St. Anthony Mary Claret

SUMMER AFTERNOONS AT LA GRANJA

Tardes de verano en La Granja

From the Spanish of the first edition (Barcelona, 1865)

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 *Tardes de verano en el Real Sitio de San Ildefonso, vulgo La Granja* (Barcelona, 1865). Claret's own notes are marked as his.

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.

Summer Afternoons at the Royal Seat of San Ildefonso, Called La Granja

Written by the Most Excellent and Most Illustrious Señor Don Antonio María Claret, Archbishop of Trajanopolis in partibus infidelium *\[a titular see "in the lands of the unbelievers"\]. With the approval of the Ordinary.*

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> *God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him, may not perish, but may have life everlasting. (John 3:16)*
>
> *Now this is eternal life: That they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (John 17:3)*

Argument

Señor Don Prudencio was staying, in the discharge of his duties, at the Royal Seat of San Ildefonso, known by the name of La Granja. There arrived, on business connected with his post, Señor Don Federico, a most estimable young man and the son of an intimate friend of that venerable old gentleman. Great and lively was the pleasure both felt at meeting in the delightful gardens of so pleasant and cool a place. Neither of them cared in the least to busy himself with politics; and so every afternoon the two of them, quite alone, went for a walk through those gardens, and instead of talking of the news and the affairs of the world they spent their leisure on matters of religion, which beyond all doubt are more solid and more profitable.

Such was the chief and almost the only subject of their daily conversations; and since the public may draw no small profit from these talks, we have decided to offer them under the title *Summer Afternoons at La Granja*.

Notice

The plan of this little work is plainly seen from the table of contents. It contains three principal ideas. The first, the existence of God, is developed on the first afternoon. The second, his divine providence, is made evident on the second and third afternoons. And the third, the divinity of Jesus Christ, is proved on the fourth, fifth and sixth afternoons.

The truths are treated without speaking of the errors opposed to them, because errors are darkness and will vanish before the light which the truths themselves cast upon them.

There are three principal errors of the day.

The first is atheism and pantheism, and in it the democrats are wrapped up.

The second is deism, and with it the communists and socialists arm themselves.

The third is rationalism, which is the element of the followers of Antichrist.[1]

Since true Christians are children of the light, we must all be ready, our loins girt (that is, keeping chastity, as the holy Fathers say), with our lamps burning in our hands, to go out to meet the Lord; like servants who wait for their master when he returns by night, so as to open to him at once as soon as he comes and knocks at the door (cf. Luke 12:35–36). These lights are faith, charity and the practice of the virtues, with which we must

shine and give light while we live amid the darkness of this world, so that neither we nor others may fall into the abyss by striking against the reef of pride or that of sensuality.

[1] *demócratas.*

First Afternoon: The First Meeting of Don Prudencio with Don Federico

Summary. This afternoon treats of the existence of one only true God. — This is shown by the Creed. — By physical proofs, namely the motion, order and contingency of beings. — By metaphysical proofs, such as eternity and immensity. — And by a moral proof. — A contemplation of all created things. — God is He who is. Who they are that deny the existence of God, and why. — The comparison of a watch and of a building. When the existence of God is denied, all authority collapses. The glory that results from all the discoveries, inventions, thoughts and speeches of men must be ascribed to God, and men must not appropriate it to themselves, as the vain, the proud and the haughty so readily do.

DON PRUDENCIO. — Hello, my dear Federico! You here?

DON FEDERICO. — Yes, sir. I arrived last night, and I believe I shall have to spend some days at this Royal Seat.

— Oh, how glad I am to see you so well! And how are your father and the family?

— Perfectly well, and at your service. I left them yesterday in Segovia, where they will be waiting for me so that we can return together to Tudela once I have done my business here. And you, Señor Don Prudencio, how are you? How are the years treating you?

— Setting aside the ailments that come with the eighty-odd years that weigh upon my shoulders, I can say that my health is not bad, but good, thanks be to God.

— I am delighted beyond measure, and I have no doubt my father will be especially glad to hear it. This very day, when I get home, I shall tell him so in the letter I left half written before I came out for my walk.

— So you are out for a walk? said Don Prudencio. In that case, if you like, we can take it together, for I left the house for the same purpose, as is my custom every afternoon.

— You do me great honor in letting me walk at your side and talk with you. And which is your favorite walk?

— My favorite walk, or rather the only one I like at La Granja, is through the gardens. However, if you would prefer…

— My will in this, as in everything, neither should nor can be other than yours. Let us go to the gardens, then; the sight of them has a special charm for me too. Every time I enter one, while I admire the hand of man in the symmetrical arrangement and careful cultivation of the plants, I admire, praise and bless the provident hand of God, the creator and preserver of them all. My soul is enraptured as I contemplate such abundance, such variety, such beauty, and again and again I break out into these or similar words: How good and wonderful is God in nature!… But while I am savoring with unspeakable delight the sweet thoughts that the sight of the wonders of creation suggests to me one after another, all my joy is embittered by the sad thought that there are men, even among us, who do not know and who deny the existence of a Creator, or who give him names as unsuited to his essence as they are unworthy of his greatness. You yourself, like me, must have heard this many times; and had I possessed your authority of voice and your learning, I would not have kept silent, as I did keep silent on every occasion when I had the misfortune to hear so great a scandal. Since I am still very young and have not so far had the chance or the opportunity to devote myself to the study of controversy on this matter, I should wish, if it would not trouble you, that from today and during the

few days of my stay at La Granja you would be so kind as to acquaint me with the proofs of the existence of God; not only to root myself more and more firmly in my beliefs, but also to know how to shut the mouths of certain chatterers who, in these unhappy times of shameless and unpunished license, dare everything, talk of everything, doubt everything, or rather deny everything, with such effrontery and in so magisterial a tone that anyone would say they were convinced of what they say, whereas in fact they only blaspheme what they do not know (cf. Jude 10).

— So it is, unhappily, said Don Prudencio, and I shall at once give you weapons to fight that infernal mob of freethinkers who infect and corrupt everything with their words and writings. Yes, my dear Federico: while those wretches make themselves guilty of high treason against the Godhead, and even against humanity, which they wound on the rebound with the powerless darts they so boldly hurl at the Godhead, let us busy ourselves with speaking of God as we ought, so as to know him better, love him more and serve him better in this life, hoping that this very thing will be a means for us to reach our further and final end, which is to see him, enjoy him and praise him in the life eternal. And since such men, by a singular aberration of their blinded understanding, still believe and call themselves Christians, and no less than *old* Christians, seeing that they have the outlandish wit to call *us* "neos," you may ask them, by way of preliminary to any discussion with such musty gentlemen, whether or not they know the Apostles' Creed, and if they do, whether they assent with true faith to the first words with which it begins: *I believe in one God…* The Creed marks out the fields perfectly; for, as is well known, it is the sign or badge by which the true faithful are known and distinguished from gentiles, Mohammedans, heretics, schismatics, Protestants and other sectaries of error. Very well: strike that note first of all, and then one of two things will follow. Either you convict them of inconsistency in denying with their lips what they believe within, or you strip them of the mask of Christians by convicting them of falsehood in calling themselves such, since they lack the first of all beliefs. Is the existence of atheism, however, a real and palpable fact? asks Señor Monescillo, Bishop of Calahorra and La Calzada, and he goes on to say:

> *"Leaving aside an inquiry which would take us to the very depths of the inner sense, we wish to declare that we do not conceive of the atheist except in practice, except in gross ignorance, except amid impious drinking bouts, except in the din of bacchanals. We do not conceive of him except precisely when he is not a man, because he does not use his reason rightly, or when he uses his reason against his own conscience, which he tries to stifle and which he subdues by means of sophistry, shouting and blasphemy. A most sorrowful and fleeting victory! The scene is tolerably well managed so long as the uproar, the applause of folly and the idea of making proselytes keep up its diabolical interest; but afterwards, in solitude, in sleeplessness, when a man finds himself alone with himself and conscience speaks, with nothing to impose silence on it and no one able to interrupt it, this inescapable afterwards must be the most terrible accusation of man by man and against man. It is at the same time the clearest witness that it is not true that he thinks what he says he thinks, that he believes the very thing he denies, and that, in spite of everything, he falls under the mighty hand of God just when he protests most loudly against the divine omnipotence…*
>
> *"And yet, though we see things so, we know at the same time a multitude of systems designed to deny the eternal truths by disfiguring Catholic dogma and reviling holy morality; and, what is more, brazen assaults on God and on his Christ abound. The explanation of it all lies in the pride of man. When the disorder of his life, his neglect, the tangle of his affairs and the disturbance of his mind become such that he does not know how to find a way out of all that goads and torments him, he then has recourse to the easy remedy of denials, struggling to prove, in his own defense, that there is no power able to call him to account for his life, deeds and miracles.*[1] *And what does this prove, if not that the enemies of truth, caught in their own nets, thrash about to break them and only manage to entangle themselves to a degree hard to comprehend? The very aberrations to which they give the color and shape of systems, the pamphlets dictated by hatred and the books crowned with cursing: what else are they but resolutions, either drawn up in a secret society to fight truth and goodness, or conceived in the fury of a remorse that cannot be extinguished, though it is constantly kept down?…"*

— That is just what I have often thought, said Don Federico, on hearing their absurdities; but it is good to know how one can and should refute the sophisms with which they so often try to deceive and pervert the

unwary.

— I agree with you, said Don Prudencio, and so I shall now give you the proofs of the existence of a supreme Being. These proofs are divided into three classes: physical proofs, metaphysical proofs and moral proofs.

Physical Proofs

Three things leap to our eyes when we cast them over the visible world: motion, in which its physical or material life consists; the constant order that reigns in all its parts; and the contingency of the beings of which the whole is made up. Each of these things supplies its own proof, and all three in the end give the same conclusion. Let us see.

Every motion supposes a mover or moving cause; for just as motion cannot be conceived without a thing moved, so neither can it be conceived without a cause that produces it.

But this mover, or efficient cause of the motions of the world, cannot be any body, nor any man. Not the first, because no body can move itself, nor of itself and by itself alone move another, since it is essentially inert, that is, indifferent to motion and to rest. Nor the second; for although man, by means of his body, is the occasional cause of certain motions, it is no less certain that he is not the truly efficient cause of any. Besides, what have the motions that one man, or if you like all men together, can occasion to do with the motions of the universe?

Therefore the motions of the world, which, as we said, are the life of this world, suppose a mover distinct from all bodies and from all men; this mover is God; therefore God exists.

— Indeed I like the argument, said Don Federico, and I shall try to keep it in mind for when it is needed. — Let us go on to the second, continued Don Prudencio.

Every series of motions and phenomena whose succession takes place in a constant and admirable order supposes an intelligent cause; for it argues in the cause that produces it an end which it set before itself and, besides, the intention of attaining it, both of which belong to the domain of intelligence.

But the motions and phenomena of this world form a series in which a constant and admirable order reigns. If not, examine human bodies, animals, plants and even inorganic beings: in all of them and everywhere there is found an infinite number of combinations most fitted to attain an end; a marvelous whole of effects that successively and steadily all tend to one and the same result; a sublime coordination of means that all conspire to one and the same end in perfect concert and enchanting harmony. And that end, that result, that purpose: what body or what man can have set it before himself or achieved it?

Therefore there exists an intelligent cause that orders all the phenomena and motions of this world, distinct from all bodies and from all men; this intelligent cause is God; therefore God exists.

— How beautiful this proof is! exclaimed Don Federico. But it seems to me, he added, that in view of the countless wonders we admire everywhere, this proof could be greatly enlarged.

— Proofs, answered Don Prudencio, are the better the more concise they are. The description of those wonders I keep for later. Let us now look at the third proof.

The world is a collection of contingent beings, that is, beings which do not have their reason for being or existing from themselves or in themselves, and which for that very reason began and will end. Every day and without ceasing we see it in detail.

But every contingent being supposes a necessary being on which it depends for its existence: a being that did not and could not receive existence from anyone and that gives it to all others; a being that did not give existence to itself, but has it because it has it and cannot lose it; that is because it is, and cannot cease to be.

Therefore there exists a necessary being on which all other contingent beings depend; this necessary being is God; therefore God exists.

— God bless us! Don Federico exclaimed at once. Yes, God bless us, that good God in whose existence I have always believed, and whom I shall now be able to prove to the fools who pretend not to know him!… And what is it, Señor Don Prudencio, that you call metaphysical proofs?

— They are so called, answered Don Prudencio, because they are drawn from things that do not fall under the senses and are the exclusive object of the intellect. I shall give only one.

Metaphysical Proof

There are two things in the universe, both objects of our intellect, which, though incomprehensible, we all admit and believe, because it is impossible not to believe and admit them: eternity and immensity. What is eternity? A moment that never began and will never end. What is immensity? In the words of a profound thinker, it is like a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. Neither definition gives a complete idea of the things defined, nor can it, because, being incomprehensible, they are indefinable; and they are indefinable and incomprehensible because they are uncreated and infinite, the one in extension, the other in duration. Are they two beings? No, but modes of being: two modifications, two qualities, two properties, two accidents. And since these are possible only in a substance, it follows that there exists a being who is in those two modes: an eternal and immense being. An eternal being without duration, because eternity is not made up, like time, of successive moments, but is all at once and in a perfect way![1] An immense being, and yet without extension, because extension belongs only to matter, and he is immaterial. This immaterial, eternal and immense being is God; therefore God exists.

— This argument, said Don Federico, is to my mind as conclusive as the others, or more so. And the moral proofs you spoke of, Señor Don Prudencio, are they as convincing as those you have just explained?

— You can judge for yourself, answered Don Prudencio, from the only one I am going to give you.

Moral Proof

Belief in God among men is, and always has been, a universal, unanimous, undeniable and evident fact.

But a belief clothed with these characteristics is not and cannot be false; it is and must be true.

Therefore this belief expresses a truth; this truth is God; therefore God exists.

— There is no need, said Don Federico to Señor Don Prudencio, for you to tire yourself framing new proofs of the existence of God; for whoever does not yield to the five already set out must be either the most obstinate of men or the most utter madman ever seen on earth.

— Now that the above proofs have been briefly explained, said Don Prudencio, let us give ourselves, for our refreshment and edification, to the contemplation of the wonders that the Lord with fruitful and lavish hand has poured out through all the reaches of space. In this connection I remember the beautiful description of them that a learned man once gave us. Here are his words exactly:

> *“Lift up, my brethren, and fix your gaze on that immeasurable vault that covers us. What beauty! What admirable variety and harmony everywhere! Do you not see those seventy million luminous bodies that wheel above our heads without ever going out, without ever meeting, without ever colliding with one another, without ever straying from their orbits, without ever crashing down upon us? What would become of the earth, wrapped in the dense darkness of night, were it not for those innumerable torches that adorn its black mantle with their sparkling fires? Do you not see the graceful silver disk of the moon, which delights our eyes with its calm and abundant light? Do you not see those brilliant constellations, that lovely Milky Way which, like a rich sash set with diamonds, stretches from Cancer to the Twins? Do you not make out there the pole star, the unfailing guide*

of the intrepid sailor? Do you not see here the shining morning star, the glad forerunner of the smiling dawn that will appear on our horizon within a few short hours?

"Ah, here she is, that enchanting daughter of the king of the stars, in her white robe embroidered with gold and jewels!… So beautiful is her face, so beautiful is all of her, that all the stars of the firmament gladly yield her precedence. All is eclipsed, all vanishes as she draws near and her father uncovers his radiant, shining face. How beautiful is a beautiful night! But how much more beautiful is a beautiful day! Everything changes; the scene is wholly different. The vault of the heavens recovers its brilliant blue; the wandering, gloomy clouds deck themselves in robes of a thousand colors; the little painted birds greet with sweet, honeyed harmony the coming of rosy dawn and of ruddy Apollo. The leafy, lofty holm oak of the mountains, the frail thyme of the hills, the humble grass of the meadows and fields: all recover their pomp and their green. The crimson rose, the fiery carnation, the golden sunflower, the snowy iris, the white lily, the spotless jasmine, the purple and bashful violet under its thick tufts: all the flowers recover their own color, their balmy fragrance; and in that tear of tenderness, in that drop of dew that they show on the rim of their precious cups, they reflect from afar the lovely, lively colors of the rainbow. The creeping insect, the innocent lamb, the noble horse and the giant elephant; the tender little bird, the cooing turtledove, the proud parrot and the majestic eagle; the tiny, delicate fish, the capricious amphibian and the monstrous whale: all the creatures of air, land and water seem to rise again to life, their limbs refreshed by restoring sleep. The clear atmosphere, now flooded with brightness, sends gentle breezes in every direction, which, while they refresh us, refresh themselves by playing among the green foliage of the trees, softly swelling the murmur of the winding brooks and gently kissing the vast smooth surface of the ocean. The mountains seem to skip for joy like restless kids, and the hills too leap with gladness like tender lambs.[1] *All, all in nature rejoices, revives and comes to life again at the return of the beneficent star that bathes, floods, gilds and quickens everything with its shining and fruitful rays…*

"And man, the true and lawful king of nature; man, for whom all this magnificence exists; man, the only being capable of admiring so much beauty: will man dare to say that all this, and he himself, is nothing but the work of chance…? Oh no, he is not a man, he has ceased to be one, who dares to utter such monstrous and blasphemous folly… Every sensible man, not only the Christian but anyone at all, provided he has not lost his reason, exclaims with the royal prophet: The heavens shew forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of his hands (Ps. 18:2)… How great are thy works, O Lord! thou hast made all things in wisdom: the earth is filled with thy riches (Ps. 103:24)! Yes, all, all is made with supreme wisdom. If not, contemplate the regularity and exactness with which the stars ceaselessly run, without straying a hair's breadth, the course that was marked out for them: a regularity and exactness that allow man to calculate infallibly their revolutions, their conjunctions, their eclipses… See next the most exact proportion of the means for the production and sustenance of all beings that enjoy vegetable and animal life… Look, finally, at that noble creature, alone worthy to preside and reign over such vast and magnificently peopled spaces…; contemplate man, that marvelous compendium of the universe, who has existence like the stones, grows like the plants, feels like the animals and understands like the Angels. Yes, look at yourself and contemplate yourself, proud and foolish atheist. Contemplate yourself, and then deny if you dare the existence of him whose likeness your soul bears… Ah! He made it a little less than the heavenly intelligences, and crowned it with glory and honor, setting it over all the works of his hands (cf. Ps. 8:6–7); and would you disfigure it with the black ingratitude of denying not only the benefit but the Benefactor too?… And would you make it, the queen of the flesh, the flesh's slave, even to comparing yourself with the dull beast of burden and becoming like it?"[2]

— A charming description indeed, said Don Federico, and the apostrophe that ends it is very apt. I would have liked very much to hear it; but since I did not have that good fortune as you did, I hope that if you remember any other notable passage you will be good enough to repeat it to me.

— Yes, sir, answered Don Prudencio. I still remember that, speaking of the contingency of all things, he said: "All things have a beginning and all will have their end, except the soul, which is immortal. Will anyone dare to assert, and if he asserts it, will anyone be able to prove, that there exists an endless series of beings, of men for example, without beginning or end? A series of that kind would have to be infinite, eternal, necessary; and a necessary and infinite series made up of contingent beings implies a contradiction; it is not possible. No, no: we must assign a first link to this chain; we must arrive at a first man in this series of men. And that first man, who formed him? Who created him?… Did he receive his existence from chance? Chance is a word that means nothing; it is a word invented only to get out of a difficulty, though whoever uses it does not

get out of it for all that. Did he give it to himself? That is not possible either, because such an existence would suppose a pre-existence, and the same difficulty remains for the latter as for the former. But let us grant this impossibility as possible: how is it, I ask, that the phenomenon is not repeated? If it was possible once, why should it not be possible twice? How is it that no man comes into this world except by the ordinary means? How is it that no full-grown man ever presents himself to us saying: I neither have nor had father or mother; I exist because I am my own creator? And that first man who is supposed to have given himself existence, how is it that he no longer has it? Would it not have been easier for him to prolong a life he already had than to give it to himself when he did not yet have it?… Let us have done with absurdities. To that chain of contingent beings, to that first man, contingent like the rest, we must of necessity assign a cause that is prior and eternally subsisting, from whom man received his existence, and who has received it from no one, not even from himself, but has it because he has it, since he is the necessary Being."[3]

— This, I believe, is the name, said Don Federico, that the Lord gave himself when he entrusted to Moses the delicate and colossal mission of freeing the Hebrew people from the slavery of Egypt.

— Yes, added Don Prudencio, and it was certainly the most expressive name that could be given; for by itself it indicates not only his being or existence but also his manner of being, that is, his necessity of being, his *aseity*, the primordial quality from which, like mighty rivers, flow all his venerable attributes, all his infinite perfections. To say, in fact, that God is the necessary Being, that he is HE WHO IS, is to say that he is the eternal and immense Being; for being independent of every outside cause in his being and manner of being, he cannot be limited to or by any place or time. To say that God is the necessary Being is to say that he is a spirit essentially pure, essentially simple, essentially free of all composition and therefore of all matter; for matter, being necessarily limited and contingent, would destroy his eternity and immensity. To say that God is a necessary Being, essentially simple, is to say that he is one and unchangeable; for his eternal and essential simplicity cannot be reconciled with any multiplicity of essence or any inner change. From his aseity flow also his complete freedom and his omnipotence. Who could restrict the one or limit the other, when there is no one prior to him, and nothing and no one exists except in dependence on him?… It follows, finally, from that inexhaustible spring of all perfection, that God is infinitely wise, infinitely holy, infinitely good, infinitely just, infinitely merciful. His power, his wisdom, his justice and his merciful goodness together form what we call Providence. By his power he created and preserves all things; by his wisdom, which *reacheth from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly* (Wis. 8:1), he rules and governs all things; by his merciful goodness he pours out torrents of graces and benefits on his creatures; by his justice he punishes the moral disorders by which man dares to disturb the order which God established and wills to reign. To touch a single one of these divine attributes, to deny a single one of these perfections, amounts to the complete denial of the Godhead, to the denial of God himself; for each and every one of them is so contained in his essence that to destroy them would be to destroy it.

— Holy God! exclaimed Don Federico. How clearly I now see, even with the eyes of reason, what once seemed to me wholly wrapped in the shadows of mystery! How true it is that reason and faith do not exclude each other, and how well, joined together like sisters, they perfect in us the idea or notion we have of the supreme Being! Now I understand what I have always heard said, that the idea of God is far more perfect in the mind of a theologian than in that of a peasant.

— There is no doubt of it, said Don Prudencio. Everything faith tells us, far from being opposed to it, is entirely in accord with the very nature of things, which is the object of sound reason. And I say *sound* reason, because once reason is perverted and darkened by the breath of a corrupt heart, everything changes its look, and a man in that condition calls white black and black white. That is why David said long ago: *The fool hath said IN HIS HEART: There is no God* (Ps. 13:1; 52:1). Indeed, that whole mob of practical atheists who weary and horrify us with their words and writings have a depraved and corrupt heart; and because it is in their interest that there should be no Avenger of their abominable disorders, they go so far as to deny his

existence. But in vain; for even if we suppose them to have a heart as corrupt and ruined as Voltaire's, or more so, at certain moments they will not be able to help exclaiming with him and like him: "I shall always believe that a watch proves the existence of a watchmaker, and that the universe shows that of a God."

— That is precisely and exactly the comparison I had thought of several times, said Don Federico. When one sees any watch, or contemplates a building, for example the monastery of El Escorial, which we have close by, who is there, or can there be, who does not admit a craftsman for the first and an architect for the second? Who would be so stupid, or rather so mad, as to believe and want others to believe that the wonderful mechanism of the watch and the no less wonderful construction of the monastery are the effect of chance, or that each formed itself? What reason, then, what pretext can be alleged for (I will not say asserting) even suspecting that the heavenly sphere and the terrestrial globe, incomparably more splendid and wonderful than all watches and buildings, are not the work of any craftsman, but both came by chance out of a shapeless mass, and that all the things contained in them formed and perfected themselves, arriving gradually by themselves at the height at which we see them today?

— However absurd and repugnant these errors may be, said Don Prudencio, they still find an echo among foolish and vicious people and among young men whose education is not well grounded in Religion. Besides the filthy excesses to which both give themselves with singular shamelessness, what best proves that such dissolving ideas have spread among them is not only their lack of all respect but their denial of all authority. This follows: once the existence of God is denied, his supreme authority, the one source of all others, is thrown to the ground, and with it religious, social and domestic authority all disappear. From this come all the further consequences we deplore in the family and in society. That is the chaos into which those wicked forgers of systems have plunged us, who, under the pretext of progressive civilization, wreck the true one. They do not want, they say, reactions; they do not want going backward; and by reviving paganism they make us go back to barbarism. Their speculative systems have now become practical, and the socialists and democrats are nothing but the fruits of those flowers.

— What I cannot understand, said Don Federico, is how those perpetual disturbers of the peace of nations persist and insist in their systems of destruction, as if they were not answerable for the evils they cause.

— To me it is still more incomprehensible, replied Don Prudencio, that many of them, being men of talent, should set themselves up as unbelievers and atheists. Of this number was the famous Arago, the learned French astronomer, who died not long ago as he had lived. "An astronomer cannot be an atheist," said Newton, and he was right; for since the whole science of astronomy is founded on the infallibility of the laws to which the stars are subject, it is inconceivable that a single one of those gentlemen should not recognize, admire and adore the author and preserver of those laws and of the stars. I say the same of naturalists, for God is no less wonderful in the tiniest insect than in the largest and most brilliant star. How many kinds of trees and plants! What a multitude of animals! What diversity of birds and fishes! And (a truly and exceedingly astonishing thing!) to each of these kinds of living beings God gave the inexhaustible power of reproducing and multiplying itself. What would we say of a watchmaker who had the remarkable skill to make a watch which, entrusted like a seed to the earth, would produce a tree whose fruits were watches as good and handsome as the first? Ah, that would be celebrated, and rightly, as the most stupendous product of the mind and hand of man. But no: it is not given to man, however wise and powerful, to communicate such a power to his handiwork. Such a power can be stamped on works not by the one who shapes them, but by the one who creates them or brings them out of nothing. The first man can do, using materials and tools and spending more or less time in forming or transforming his handiwork. The second belongs properly and exclusively to God, who needs none of these things. An instant and a word suffice him to give existence, form, life and reproductive power to whatever he wills to have it. And once things are made and created, he does not abandon them as a craftsman does, but preserves them and leads them to their perfection, either by himself or by using men as secondary causes or instruments for the attainment of his ends.

— And yet men, rejoined Don Federico, ascribe to themselves not only the glory of their works but also that of the inventions or discoveries by which the arts and sciences have made such progress.

— The man who grows vain over these things, forgetting God, replied Don Prudencio, besides being foolish, commits an injustice by not rendering to God the things that are God's. What can man do without him? He, and he alone, gave things these or those properties; he gives man the power to know and combine them; and from this combination result many inventions that astonish us by how wonderful they seem. God *ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight* (Wis. 11:21), and does so sweetly. He created all things for himself, but he also willed and wills that man, as the most privileged creature of nature, should make use of all, so that man in his turn may serve him by giving him the glory that is his due. God, and God alone, gives to this man or that, as and when it pleases him, the inspiration or idea of this or that discovery, and together with it the wit and strength of will to carry it out. So we read in Holy Scripture that when the Lord willed that a tabernacle be built for him, he chose Beseleel and Ooliab, filled them with his spirit, and endowed them with understanding and wisdom, with knowledge and skill to work gold, silver, brass, stone and wood; in short, with all that was necessary and sufficient for the perfect execution of his plan (Exod. 31:1–11). What he did with those two famous artists he has done and does with others. From this follows clearly what I said a moment ago: that any man, whoever he may be, would do very wrong to ascribe to himself, without referring it to God, the glory that results from his handiwork, inventions or discoveries. Does God not do enough by leaving him the usefulness of them all?

— That reminds me, said Don Federico, of a text of the Apostle St. Paul that fully confirms what you have been saying, Señor Don Prudencio. Writing to the Corinthians, the Apostle says: *What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?* (1 Cor. 4:7).

— You are quite right, my dear friend, said Don Prudencio, and he went on: Commenting on this same text of the Apostle, St. Thomas says: "Who is it that has made you stand out among your brethren by those gifts, talents and dignity that make you so proud? Is it not God, from whom you have received everything? Then if nothing is yours, but everything is God's, what merit have you to be puffed up, as if you owed those graces and privileges to yourself alone?" For that same reason, all we have said of works and discoveries must be applied also to thoughts and speeches. There are men so vain that if they happen to let fall some witticism or rattle off a few fine phrases, they are as swollen and pleased with themselves as those the prophet David mentions: *Our lips are our own: who is Lord over us?* (Ps. 11:5); as if for their talent, their happy conceits and elegant speeches they had no glory and praise to give to Him without whom neither they nor anyone else is able to utter a single word or have a single thought, in the words of the Apostle already quoted (cf. 2 Cor. 3:5).

As Don Prudencio said this, the two speakers, now on the way back from their walk, reached his house, and there they took leave of each other, to resume their edifying talks on the following day. Don Federico went home, and all night he kept reflecting on what the two had discussed, breaking out from time to time into these exclamations:

O my God! How is it possible that you are so little known, so little loved, and, what is worse, so much offended? The heavens, the earth, all things tell us aloud to serve and love you; and far from doing so, we insult you. Ah, my adored Master! I want to love you for myself and for all those who do not love you, for all those who offend you…! Ah, I would like to have, Lord, not one heart but thousands upon thousands, to love you with them all…! O my Good! O my Love!… Who is like God?…

Prayer

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will. We praise you, Lord, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you. We give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father almighty. Lord Jesus Christ, only-begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, who take away the sins of the world, have pity and mercy on us. You who take away the sins of the world, graciously receive our prayer. You who are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us; for you alone are Holy, you alone are Lord, you alone are Most High, O Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

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[1] *juicio de residencia*.

[2] \[Claret's note:\] *Tota simul et perfecta possessio* \[the whole, simultaneous and perfect possession (of unending life)\] (Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* V, prose 6).

[3] \[Claret's note:\] *Montes exultaverunt ut arietes, et colles sicut agni ovium* \[The mountains skipped like rams, and the hills like the lambs of the flock\] (Ps. 113:4).

[4] \[Claret's note:\] *Homo cum in honore esset, non intellexit; comparatus est jumentis insipientibus, et similis factus est illis* \[And man when he was in honour did not understand; he is compared to senseless beasts, and is become like to them\] (Ps. 48:13, 21).

[5] \[Claret's note:\] *Ego sum qui sum* \[I AM WHO AM\] (Exod. 3:14).

Second Afternoon

Summary. This afternoon treats of the perfections of God. How God is in all things, and especially in the souls of the just, of the blessed, and of sinners. — The providence or care that God has of all things. — Why he permits the wicked man to be happy and the just man unfortunate. — Why we see vice triumphant and virtue persecuted. — Why there are poor and rich. — Three kinds of goods: exterior, interior and supernatural.

DON FEDERICO. — Your servant, Señor Don Prudencio. How have you been since yesterday?

DON PRUDENCIO. — Very well, thanks be to God. And you, Señor Don Federico, how did our long walk last evening agree with you, together with our no less long conversation?

— Both agreed with me so well and pleased me so much that this afternoon the hours seemed like days to me, as I waited eagerly for six o'clock to come and find you and go back to the gardens, where I hope we shall resume our conversation.

— Let us go to them, then, said Don Prudencio. And on what point would you like the conversation we are about to begin, as soon as we leave the house, to turn?

— Thanking you as I ought, answered Don Federico, for the favor of letting me choose the subject myself, I shall take the liberty of saying that I should like an enlargement of yesterday's conversation. Let me explain. Yesterday you proved satisfactorily and irrefutably the existence of God, and you spoke of not a few of his attributes. I should like you to speak to me further about these; for in that way I shall better know who that supreme Being is, I shall know him more, and so I shall have more reasons to love him, according to what I have heard said, that God is loved in proportion as he is known.

— Just so, said Don Prudencio. St. Thomas says so, and besides, our own reason shows it. Two of the three faculties of the soul are, as is well known, the understanding and the will: by the understanding the soul knows, by the will it loves. The third faculty, the memory, keeps in store, with greater or less ease, what those two faculties produce or acquire. The understanding without the will would be a mere spectator of all that can be known; the will without the understanding, for all its natural activity, would remain inactive for lack of direction with regard to all that is lovable, or at most would find itself dragged by a sort of blind instinct toward its object without reaching it. So the will cannot love any object unless the understanding first knows it and proposes it as good and worthy of love. It follows also that the more worthy of love an object is, the more the will will love it, if the understanding proposes it as such. And since God is infinitely lovable,

not only in himself but in each and every one of his perfections or attributes, it follows finally that whoever knows God more and better loves him more and better. That is why Bacon said very aptly: “A little knowledge leads a man away from God; much knowledge brings him near to him.”

God is, as we said, the supreme Being, the necessary Being, the Being who exists and lives of himself, depending on no one, while nothing and no one can live or exist without him. The heavens and the earth and all that exists and lives in them are the work of his hands. He is the only Being who neither has nor can have any defect; the Being perfect in the highest degree, the Being in whom all perfections dwell in a boundless, infinite way. He is the Being who always was, who is, who will always be. By his eternity he is before all things; by his immensity he fills all things; he is present everywhere, in the world and outside the world. He is within, he is without, above, below, at its sides. He is within without being contained, without without being shut out, above without being lifted up, below without being lowered. He is within the world to fill it, below to sustain it, at its sides to embrace it, above to rule and govern it. There is no corner, no space, no thing whatever where he is not, by essence, by presence or by power: by essence, giving being and life to all that exists and lives; by presence, seeing and contemplating all things; by power, preserving all things or renewing them without ceasing. As he, and he alone, gave the various beings and things their own nature, so he, and he alone, preserves, moves and governs them in a way that suits the nature of each. Thus in free beings he works in such a way that his action does not destroy or harm in the least the free will with which he endowed them. *In him we live, and move, and are,* says the Apostle (Acts 17:28); and we are, by him and in him, what he himself made us and wills us to be, that is, intelligent and free creatures.

— But tell me, Señor Don Prudencio, asked Don Federico, are we all in God, and is God in all of us? Is he not only in the just but in sinners too?

— Since God is everywhere, answered Don Prudencio, we are all in him and he is in all of us; but he is in a special way in the souls of the just, as he is in a most special way in the heavens, where he has fixed his throne, as he himself says.[1] God is in the souls of the just who are still wayfarers by his grace, which gives them supernatural life, though still a life that can be lost, since they can lose it by ceasing to be just. He is in the souls that have reached the goal, the blessed, by his glory, which gives them heavenly life, imperishable and eternal; for they have reached the end of their course, the inexhaustible fountain of life, the vision and enjoyment of the supreme Good by whom and for whom they were created.

God is also present in the souls of sinners, even of those guilty of mortal sin. But since they are without grace, which, as we said, gives supernatural life, and since they also lack the virtue of charity, which even in this life makes the just perceive and feel within themselves the presence of God, they are, with regard to him, almost like statues that have eyes and see not, ears and hear not, hands and touch not, nor feel (cf. Ps. 113:5–7). The sinner, or *the sensual man,* as the Apostle calls him, *perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God* (1 Cor. 2:14). Mortal sin does to the soul what a mortal wound does to the body. The wound kills the body by separating the soul from it; mortal sin kills the soul by depriving it of grace. And so, just as a dead body neither sees nor hears nor feels material things, so the dead soul neither sees nor feels nor hears spiritual things, and takes no notice of the sacraments, prayers and so on.

— I cannot understand, said Don Federico, how the soul, though dead through mortal sin, still keeps its powers or faculties, understanding, memory and will. Does it not seem that it ought to lose everything, as the body does when it dies?

— When it is said, answered Don Prudencio, that mortal sin brings death to the soul, it is meant that by it the soul is stripped of the supernatural life that grace gave it. This does not and cannot mean that together with that life the soul loses its natural life, which consists in the exercise of its faculties, understanding, will and memory, which are so many qualities that make up its rational being. This being, spiritual as it is by nature, is also by nature, that is, intrinsically, indivisible, indissoluble, indestructible, and therefore immortal. It is so

extrinsically as well, because nothing and no one among created things can destroy it. Only God, who created it and preserves it, could cease to preserve it, dissolve it, annihilate it; but since he does not annihilate what is material, neither can we believe that he annihilates what is spiritual. The natural life of the soul consists, as I said, in the exercise of its faculties; and it sometimes happens that God, by his judgments from which there is no appeal, permits this or that person to lose the exercise of this or that faculty. Then that person, though he loses something of his life, loses nothing of his being, because the faculty whose exercise or use the soul is deprived of remains in it, though dormant. To sum up, I will say that the soul of the just man enjoys two lives, the one natural and the other supernatural, while the sinner enjoys only the first, since sin takes the second away from him.

— You have, Señor Don Prudencio, exclaimed Don Federico, well pleased with what he had just heard, you have a way of explaining things that is delightful. I shall put to you another difficulty that I have heard many times. Some say that God, content with having created the world, abandoned it from the moment it left his hands, and takes no care whatever of the beings and things that happen in it.

— It is not I who will answer that, said Don Prudencio, but Jesus Christ himself. This divine Lord says in his holy Gospel: *Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns: and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not you of much more value than they?… Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they labour not, neither do they spin. But I say to you, that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these. And if the grass of the field, which is to day, and to morrow is cast into the oven, God doth so clothe: how much more you, O ye of little faith?* (Matt. 6:26, 28–30).

And elsewhere in the same Gospel he says: *But the very hairs of your head are all numbered* (Matt. 10:30). And in St. Luke he adds: *But a hair of your head shall not perish* (Luke 21:18). Who, then, can doubt the care and providence that God has of all things, and especially of us, who are his children? Yes, sir, we are his children; so Jesus Christ himself declared to us when he taught us to ask our Father who is in heaven for our daily bread. And the beloved disciple says: *Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called, and should be the sons of God* (1 John 3:1). Now, knowing that among men a father, however bad, works and wears himself out to clothe and feed his children, Jesus Christ argues in this way:

Or what man is there among you, of whom if his son shall ask bread, will he reach him a stone? Or if he shall ask him a fish, will he reach him a serpent? If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children: how much more will your Father who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him? (Matt. 7:9–11). More still: God himself says through Isaiah: *Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? and if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee in my hands* (Isa. 49:15–16). Since he always has us before his eyes, then, and since he is the best of fathers, how could he fail to take care of us, who are his children?

The idea of those who picture God as a great lord who, shut up in his palace, knows nothing and wants to know nothing of what goes on in his estates, and perhaps in his own house, is the most nonsensical and absurd thing that can be imagined. God is everywhere present, he is immense; he sees all, hears all; nothing can be hidden from him; he governs all, directs all according to his high ends, using to attain them the secondary causes he himself created. And since he is essentially good, since he is the supreme Good, and good of its nature spreads and pours itself out, he delights in pouring his goods upon us, in sharing his goodness with us.

— If God is so good, others say, added Don Federico, why does he permit the wicked man to be happy while the just man groans in misfortune? How is it that we see vice triumphant and virtue persecuted? How are we to explain the horrible sufferings and disasters that decimate and devour mankind?…

— Indeed, said Don Prudencio, the sufferings to which mankind is subject are immense and devastating, and in spite of the high-sounding phrases of the so-called philanthropists, in spite of the sacrifices and benefits of Religion and of charitable people, many sighs and laments remain unsilenced… But is God, I ask, the author of our evils and sufferings? Let us leave aside original sin, the poisoned spring of all evils, and take mankind as it presents itself to our eyes. What do we see? That most diseases, and the most loathsome of them, come from some vice forbidden by Christian morality. Intemperance and lust by themselves clear Providence of the evils that afflict us. Intemperance claims more victims than war, and the unbridled love of pleasure spreads over the earth more afflictions and disasters than we could imagine. This, this is the capital vice that draws the greatest punishments upon us, that weakens and destroys mankind, that drains life, and that, like a deadly poison, seeps into a man down to the root and principle of his physical constitution. Did tyrants ever invent tortures like the unbearable tortures of those who abandon themselves to sensual pleasures? Is there, or can there be, any other evil that causes more and greater havoc?… Let man, then, blame himself, and himself alone, for so much suffering, and stop accusing divine Providence, which established laws that protect mankind, laws that preserve it from the evils that consume and devour so many victims.

Vice triumphs, it is said, while virtue is persecuted…! Sad triumphs are those of vice! Glorious persecutions are those of virtue! The wicked man enjoys himself, they add, while the just man suffers… No doubt of it; but let us look into the hearts of both, and there we shall see their lots reversed. The one enjoys himself, but suffers, and suffers because he enjoys himself; the other suffers, but enjoys, and enjoys because he suffers. War without truce or rest in the soul of the sinner; unbroken peace in the soul of the just. Ceaseless unrest, bitter sorrows, gnawing remorse, shameful diseases, an ignoble and early old age, black melancholy, struggle with God and with himself, despair and death: there is the troublesome escort that everywhere goes with the guilty man. Though he stand at the summit of worldly glory, though he be at the height of temporal happiness, all those monsters come by turns to inflict on him an inescapable and endless torment, and to make him pay cruelly for the unlawful pleasures to which he gives himself. Never a calm day for the wicked man. His nights are like those of Tiberius amid the delights of Capri…! And then, for whom are dishonor and infamy? For whom the prisons, the penal colonies, the scaffolds?… Are they perhaps for the virtuous man?… Ah, sometimes, it is true, the just man has been seen to climb the fatal steps of the gallows; but far from being a mark of shame for him, it set the seal on his heroic triumph. No, no, there is no doubt of it: when one compares dispassionately the lot of the sinner with that of the just man, one must be a fool to envy the former his so-called happiness. If there is in this world any gleam, any drop of true happiness, it belongs to virtue. What can all the misfortunes of the earth do against the just man, against the true Christian? He suffers, yes; but he knows that he suffers not because he is just but because he is a man, and that is already a powerful relief in his present misfortune. He suffers during this life, but he knows that it is only a passage to reach the homeland where there is no more suffering. He suffers, but he knows that his momentary sufferings, sanctified by the atoning sufferings of Calvary, will win him *an exceeding eternal weight of glory* (2 Cor. 4:17); while for the impious and wicked man his filthy and momentary pleasures are preparing an eternal weight of shame and torment.

— The faultfinders of divine Providence say something more, rejoined Don Federico. If God is so good and fair, they say, if he governs all men like a father, why did he not share out the goods of the earth equally among them all? Why does he allow there to be rich and poor, and the poor to be more numerous than the rich?

— Ah, my friend, answered Don Prudencio, this new complaint of those who try to find faults everywhere to throw in the face of God himself is no less unjust than the last. One might as well say: Why did he not create all men equally perfect, in soul as in body? Why did he not and does he not give all the same span of life? Why does he permit some to be lost while others are saved, and the former to be more numerous than the latter? And who are we to summon to judgment, call to account and criticize the Creator and Lord of all

things and of ourselves? Is God, by our limited way of seeing and judging, to have less freedom in the distribution of material goods, those that concern the body, than in that of spiritual goods of every kind, which concern the soul? God, says the royal prophet, *hath given the earth to the children of men* (Ps. 113:24).[2] He did not give it to this man or that, but to all in general, so that all might live on its produce. In the beginning, of course, whoever chose for himself and was first to occupy this or that piece of land made it his own by cultivating it or making it productive with the sweat of his brow. Men multiplied, and as the lands were naturally divided up, each had to respect the property of the other. Next came industry; the mines were worked; money was introduced, and from then on transactions were made by its means instead of the exchange of goods that prevailed at first. According to the greater or less work and the greater or less industry of each, each became more or less rich: one in lands, another in herds, another in herds and lands, another in money. There was no lack of poor among them, as there are now and always will be. So God has always permitted it and permits it, allowed it and allows it; I will say more, he willed it and wills it, but on the clear understanding that the rich man give to the poor, that whoever has much give much, and whoever has little give little. What is superfluous to the one who has is necessary to the one who has not, and the first has the obligation to give it to him, for the second has the right to be given it, since he has a right to live on the produce of the earth which Providence supplies for all. That is why a holy Father of the Church says: "Whoever refuses food to one who lacks it becomes guilty of homicide."[3] And the God-Man, taking the cause of the poor as his own, will say to the pitiless rich on the day of the solemn reckoning:

Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire… For I was hungry, and you gave me not to eat: I was thirsty, and you gave me not to drink. I was a stranger, and you took me not in: naked, and you covered me not (Matt. 25:41–43).

This does not and cannot mean that the healthy and robust poor, who could earn their keep by work, have a right to fold their arms and demand it of the rich. To such idlers St. Paul says: *If any man will not work* (according to his state and condition, to earn his living by honest and decent work), *neither let him eat* (2 Thess. 3:10). With these words the holy Apostle condemns voluntary and idle begging, as the Hebrews condemned it, among whom this was a proverbial saying. Pythagoras and the laws of Solon did the same, and even the Roman laws condemned idleness or loafing as a crime. If such people have no right to be given their keep, still less have they a right to take it for themselves, for that would be theft, which God condemns by the seventh of his ten commandments.

God, as I said, permits there to be rich and poor in this world, as he permits there to be healthy and sick, good and bad, just and sinners; and for all of them, as Jesus Christ says in St. Matthew, he makes his sun to rise and sends his rain (Matt. 5:45). In this diversity, as in so many others we observe on earth, divine Providence shines in a particular way and the greater glory of God is resplendent. Harmony is founded not on uniformity but on diversity. Would harmony be possible in a garden whose plants were all of the same kind and whose flowers all showed the same color? No; nor would it be in an orchestra whose instruments all gave the same sound. More still: do not musicians know how to increase the harmony of their scores by combining certain dissonant tones with the consonant ones? And does not a painter's skill shine all the more in a picture the better he knows how to mix or distribute among the various, more or less lively colors the shadows that set off the whole? Apply the case, then.

In that diversity there shines also the greater good of mankind. Who would work if everyone were equally rich? No one would want to serve, no one to be subject to another, no one to work; and from that you can deduce the fatal consequences that would follow for all. Since there are rich and poor in the world, everything gets done, everything goes forward, and for everyone there is occasion to practice virtue. The rich have a thousand occasions to practice the works of mercy, while the poor too have occasions to practice humility, gratitude, patience, obedience and other virtues.

— All this is very true, Señor Don Prudencio, said Don Federico; but still the comfortable life of the rich makes the poor envious. The rich, say the poor, eat well, dress elegantly, go about, amuse themselves with games, dances and theaters, while we have a hard time of it.

— If the rich man makes bad use of his riches, answered Don Prudencio, he will have to give account of them to the one who entrusted them to him, and certainly he will receive no reward for it, but the punishment he has deserved. If the poor man does not have the resignation he ought, and instead envies the rich, for that too he will be answerable and liable to punishment. Both must start from the unshakable principle that the Master and Lord of all gives what he will to each, when and as he pleases. The goods that God in his generous and most free providence usually distributes among men are of three kinds: some are exterior, others interior, others supernatural. The first are all sensible or visible: riches, honors, clothes, food, amusements and so on. The interior or personal goods are peace, tranquillity, contentment, joy and so on. The supernatural goods are the merits gained by the practice of virtue, and the eternal reward God gives in heaven, which is the end for which we were created. Well then, do you know, my friend, how God is accustomed to share out these three kinds of goods? Commonly we see that to whom he gives more of the first he gives less of the second, and perhaps of the third; and that he gives more of the second, and perhaps of the third, to whom he gives less of the first. Observe it carefully and you will see that many people who seem to swim in happiness, because they amuse themselves, eat well and dress better, are not seldom without personal and domestic peace; they are caught up in endless lawsuits; they are the target of envy, persecution and the most atrocious slander; they are slaves of capricious etiquette, surrounded by tiresome obligations; they have to attend, willy-nilly, certain gatherings in clothes they lack and cannot buy, and so on and so on. Holy God! How many vexations, sorrows, annoyances, tantrums and other such things!…

And all this without counting or mentioning the immense emptiness they find in their worldly amusements, because God is missing from them, and without mentioning the terrible bitterness that usually goes with or follows them.

How different is the lot of those who honestly earn by their work the bread they eat, if they are good Christians! What peace they feel in their hearts! What joy reigns in their families! They alternate their toilsome labors with their frugal meals, a thousand times tastier to them than the most delicate dishes are to the rich. Night comes, and after commending themselves to God and to his most holy Mother, they spend the whole of it in a single sleep that refreshes their limbs, so that they return to their tasks the next day. The feast day comes; they collect their wages, pay their debts, fulfill their religious duties, rest, amuse themselves honestly; and their innocent amusements give them more pleasure than the opulent get from their pompous and dangerous entertainments. In them you see fulfilled what I was saying a moment ago: that they have fewer goods of the first kind, more of the second, and perhaps more of the third, as we see in St. Isidore and other laborers.

It is not so easy for the rich to obtain these last goods, because the road of riches is strewn with countless stumbling blocks and dangers. Jesus Christ in the Gospel gives us the example of the rich glutton, who feasted sumptuously every day and was clothed in fine linen and showy purple. Puffed up as he was with his treasures, given over as he lived to pleasures, and hard of heart as he was toward the poor, at his death he was condemned to hell, while Lazarus, one of those poor, was carried to a place of rest from which he afterwards passed to heaven. The unhappy glutton begged Abraham for some relief amid his burning torments, but Abraham answered him: *Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented* (Luke 16:25).

Let the covetous and gluttons, and all who make bad use of their riches, take warning and fear from this example, lest the goods the Lord grants them in this life serve them as instruments to offend him more and more, and then become the cause of their most terrible torments in hell.

— Now better than ever, said Don Federico, I understand the advantages of poverty and the dangers of riches; whereas, if those who possess them knew how and were willing to use them well, those very riches could serve them as a means to lay up merits and win greater glory in heaven. — So it is, said Don Prudencio. God wants the rich to be, as it were, representatives of his Providence; he wants them to be like stewards of his goods; he wants them not to set their hearts on riches, as he says expressly through David (*if riches abound, set not your heart upon them*, Ps. 61:11); he wants them, amid their treasures, to be poor in spirit, that is, to live detached from them, *as having nothing, and possessing all things*, in St. Paul's words to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 6:10); he wants whoever has much to give much too, and whoever has little to give gladly of the little he has (cf. Tob. 4:9); he wants whoever has two coats to give one to him who has none, and whoever has food to do likewise (Luke 3:11).

St. Martin, Bishop of Tours, while still a youth and a catechumen, gave half of his cloak to a naked beggar, and the following night Jesus appeared to him, saying: "Martin, still a catechumen, has covered me with this garment."

By thus personifying poverty in himself, the God-Man gives us to understand how pleasing acts of charity are to him, and he will leave none of them without reward, even if it consists only in giving a cup of water in his name to one who is thirsty (cf. Matt. 10:42). And to encourage the poor to bear their misfortune with patience and joy, though he was and is the Master of all, he was born of a poor mother, lived and died poor, chose poor companions, was always the friend of the poor, and his whole teaching breathes the purest and most dignified poverty.

In conclusion I will say that the poor should rejoice to find themselves in the same state as the Son of God; they owe respect and veneration to the rich, and far from envying them and grumbling about them, they should commend them to God and wish them every kind of prosperity and happiness in this life and the next. I will say too to the rich that they must be rich with humility and charity, for their riches do not authorize them to be proud or haughty, nor to leave without bread and clothing those who lack both. They should also consider that, just as they are rich now, God may permit or arrange that they become poor, and then they will have to say with Job: *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away… blessed be the name of the Lord* (Job 1:21). They should, finally, understand that the best of all means to increase and preserve their treasures is almsgiving done for the love of God and the good of their neighbor. Let them be assiduous, faithful and prudent in doing it, giving and giving again, not to vagrants and idlers but to those truly in need, especially if they are the shamefaced poor. The hard-hearted rich man flees from the poor; the charitable man goes in search of him, and when he finds him, helps him with pleasure, seeing in him an image and member of Jesus Christ, a brother of his who gives him the means to gain much before God and to merit the praise and rewards of his divine Majesty on the great day when he will come to judge us.

With this the second conversation of Don Federico with Don Prudencio ended; and taking leave of him until the next day, as soon as Don Federico was home and withdrawn into his room, he exclaimed:

O my God and my Father, how wonderful, good and lovable you are!… Who will not love you? Ah, I love you with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my strength. Never again will I forget you; I will always study your most holy will so as to do it; I will always meditate on your most just law so as to keep it… Who is like God?…

Te Deum

We praise thee, O God, and confess thee universal Lord. The whole earth calls thee eternal Father, and venerates thee; to thee, full of longing, the Powers and Angels of heaven, the lofty Cherubim and the pure and burning Seraphim, who melt in fervent love, repeat in ceaseless hymns with reverent song: Holy, Holy, Holy, thrice Holy. Most high God, wielder of the thunderbolt, triumphant Lord of hosts, with reverent tongue heaven and earth fittingly proclaim thy majestic glory. The choir of thy faithful Apostles, thy sacred Prophets and thy

strong and valiant Martyrs praise thy greatness without ceasing. The Church our mother confesses thee and reverently adores thee, almighty Father and Lord; thee, true and adorable Son; and thee, divine, ineffable Spirit. Thou art the King of glory, beloved Christ, the begotten Son of the eternal Father. To free mankind thou becamest flesh and didst not disdain a virgin's womb. By the cruel death thou didst suffer thou didst open to them the kingdom of heaven. Thou sittest at the right hand of God, and thou hast revealed that thou wilt come to judge. Help, then, compassionate Jesus, those thou hast redeemed with thy blood. Make them love thee and persevere faithfully. Save thy people, for thou didst value an inheritance that cost thee such a price. Deign to rule it and lead it on to eternal glory. Every day, my God, we give thee thanks and praise thy most holy name. Deliver us from sin this day; mercy, mercy, my voice cries to thee. I implore thy mercy, trusting that thou wilt grant it to my hope. In thee have I hoped, Lord ever merciful: thou wilt not let me be lost for ever.

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[1] \[Claret's note:\] *Dominus in caelo paravit sedem suam* \[The Lord hath prepared his throne in heaven\] (Ps. 102:19).

[2] \[Claret's note:\] *Terram dedit filiis hominum* \[but the earth he has given to the children of men\] (Ps. 113:24 \[Claret's reference: Ps. 113:25\]).

[3] \[Claret's note:\] *Si non pavisti, occidisti* \[If you have not fed him, you have killed him\].

Third Afternoon

Summary. The preceding subject continued. — God permits dishonor for the exercise of humility. — Why there are healthy and sick. — Why the wicked are not punished at once. — Why God permits so many calamities and misfortunes.

DON FEDERICO. — After greeting you, Señor Don Prudencio, I beg you to excuse my lateness. I come half an hour later than we agreed, because of an unexpected and unavoidable piece of business that has kept me at home until now. I see you were already ready to go out, and if you have not done so, it was only to wait for me. I am grateful for such consideration, and at the same time sorry to have put you to such trouble.

DON PRUDENCIO. — Do not speak to me of trouble, my friend, for you have caused me none; and if I did show some consideration in waiting for you, you deserve it. Let us now begin our walk, and with it our conversation; only both will have to be a little shorter, for the very reason that we are beginning them somewhat later.

— I quite understand, said Don Federico, and I am at your disposal.

— And I at yours, answered Don Prudencio, for you to tell me what turn you would like our conversation to take.

— My wish would be to continue yesterday's, Don Federico ventured to say; for although what you told me can be applied in its way to certain other things I am going to put to you, I should like you to explain them to me one by one so that I may remember them better. For example: since we are all under the fatherly providence of a God infinitely good and just, just as he wills that there be rich and poor for the ends you set out to me, and permits there to be people held in honor and people in disgrace, in this latter case he ought to arrange things so that each is in its place; that is, that whoever is worthy of honor be honored, and whoever deserves dishonor be dishonored. This seems to me as if it would be very just, because honor is worth more than all riches and more than life itself. Nevertheless, very often in this wretched world we see the parts reversed in this. Is that not so, Señor Don Prudencio?

— Yes, sir, he answered, again and again we see that in this, as in so many other things, not everyone has what he seems to deserve. But do you not know that if things are not in their place down here, they will be up there? Are you unaware that this very reversal of parts is one of the means the admirable and adorable providence of God uses to lead us to the end he set before himself in creating us, that is, to our salvation? No one can attain it without being humble; that is certain, for Jesus Christ himself tells us so in the Gospel (cf. Matt. 18:3–4). Well, what better means of practicing humility than humiliation? And what greater

humiliation than to see oneself despised, slandered, dishonored? No: however many resolutions a man makes and however much he desires to be humble, he will never be so if he has no contempt and dishonor to suffer. Put a nail on top of a board: will it go into it by itself, however sharp it is? No; only by blows of the hammer will you manage to drive it into the board. We are the same: only by hammer blows does God manage to make us humble, however good our dispositions to be so may sometimes be. When adversities, slanders, persecutions and the like come upon us, then, the first thing we must do is to accept everything with resignation as something providential, acknowledge that it is for our good, and exclaim with David: *It is good for me that thou hast humbled me* (Ps. 118:71).

Next we must reflect that our divine Redeemer, to give us examples of the humility we so much need, willed to be and was despised in his childhood, in his youth, and still more in his manhood; he willed to be and was scourged like a vile slave, put below the seditious murderer Barabbas, and put to death hanging on a shameful cross between two thieves. And who is there who, thinking of this, can compare his own humiliations and setbacks with those Jesus suffered for us? What wretched sinner (and we all are such!) will dare to complain on seeing Jesus, innocent and holy, suffer the same as he and even infinitely more?

Besides, it is indispensable always to bear in mind the very great difference between being dishonored because God simply permits it as a means to exercise virtue, and being dishonored through one's own fault, or because God inflicts dishonor as a punishment on one who deserves it for his infamous crimes. The names of these last remain stigmatized on earth for ever after; while the innocent and virtuous, though they suffer for a time, do so in order to shine afterwards with greater splendor, and their names remain eternally vindicated among men. Witness chaste Joseph, who, after being slandered and imprisoned, came out of prison to sit on the throne beside King Pharaoh (Gen. 39–41). Witness also, and above all, Jesus Christ, who, humbled to the utmost, received *a name which is above all names: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth* (Phil. 2:9–10), all confessing that Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father in the highest heaven.

— When I put my little objections to you, Señor Don Prudencio, on the point you have just explained so clearly and plainly, said Don Federico, I was about to add that it seemed to me the same was true of health and sickness as of honor and dishonor; but now I see that, merely because I have mentioned it, you are going to convince me with like reasons.

— Clearly, answered Don Prudencio, the same reasons hold for both extremes. In our case, however, besides the permissive will of God, which we must always presuppose, it must be observed that sickness and death itself are consequences of the original sin that we all contracted; and although it was blotted out from the soul in baptism, we are all, as to the body, subject to these as to a just punishment we all deserved. This is the general rule from which no one is exempt; but among the sick there are some, and not a few, who lost their health through their excesses in eating, drinking and other things. Others, in spite of blameless conduct, are always suffering; God permits this so that both they and those who care for them may have occasions and reasons to practice patience and the other virtues. Some die at a very tender age, others at a very advanced one. In all this we must adore the hand of divine Providence, which so disposes it. God is the master of our life, and as he gave it to us, he can preserve it for us or take it from us when he wills. Sometimes he takes it from the young because, seeing them good and foreseeing what they would become later, he takes them away so that the malice of the world may not pervert them or be the cause of their eternal ruin (cf. Wis. 4:11). To the wicked God sometimes gives health and long life, rewarding in them in this way some good works they have done; and he does it because, seeing that they will not amend and foreseeing that they will not amend and will die impenitent, he does not want the little good they have done to go unrewarded. To the good, on the contrary, God quite often permits sicknesses and other evils to come and try them: first, because the just man, though just, often fails, and his faults must be purged either here by means of these pains or temporally in purgatory by the pains of loss and of sense, far worse than all those of this world;[1] second, to

give the just man means of increasing his merits and of giving the world good examples of humility, patience and resignation, no less than edifying proofs of the love of God. So we see it in the Martyrs and in so many other Saints, as also in the most holy Virgin Mary and in her divine Son, who had nothing to purge, and yet whom God permitted to suffer so much.

"God our Lord," says St. Augustine, "does not reward here in the good all their good works, nor punish in the wicked all their evil ones, so that it may be believed that there is another life in which what was not punished or rewarded in this one will be rewarded or punished. Nor does he leave everything unrewarded or unpunished, and this so that it may be seen that there is a Providence that knows all that happens or is done in this world."[2] There are those who say rashly and with exaggerated zeal: Why has God not done and why does he not do with wicked men the same as with the rebel angels?

Ah, my friend, poor mankind if the Lord had treated us as he treated them! Who could tell us where the very man who says this would be at this moment? Who knows where we ourselves would be now if God had treated us with such severe justice? "Not in vain," says the same Father St. Augustine already quoted, "does God permit there to be wicked men on earth; for he permits them either that they may be converted and saved, or to exercise the good in virtue." So the lives of very many sinners bear witness, who from being such became great Saints, like St. Paul, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Augustine and others, who have been and are for the world great models of humility, repentance, penance and so on, and at the same time most evident signs of the divine mercy. God also uses the wicked to obtain many other goods. Would heaven possess a numerous multitude of slaughtered innocents had there not been an envious and cruel Herod? Would the redemption of the human race have been accomplished had Jesus not found among his own people executioners to put him to death? Would there be in the highest heaven so many millions of Martyrs had there not been so many tyrants on earth?

In the same way that God tolerates wicked men in this world, he also permits there to be evils, such as wars, famines, plagues and other calamities. Why? Because, besides justly punishing our misdeeds with them, he knows how to draw great goods from them for our benefit. With these plagues he makes it plain to us that the earth is only a valley of tears and miseries, and that since he has given us an inborn and invincible desire for a happiness that the earth can never satisfy, we must continually lift our eyes and our hearts toward the homeland of true and eternal happiness, the homeland where he dwells, the homeland where he himself admits us to the enjoyment of his own happiness. By the pains and trials to which we are exposed by divine permission the Lord likewise supplies us with abundant means of laying up treasure for heaven; he tolerates, besides, that our enemies, the world, the devil and the flesh, should ceaselessly shoot their darts at us, so that, struggling continually against them, we may win the palm of victory, the crown of triumph, a crown which only those will obtain who have *strived lawfully*, as the Apostle says (2 Tim. 2:5).

— Now I understand, said Don Federico, the proverb that says, "There is no ill that does not come for some good," for I see clearly with what goodness divine Providence knows how to draw from our ills goods that are of great profit to us in this life and the next. How wonderful God is in all that he does, and even in what he permits!

— Very wonderful indeed is the Lord, said Don Prudencio, in turning the ills with which he punishes us into goods with which he rewards us. In this the wisdom, power and goodness of our Father who is in heaven shine out together; and consequently from these very ills there results for him a good, which is his greater glory. That is why the same Father St. Augustine said very aptly: "God judged it better to bring good out of evil than not to permit any evil at all." Do not imagine from this that each of us may also permit or cause evils in order to obtain some good. No, that will never be lawful for us, above all in the moral order.[3] Physicians and surgeons sometimes cut into healthy flesh, and with their lancets, leeches, cauteries and so on leave their patients in a sorry state; but since they do it to preserve life or restore health, they may and must act according to the saving principles of their profession. God, who is the supreme spiritual physician of our

souls, often does with them what those men do with our bodies. He prescribes for us this or that public or private calamity; he permits wicked men, more greedy for the goods and happiness of their neighbors than leeches for human blood, to be applied to us like so many bloodsuckers, to take away the swelling of pride, calm the heat of our concupiscence, or neutralize the deadly effects of our untamed passions. And in these cases, what must we do so as not to spoil in ourselves the good that God intends? Suffer, keep silent, pray for our enemies, do good to those who do us harm, and thank God for the benefit he grants us, as the patient thanks the doctor when by means of leeches or other remedies he has found relief or recovered his health.

We see these considerations confirmed and strengthened in many passages of Holy Scripture and of Church history. In the Second Book of Kings we read that God, to punish the sin of adultery David had committed, said to him by the mouth of Nathan: *Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thy own house* (2 Kings \[2 Sam.\] 12:11), to avenge that great wickedness of yours. And in fact he used Absalom, who rebelled against him, stirring up a revolution in his kingdom during which thousands upon thousands of atrocities were committed.

In the same book we read that the guilty and unhappy David, as a consequence of the rebellion of his son Absalom, had to flee from his palace and leave Jerusalem to save his life; and that as he fled toward Bahurim there came out to meet him a man of the house of Saul named Semei, who spewed out countless curses against him, throwing stones and dust at him. Those who were with David, horrified and indignant at this, wanted to kill the insolent Semei; but David would not allow it, and said to them: *Let him alone… for the Lord hath bid him curse David: and who is he that shall dare say, why hath he done so?* (2 Kings \[2 Sam.\] 16:10–11).

In Isaiah we see that God used Cyrus, king of the Persians, to punish the Chaldeans (Isa. 45). He calls the Assyrians “the rod of my anger,” *Virga furoris mei* (Isa. 10:5); just as later we see in Church history that the devastating Attila called himself “the Scourge of God,” *Flagellum Dei*.

Leaving aside many other authorities I could bring forward to prove how providential are the evils we suffer publicly or privately, I will quote only, and once again, the great Doctor and Father St. Augustine: “God does with us,” he says, “what a father here below is accustomed to do: angry with his son, he takes a stick and punishes the son with it; afterwards he throws the stick into the fire and makes the son heir to all his goods.” In this way, according to the Saint, God uses wicked men like a stick or scourge to inflict evils on the good and punish them, who, good as they are, have nonetheless offended him; and afterwards he throws the instruments he used into the fire of hell, appointing those he punished heirs of his kingdom.

— How far astray many Christians go, exclaimed Don Federico, through not considering that the evils others cause them come from God, or that God permits them to befall them!

— Of this lack of reflection, said Don Prudencio, St. Dorotheus complained bitterly and rightly in these words: “There are some who, forgetful of God, when another throws an offensive word at them or does them some harm, turn all their rage against him, imitating in this the dogs that bite the stone without noticing the hand that threw it.”

This is not to say that the one who is offended or harmed in his honor, body or goods should or may take issue with God, as if the guilt or moral deformity that those acts contain were God’s. That deformity belongs properly and exclusively to the one who has the malice and daring to commit them, and for that reason he is answerable for them before God and men. God does nothing but use, for his providential ends, the bad nature and worse dispositions of men who freely acquired them and freely put them into practice, all the malice, all the deformity of their deeds and words remaining theirs, while God concurs only in what is material in them. We must say of these evil deeds the same as of scandalous ones. Given the malice of the devil, the natural weakness of man in his present state, his likewise natural inclination to every kind of evil, and the general corruption that reigns in everything, there cannot but be scandals; and in this sense Scripture says *it must*

needs be that scandals come, but it adds nonetheless: *woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh* (Matt. 18:7).

That is, according to the explanation of Father St. Jerome: "Woe to the man who by his vices is to blame for doing what must needs happen in this world!" No, God is not and cannot be the author of, or an accomplice in, the sin contained in the actions or words of wicked men, whether these give scandal and cause the spiritual ruin of their neighbors, or are simply the cause of their bodily or material harms. Everything morally defective or culpable that harms man is the work of man. God tolerates these sins, as he also tolerates those that offend him directly, concurring only, as I said, in what is material in what is said and done, without being for that reason responsible for any deformity; just as the soul is not responsible for the limp of a lame foot when it moves it. It follows, then, from what has been said… But did you hear that thunder, Señor Don Federico? The storm, which I thought was still far off, seems to be coming nearer; so it will be prudent to retrace our steps at once. Everything seems to conspire against our walk and conversation today. Blessed be God.

— I think, said Don Federico, that to keep from getting wet we shall have to quicken our pace, for the storm is growing stronger and it is almost upon us.

— No, answered Don Prudencio, I do not think we need go so fast that I cannot give a summary of what has been set out since we came out. I say, then, that by his unceasing and fatherly providence God rules and governs all things and takes very particular care of men; that nothing happens by fate or by chance, for everything, down to the most insignificant things, happens according to the ordering or permission of God; that God ordinarily bestows on us every kind of good, and that at times he permits many evils to befall us, using the former to favor us and the latter to punish us; that these same evils, while they are a just punishment for our sins, are for us excellent means of practicing virtue and of recovering by it the friendship of God; that whatever the evils with which God permits us to be afflicted, publicly or privately, he never abandons us to our own strength, but gives us his grace, as the Apostle says (1 Cor. 10:13), to rise above them and come out victorious; that in losses, sorrows, adversities, persecutions, slanders and so on we must not stop at the things or persons that cause them, but think that God sends us this cup of bitterness as he sent his Son the cup of his passion and death. Each of us may indeed say to him as the Son did: *My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me* (Matt. 26:39), this sorrow, this persecution, this…; but we must also add, like Jesus: *Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.* And if God disposes or wills that we drain our cup to the dregs (cf. Ps. 74:9), let us accept it with resignation, neither doing nor wishing any harm to whoever persecutes us, slanders us or offends us in any other way. Far from that, we must imitate the conduct of the divine Savior toward his executioners, saying as he did in his last moments: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* (Luke 23:34).

— Let us hurry, said Don Federico to Señor Don Prudencio, for the storm is about to break over us… Good, here we are.

— Well then, good night, my friend, said Don Prudencio; until tomorrow, God willing.

Hurrying home as fast as he could, Don Federico exclaimed inwardly: O my God, how wonderful is your providence! And how blind we are not to see and recognize in all things your fatherly hand, which does, disposes or permits everything for our good!

Prayer

O my Father, how good you are! O my Benefactor, I love you with all my heart! I bless you, O God infinitely good, infinitely wise, infinitely powerful! Ah, no created understanding can comprehend the breadth, the immensity of your perfections; no human heart can appreciate the multitude, the infinity of your kindnesses toward us…! You are my God and all my good, and I hope you will be my complete happiness in the eternal

glory of heaven. Amen. Who is like God?…

[1] *poena sensus*.

[2] the thought is from St. Augustine, *The City of God* I, 8.

[3] Rom. 3:8.

Fourth Afternoon

Summary. This afternoon treats of God, one and three. — God has set his seal on all his creatures: angels and men he made in his image; on other things he stamped his footprint or trace. — The choice of Mary for the dignity of Mother of God. — The mystery of the Incarnation of the Word. — The excellences of Mary, Mother of God. Devotion to most holy Mary through the sentiments of veneration, confidence and love…

DON FEDERICO. — I come to your house a little earlier today, Señor Don Prudencio, to make up as far as I can for my lapse yesterday and to recover for us both the precious time that last night's storm snatched away. I do so at the risk of being a nuisance to you, but do not be surprised at it. I enjoy these conversations of ours so much that I am almost impatient until we take them up again.

DON PRUDENCIO. — I am very glad of it, my friend; and since last night's heavy rain has cooled this district a good deal, we can go out at once without any trouble. Today, however, I do not intend to give you the freedom to choose the subject of our conversation, for I mean to remind you of certain high mysteries the remembrance of which is never anything but very profitable.

— I shall listen to you gladly and gratefully, Señor Don Prudencio, said Don Federico.

— Let us go out, then, the other added, and without further preamble let us come to the subject. Until now our conversations have always and exclusively had as their object the existence of God and his Providence, that is, the never-interrupted care he has of all things, and especially of us. Today we are going to discourse on this Being considered in himself, as he himself has made himself known by revelation, as we believe in him by the Catholic faith. God, as you know, is one and three: one in essence and three in persons, who are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. *There are three who give testimony in heaven,* says St. John the Evangelist, *the Father, the Word* (that is, the Son), *and the Holy Ghost. And these three are one* (that is, one essence) (1 John 5:7). At the baptism of Jesus by his Forerunner there was a simultaneous revelation of these three persons; for the voice of the Father resounded in the air, declaring Jesus to us as his Son, and the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the form of a dove (Matt. 3:16–17).

The divine Master inculcated this adorable mystery in his disciples, commanding them to teach it in their turn to all nations and telling them to baptize them *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost* (Matt. 28:19). In this, if you look closely, the unity of nature or essence in God is expressed by the word NAME in the singular, and the trinity of persons by mentioning each by its own name. This, says St. Athanasius, is the Catholic faith: to believe and venerate one God in Trinity and the Trinity in unity.[1] One is the person of the Father, another that of the Son, another that of the Holy Spirit. The Godhead of the three persons is one alone, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal. The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; yet they are not and cannot be three gods, because the nature, like the Godhead, which is whole in all and whole in each of the three persons, is one and not threefold.

— How lofty and adorable this mystery is! exclaimed Don Federico. This has always been my faith, and I hope to die in it, and, if need be, for it.

— You also believe, said Don Prudencio, and I with you and with all Christians who do not have their heads unscrewed by one of those ridiculous systems, improperly called philosophical, with which now more than ever certain know-it-alls try to pervert us under the pretext of enlightening us; we also believe, I say, and

believe it with divine and infallible faith, that this God, three and one, or rather the only God, is the only Creator of all things visible and invisible. But there is something in created things that perhaps you have not noticed: in all things there shines, as it were, a characteristic seal of the triune God.

— I know, said Don Federico, that this seal shines in a particular way in man, created in the image and likeness of God.

— In all his works, said Don Prudencio, God has done in some way as manufacturers do, who stamp their seal or mark on all the articles that leave their workshops; or as a hardworking and provident mother of a family does, who marks all the pieces of her linen with her initials so that none may go astray. All created things are divided, as I have said, into invisible and visible. The invisible are the Angels, souls and the air; but the air can be weighed, compressed, expanded, divided and so on, because it is material. The Angels and souls have none of these qualities, because, being spiritual, they are not and cannot fall under the domain of the senses, being as such essentially indivisible, impalpable and so on. Each of the Angels, like each of our souls, has three faculties: understanding, memory and will. This trinity of faculties in the unity of substance, in the Angels and in souls, is an image of the trinity of persons in God and of the unity of his substance, nature or essence.

Let us make man to our image and likeness (Gen. 1:26), said the three divine persons on creating him; and this likeness the human soul reflects, like the Angel, in its trinity of powers and its unity of substance. "We have in our soul," says St. Augustine, "three faculties: understanding, memory and will. These three things are not three lives but one life, nor three souls but one soul, and therefore not three substances but one substance. Considered in themselves, memory, will and understanding are called life, soul, substance; but considered in relation to their functions, they are called by their own names, and the three form only one being. Even in my operations I find a kind of image of the divine Trinity, whether in knowing or in loving. When I have an attachment to an object, I find three things in this operation of mine: the object desired, myself who desire it, and the affection with which I desire it. The same happens to me when I know something."[2]

As for the other beings of creation, here is what St. Augustine also says, commenting on what we read in Scripture, that God made all things *in measure, and number, and weight* (Wis. 11:21): "In all the works of God," he says, "you will find unity, form and order: unity in the nature of bodies and in the substance of spirits; form in the shape and qualities of bodies and in the gifts of spirits; order in the weight or relative position of bodies and in the affections and powers of the soul."

"It is inevitable," he concludes afterwards, "that in considering the Creator in created things we should also see the Trinity, whose image is revealed, as far as possible, in all the beings of creation."

— What you have just quoted from St. Augustine, Señor Don Prudencio, said Don Federico, brings to my mind what we were taught in the philosophy class. All beings, we were told, are endowed with three absolute qualities or properties: unity, truth and goodness. *Unity:* leaving aside as unquestionable the unity of spiritual beings, this quality belongs also to bodily beings, in spite of the plurality of parts that enter into their composition. We say *a* tree, *a* bench, *a* rock, and so on. Break the rock into a thousand pieces: then, together with its name, the rock loses its unity; but the thousand parts that made up the whole called a rock acquire it. Each of them will be a stone, a paving block, a… and so on. *Truth:* we call true silver and true gold the two metals that bear these names, because they have everything necessary to constitute their respective kinds. Pinchbeck we call false gold with respect to the true; but it does not for that reason cease to be, in its kind, a true metal called pinchbeck. *Goodness:* every created being unites in itself the conditions necessary and proportioned to the end for which it was destined. In this absolute sense all of them, each in itself, are good; and that is why Holy Scripture says: *And God saw all the things that he had made, and they were very good* (Gen. 1:31).

— Exactly, my friend, said Don Prudencio; so that whether things are looked at from this point of view or from the one St. Augustine gave us, we see God reflected in creation as three and one. So, then, all that God has made is worthy of God: everything shows us his existence; everything, in its way, gives us a glimpse of his essence; everything reveals to us his Providence, or the care with which he preserves and directs all things, exalting them by the very fact that he deigns to concern himself with them. But the most wonderful thing, because the most prodigious; the thing that can never be extolled or duly appreciated, because it is infinitely good, is that he has made himself known on earth in person and bodily. Yes, sir, bodily: not that God has a body, but that, wishing to save lost mankind, God sent us his only-begotten Son, so that, uniting himself hypostatically to our nature, he might pay its debts, and so that we, believing in him and keeping his holy law, *may not perish, but may have life everlasting* (John 3:16): a life which he himself helps us to attain, not only encouraging us with his grace from heaven but feeding us with his own body and blood in the sacrament of his love. Bethlehem, Calvary and the Upper Room, that is, the Birth, the Crucifixion and the Eucharist: here is another trinity of things as incomprehensible and unsearchable as the very Trinity of persons in God. Moreover, while it is true that every creature must render God whatever homage it can, it is no less true that none, however privileged, can render it in a way worthy of him. To be worthy of God, that homage must be infinite, and there is no creature that can give its acts such a value, since that value is beyond its powers and beyond what it is in itself. God, therefore, could not and cannot be worthily adored by a mere man; he can be so only by a God-Man, by a person equal to the other persons of the most holy Trinity, a person who imparts to his own acts an infinite value, worthy of God alone. This is precisely what the person of the divine Word, united to human nature, has done and does. Subsisting in this nature, he renders God the homage due to him, adoring him worthily and submissively consecrating his whole being to his glory.

Accordingly, Jesus Christ is the only truly worthy adorer of the Godhead. Our homage, supplications and adoration have no value at all, are not acceptable in the eyes of God, except in so far as they are dignified, in so far as they are incorporated or united with the adoration, supplications and homage of the God-Man. Jesus Christ, Son of God and son of man, represents all men before God; he adores God in his own name and in ours, and therefore we must adore God in him and through him, uniting our adoration with his and remaining always personally united to him as members to their head. This union matters to us all the more because without it all we might do to obtain our eternal salvation would be of no use to us. We must cling to Jesus as ivy to the tree; still more, be united with him as the branches are united with the vine (cf. John 15:5), and only so shall we be able to share in his life-giving sap, only so shall we share in his supernatural and divine influence, only so shall we live in Jesus and Jesus will live in us.

By the great and adorable mystery of his Incarnation the Son of God, besides saving human nature, has honored and ennobled it as far as was possible, and through it all creation, since man is a kind of compendium of all creation. Created beings fall into two great series, spiritual and bodily; and man, composed of soul and body, is the link that joins them, belonging to both. The soul of man, though in a lower degree, is a spirit like the Angel, endowed with understanding, memory and will. By his body man communicates with all lower or material nature; for besides the elements that make up his bodily humanity, he unites in himself the most visible and fundamental qualities observed in bodies of every kind. He has being like the planets, life like the plants, sensation like the animals. And so, though indirectly, everything is exalted by the incarnation of the divine Word; but the one who receives the greatest honor and glory from it is God, and the one who draws the greatest profit from it is man, for by it he is ransomed, restored and made *heir of God, and joint heir with Christ* (Rom. 8:17). This was a work worthy of a God and possible to him alone; for only a God-Man could make condign satisfaction to divine justice for our sins, and only in a Man-God could the two natures, divine and human, be brought into contact, into intimate fellowship, reconciling them, and so extending to the other members of the human race their original but forfeited rights to arrive one day, and for ever, at the possession of God. What an idea, what a grand plan!

— Truly, said Don Federico, this is the most magnificent and prodigious plan God could conceive and carry out. But I notice that the one who was to be the Mother of God made man must necessarily have entered into that plan, and you say nothing of her.

— The observation is just and timely, answered Don Prudencio, and I shall at once turn to so singular and incomparable a Mother. Since the fall of the human race was foreseen by God from eternity, and the plan of the incarnation of the Word was conceived to redeem and exalt it, Mary too entered into that plan, as foreordained and predestined to give a human body to the divine Redeemer. That is why the Church has never hesitated to apply to her the following words, which belong to the eternal Wisdom: *I was set up from eternity, and of old before the earth was made. The depths were not as yet, and I was already conceived… When he prepared the heavens, I was present* (Prov. 8:23–24, 27). The eternal Father chose her from that time as his Daughter, the Holy Spirit as his Spouse, and the divine Word as his Mother. What graces and privileges, then, would the three divine persons not grant her when, the fullness of time having come, Mary was conceived to be Daughter, Spouse and Mother of them respectively! "It is a general rule," says St. Bernardine of Siena, "that when God chooses a rational creature for a singular dignity or a sublime state, he gives it all the gifts of grace that are necessary to the dignity or state of that person and befitting its splendor." And what greater dignity than Mary's? Mary is Mother of God; and this sublime, incommunicable and therefore unique dignity contains many others that flow from it of themselves. Because she is Mother of God, Mary is Queen of heaven and earth, Co-Redemptrix of the human race, Mediatrix between God and men, Mother of them all, Advocate of sinners, Dispenser of all graces.[3]

— How well the divine Lady deserves these beautiful and honorable titles! exclaimed Don Federico. But tell me, Señor Don Prudencio, have there not been heretics who claimed that the Virgin Mary is not truly Mother of God?

— Yes, sir, answered Don Prudencio; there were such already in the fifth century. Nestorius and his proud followers had the infernal audacity to deny the Virgin Mother her divine motherhood; but the Council of Ephesus anathematized them on 22 June of the year 431. From this sacred Council derive those words we say every day to most holy Mary: *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen, Jesus.* Mary is truly Mother of God, as every woman is truly mother of her child. A woman brings forth the fruit she naturally conceived in her womb by the means God instituted. That fruit is nothing other than a human body, to which, once sufficiently formed, God united a soul that gave it life and made it a person. From this there results a man, a human person, whose true mother is said to be, and is, the one who conceived his body. Mary likewise brought forth the fruit she had conceived in her immaculate and virginal womb, and which the Holy Spirit formed supernaturally in her and from her. When the body had been formed and organized, God united to it a soul that gave it life, but without making it a person; for to make it a person the second of the three divine persons united himself hypostatically, at the same instant, to that body and soul. And since the divine persons are inseparable from their one nature, that nature, together with the person of the Word, was united to the soul and body that already constituted in Mary's womb a true man, though without a human personality. We have, then, in the Son of Mary two natures, divine and human, and only one person, which is that of the Son of God. Since he became man in Mary's womb and was brought forth by her, it follows that the Son of God himself is the Son of Mary, and consequently that she is true Mother of a true man who personally and truly is God. Therefore we can and must call Mary *Theotokos*, that is, MOTHER OF GOD, not by exaggeration but quite literally, because strictly and really she is.

— Allow me, Señor Don Prudencio, said Don Federico. Since there are in Jesus, the Son of Mary, two natures, divine and human, and since the three divine persons are inseparable from their one nature, it seems that in Jesus there cannot be only one person, that of the Word, but there must be three, namely that of the Father, that of the Son and that of the Holy Spirit, since all three are equally inseparable from the divine nature.

— The three divine persons, answered Don Prudencio, being inseparably united to their common and only nature, are where that nature is. But since it was not the divine nature that took flesh, nor the three persons, but only one of them, that of the Son, we say and must say that in Jesus there is only the person of the Son of God, because he alone became man in Mary's womb. It does not matter that the Father and the Holy Spirit are also in the divine nature that is in the incarnate Son, for they do not and cannot appear in him as incarnate as he is. Only the Son of God became Son of Mary, and he alone could clothe himself with a human body without the other two persons taking it with him, because all three persons are distinct from one another. In Jesus, then, there are two natures and only one person, as in God there are three persons in only one nature; and just as the unity of nature in God means that there is only one God, so the unity of person in Jesus means that there is only one God-Man. The reason for this last unity is that the person of the divine Word is the only bond that unites hypostatically, without confusing them, the two natures, divine and human. Consequently, the one who is God-Man is the same who is Man-God; or, if you prefer, there is only one Jesus, at once Son of God and Son of Man; more plainly, one Jesus who is God and Man.

— How wonderful and adorable are these high mysteries of our holy faith! exclaimed Don Federico. What goodness in God to become man to redeem us! What glory for Mary, Mother of that good God who became man without ceasing to be God!

— Yes, my friend, said Don Prudencio; in contemplating these mysteries of divine goodness and love toward us, we ought in gratitude to empty ourselves before God, as he *emptied himself* for us, in the Apostle's expression (Phil. 2:7), by becoming man in the most pure and virginal womb of most holy Mary. And what tongue can extol, what mind comprehend, the sublime dignity to which that fortunate Virgin was raised by her divine motherhood, that one Virgin among all mothers, that one Mother among all virgins? Chosen among all the daughters of Adam to be Spouse of divine Love and to share, so to speak, the honors of the divine fatherhood with respect to that Son whom the eternal Father begot of himself before all ages and whom she conceived in the flesh in the fullness of time, that Son consubstantial with his Father according to the Godhead and consubstantial with Mary according to the humanity he received from her, she had to be filled with all the graces, prerogatives and excellences proper and peculiar to a creature raised to such rank and dignity. From her close alliance with the Holy Spirit, from her motherly union with the eternal Word, from her honorable kinship with the eternal Father, it results that Mary is a creature so graced, so illustrious, so sublime that nothing created can equal her: a creature above all creatures; a being who is not God, but whose place is immediately after God; a being before whose name heaven, earth and hell bow down, as they bend the knee before the name of her divine Son; a being who is the purest emanation of the eternal Light, the most spotless mirror of the divine Majesty, the most perfect image of the infinite Goodness (cf. Wis. 7:26); a being who, in St. Bernard's expression, has a suppliant omnipotence; a being, in short, who, without being infinite, surpasses everything finite. Well might she herself say in her immortal and ineffable canticle: *He that is mighty hath done great things to me* (Luke 1:49). All these excellences God the Father owed to Mary, and he gave them to her so that she might worthily share with him the rights over his Son, which he as Father and she as Mother possess in common.

All these excellences God the Son also owed to Mary, and he imparted them to her so that her motherhood might, as far as possible, be in keeping with the dignity and sonship of the divine Word, who is one and the same. Does not a son owe it to his mother to honor and love her? What, then, would a Son who is God not do to honor his most pure Mother and show her his love? Would he not raise her to the most exalted condition, dignity, power and throne after the divine? If an earthly king left his mother sunk in the state and condition of an ordinary woman, he would certainly fail in the love and honor he naturally owes her; for it is a law engraved not only in the hearts of kings but in those of all men, that every good son, to honor and love his mother as he should, must admit her to every possible share in his goods, honors, rights and even his power, gladly and promptly granting her requests, as Solomon did with Bethsabee his mother (3 Kings \[1 Kings\]

2:20). If, then, God engraved these sentiments in our hearts with respect to our mothers, what would the God-Man not do, what will he not still do, with respect to his own?

— With true and very great pleasure, said Don Federico, I am listening to the many great glories of our good common Mother, the Mother of God, and I am sorry from my heart that, as it is already late, our time for talking of the high and singular prerogatives of so august a Lady is coming to an end. Nevertheless, as we are now going back home, I hope you will kindly tell me, Señor Don Prudencio, what the divine Spouse did for his worthy and virginal Spouse.

— The Holy Spirit, Don Prudencio went on, in choosing Mary as his Spouse, that is, as Spouse of a divine person who is called Holy above all others, had to lavish on her all the gifts of holiness fit to make her the holiest of all creatures, the worthiest among them all to be his Spouse; and he lavished them on her, sharing with her as much as he could give and she could receive. So Mary was endowed with a holiness the most eminent in creation: a superhuman holiness, a holiness above the angels, a holiness divine by participation, a holiness, in short, that makes her the worthy Spouse of so holy a Spouse. He embodied in her, in the highest degree, all the virtues; he poured out on her blessed soul with inconceivable profusion all his graces, all his gifts, all his fruits; so that Mary is the most finished copy, the most perfect model, the most faithful likeness of the divinity and holiness of the divine Spirit: in a word, the masterpiece in which God the Spirit exhausted, so to speak, all the resources of the wisdom, goodness and omnipotence that he possesses and exercises with the other two divine persons.

Thus it is that the three persons of the most holy Trinity all concurred to make Mary the most complete and most faithful image of themselves, to make her, for the world, a kind of visible photograph of the invisible Trinity, whose complement she is, humanly speaking, in the words of a famous and devout writer: *Maria universum Sanctae Trinitatis complementum* \[Mary, the whole complement of the Holy Trinity\].[4]

— In all truth and sincerity, said Don Federico, I declare to you, Señor Don Prudencio, that I had never had, as I have now, so high an idea of the greatness and exaltation of the Virgin Mary. O blessed, blessed once and a thousand times among all women, for she alone, and she only among them all, merited from the Most High the first birthright among all creatures, the supremacy among all queens, and to be the precious bond that unites her divine Son Jesus Christ indissolubly with all of us, making him our brother, as he is the divine link that unites hypostatically in himself the divine nature with the human, to redeem and save us.

— Since so exalted a Lady was destined to so sublime a dignity, added Don Prudencio, it is easy to understand that God, her Father, her Son and her Spouse, would preserve her in her conception from every stain of original sin;[5] that in giving birth and afterwards she would supernaturally unite the glories of motherhood with the unfading flower of her virginity; and that after her death she would be exalted in body and soul above all the choirs of Angels and placed beside Him who by his own power ascended to the right hand of his eternal Father with the humanity she herself had given him.

All this, my friend, should inspire in us the holiest and most fervent devotion to most holy Mary; and this devotion, to be worthy of her and profitable to us, must embrace three sentiments: first, a sentiment of respect and veneration proportioned, as far as possible, to her sublime dignity as Mother of God; second, a sentiment of true and boundless confidence in her power and goodness, having recourse to her as our refuge and protection in all our needs; third, a sentiment of tender and filial love, answering to the motherly tenderness with which she loves, protects and helps us. With the understanding we must meditate on the excellences of so privileged a creature: her dignity, her holiness, her goodness, her power, all her titles and privileges. With the will we must kindle in our heart an unquenchable fire of love in honor of so lovable and loving a Mother of God and of men. With the memory we must recall without ceasing her never-interrupted favors and benefits, which make her so worthy of our gratitude and our veneration.

That is all for today. Good evening, Señor Don Federico, and until tomorrow, God willing.

— Good night, Señor Don Prudencio, the other answered.

Oh, how little people think of God, one and three! exclaimed Don Federico, now on his way home. How little he is known and loved! Ah, I too have been negligent until now in thinking of him, knowing him and loving him; but from now on I will try to meditate every day on God and his works, on creation, preservation and redemption. I will try likewise to think more of you, O holy Virgin, to know you and love you more. In return, you, O Mother of God and my Mother, will always protect me and pray to your divine Son for me now and at the hour of my death. Amen.

Prayer

O Virgin and Mother of God, I give myself to you as your child, and in honor and glory of your purity I offer you my soul and body, my faculties and senses, begging you to obtain for me the grace never to commit any sin. Amen, Jesus.

Hail Mary, Daughter of God the Father; hail Mary, Mother of God the Son; hail Mary, Spouse of God the Holy Spirit; hail Mary, temple and tabernacle of the most holy Trinity; hail Mary, conceived in grace without stain of original sin.

I resolve to pray the holy Rosary every day in honor of Mary with attention, devotion and fervor, and I will urge as many as I can to do the same. So I resolve, and I hope to fulfill it, helped by the grace of God. Amen.

Canticle to the Virgin Mother of God

We exalt thee, most pure Virgin, and praise thy most holy name. Heaven confesses thee Mother of God, Virgin immaculate in heaven and on earth. All the Angels venerate thee, and the Archangels give thee glory. The Seraphim ask love of thee, and the Cherubim their light. The Virgins praise thee, and never cease to exalt thy name. The Patriarchs say that they bless thy most holy name. The venerable choir of Prophets calls thee holy and wondrous Queen; the Apostolic College admires thee and aspires to serve thy blessed beauty. The Martyrs acclaim thee, the Confessors love thee, and the most pure choir of Virgins calls thee its most perfect pattern. Thou art Daughter of the Father, and of the best of Sons the best of Mothers; the Holy Spirit dwells in thee as in his holy temple; the whole Trinity makes in thee the throne of its Majesty. Thou art a living heaven, and through thee man is restored, and our nature owes its whole being to thy beauty. Thou didst dry the first tears and win for us true glories, for thou didst make the sad fault a happy one, and redeemed through thee we gained more than we lost when undone by Eve. Thou art the heavenly Ark of the Covenant where thy almighty Son, Redeemer, Savior, Holy and Merciful, had his dwelling. From thee, as from a sacred bridal chamber, the Word came forth, white and red, to redeem the world; and so deep a mystery is owed to thee as well, for thou madest God approachable, human and small. Thou art and wilt be the sealed fountain, venerated in all the universe, from which the thirsty drink grace, glory, love and gladness. Thou art the tower of David, thou the house, thou the live coal of love that sets the world on fire. Thou madest the heavens come down to the earth. All our consolations and all our good are enclosed in thee. Thou art the mistress of piety, the forge of charity, the treasure of virtue, the source and fountain of health. God has given thy beauty by grace what belongs to him by nature. He is immense who made all things out of nothing; thou too art immense, sacred Virgin. He is almighty, just, wise and merciful, and nothing is withheld from thy power. He is goodness itself, the good of my soul; thy goodness and virtue are a lofty palm that rises to a higher height and surpasses every creature. Between his omnipotence and thine one difference alone stands: his is his own, not lent, and thine is shared from God. What he possesses by essence alone he gave to thee by bounty. Thou art not God, my Lady, but heaven adores thy Majesty;[1] for being Mother of God has raised thee above the possible and the created. Thou art Mother of the Sun and of eternal day; thou art less only than God, O Mary. Thou art the immaculate Mother of God, and not, as men and women are, a captive of sin, for thy Son preserved thee from it, and thy noble lineage never paid that tax, O loving Virgin! Thou art immaculate, holy Virgin, in body and soul, and so great is thy virtue that there is no nature, if it be created, that is not prostrate at thy sacred feet. Thy light alone, thy sun, is a sun without shadow, and the universe is amazed and astonished to see that thy being, which is human being, is a being so high and sovereign that with the holiness it has to spare our lost life recovers life. Crystal mirror formed by the divine Artificer, thou admittest no stain, mocking the sun, no shadow of the moon; and all the stars, beautiful as they are, beside thy

brightness and beauty are shadows, and ugly, very dark. Virgin, tender Mother of the afflicted, light and guide of the blind and lost, sweet shelter of the forsaken, who, sad and troubled, fallen in this valley of sorrow, sigh ever to thee, ever pursued: have pity on me, loving Mother; let thy mighty hand raise me up; let not my life in this life let go of thy favor, but cling to it always. Defend me in death until I come happily to see thee; and show us thy Son, O great Mistress of perfect virtue; for through thee we gained him, through thee, O Virgin, may we see him merciful. Through thee he was Redeemer; through thee, Lady, may he be Savior. Through thee he came down from heaven and took flesh in thee upon this earth. Be thou with him our consolation. In the hour, ah! of death let thy sweet strong arm defend me; and when the enemy, fierce witness of my sins, seeks stubbornly my ruin in that agony, a heavy accuser, never tired of pursuing me, in so cruel a peril and so great a risk cover me, holy Virgin, with thy mantle; and to thee, Lady, may I owe the victory, grace in this life and glory in heaven.

Amen.

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[2] *Quicumque vult.*

[3] Cf. *On the Trinity* VI, 10.

[4] *Mater Populi fidelis*.

[5] \[Claret's note:\] "Isaych, *Hom. II de B. Virg.*"

[6] *Ineffabilis Deus*, 8 December 1854.

[1] *latria*.

Fifth Afternoon

Summary. This afternoon treats of the creation of the Angels in the state of grace, but as wayfarers. — The revelation of the great plan of the incarnation of the Word in the womb of the Virgin Mary. — The fidelity of the good Angels and the rebellion of the wicked. — The end of each. The creation of Adam and Eve, the temptation and the fall. — Jesus, Savior and Redeemer of the human race, had to be true God and true man. — Original sin and its consequences. — Why, although Baptism blots out original sin, it does not take away its consequences.

DON PRUDENCIO. — Today it is I who come to find you, Señor Don Federico; and as I notice that my unexpected visit surprises you somewhat, I will tell you that at eight o'clock sharp I have to preside over a gathering of friends at my house, so that, in order not to deprive ourselves of our walk, we shall have to go out earlier, if setting out sooner is no trouble or hindrance to you.

DON FEDERICO. — Far from being a hindrance or trouble to me, going out earlier today suits me perfectly, for at the very same hour that you are busy in your house I shall have business in another. Only, since you catch me unprepared, you will have to put up with a moment's delay, the time I shall take to change my clothes.

— I supposed, said Don Prudencio, that surprising you as I did, this would be necessary. Take your time and do whatever you need, and…

— No, no, replied Don Federico, we can go out in two minutes… Here I am, ready to follow you, Señor Don Prudencio, he went on.

— Let us go, then, said Don Prudencio, and let us begin our conversation at once. In it I mean to enlarge on certain things we have already discussed in our earlier ones. You will no doubt remember, my friend, that in them we spoke at some length of the existence of God, of his unity of essence and trinity of persons, and also of his providence. We said a good deal too about creation, original sin and redemption; but these three things admit of still greater light, if we treat them not, as it were, incidentally, as we did, but expressly, as I now intend to do, bearing in mind, however, what has already been said, so as not to fall into tiresome repetition, and adding various other things to complete what has been stated.

God had no need whatever to give existence to anything that has it. Essentially and infinitely happy in himself, he lacked nothing, nor could he lack anything, to be so. Since he could nonetheless communicate happiness to other beings, without losing a jot of his own, by drawing them out of nothing, he willed in his goodness to do so, and he created the universe. Within it, among innumerable other lower creatures, he placed two kinds of higher beings, the Angels and men, the only ones capable, because they are intelligent and free, of attaining the enjoyment of true and eternal happiness in heaven. God created the Angels before men; and unlike men, who consist of soul and body, he made the Angels purely spiritual creatures, more perfect and noble than men, endowed like them with understanding, will and memory, that is, capable of knowing and loving God and of keeping the memory of his benefits. He created them all in the state of grace, but he did not confirm them in it. He willed that they should be wayfarers before being possessors of the goal, the blessed; that is, he willed that, enjoying as they did free will, a liberty proper to each, they should cooperate freely and individually, on the day of trial, with the grace with which they were adorned, so as to merit attaining the end for which he destined them. The Lord revealed to them his plan of creation and with it that of the redemption of mankind, which he foresaw would already fall in the persons of Adam and Eve. He let them know, then, that in the fullness of time that unhappy race would have a Redeemer, who would be the divine Word made man, that is, the Son of God made man in the womb of a virgin, in the womb of a mere human creature, who by her dignity, her holiness and her singular prerogatives would be exalted in body and soul above all the choirs of Angels; just as her Son, the Man-God, would raise his humanity to sit at the right hand of the Father, where every knee in creation would have to bend to adore him, honoring and venerating at the same time Mary his Mother as Queen and Empress of the whole universe.

When this twofold plan had been made known to the Angels, God required of all of them an act of spontaneous and humble submission to the Messiah then to come, and to his virginal Mother, in spite of the inferiority of his humanity with respect to the angelic nature. Thousands of thousands, or rather millions of millions of Angels, led by the archangel Michael, submitted instantly and humbly to the just and gracious decrees of the Most High, paid in advance their due homage to God the Savior and to his divine Mother, and with fervent eagerness rendered their tribute of love to God, three and one, their Creator. There were many others who, puffed up with their extraordinary beauty and boldly led by proud Lucifer, rebelled against God, resisting his plans and refusing to pay homage to any being inferior to them in nature, however much they saw in the future Mother of the Redeemer the highest dignity possible in creation, and in her divine Son humanity hypostatically united to the Godhead. No, said the proud captain of that impious and rebellious host; *I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God… I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the most High* (Isa. 14:13–14).

The trial was over, and by virtue of it God confirmed the faithful Angels in grace, established them in the state of glory, and admitted them for ever to be part of his heavenly court. As for the rebels, having lost the grace in which they had been created and been turned by their own fault into angels of darkness, God deprived them of his glory and cast them all together into the abyss, into the unquenchable fire, into everlasting fire.

— The terrible but just punishment that such illustrious creatures deserved by their rebellion is truly horrifying, said Don Federico…

— Let us come now, Don Prudencio went on, to the creation of man. When the sixth day had come, and all the kinds of plants and of land, water and flying creatures had been drawn out of nothing, God created our first parents, Adam and Eve, somewhat lower than the Angels, but in the state of grace, as he had created the Angels. He endowed them too with understanding and free will; he placed them in a paradise of delights, making them lords of all the animals and plants, with leave to eat the fruit of all the trees except one, which he set apart on purpose so that they might acknowledge that He kept and would always keep his sovereign dominion over all things. Such was the trial to which God subjected the obedience and fidelity of Adam and

his wife. They were living in complete and ineffable happiness in the earthly paradise when Lucifer, swollen with spite and rage against God and devoured by envy at seeing the happiness of the first two human beings on earth, and the happiness that awaited them in heaven, resolved to make them lose the first, and with it their rights to the second. For this purpose he made use of a serpent, which coiled itself around the forbidden tree and through it spoke to Eve, who was near by, idle and moved by curiosity: *Why hath God commanded you, that you should not eat of every tree of paradise? — Of the fruit of the trees that are in paradise we do eat,* she answered; *but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of paradise, God hath commanded us that we should not eat; and that we should not touch it, lest perhaps we die. — No,* the serpent replied, *you shall not die the death. For God doth know that in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil.* — The woman took of that fruit and ate, and gave to her husband, who ate also (Gen. 3:1–6). So was consummated, my friend, this great act of disobedience to the formal precept of the Creator: an act which, though in itself it seems very simple and of little account, nonetheless involves a manifest rebellion, the effect of the pride and ambition that the father of lies, in the form of the insidious serpent, suggested to both of them. At the very instant they had eaten, the eyes of Adam and Eve were indeed opened; not to be like gods, as he had promised them, but to know the inestimable goods they had just lost and the countless great evils to which they were now subject. They saw themselves suddenly stripped of grace and original justice, and deserving of the punishment that God was surely and at any moment about to inflict on them. Fearful and covered with shame, they hide. The Lord summons them, and after rebuking them, he thunders against them and all their race that terrible but just sentence whose consequences we all know and deplore. Then he curses the serpent, the unclean reptile that Satan used to ruin them and us; but from that very moment God made a ray of consoling hope shine for unhappy mankind, personified there in the first father and first mother of all men. In the hearing of Adam and Eve he let the perfidious Lucifer, author of such wickedness, know that under that same form of a serpent he had taken, he would one day have his head crushed by A WOMAN; that is, that a day would come when a Woman and her Son (Mary and Jesus) would conquer him.[1] By this the unhappy parents of the human race understood that a day of redemption would dawn for it, and they handed down this consolation by tradition to their posterity.[2]

— Exceedingly sad, said Don Federico, and deplorable in the extreme was the misfortune of our first parents in paradise…!

— And so it was for them, and so it still is for us! exclaimed Don Prudencio. But amid so many sorrows, the words of the Apostle are a powerful comfort to us: *Where sin abounded, grace did more abound* (Rom. 5:20),[3] the grace of Jesus Christ, true God and true Man. That, no doubt, is why the Church sings in the *Exsultet* of Holy Saturday: "O happy fault, that merited so great and such a Redeemer!" And well for us, my friend, that God himself took upon himself the payment of our debts, for otherwise we were irremediably and for ever lost. Satisfaction and offense must, in justice, stand in corresponding proportion. Since the fault of Adam and Eve was morally infinite, because by it they offended an infinite God, the satisfaction had to be equally infinite, according to the rules of strict justice. Now I will not say one man, but not even all men together, are capable of giving God such reparation or satisfaction. We needed, then, a redeemer who was at once God and Man: man to suffer and die, and so expiate the fault of mankind; God to give this satisfaction the infinite value it had to have to be acceptable in the eyes of God and to free us from the slavery of Satan. That is precisely what the God-Man Jesus did, who is *the Lamb of God… who taketh away the sin of the world* (John 1:29), paying for our sins a price more than condign, a satisfaction not only morally infinite but intrinsically and divinely infinite.

— What goodness of God, exclaimed Don Federico, to have provided us himself, although he was the one offended, with so powerful and effective a means of reconciling us with his divine Majesty, of drawing us out of the shameful abasement into which we had sunk, and of making us recover the rights we had lost!

— And note, my friend, added Don Prudencio, several correspondences that are found, providentially and fittingly, between the fall of man and the sovereign remedy God applied to it. Satan conquered the human race in the person of its first parents beneath the forbidden tree; Jesus conquered Satan, ransoming, redeeming and saving the human race also on a tree, that of the cross. Adam, naked in body, was also left naked in soul by sin, losing the grace that adorned it; Jesus willed to die naked in body too, to cover our souls with the mantle of his graces and merits. Satan used a woman, Eve, to bring about the ruin of her husband and of all their descendants; God too used a woman, Mary, for the restoration of those same descendants, giving us through her a Redeemer and making her the Gate of heaven.

— I should like you to do me the kindness, Señor Don Prudencio, said Don Federico, of telling me something more about original sin and its consequences…

— With great pleasure, my friend, he answered. Now that we know how our first parents committed it, I must tell you that we all inherit it from them, and so will all who come after us. This is a truth, a dogma of faith, contained in both Testaments, Old and New, and defined as such by the holy Council of Trent.[4] I will say more: natural reason itself and everyday experience make the same truth evident to us. The whole human race was contained in Adam as the tree is contained in its germ or seed. When Adam was tainted, then, all his descendants were tainted in him and through him. See, if you doubt it, how the fatal consequences of his transgression reach all of us who inherit his corrupted nature. Hardly was the sin committed when everything rebelled against the unhappy pair who had committed it: their body refused to recognize the soul's rule, the passions rose up against reason, the appetites mutinied against the will. In a word, the lower and carnal man declared from then on a war without truce against the higher and spiritual man; and there you have the origin of that inner struggle of which St. Paul so lamented (Rom. 7:23), a struggle which to our misfortune we all experience.

— This is a truth so plain that no one can deny it, said Don Federico.

— If we consider in man, Don Prudencio continued, what God has made and put in him and what man has made and put in himself, we see sublime things side by side with monstrous and repugnant ones. God endowed man with a noble faculty called the understanding, assigning truth to it as its object, so that it might embrace truth and with it be happy: an understanding keen, perceptive, ingenious and inventive; an understanding by which he resembles the Angels and rules the fish of the waters, the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, in spite of their rebellion against man; an understanding by which he penetrates space, contemplates and weighs the stars, calculates their distances and motions, predicts their phenomena and revolutions… Well, amid so much nobility, power and wisdom, man degrades himself so far, abusing his understanding and exchanging its lawful object, that instead of seeking and holding to the truth, he seeks and takes pleasure in lies, plunging blindly into a sea of falsehoods and errors, since with them he can give himself to the gratification of his passions. He abandons God, who is truth itself, truth by essence, and follows recklessly the devil, who is the father of lies (John 8:44); he obeys his commands, venerates and adores him. Can there be a greater monstrosity?

Nor does he abuse any less his other, equally noble faculty, the will. The object of the will is the good, as truth is the object of the understanding. So that man might attain that object by his will, God imprinted on his heart a holy law, a law of love, a law according to which he must love God above all things and his neighbor as himself. Well, you know it already: in spite of this law of love, so natural to the human heart, so just, so reasonable, man, far from loving God, offends him, outrages him, puts him after riches, honors and pleasures. God, to rouse him and move him to fulfill so sweet a law, entices him with promises of eternal goods and threatens him with torments that will never end; but he, indifferent to everything except his whims and degrading pleasures, despises everything like a raving madman, paying no heed to the divine promises and threats, however much they are the infallible sanction of an eternal law that cannot be repealed.

Do you suppose, my friend, that while man fails in the first and chief part of that law, he at least fulfills the second, which consists in loving his neighbor as himself? Ah, cast a glance over what happens in the world, and you will see, even among Christians, nothing but criticism, backbiting, insults, hatreds, envy, deceit, persecutions, thefts, devastation, destruction, killings… Is this fitting for Christian people? Is it fitting even for rational people? Have not all men one same origin, one same end, one same Father who is in heaven, one same Redeemer? Is not love the badge by which Jesus wants all his disciples, all Christians, to be known (John 13:35)? Does he not command them all to love one another, to help one another, to assist one another, to procure every kind of good for one another without doing one another any harm?… This is a subject, my friend, that would take us very far; and now I remember that we both have our engagements at eight this evening. So we must turn back now, so as to rest a little beforehand.

— As you please, Señor Don Prudencio, answered Don Federico; but I should like you, as we go back, to clear up a doubt that occurs to me about original sin. With it eternal salvation is not possible for man; and yet Jesus Christ did not come to blot it out and redeem us until forty centuries after it was committed.

— It is true, answered Don Prudencio, that the Son of God delayed his coming into the world in human flesh for four thousand years; but the effect of his sacrifice goes back to the beginning of the world. That is why St. John in his Apocalypse speaks of *the Lamb which was slain from the beginning of the world* (Apoc. 13:8).[5] Clearly he did not actually die then; but even then he offered himself to die, and from then on God accepted his sacrifice for the benefit of the men who would precede his coming. Thus the Christian religion can be traced back to the first days of creation, with this difference: before the incarnation of the divine Word men were saved by faith in the Messiah who was to come, and we are saved by faith in the one who has come. All the just, both those who preceded him and those who have lived since, were his members; and so he suffered and was sacrificed in all who suffered for truth and justice.

— Something else occurs to me now, said Don Federico, and I hope you will still have time to clear it up for me, adding something to what you have already told me about it. Since original sin is forgiven us in baptism, how is it that we are not freed from the many terrible results of such a poison? It seems that once the cause is removed, its effects too should disappear.

— I remember, indeed, said Don Prudencio, that I spoke to you about this the other day. Today I will give you several of the many reasons the holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church allege in support of God’s way of dealing with the baptized, permitting, and even willing, that they remain subject to the consequences of the fault they contracted. God wills it so:

1. Because if baptism, besides blotting out the fault in us, also freed us from the evils it brings, people would come to receive that sacrament more to obtain this temporal benefit than in the hope of spiritual and eternal goods.

2. So that in this way we may have occasions and reasons to exercise faith, patience and other virtues, and by practicing them gather merits for heaven.

3. So that we may have a greater horror of sin, seeing that although it is forgiven us, we are not freed from the temporal punishment it deserved and deserves.

4. So that the very miseries of this life may serve as a spur to walk with greater ardor and constancy toward the heavenly homeland, where there is not and cannot be any pain, misery or evil.

5. So that these very pains one suffers, once the guilt is blotted out, may be the most effective remedy against temptations.

6. Because, being members of Jesus Christ, who is our head, we must be conformed to him; and we all know that, though he had not contracted our sin and was innocence and holiness itself, he willed to subject himself to all our pains, death included. On this St. Bernard says: “It is not seemly that under a head crowned with

thorns there should be a pampered member."

7. So that man may cease to be haughty, seeing himself subject to so much misery and calamity.

8. Finally, so that man, knowing that there is no effect without a cause, may recognize and confess, on seeing himself sunk in so many and such great evils, that they come from a cause no less great and even more enormous, which is original sin.

— All these reasons seem good and convincing to me, said Don Federico, and I am very grateful to you, Señor Don Prudencio, for having made them known to me so clearly and concisely.

— I am very glad you liked them, said Don Prudencio, taking leave of his friend, and I hope you will keep them in mind, like everything else we have already said and what we shall say tomorrow, God willing. And so, keep well, and… until tomorrow, as agreed.

— Yes, sir, as agreed, answered Don Federico; but I think that tomorrow we shall have to bring our walks to a close, and with them our conversations, for my business being now finished, I shall have to leave first thing the day after tomorrow. Good evening, Señor Don Prudencio.

After the meeting he had to attend, Don Federico, finding himself alone in his room, knelt before a crucifix and, meditating on the great truths Don Prudencio had explained to him, exclaimed:

O my God, if you had hurled the thunderbolts of your justice against me right after my first sin, as you did against Lucifer and his followers, how many years I would already have been burning with them in the depths of hell! Ah, you have shown me mercy without any merit on my part; and not content with having blotted out original sin in me by baptism, you have given me the sacrament of penance to forgive my personal sins, not once but as often as I have come to that holy tribunal. Blessed and praised be your infinite mercy and your boundless goodness!

Prayer

O most merciful Jesus, ever burning with the fire of charity toward us! By your immense and infinite merits I beg of you the pardon of sinners through their speedy and complete conversion, the perseverance of the just to the end, and the most effective relief of the poor souls in purgatory. Amen.

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[1] \[Claret's note:\] *Ipsa conteret caput tuum* \[she shall crush thy head\] (Gen. 3:15).

[2] the *Protoevangelium* (Gen. 3:15), "the first announcement of the Messiah and Redeemer".

[3] \[Claret's note:\] *Ubi abundavit delictum, superabundavit gratia* \[where sin abounded, grace did more abound\] (Rom. 5:20).

[4] Council of Trent, Session V, *Decree on Original Sin* (1546).

[5] \[Claret's note:\] *Agni qui occisus est ab origine mundi* \[of the Lamb which was slain from the beginning of the world\] (Apoc. 13:8).

Sixth Afternoon

Summary. This afternoon explains why the Redeemer was so long in coming. — How the world was before his coming. The birth of Mary. — Mary was married to St. Joseph, and why. — The evangelists St. Luke and St. John on the Incarnation of the Word. — The graces and prerogatives of the soul of Jesus.

DON FEDERICO. — I have the pleasure of greeting you, Señor Don Prudencio, and the regret of repeating what I hinted to you when we parted last night: that my time at this Royal Seat is growing short. I am not so sorry to leave the place as to have to part from you, for this will deprive me at once of your kind company and of your pleasant and profitable instruction.

DON PRUDENCIO. — I am sorry too, my friend, for with your absence I shall be deprived of a companion entirely to my liking. While the hour of parting comes, then, let us make use of what is left to us to take our recreation and talk together, if only for the last time. As for our conversations of these days, I suppose you will have taken notes so as not to forget what we said in them, and I hope you will also take notes of what we are going to say today, to complete the explanation of some points we have already touched on that still admit of no small enlargement. Let us go out, then, and since our hours are numbered, let us come to the point without losing a moment.

The fall of our first parents, and the promise God made them of a Restorer without fixing the time of its fulfillment, were the chief subject of our conversation yesterday. I remember having told you already, and you know it very well, that the time that passed from the sin of Adam to the coming of Jesus into the world was of very long duration, for it covered no less than four thousand years. So great a delay is explained by saying that God acted so in order that the generations, taught every day by their many miseries and calamities, might know more and more the great and indispensable need the earth had of a Redeemer, might conceive day by day a greater horror of sin, and might dispose themselves to receive with gratitude and profit the grace so long awaited, which cost them so many tears. So men ought to have done, since it mattered so much to them and God willed it; but the perversion and consequent blindness of the peoples that followed one another and multiplied with time was so great that, except for the Hebrew people, all the rest lost even the notion of the true God. Everything in the world was god to men except the true and only God; and as a consequence of this indefinite and indefinable substitution, human degradation became general and beyond description. In Egypt, Chaldea, Greece and Rome the wise men themselves fell into the grossest errors concerning the Godhead. Plato alone, less vain than all of them, was frank enough to say that "human reason by itself had not strength enough to resolve the great difficulties of philosophy, until there should come down from heaven a higher reason to teach men justice."

In the chosen people, the only one among all that faithfully kept the venerable traditions of the consoling truth that was to regenerate the world, the patriarchs sighed without ceasing for the fulfillment of the divine promises; the prophets, inspired by God, encouraged the just by foretelling to them, at longer or shorter range, the coming of the divine Consoler, and rebuked the vices of sinners, urging them to prepare to receive the Holy of holies. At last the day came; the longed-for hour struck which the Most High in his high and adorable purposes had fixed for releasing the first pledge, the forerunner and sure guarantee of the faithfulness of his promises. Of the line of the patriarchs and prophets there was born in Nazareth a little girl conceived without any stain of sin, full of grace and resplendent with holiness. This is the Virgin foretold by Isaiah (Isa. 7:14), the Virgin who, betrothed when very young to the virgin St. Joseph, and without any detriment to her ineffable virginity, was to give the world its deliverer.

— But tell me, Señor Don Prudencio, asked Don Federico, how is it that, since the Virgin Mary was to remain as much a virgin after giving birth as she was in it and before it, God permitted or willed that she should have a husband? This seems as though…

— Listen, my friend, said Don Prudencio, interrupting him. In all the works of God the most exquisite prudence is wont to shine, and in the incarnation of his Son, which was to be the most stupendous of all his works, his prudence had to shine forth in the most extraordinary and astonishing way. Would you like to know how the great Father of the Church St. Jerome reasons on this? I will tell you. "Why," that Father asks, "does the Son of God take flesh in the womb of a betrothed virgin?" And he gives several reasons for it: "First, so that by the genealogy of Joseph that of Mary might be shown; second, so that she might not be stoned by the Jews as an adulteress; third, so that in fleeing to Egypt she might have a support. The martyr St. Ignatius" (St. Jerome goes on) "adds a fourth reason: so that, he says, Mary's childbearing might be hidden from the devil, who would think it ordinary and not virginal."[12]

I will also quote you some magnificent words St. Bernard wrote on the subject: "What could be wiser?" he says. "What more worthy of divine Providence? By so prudent a design a witness of the heavenly secrets is admitted, the enemy is shut out from them, and the good name of the Virgin Mother is kept unstained."[3]

— I like very much the two authorities you have just quoted, said Don Federico; but it seems to me that nonetheless men may fall into the mistake of believing Jesus to be the son of Mary and Joseph, as other men are the sons of their parents.

— Catholic Christians, answered Don Prudencio, do not and cannot fall into that mistake, because the Gospel is extremely explicit on this point. Here is what St. Luke tells us: *The angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel being come in, said unto her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. Who having heard, was troubled at his saying, and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said to her: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the most High; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father; and he shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever. And of his kingdom there shall be no end. And Mary said to the angel: How shall this be done, because I know not man? And the angel answering, said to her: THE HOLY GHOST SHALL COME UPON THEE, AND THE POWER OF THE MOST HIGH SHALL OVERSHADOW THEE. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God… And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her* (Luke 1:26–35, 38). Once Mary's consent had thus been obtained, the three divine Persons, and especially the Holy Spirit, the personal Love of the Father and the Son, since the incarnation of the Son was a work of love, formed in the virginal womb of that blessed Maiden, without the intervention of anyone else, a most perfect and most pure little body, to which they united a soul no less pure and perfect; and when this individual humanity had been constituted, but without a human person, the person of the divine Word united himself to it, and the great and inestimable work of our reconciliation with God was in principle accomplished. God alone formed the body of the first Adam, who by his sin infected the whole human race, and he formed it from the red and virgin earth of the field; God alone formed the body of the second Adam, who came to restore what the first had destroyed, and he formed it from the red and virgin blood of Mary's most pure womb, honoring her for nine months with his personal presence and ennobling her thereupon with the most exalted dignity of Mother of God.

— How I delight, Señor Don Prudencio, in the exposition of so great and adorable a mystery! exclaimed Don Federico.

— The evangelist St. John, Don Prudencio went on, who wrote his sublime Gospel to prove the divinity of Jesus Christ against Cerinthus, Ebion and all those who in the course of time would claim, as they did and as the impious and blasphemous Renan in our own day,[4] that the Son of Mary was nothing but a mere man, says: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him: and without him was made nothing that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it… That was the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, he gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in his name. Who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH, and dwelt among us, (and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth* (John 1:1–5, 9–14).

— I do not know, said Don Federico, how the heretics, ancient and modern, have been able to twist the sense of words so clear, precise and decisive. What blindness is theirs!… But tell me, Señor Don Prudencio: this

grace, glory and truth with which St. John says the Only-begotten of the Father, that is, the person of Jesus Christ, was full, can it also be referred to his blessed soul?

— Without any doubt, answered Don Prudencio. At the very instant in which the soul of Jesus was created and united to his body, it was also hypostatically united, as we said on another occasion, with the Godhead through the person of the Son of God; and then he imparted to it as great a fullness of grace, glory and wisdom as befitted the glory and honor of such a person subsisting in two natures. This fullness of grace and prerogatives contains the following:

1. An immense purity, a complete sinlessness and an all-embracing wisdom, so that he neither sinned nor could sin, neither erred nor could err, nor fall into any imperfection.

2. A holiness incalculably superior to that of all the Angels and just men, a holiness that included, in a superlative and unattainable degree, humility, charity, obedience and all the other virtues. So he is called, and is by excellence, the Holy of Holies.

3. Beatitude, or the beatific vision; for from that first instant the soul of Jesus saw the divine essence with the greatest possible clarity, and seeing it, loved it, and loving and seeing it, rejoiced in it with immense joy.[5]

4. The sum of all the treasures of the knowledge of God, which made known to him all created things, past, present and to come, as to one who was to be judge of the living and the dead, to reward the good and punish the wicked.

5. An unlimited power of working miracles by his mere will: a power that extended to healing the sick, raising the dead, casting devils out of bodies, binding the winds, calming the storms of the seas, and, in short, subjecting all the elements to his command.

6. The divine power to forgive the sins of men, to convert sinners by softening and changing their hearts, to ordain sacrifices and institute sacraments, as so many fountains of grace for men.

7. To be the chief or head of the mystical body of his Church, not only militant but also suffering and triumphant. Hence Jesus, as man, was the first and chief of all the predestined, *the firstborn amongst many brethren*, as St. Paul says (Rom. 8:29), whom the Most High predestined to be his companions in glory, conformed to him in the gifts of grace as they were like him in nature.

— How grateful the soul of our divine Redeemer must have been, exclaimed Don Federico, to the One who imparted to it so many graces and excellences!

— In view of such great graces and prerogatives, Don Prudencio continued, the soul of Jesus answered God with four excellent affections: first, with a most eminent gratitude for so many and such great benefits; second, with a most profound humility in the presence of God, seeing and acknowledging the nothingness it had of itself; third, with a most fervent love of his infinite goodness; fourth, with a complete offering to obey him most promptly in everything that might please him. *Behold, I come to do thy will, O God*, he said (Heb. 10:9). And so from that time he accepted, for the glory of his eternal Father and the salvation of souls, all the labors, privations, humiliations, persecutions, contempt, sufferings and death itself. His whole most holy life is an unbroken series of proofs, each more evident than the last, of his obedience, his humility and his sacrifices, until he ends it in a shameful execution, draining all his blood in it as a sublime pledge of his love for God and for men; for, as he himself says: *Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends* (John 15:13). He does not come to enjoy delights or any comfort. For his birth he chooses the cold season, a ruined stable and a wretched manger: such is his palace and such his cradle. Eight days after his birth he submits his tender little body to the legal ceremonies of circumcision. Soon afterwards he is persecuted by Herod and has to flee to Egypt and remain there in exile. Then he goes to Nazareth, and there he obeys submissively and as a son the most holy Virgin, his Mother, and his supposed father Joseph. Until the age of thirty he lives in Nazareth the most hidden and humble life; and on reaching that age he begins his

public life, preaching the kingdom of God and doing good to all. He begins this life by humbling himself to receive baptism at the hands of St. John; but in his very humiliation he is exalted before the crowds, for as soon as he is baptized the Holy Spirit comes down upon him in the form of a dove, and the voice of the eternal Father resounds clear and loud in the air, saying: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased* (Matt. 3:17).

— But how could Jesus carry his humility to such a point? asked Don Federico. How could Jesus will to receive a baptism which, in the eyes of the common people, must have made him pass for a sinner; since, as I understand it, St. John's baptism was a baptism of penance for the remission of sins?…

— So it was, answered Don Prudencio; but that was not the only occasion on which, without having committed or being able to commit any personal sin, and without having contracted original sin, his love of humility led him to be confused with other men. Did he not submit, as I said, to circumcision? Did he not will to be redeemed according to the law, like the other firstborn of Israel, at his presentation in the temple? Did he not still pass among the Jews at that time, that is, at the age of thirty, for the son of the carpenter of Nazareth? And did he not let himself be crucified, accused as a deceiver, between two criminals?… Oh, this, my friend, is a bottomless abyss of humility, an incomprehensible self-emptying against which our pride ought to be dashed to pieces. Would you have more? After his baptism he went into the desert, where he fasted forty days and forty nights, at the end of which he permitted the devil to tempt him… Then he chose his Apostles, twelve in number, and shortly afterwards, at the request of his most holy Mother, he worked in their presence his first miracle, which consisted in changing water into wine at the wedding at Cana of Galilee. Then, accompanied by his Apostles and disciples, he worked many others in confirmation of the divine doctrine he was spreading through all the regions of Judea. Twice he miraculously fed the hungry crowds that followed him; he delivered many possessed persons; he gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, health to the sick, life to the dead. By his humiliations he made plain the truth of his humanity; by his marvelous wonders, while he showed the divinity of his doctrine, he proved his own divinity, already publicly attested at his baptism by the eternal Father and the Holy Spirit. That is why he himself said to the Jews who were obstinate in their unbelief: *Though you will not believe me, believe the works* (John 10:38).

— And yet, in spite of so many convincing arguments, exclaimed Don Federico, how very many remained deaf to his words! What hardness of heart was theirs!…

— Jesus took with him, Don Prudencio went on, Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, and led them up a very high mountain apart, called Tabor; and while he was there in prayer, he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun and his garments became white as snow… A bright cloud came and overshadowed them all, and a voice came out of the cloud, saying: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him* (Matt. 17:5). This was the same voice of the Father that was heard at the Jordan when the Lord was baptized by the Baptist. Here it adds, *Hear ye him*: that is, believe him and put all your trust in him; obey him in all he tells you. Finally Jesus, with all his Apostles, went up to Jerusalem to seal there with the blood of his veins the heavenly truths he had preached throughout Judea. When his hour had come, he gave himself up to his enemies. He was cruelly bound, barbarously scourged, inhumanly crowned with thorns, and… at last, he died on a cross! He was buried the same day; but on the third day after his death he rose again, as he himself had so often foretold; and this is the greatest and best proof of his divinity, attested by people of every class and condition, friends and enemies, soldiers and civilians, men and women, the living and the dead, Angels and men.

— This raising himself from the dead, said Don Federico, does indeed argue a superhuman power, or rather a divine power; and if there were no other proof of the divinity of Jesus Christ, his resurrection alone would suffice.

— It is indeed, added Don Prudencio, the plain proof that Jesus is man and God together, the clearest and most irrefutable proof, and at the same time a very great consolation for us, since the resurrection of Jesus is a guarantee of our own after the horrors of the grave. Once risen, Jesus remained forty days on earth with the scars of his mortal wounds, and during that time he appeared again and again, visible and tangible, to his Apostles and disciples, instructing them on what they were to do and teach. At the end of those days, when the eleven Apostles who had remained faithful to him had gathered by his order, in the presence of them all he rose, also by his own power, into heaven, to sit at the right hand of his eternal Father, where he lives for ever; and from there he will come to judge us all, to give the good, in the presence of all generations, the eternal reward he had promised them, and the wicked the eternal punishment they deserved.

— I notice, Señor Don Prudencio, said Don Federico, that you have said nothing to me of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles…

— Since the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the sacred college, answered Don Prudencio, did not take place until ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven, I have not mentioned it until now. I say, then, that ten days after his ascension to the right hand of the Father, the Savior sent the Holy Spirit to his Apostles, as he had promised them, in the form of tongues of fire, to instruct them in the languages they did not know, to set them on fire with the love of God, and to encourage them to fulfill the mission for which they were destined. Accordingly the Apostles came out of the Upper Room completely transformed, from rough and ignorant fishermen into wise and zealous preachers and propagators of the doctrine of their divine Master; and from the cowards and fearful men they had been, they became the most valiant and courageous champions of the truths he had taught them, so that they might spread them and by them establish his kingdom on earth.

— Would you believe, Señor Don Prudencio, said Don Federico, that, having heard these explanations of yours, it seems to me that from today on I shall love our Lord Jesus Christ more?

— I shall be very glad, the other answered, to have contributed to so happy a result. And bear in mind that Jesus did not cease to be with us on earth because he ascended into heaven. Another of the promises he made to his Church was this: *Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world* (Matt. 28:20). Day and night he is with her; he directs her, assists her, consoles her, protects and defends her against her enemies, gives her life and sanctifies her with his graces, feeds and strengthens her… ah, my friend, you know it already: he feeds and strengthens her with the bread of Angels, with the Eucharistic bread, with that bread which, by the force and power of his own words, has ceased to be bread in order to be his body, his blood, his soul, his divinity, all of Him, the same who is in heaven…! What goodness! What generosity! What love! To give himself, even today and always, to each and every one of us, whole and entire, as food, after having already given himself, whole and entire too, as the price of the ransom of each and all… Oh, only a God could conceive this, only a God could do it, only a God could continue it…! The Lord performed this sublime act of love on the day before his most sorrowful passion and death, instituting the unbloody sacrifice of himself and the priestly power to renew it in memory of him. By this means the divine Savior provided us with three things, each greater and more wonderful than the last. The first is the continuation of the sacrifice of Calvary in holy Mass, a sacrifice in which he offers himself and we offer him to the eternal Father. The second is the personal and bodily abiding of so sovereign a Lord in the most holy Sacrament of the altar: to defend us, as our Advocate; to caress us, as our Father; to teach us, as our Master; to heal us, as our Physician; to guard us, as our Shepherd; to converse with us, as our Friend; to console us, as Spouse of our souls; to govern us, as our King; to receive our homage, as our Lord; so that we may render him our adoration as our God and Creator. The third is most holy and adorable communion, in which he is all things to all, feeding us all as a mother feeds her little children.

From this it follows that the same God who by his presence is the delight of the Church triumphant is also the delight of the Church militant, taking pleasure in dwelling among the children of men (Prov. 8:31). And though we do not have the happiness of seeing and contemplating him face to face, as the blessed do in

heaven, we have nonetheless the consolation of glimpsing his divine Majesty behind the Eucharistic veil, and the ineffable advantage of eating his flesh and drinking his blood under the species of bread and wine: flesh and blood that give us true life in this wretched life and serve us as viaticum to reach the eternal one.

— Of how many benefits, exclaimed Don Federico, we are debtors to our good and divine Redeemer! Surely, if all men are not saved, it is not because he has not done all that was divinely and humanly possible to save them, but because they do not do what they can and must to attain their salvation.

— Great, especially nowadays, said Don Prudencio, is the indifference of Christians, and great their sloth in profiting from the immense goods that the Savior obtained for them with so much toil and suffering and lavishes upon them, to lead them to the possession of the supreme good. Great too is what he has had and still has to bear from heretics, unbelievers and bad Christians; and yet for all of them he shed his blood and offers it every day to save them. Ah, this proves the great and infinite love and zeal Jesus has for the glory of his eternal Father, and the very great and unquenchable love with which he loves men, his redeemed. Let us love him, since love is repaid with love. Let us be grateful to him for having redeemed us at the cost of so many labors, and for having borne with us until now in spite of our strayings and misdeeds, which offend him so much. Let us be grateful also to his most holy Mother, who is our Mother too, for the lively interest and effective intercession with which she obtains for us the means of our sanctification and salvation. Long live, long live for ever Jesus and Mary in the hearts of all the just, and may they triumph over all errors, sins and vices in the hearts of all sinners!

(As Don Prudencio broke out into this enthusiastic acclamation, which Don Federico repeated with no less fervor, the two speakers reached the threshold of the former's modest house, where, taking his leave, Don Federico said to him:)

DON FEDERICO. — I am most grateful to you, Señor Don Prudencio, for the enlightening instruction I have had the pleasure of hearing from your lips these days.

DON PRUDENCIO. — And I declare to you, my friend, that during these same days I have taken the greatest pleasure in your docility, uprightness and perseverance. Profit by this instruction; and when you embrace your good parents, offer them the poor services of this useless old man, with a thousand affectionate remembrances.

DON FEDERICO. — God be with you, Señor Don Prudencio. Until another time, God willing.

When Don Federico had returned home and recovered from the fatigue of his journey, his soul still fervent with the great truths that Don Prudencio had renewed in his memory and enlarged, he knelt in his oratory and addressed the following prayers to the Saints who were especially distinguished in the knowledge and love of our Lord Jesus Christ; and these prayers he repeated ever more often, and each time with greater fervor.

O glorious St. Peter, to whom the heavenly Father revealed the divinity of Jesus! You who with the liveliest faith confessed him Son of the living God, and with the most fervent charity loved and served him: grant, I beseech you, that I and all may confess the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ; that all may love and serve him; that all may receive him often and devoutly in the holy Eucharist, and have recourse to his other sacraments, all of them storehouses of his infinite merits and inexhaustible springs of his graces. Amen.

O glorious St. John, beloved disciple of the divine Master, whom you loved so much and desired so much to see known and loved by all, and for this end wrote and preached his holy Gospel: obtain for us, I beseech you, the grace always to believe in Jesus Christ, always to love him, to love him more and more each day as you loved him, to receive the holy sacraments often, and especially the holy Eucharist, whose institution you witnessed close at hand on the night of his memorable Last Supper. Amen.

O glorious St. Paul, who, converted by Jesus on the road to Damascus, became a vessel of election, the doctor and apostle of the Gentiles! You who for love of the incarnate Son of God wrote so much, preached so

much, labored and suffered so much: make us sharers, I beseech you, in your love for Jesus, so that we may succeed, like you, in glorying in nothing but his cross (Gal. 6:14). Amen.

O glorious martyr St. Ignatius, and you, St. Bernard, St. Dominic, St. Bernardine, St. John Capistran, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis de Sales, and all the other Saints most loving of the divine Redeemer: impart to me, I beseech you, and impart to all Christians, something of your burning love for his divine Majesty, so that each of us may say with the Apostle and with you: *I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me* (Gal. 2:20), my Jesus, my Redeemer and my God. Amen.

O St. Mary Magdalene, St. Bridget, St. Gertrude, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa of Jesus, St. Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi, and all the other holy women who were most distinguished by their love for the Son of God and Son of Mary: I beseech you to obtain for me a true and growing love for so divine a Lord, so that I may do everything for love of Jesus; that all the pains, labors, slanders and whatever I may have to suffer, I may suffer all for love of Jesus; that I may faint with love of Jesus; and that, when it shall please God, my soul may be loosed from this wretched body of mine to fly to heaven and be for ever with Jesus, with Mary, with the Angels and all the Saints of the heavenly homeland. Amen. Long live Jesus! Long live Jesus! Long live Jesus!…

Long live Jesus in my heart and in the hearts of all people!

May all hearts be sealed with this monogram:

✠ **I. H. S.**

The letters I… H… S…, of which this monogram is composed, signify: Jesus Hominum Salvator, *Jesus, Savior of men.*

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[1] On Matt. 1:18.

[2] \[Claret's note:\] God hid the divine childbearing of Mary, and consequently the divinity of Jesus, not only from the devil but also from the wicked Jews and from all the heretics who have come denying it down to our own day, down to Renan, as being all of them children of the devil: *Vos ex patre diabolo estis* \[You are of your father the devil\] (John 8:44). The heavenly Father revealed it to Peter, and he confessed it, saying to Jesus: *Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God* (Matt. 16:16).

[3] St. Bernard, *Homilies in Praise of the Virgin Mother* (*Super Missus est*) II, 13.

[4] St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III, 11, 1; St. Jerome, *On Illustrious Men* 9.

[5] St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 9–12.