continued use of these means. Otherwise, tell me: how would man apply himself to the sciences if he found no pleasure in knowing? How would he procure food, and how, having found it, would he take it, if he found no pleasure in eating? Surely he would neglect himself, grow weak and die of starvation, and so the individual would perish. And how would the species be preserved if man experienced no enjoyment in its propagation? How would he marry; how would husband and wife bear with each other's temperaments? How would he take upon himself the expenses, troubles and labours of the family, if in these very things there were not some joys to serve as a counterweight and make the going easier? Ah, dear Theophilus! God has made all things well;[9] He has disposed all things in number, weight and measure.[10] The one who does wrong

is man, who upsets everything, who abuses everything.

11. Man applies himself to the sciences and arts, he feels a great pleasure in knowing, and instead of turning to God, the author of the intelligence man has, of the light by which he sees and of the things he sees, he turns, says St. Augustine, his back to the light;[11] he looks at created things and forgets his Creator,[12] and reflects on himself all the light of knowledge that those things he studies and discovers cast; this very light dazzles him, blinds him and makes him proud like another Lucifer.[13] Just as he abuses his intelligence, so he abuses food. He procures it and eats not in order to live, but lives to eat and drink, making a god of his belly[14] and forgetting the true God. He does the same in propagation: *Sicut equus et mulus, quibus non est intellectus*.[15] *Omnis quippe caro corruperat viam suam*.[16] (Here is why there are so many impurities.) *Et animalis homo non percipit ea quae sunt spiritus Dei*.[17] (Here is why there are so many impieties and heresies, for there is no heretic without a woman.) \[This harsh saying, a commonplace of older polemic, reflects its period, not the teaching of the Church.\]

12. Man, degraded by this abuse and almost reduced to the class of brute, lives more for himself than for God, as the Apostle bitterly complains.[18] Yes; his life is more for the body than for God; he deludes himself and lets himself be fascinated by all the things around him. I have already told you that, while man lives in this world, his spirit is united to the body;[19] the body ceaselessly transmits the impressions of all that surrounds it, like a mirror, which represents everything placed before it. In truth, the soul of man possesses some faculties which, naturally raised above everything corporeal and sensible, are governed by other principles, deal with higher objects and dwell, so to speak, in a region that of itself has nothing to do with all that exists material and earthly. Without failing to recognize, however, the dignity of these faculties or the height of the region in which they dwell, it must be confessed that such is the influence exercised on them by the others of a lower order that they often make them descend from their height, and, instead of obeying them as mistresses, reduce them to the class of slaves. When things do not reach this extreme, the result at least all too often is that the higher faculties are idle, as if asleep; so that the understanding barely glimpses, as at a dark and long distance, the truths that form its noblest and principal object, and the will does not turn to its own either, except with the greatest carelessness and slackness, if it does anything at all.

13. The other cause, joined to the previous one, is the distance of the other life. There is a hell to fear, a heaven to hope for; but all this is in the other life, it is reserved for a more distant time; they are things belonging to an entirely different order, to a new world, in which we firmly believe, but from which we receive no direct impressions at the moment; and so we need to make an effort of concentration, of reflection, of meditation, to become penetrated with the immense interest they have for us, and with the fact that, in comparison, all that surrounds us is nothing. Suppose that a man finishes this reflection and says, like the wise Solomon, that all the gold of this world, in comparison with heavenly goods, is like fine sand.[20] More still: suppose that the good Christian, after his mental prayer, says, like St. Paul, that he counts all the things of this world as dung.[21] Nevertheless, meanwhile some earthly object comes to strike his imagination and excite his feelings, now inspiring him with some fear, now flattering him with some pleasure; and behold, the other world begins to vanish from his eyes, and, thinking neither of heaven nor of hell, he no longer hopes for the one nor fears the other, as if they had never existed for him. The understanding returns to its ordinary torpor, the will to its languor with regard to the things of the next life \[the text reads "pasadas," "past," apparently for "futuras" or "eternas"\], and both are occupied only with present things.

14. Experience teaches that man almost always is guided by the impressions of the moment; he sacrifices the future to the present; and when he weighs in the balance of his judgement the advantages and drawbacks that an action may bring him, the distance or nearness of the realization of those drawbacks and advantages is one of the most influential circumstances in his choice. And how should this not happen in the affairs of the other life, if the same thing happens with regard to those of the present one? How many, many there are who sacrifice riches, honour, health and life to a moment's pleasure! And why? Because the object that flatters is

present and the evils that are to follow are distant, and man deludes himself that he will avoid them, or else resigns himself to suffer them. If this happens in bodily and temporal things, much more does it happen in spiritual and eternal things; hence comes the cause of the prophet's complaint, who exclaims: *Filii hominum, usquequo gravi corde? Ut quid diligitis vanitatem, et quaeritis mendacium?*[22]

15. This is how the enigma is explained that St. Augustine proposes when, speaking with God, he says: "Since all love the blessed life, which is nothing other than the joy that comes from the truth, why does truth beget hatred in men, and why did even Your Son Jesus Christ become their enemy because He preached it to them? The cause of this can be no other than that truth is so loved that even those who love something quite different would wish that what they love were the truth; and since, on the other hand, they do not wish to be deceived, neither do they wish to be convinced that they are. Thus that very thing which they hold to be truth, and love as such, is the reason why they hate the truth. They love truth inasmuch as it shines or enlightens, but they hate it inasmuch as it accuses and reproves them; and since they do not wish to be deceived, but wish to deceive others, they love truth when it discloses or manifests itself, but hate it when it discloses or manifests them. Thus the return they will receive from truth will be that those who do not wish to be disclosed and manifested by it, it will manifest and disclose, even against their will, without truth itself being disclosed and manifested to them. Such precisely is the spirit of man, which wishes to hide its blindness, its infirmities, its ugliness, its indecencies, and does not want anything hidden from itself; but the contrary happens: it remains uncovered to the truth, and the truth remains hidden from it. Yet in spite of this state of misery in which it finds itself, it would rather enjoy and rejoice in solid and true goods than in apparent and false ones. Therefore it will be truly blessed if, free of all trouble, it finds joy only in the supreme Truth, from which all other true things have received their truth."

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[1] Cf. Lk 5:31.

[2] Cf. *Aut.* nn. 33, 171, 191, 315, 475, 545, 717–728, 729–735.

[3] Cf. Gen 1:27.

[4] *De Trinitate* X.

[5] Cf. Gen 1:28.

[6] Cf. ch. 3, n. 2.

[7] Cf. 1 Cor 13:12; 1 Jn 3:2.

[8] Cf. 1 Cor 13:12.

[9] Cf. Gen 1:31.

[10] Cf. Wis 11:21 \[11:20\].

[11] St. Augustine, *In Io. Ev. tract.* 1, n. 19: PL 35, 1388: *Obras* (BAC, Madrid 1955) vol. 13, p. 93. Also quoted in *El ferrocarril* (LR, Barcelona 1859) pp. 58–59.

[12] Cf. Deut 32:18; Rom 1:25.

[13] Cf. Is 14:12.

[14] Cf. Rom 16:18; Phil 3:19.

[15] Ps 32:9.

[16] Gen 6:12.

[17] 1 Cor 2:14.

[18] Cf. Phil 3:18–19.

[19] Cf. ch. 3, n. 4.

[20] Cf. Wis 7:9.

[21] Cf. Phil 3:8.

[22] Ps 4:3.

Chapter IV: Subjects to Be Treated in the Mission, How They Should Be Proposed, and What Maxims Should Often Be Inculcated

Here you have, most beloved Theophilus, the sermons you have been asking me for so long; as you can tell from the physiognomy of the style, some are written by me and others are not; I have only chosen them from among the many authors I have had occasion to see, and who seemed to me most suitable, whether for their composition or for the subject they contain. On each subject I have put more than one, so that you can choose the one you like best and that is most suited to the audience.

At the beginning of each sermon you will find its skeleton, which will serve you a great deal, whether to grasp the sermon at once and choose or reject it, or also to recall the order and matter of the sermon and improvise it, once you have made yourself master of the matter. At the end of some sermons I have put a kind of storehouse of chosen materials and examples, so that you can make the appropriate use of them according to circumstances.

I charge you above all that before going up into the pulpit you be well penetrated with what you are going to say; this lively penetration that you will have of the matter you are going to propose will make you form clear ideas and will suggest to you the way to express them with grace and energy, and even with natural similes and comparisons.

From conceiving ideas well and expressing them thus perfectly there results that magical style which awakens the senses, touches the heart and quickens the soul by the happy combination of the moral and the natural; and perhaps you will convince more with a comparison than with an authority, even one from Holy Scripture.[1]

Man takes more pleasure in emblems, allegories and comparisons drawn from sensible things than in naked truth, because the latter is stern and the former smiling. Aesop would not have pleased his readers for twenty-five centuries if, instead of fables, he had written austere truths. Nor would our divine Saviour have instructed the people so effectively by discourses as by His parables; for this reason I shall have ready for you various comparisons, likenesses and examples, so that you may choose the most fitting, according to the circumstances of the place, the audience and the time to which you must adapt yourself, as water adapts itself to the pipe into which it is poured, and the prophet Elisha to the child whom he raised.[2]

When you have won over and convinced the audience, you will try to bring it to practice: that it turn away from what is evil and practise what is good. For, as St. Liguori says,[3] the moral is the fruit of a sermon to the people; and so you will always take care to root out vices and plant virtues, which you will go on doing according to the subject you are treating, which will be like the cloth on which you embroider the virtues.

1. The things you must inculcate most and repeat often are the observance of the commandments, taking them one by one and explaining them clearly.

2. The truths that every Christian must know and believe, the things he must hope for and ask for; and you will teach him the way to make mental and vocal prayer, and the good works in which each one should exercise himself according to his state and opportunity, offering everything to God.

3. The sacraments he must receive; how he must receive them; how he must prepare to receive them, and the way to give thanks afterwards.

4. The devotion he must have to the Most Blessed Trinity, to the Most Holy Sacrament,[4] devotion to the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ,[5] and the way to make the Way of the Cross;[6] devotion to Most Holy Mary; the way to pray the rosary;[7] and the way to wear the scapular, medals, etc.[8] Devotion to his patron saint, to the guardian angel and to the holy souls in purgatory.

5. You will strongly inculcate the reading of good books, and abstaining from bad ones.[9]

6. That all keep away from bad company, from dangers and occasions of offending God.[10] In involuntary dangers, that they call upon God.

7. You will strongly inculcate patience in sorrows, labours and adversities, conformity in all things to the will of God, and the faithful fulfilment of their obligations.

8. That they exercise themselves in the works of mercy;[11] that they have peace and union;[12] that there be no lawsuits or quarrels among them; that they treat others as they would wish to be treated,[13] and that they do not do to others what they would not wish done to themselves.[14] You must always remember that the whole law and the prophets depend on these two points: loving God and neighbour;[15] and for this reason they must be strongly inculcated.

9. You must bear in mind that the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, and that it enters and penetrates into the folds of soul and spirit, to the joints of bones and marrow, and discerns and judges the most hidden thoughts and intentions of the heart, as St. Paul says.[16] On this doctrine of the Apostle I shall give you a likeness. Just as a sword, to cut, must be out of its scabbard and well sharpened (for the scabbard, even if it were of gold and set with precious stones, would prevent the cut), so the sword of the divine word, to cut with both edges whatever opposes the love of God and the love of neighbour, must be well sharpened with purity and rectitude of intention; without the scabbard, however beautiful, of human eloquence and flowers of rhetoric;[17] and that is how I hand it to you.

Moreover, the eternal Word must be considered in three states: incarnate, consecrated and preached. To become incarnate He chose the humblest mother,[18] but the most chaste and most fervent, who is Most Holy Mary; and just as Most Holy Mary is mother of the Word incarnate, so the priest, says St. Bernard, is as it were father and mother of the Word consecrated and preached.[19] Therefore he must try to be humble like Mary, chaste like Mary and fervent like Mary. The consecrated Word exists and remains in the Sacrament as long as the humble species of bread and wine of the Sacrament exist and remain; so that, if these disappear, the reality disappears too. The same happens with the preached Word: as long as the humble species of Jesus are preserved, it produces its effect; but as soon as these disappear and one preaches in an arrogant and bombastic style, it instantly loses its power; it is now a human word, not divine, and as human it is regarded: people admire the composition, the artifice, and no one is converted.

10. The Most Holy Virgin, who *castitate placuit, et humilitate concepit*, as St. Thomas of Villanueva says, by her chastity pleased God and by her humility conceived Him in her virginal womb; scarcely had she brought Him forth in the middle of the night when she wrapped Him in poor swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger[20] in the stable of Bethlehem, where He was adored by the angels, the shepherds and the Kings.[21]

Learn, Theophilus, from Mary: by chastity you must please God, and by the humility with which you study the holy Books and pray to God you will conceive what you are to say, or the Word you are to preach. The Virgin wrapped Him in poor swaddling clothes;[22] you will wrap Him in a simple and natural style. The Virgin placed Him in the manger with all reverence;[23] you, without failing in the sacred decorum your ministry requires or in the reverence due to the divine word you preach, will place it in such a way that even the roughest and dullest men can reach and understand it, as the beasts reach the manger,[24] which is precisely meant for them. The preached Word follows the same practice: *Cum simplicibus sermocinatio eius...*[25] *Spiritus Domini super me, evangelizare pauperibus misit me Dominus.*[26]

And Jesus Christ Himself gives thanks to His eternal Father because the divine word is revealed or preached to little ones, that is, to the humble.[27] The manger was near the entrance through which people passed, those of the city and strangers, the learned and the ignorant, great and small, men and women, so that you may understand that the preacher is a debtor to all: *Sapientibus et insipientibus*, as the Apostle says.[28] This is why his style must be popular, as St. Liguori and Muratori teach. The angels and the star drew the shepherds and the Kings;[29] the angels too, and other things, will draw people to you at the holy mission. With what fervour and devotion they will hear the divine word! For God will inspire and teach them the doctrine He inspired in Origen and St. Augustine when they said: *Non est minus verbum Dei quam Corpus Christi*.

They will hear the sermon, they will go to confession and receive communion.

Besides this expression of Origen and St. Augustine, in which they show the reverence and devotion with which the faithful must receive the divine word, I shall now make use of a comparison Quintilian hints at, and it will serve you greatly for your guidance, prudence and discretion. It runs thus: *Utendum est verbo, ut nummo, cui publica forma sit*.[30]

Therefore, dear Theophilus, you will use words as one uses money. 1) It must be the money of the country; so also you must use the language the country uses, so that everyone understands you well. 2) The money given to the poor and to servants, and most used every day, is coppers and small silver, and among the rich, silver and gold coins; so also you, with the poor and simple, ordinary people, will use words and expressions that everyone understands well, and if at some time you must speak with the learned, you will speak with words suited to their literary riches. 3) Money is also used in paper; you will do likewise by means of leaflets, little books, etc., and so you will carry on a great commerce for heaven.[31]

11. Finally, Mary, mother of the Word incarnate, is the Mother of Fair Love: *Ego mater pulchrae dilectionis*.[32]

Here, Theophilus, is the last and principal endowment you must have in order to be a good missionary: to be devoted to Mary and to love God very much.[33] So you will preach well, as the Venerable Ávila says,[34] and you will do all things well,[35] because everything done out of love is love, says St. Francis de Sales.[36] *Vale* \[Farewell\].

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[1] Cf. *Aut.* nn. 297–299. Aguilar, P., *Vida*... \[Madrid 1871\] p. 76.

[2] Cf. 2 Kings 4:33–36.

[3] St. Alphonsus Mary de Liguori, *Selva di materie predicabili* (Bassano 1833) pt. 3, ch. 7, p. 345.

[4] Cf. *Aut.* nn. 37–40. Cf. *Aut.* n. 694.

[5] Cf. Fernández, C., *El Beato* I p. 77. Cf. *Aut.* n. 692.

[6] Cf. *Aut.* n. 765.

[7] Cf. *Aut.* n. 677. *Aut.* n. 45.

[8] Cf. *Aut.* nn. 337–339.

[9] Cf. *Aut.* nn. 42, 310–322.

[10] Cf. *Aut.* n. 53.

[11] Cf. Mt 25:35ff. .

[12] Cf. Mk 9:50; 2 Cor 12:20.

[13] Cf. Mt 7:12; Lk 6:31.

[14] Cf. Tob 4:15.

[15] Cf. Mt 22:40.

[16] Heb 4:12.

[17] Cf. Fernández, C., *El Beato* I pp. 332–333.

[18] Cf. Lk 1:38, 48.

[19] Cf. *Sermones varios*, n. 51: *Obras completas de San Bernardo* (BAC, Madrid 1953) vol. 1, p. 1069.

[20] Cf. Lk 2:7, 12.

[21] Cf. Lk 2:16; Mt 2:11.

[22] Cf. Lk 2:7.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Cf. Is 1:3.

[25] Prov 3:32.

[26] Lk 4:18; cf. Is 61:1. Cf. *Aut.* n. 119. Cf. *Aut.* n. 687.

[27] Cf. Mt 11:25.

[28] "To the wise and to the foolish" (cf. Rom 1:14). Xifré, J., *Crónica de la Congregación*: Anales CMF 15 \[1915\] 190.

[29] Cf. Mt 2:2.

[30] *Institutionum oratoriarum libri duodecim* bk. 1 \[Paris 1760\].

[31] Cf. *Aut.* nn. 310–322.

[32] "I am the mother of fair love" (Sir 24:24 \[Vulgate numbering; the source cites "Ecl."\]).

[33] Cf. *Aut.* n. 440.

[34] Cf. Venerable Master John of Ávila, *Obras* (Madrid 1759) vol. 1, p. 45. Cf. *Aut.* n. 440.

[35] Cf. Mk 7:37.

[36] St. Francis de Sales, *Práctica del amor de Dios* \[*Treatise on the Love of God*\] (Madrid 1775) bk. 3, chs. 2–3, pp. 109–116.