

St. Albert the Great

ON CLEAVING TO GOD

De Adhaerendo Deo

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Chapter I. On the ultimate and highest perfection of man, insofar as it is possible in this life.

Of D. Albert the Great, Bishop of Regensburg, of the Order of Preachers, the book *On Adhering to God*.

Chapter I. On the ultimate and highest perfection of man, insofar as it is possible in this life.

I have thought to depict for myself something ultimate, insofar as it is possible in the dwelling of this exile and pilgrimage, by writing concerning and upon a full and possible abstraction from all things, and concerning an unencumbered, secure, bare, and firm adherence with the Lord God alone, especially since the end of Christian perfection itself is charity, by which one adheres to the Lord God.

Indeed, every man is bound, by necessity of salvation, to that charitable adherence; this comes about by observance of the precepts and by conformity to the divine will. Observance of these excludes everything that is opposed to the essence and habit of charity, of which sort are mortal sins. But religious have bound themselves also to evangelical perfection, and to those things that are of supererogation and counsel, through which one arrives more readily at the ultimate end, which is God. Through observance of these there are excluded also those things that impede the act or fervor of charity, so that one may be carried less toward the Lord God; of this sort are the renunciation of all things, and moreover of body and soul, except only by the vow of profession. For since the Spirit is the Lord God, and those who adore him must adore in spirit and truth ^[1], that is, in knowledge and love, in intellect and affection, bare of all phantasms. Hence also there is that saying of Matthew 6:6: When you shall pray, enter into your chamber, that is, into the innermost parts of your heart; and with the door closed, namely the door of your senses, and there with a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith not feigned, pray to your Father, in spirit and truth, in secret. This is fittingly done then, when a man has been cleared and stripped of all other things, and wholly received back within himself. There, with all and each thing excluded and forgotten, before Jesus Christ, with silent mouth, the mind alone securely and trustingly lays open its desires to the Lord its God, and through this, with the whole affection of heart and love, it most sincerely and most fully pours itself into him in the inmost marrow of all its powers, and immerses, enlarges, inflames, and dissolves itself in him.

Notes

[1] John 4:24. (*Joan. IV, 24.*)

Chapter II. How someone, all other things having been despised, should adhere and attend to Christ alone?

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Nevertheless, whoever desires and strives to approach and enter such a state, it is altogether necessary that, as though with eyes and senses closed, he should not entangle or disturb himself at all concerning any thing, should not be anxious or care; but he should thoroughly shake off all things as irrelevant and harmful and destructive. Then he should receive himself wholly within himself, and there should attend with his mind to no other object at all than Jesus Christ alone, wounded; and thus through him into him, that is, through the man into God, through the wounds of the humanity to the innermost things of his divinity, he should earnestly and strenuously direct himself. There, readily and securely, without dispute, he should commit himself and all his own things, each and all, to his tireless providence, according to that saying of Peter: Casting all your care upon him ^[1], who can do all things. And again: Be anxious for nothing ^[2]. And again: Cast your care upon the Lord, and he will nourish you ^[3]. And again: To adhere to God is good for me ^[4]. And: I set the Lord always in my sight ^[5]. And the bride in the Canticles: I found him whom my soul loves ^[6]; indeed, all good things came to me together with her ^[7].

For this is that hidden heavenly treasure, and also the precious pearl, which, having been purchased before all things, is sought with humble trust, most instant effort, and tranquil silence, even to the loss of bodily advantage, praise, or honor, in fortitude of spirit. Otherwise, what does it profit a religious if he gains the whole world and suffers loss to his own soul? Or what help is status, the holiness of profession, the habit of perfection, tonsure, and the outward arrangement of manner of life, without life in the spirit of humility and truth, where Christ dwells through faith formed by charity? Hence there is that saying of Luke 17:21: The kingdom of God is within you, which is Christ Jesus.

Notes

- [1] 1 Peter 5:7. (*I Petri*, V, 7.)
- [2] To the Philippians 4:6. (*Ad Philip. IV*, 6.)
- [3] Psalm 54:23. (*Psal. LIV*, 23.)
- [4] Psalm 72:28. (*Psal. LXXII*, 28.)
- [5] Psalm 15:8 and Acts 2:25. (*Psal. XV*, 8 *et Act. II*, 25.)
- [6] Canticles 3:4. (*Cantic. III*, 4.)
- [7] Wisdom 7:11. (*Sapient. VII*, 11.)

Chapter III. What the conformity of man's perfection in this life may be?

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Moreover, the more the mind is solicitous about thinking and treating of these lower and human things, the more it is drawn away from higher and heavenly things through the inward parts of devotion; and the more fervently the sense is gathered from the memory, affection, and intellect of lower things to higher things, the more perfect prayer will be and the purer contemplation. For it cannot at the same time be perfectly intent on both, which are divided as light and darkness are. Indeed, he who adheres to God dwells in light; but he who adheres to the world is in darkness. For this reason, man's more sublime perfection in this life is to be united to God in such a way that the whole soul, with all its powers and strengths, is gathered into the Lord its God, so that it becomes one spirit with him, and remembers nothing except God, senses or understands nothing except God, and all the affections, united in the joy of love, rest sweetly in the enjoyment of the Creator alone.

For the image of God expressed in the soul consists in these three powers, namely reason, memory, and will. And as long as those powers are not wholly impressed upon God, the soul is not deiform according to the primary creation of the soul. For God is the form of the soul, on whom it ought to be impressed, as wax is impressed by a seal and the thing sealed is marked by the mark. But this is never fully done unless reason is perfectly illuminated, according to its capacity, for the knowledge of God, who is highest truth; and the will is perfectly affected toward loving the highest goodness; and memory is fully absorbed in beholding and enjoying eternal happiness, and in resting sweetly and delightfully in it. And because the glory of beatitude, which will be perfected in the homeland, consists in the consummated attainment of these things, it is clear that the perfect beginning of these things is perfection in this life.

Chapter IV. How human operation ought to be in the intellect alone, and not in the senses?

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Happy, therefore, is he who, through the continual wiping away of phantasms and images, and through inward turning and there through the upward leading of the mind into God, at last sometimes forgets phantasms in a certain manner, and through this consequently works inwardly with bare, simple, and pure intellect and affection around the most simple object, God. Therefore cast away from the mind all phantasms,

species, images, and forms of all things short of God, so that your exercise concerning God within you may depend on the bare intellect alone, and affection, and will.

Indeed, the end of all exercises is this, namely to attend and rest in the Lord God within you through the purest intellect and the most devout affection, without phantasms and entanglements. But an exercise of this kind does not take place in fleshly organs and exterior senses, but through that by which someone is a man; but someone is a man by intellect and affection. And for that reason, as long as a man plays with phantasms and senses, and dwells upon them, he seems not yet to have gone out beyond the motions and limits of his beastliness, that is, of that which he has in common with beasts. For they know and are affected through phantasms and through such sensitive or sensible species, and not otherwise, because they do not have a higher power of soul. It is otherwise concerning man, created according to intellect and affection and free choice to the image and likeness of God; by these he ought to be impressed immediately, purely, and nakedly upon God, and to be united and firmly adhere to him.

For this reason the devil most diligently and greatly strives to impede that exercise as much as he can, since it is in a certain manner the preamble and beginning of eternal life, envying man in this matter. Therefore he always attempts to estrange the mind of man from the Lord God, now through these temptations or passions, now through those, now by superfluous solicitude and indiscreet care, now by disturbance, dissolute conversation, and irrational curiosity; now through studies of subtle books, alien conversations, rumors and novelty; now through harsh things, now through contrary things, and so forth. Yet although these sometimes seem light and as though no sins, nevertheless they are great impediments of this holy exercise and work. And therefore, even if they have seemed useful and necessary, whether great or small, they are immediately to be utterly rejected as harmful and destructive, and driven away from the senses.

Therefore it is most greatly necessary that things heard, seen, done, and said, and other similar things, be received without phantasms, images, and occupations, nor also consequently, or before, or then, should phantasms and entanglements be formed and nourished concerning this. And thus, when a phantasm does not come to memory and mind, then it does not impede a man, whether in prayer, meditation, and psalmody, or in any other operation and spiritual exercise whatever, nor again will it repeatedly occur to him.

And thus, readily and securely, commit your whole self, even fully all things each and all, to the infallible and most certain divine providence with silence and quiet; and he himself will fight for you. And he will liberate and console you better, more honorably, and more sweetly than if you always by day and night were continually imagining about this, and with a vain, wandering, and captive mind were foolishly running about in error this way and that, here and there, and also, failing in mind and body, were losing time and consuming your powers foolishly and irrationally.

Therefore receive all things, each and all, from wherever and however the things occurring may have their origin, thus with silence and tranquility and with equanimity, as if they came to you from the hand of fatherly and divine providence. Therefore strip yourself of all phantasms of bodily things, according to the requirement of your state and profession, so that with bare mind and sincerely you may adhere to him to whom you have devoted yourself in many ways and totally, so that, in some manner, no middle thing can be possible between your soul and him, so that purely and fixedly you may be able to flow from the wounds of the humanity into the light of his divinity.

Chapter V. On purity of heart, which is to be pursued before all things.

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Therefore, if by a straight and secure path and briefly you desire and strive to arrive at the end of the beatitude of the way and of the homeland, of grace and of glory, then with intent mind earnestly breathe toward perpetual cleanness of heart, purity of mind, and tranquility of the senses. Gather together the

affection of the heart, and continually fix it upward in the Lord God; and among these things withdraw yourself from your familiars, and from all men, insofar as it lies in you, and from business matters impeding your purpose of this sort, always seizing the opportunity where and when you can find the place, time, and mode of quiet and contemplation, taking hold of the secrets of silence, avoiding the shipwrecks of the present age, and also fleeing the disturbances of the noisy world.

For this reason, at every time devote yourself principally to purity, cleanness, and quiet of heart, namely so that continually, as though the carnal senses were closed, you may be turned into yourself, and may keep the doors of the heart diligently shut, as far as possible, against the forms and phantasms of sensible things and the imaginations of earthly things.

Indeed purity of heart, among all spiritual exercises, in a certain manner claims primacy for itself, as the final intention and the recompense of all labors, which every spiritual and truly religious person is accustomed to receive in this life.

Therefore absolve your heart, senses, and affection, with all diligence, skill, and effort, from all these things that could impede its liberty, and moreover from every thing of the world having the possibility of binding and conquering you. And thus struggle to gather together all the dispersions of the heart and the affections of the mind into one true, simple, and most principal good, and to have them gathered within you as in one place; and through this strive always to adhere in mind to divine things and to God, and, earthly fragility having been abandoned, continually to transform the heart toward heavenly things in your inmost parts in Jesus Christ.

Wherefore, if you begin to bare and purify yourself from phantasms and images, and trustingly to simplify and tranquilize your heart and your mind in the Lord God, so that you may draw and feel the fountain of divine good pleasure in all your inner parts, and through good will be united to God in intellect, this suffices for you in place of every study and reading of sacred Scripture, and for love of God and neighbor, as the anointing teaches.

Therefore with every study, effort, and labor simplify your heart, so that, unmoved and tranquil from phantasms, you may be turned and stand always in the Lord within yourself, as if your soul were in that now of eternity, that is, of divinity; in such a way, namely, that for love of Jesus Christ, from a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith not feigned, you abandon yourself, and totally and fully commit your whole self to God in every tribulation and event, and always and patiently desire to obey his will and good pleasure.

That this may happen, it is necessary that you frequently return to the heart, and persist in it, and absolve yourself from all things as far as possible; that you always keep the eye of the mind in purity and tranquility; that you preserve the intellect from phantasms and forms of infirm things; that you utterly absolve the affection of the will from cares of earthly things, and adhere radically with fervent love to the highest true good; and that you also continually have memory lifted upward and firmly established in that same true highest good, alone essential and uncreated. This is only so that the whole soul, gathered into God with all its powers and strengths, may become one spirit with him, in whom the highest perfection of the way is known to consist.

But this is the unity of spirit and love, by which a man is made conformable in all vows to the supernal and eternal will, so that he may be by grace what God is by nature.

Meanwhile it must be noticed that in that very moment in which someone, by God's aid, is able to conquer his own will, that is, to cast away from himself disordered love or zeal, namely so that he dares plainly and totally to trust the Lord God concerning all his necessity, by this very deed he pleases God so greatly that God bestows his grace upon him; and through that grace he feels true charity and love, driving out every ambiguity and fear, and hoping confidently in God. And so nothing can be more blessed than to place all

things in him in whom there is no defect.

Therefore, as long as you stand in yourself, and do not stand, cast your whole self securely into God, and he will receive you, heal you, and save you. If you continually turn these things over truly within yourself, they will contribute more to blessed life for you than all riches, delights, honors, and moreover all wisdom and knowledge of this deceitful age and of the corruptible world and life, even if in these you excelled all who ever were.

Chapter VI. That the devout man ought to adhere to God, with intellect and affection bared.

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And because the more you have bared yourself of exterior worldly and sensible phantasms and entanglements, the more your soul will recover its powers and its interior senses, so that the things above may have savor for it. Therefore learn to abstain from phantasms and images of bodily things, because above all things a mind bare of forms and species of this kind pleases God, whose delights also are to be with the sons of men, that is, with those who, with tranquil, pure, and simple mind, attend to him, are free for him, and adhere to him apart from such occupations, distractions, and passions. Otherwise, if your memory, imagination, and thought are often free for such things, it is necessary either to be charmed by new things or by relics of old things, or to be variously qualified according to other objects. Hence the Holy Spirit withdraws himself from thoughts that are without understanding ^[1].

And so the true lover of Jesus Christ ought to be united in intellect, through good will, to the divine will and goodness, and bare of all phantasms and passions, so that he does not notice whether he is mocked, loved, or whatever is brought upon him. For good will completes all things; it is above all things. Hence, if a good will is present, and has been purely conformed and united to God in intellect, it does not harm if the flesh and sensuality and the exterior man are moved toward evil and are sluggish toward good, or even if the interior man is sluggish in affecting devotion; but only by faith and good will he ought to adhere to God nakedly in intellect. And he does this if he observes all his imperfection and nothingness, and knows that his good consists in the Creator alone, and with his powers and strengths leaves himself and all creatures, and wholly and totally immerses himself in his Creator, so that he directs all his operations purely and wholly into the Lord his God, and seeks nothing outside him, in whom he perceives that he has found every good and all the happiness of perfection. And thus he is in a certain manner transformed into God, because he can think, understand, love, or remember nothing except God equally and concerning God. But he does not see other creatures and himself except only in God, nor does he love except God alone, nor is he mindful of them or of himself except in God.

But this knowledge of truth always makes the soul humble, judging itself and not another; but on the contrary worldly wisdom makes the soul proud, vain, swollen, and inflated with wind. Therefore let this be the spiritual and foundational teaching: that one who approaches the knowledge, service, and familiarity of God, and if you wish truly to possess God, it is necessary that you bare your heart of every sensible love, not only of whatever person, but also of whatever creature, so that with a simple and whole heart, according to all your power, you may tend toward the Lord your God, the creator, freely, without any duplicity, care, and solicitude, with full trust in his providence alone concerning all things.

Notes

[1] Wisdom 1:5. (*Sapient. I, 5.*)

Chapter VII. How the heart is to be gathered back within itself?

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Moreover, as is said in the book *On Spirit and Soul* ^[1], to ascend to God is to enter into oneself. For he who, entering inwardly and penetrating within, transcends himself, truly ascends to God. Therefore let us gather our heart from the distractions of this world, and call it back to interior joys, so that at some time we may be able to fix this in the light of divine contemplation. For this is the life and rest of our heart, when it is fixed in the love of God through desire, and is sweetly refreshed by his consolation.

But that in the experiential tasting of this thing we are impeded in many ways, and are by no means sufficient to reach him, the reason is ready at hand: because the human mind, distracted by solitudes, does not enter itself through memory; overshadowed by phantasms, it does not return to itself through intellect; enticed by concupiscences, it by no means returns to itself through desire for inward sweetness and spiritual gladness. Thus, lying totally among these sensible and present things, it cannot enter into itself as into the image of God.

Therefore it is fitting and necessary that with the reverence of humility and very great trust the mind lift itself above itself and every created thing through the denial of all things, and that it say within itself: He whom I seek, love, desire, and long for out of all things, before all things, and above all things, is not sensible nor imaginable, but above every sensible and intelligible thing; he is never perceptible by any sense, but is wholly desirable with full desire; he is moreover not formable in figure, but is most perfectly desirable by inward affection; he is not estimable, but is wholly affectible by a clean heart, because he is lovable and delightful above all things, and of infinite goodness and perfection. And then it is borne into the darkness of the mind, and is lifted higher within itself, and enters more deeply.

And this mode of ascending, up to the enigmatic beholding of the most holy Trinity in unity, and of unity in Trinity, in Jesus Christ, is the more ardent insofar as the ascending power is more inward to him; and the more fruitful insofar as it is nearer by affection. Indeed, in spiritual things those things are higher which are more inward, with respect to spiritual experiences.

Wherefore never desist, never rest, until you taste some pledges, as I may say, or experiences of that future fullness, and until you obtain the sweetness of divine suavity through however small first-fruits, and do not cease to run after it in the fragrance of him, until you see the God of gods in Sion. For in spiritual progress, and with God's union and adherence within you, do not rest, nor go back, until you have attained what you intend.

Take an example of this in a likeness from those ascending a natural mountain. For if our spirit has immersed itself by desire in these things that pass below, at once it is snatched through infinite distractions and crooked paths, and, divided from itself in a certain manner, is dissipated, and is scattered as if into as many things as there are things that it covets through desires. Hence there is motion without stability, running without arrival, labor without rest. But if our heart and spirit has drawn itself by desire and love from this infinite distraction of lowest things, which is downward, and, carrying these lowest things away, gradually gathering itself within itself into one immutable sufficient good, has learned to be with itself, and has adhered to him inseparably by a certain affection, then it is gathered and strengthened so much more into one, the more it is lifted upward by recognition and desire, and is habituated within itself in the true highest good itself, until at last it becomes wholly immutable and arrives immutably at that true life, which is the Lord God himself; so that perpetually, without every vicissitude of mutability and time, it may now rest in that inward, quiet, and secret dwelling of divinity, perfectly placed within itself in Christ Jesus, who is the way for those coming to him, the truth, and the life ^[2].

Notes

[1] Book *On Spirit and Soul*, chapter 21. (*Lib. de Spiritu et anima*, cap. 21.)

[2] John 14:6. (*Joan. XIV*, 6.)

Chapter VIII. How in any event the devout man ought to commit himself to God?

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I now believe and judge that, from the things brought forward so far, you know that the more and more you have bared yourself of phantasms and of all worldly and created things, and have been united to God in intellect through good will, the more you approach the state of innocence and perfection. What is better than this? Or what is happier and more pleasant? Therefore above all things it is valuable that you keep the mind bare without phantasms and images, and free from whatever entanglements, so that you are solicitous neither about the world, nor about friends, nor about prosperous things, nor about adverse things, present, past, or future, in yourself or in others, nor even too much about your own sins. But with a certain simplicity of purity, nakedly think that you are with God outside the world, as if your soul were now in eternity, separated outside the body; surely it would not handle secular things, nor care about the state of the world, nor about peace, nor about war, nor about clear weather, nor about rain, and plainly not about anything of this age, but would totally attend, be free, and adhere conformably to God alone. Thus, in its own way, even now leave your body and all present and future created things, and fix the point of your mind and spirit fixedly, according to all your power, nakedly and readily, in that uncreated light. And thus let your spirit be purified from all phantasms, involvements, and cloudings, like an angel bound to a body, who is not impeded by the operation of the flesh nor entangled by vain and wandering thoughts.

Therefore let the spirit strengthen itself against whatever temptations, vexations, and injuries, so that with equanimity and unshaken it may persevere in God in either fortune. And when disturbance, or acedia, or confusion of mind is present, do not on that account become insolent, or be faint-hearted, nor on that account run to vocal prayers or other consolations; but do this alone, that you may raise yourself again through good will in the intellect, so that you may adhere to God in mind, whether the sensuality of the body wishes or does not wish.

For the devout soul ought to be so united with God, and to have and make its will so conformable to the divine will, that it does not occupy itself with any creature or adhere to any creature, just as when it had not been created; and as if there were nothing except God alone and the soul itself. And thus it should receive all things, each and all, with equanimity, securely and infallibly, from the hand of divine providence, awaiting the Lord uniformly in all things in patience, tranquility, and silence.

For this reason, to bare the mind from all phantasms is valuable above all things for spiritual life, so that through good will you may be united and conformed to God in intellect.

Furthermore, there will be nothing intermediate between you and God. This is clear thus: because no thing from outside will be intermediate, since by the vow of voluntary poverty the possession of every thing has been taken away down to the last thing, and by the vow of chastity the body, and by obedience the will and the soul itself. And thus, in a certain manner, nothing is left that mediates between you and God. But that you are a religious is proved by the profession itself, your state, and now your habit, and tonsure, and similar things of this sort; but whether you are a feigned or a true religious, you yourself will see.

Therefore notice how gravely you degenerate and sin against the Lord your God and against all his justice, if you act otherwise, and adhere by will and love to the creature rather than to the Creator himself, putting the creature before the Creator.

Chapter IX. Contemplation in God, insofar as it is to be placed before all other exercises.

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And because all things short of God are the effect and work of the Creator himself, having power and being, and whatever they are and can do, limited; and because, as produced from nothing, surrounded by nothingnesses, and tending from themselves to nothing, they necessarily receive, at each moment, from the highest craftsman God himself, their existence, preservation, operation, and whatever is in them, and thus through all things, as truly insufficient from themselves for themselves and for others; and in relation to his operation they are as nothing to something, as finite to infinite. Wherefore let all our right contemplation, life, and operation be in him alone, and around him, and because of him, and into him; he also by one nod of his will could and would know how to produce more perfect things, infinitely, than all things now created.

Therefore no contemplation and enjoyment of love, whether according to intellect or according to affection, is more useful, more perfect, and happier than in God himself, the creator, the highest and true good, from whom, in whom, through whom, and to whom are all things ^[1]. He is sufficient for himself and for all things unto infinity; he contains in himself the perfections of all things most simply from eternity; in him there is nothing that is which is not he himself. With him and through him the causes of all unstable things stand; in him the immutable origins of all mutable things remain, and also in him the everlasting reasons of all rational and irrational and temporal things live. He completes all things; with his whole self he essentially fills the universe and each single thing; he is more inward and more present to each thing through essence than the thing is to itself. In him all things are at once united, and in him they live everlastingly.

Furthermore, if from infirmity or lack of habituation of the intellect someone is held more to contemplate among creatures, then this seems the best, true, and fruitful contemplation possible to mortal man: that at least in all his contemplations and meditations, whether they take place around creatures or around the Creator, delight should rise up within him in the Creator himself, God one and three, so that the fire of divine love and of true life may blaze up in himself and in others, unto the merit of the happiness of eternal life.

The difference in this also must be noticed between the contemplation of Catholic faithful and that of gentile philosophers: because the contemplation of philosophers is on account of the perfection of the contemplator, and therefore it stops in the intellect, and thus their end in this is the knowledge of the intellect. But the contemplation of the saints, which is that of Catholics, is on account of love of the one himself, namely of God contemplated. Therefore it does not stop at the ultimate end in the intellect through knowledge, but passes over to affection through love. Hence the saints in their contemplation have the love of God as what is principally intended, because it is happier also to know the Lord Jesus Christ and to have him spiritually through grace than to have him corporally without grace, or even essentially.

Moreover, while the soul is withdrawn from all things and reflected into itself, the eye of contemplation is enlarged, and it raises itself as a ladder, through which it may pass to contemplating God. From this contemplation the soul is inflamed toward heavenly and divine goods and toward eternal things, and it looks from afar upon all temporal things as if they were nothing. Hence, when we proceed into God by the way of removal, first we deny of him all bodily and sensible and imaginable things; second, even intelligible things; at the last, this very being according to which it remains in creatures. Thus, as far as the state of the way is concerned, we are joined best to God, according to Dionysius ^[2]. And this is the darkness which God is said to inhabit, which Moses entered, and through this into inaccessible light. But not first that which is spiritual, but that which is animal ^[3]; therefore by the customary order one must proceed from the labor of action to the quiet of contemplation, from moral virtues to theoretical and speculative ones.

Finally, O my soul, why are you occupied needlessly around many things, and always needy in them? Attend to and love this one best good, in which is every good, and it suffices. Therefore unhappy is he who knows and possesses all things except him, but does not know him. And if he knows all these things and him, he is happier not on account of this, but on account of him. Hence, John 17:3: This is eternal life: that they may know you, and so forth. And the Prophet: I shall be satisfied when your glory appears ^[4].

Notes

[1] To the Romans 11:36. (*Ad Roman. XI, 36.*)

[2] St. Dionysius, book On Mystical Theology. (*S. Dionysius, Lib. de Mystica theologia.*)

[3] 1 Corinthians 15:46. (*I ad Corinth. XV, 46.*)

[4] Psalm 16:15. (*Psal. XVI, 15.*)

Chapter X. Actual and sensible devotion is not to be cared for so much as adhering to God by the will.

Chapter X. Actual and sensible devotion is not to be cared for so much as adhering to God by the will.

Furthermore, do not care greatly for actual devotion, or sensible sweetness, or tears, but only be united in mind with God within you, through good will in the intellect. Indeed, above all things a mind bare of phantasms, that is, of images, species, and likenesses of created things, pleases God. For it is fitting that a monk be alien from every creature, so that he may attend to God alone within himself nakedly and readily, be free for him, and adhere to him.

Wherefore deny yourself, so that nakedly you may follow Christ, the Lord your God, who was truly poor, obedient, chaste, humbled, and suffering; in whose life and death also many were scandalized, as is clear from the course of the Gospel.

Furthermore, a soul separated from the body does not notice how or what is done concerning its abandoned body, whether it is burned, or hanged, or cursed; and it is not saddened at all on account of these injuries brought upon the body, but thinks only of that now of eternity, and that one thing which the Lord in the Gospel says is necessary. So also you should hold yourself toward your body as if you were now not in the body, and always think about the eternity of your soul in God, and earnestly direct your thought into that one thing about which Christ said: Moreover one thing is necessary^[1]. And from this you will feel great grace for acquiring nakedness of mind and simplification of heart.

Nevertheless, that one thing is most present to you if you have bared yourself of phantasms and of whatever other entanglements; and soon you will feel that it is so, namely that with bare and unencumbered mind you are free for God and adhere to him. And thus you will be unconquered even in all things, however they can be brought upon you, just as also the holy martyrs, fathers, and all the elect and blessed, who, despising all things, thought only of the security and eternity of the soul in God. And thus, armed within and united to God through good will, they despised all things of the world, as if the soul were already altogether divided from the body.

Therefore from these things consider how much good will united with God can do, indeed through that impression of the soul in God, so that through its virtual and spiritual division from the flesh, the soul in a certain manner may look from afar upon its own exterior man as not its own. And thus it holds as vile all things that are brought upon itself or upon its flesh, as if they were done to another, or to one who is not a man. For he who adheres to the Lord is one spirit^[2], namely with him. Therefore never dare at all, before the Lord your God within you, to think or imagine anything that before men you would blush either to have heard or to have seen, on account of the principal reverence of God.

This also is just: to lift up every thought and thinking of yours to God alone, and to behold him with the point of the mind alone, as though there were nothing else besides him, and thus by adhering to enjoy him; this is the perfect beginning of future life.

Notes

[1] Luke 10:42. (*Luc. X, 42.*)

[2] 1 Corinthians 6:17. (*I ad Corinth. VI, 17.*)

Chapter XI. How temptations are to be resisted, and how tribulations are to be sustained?

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Therefore there is no one approaching God with a true and whole heart who is not tested by vexations and temptations.

Therefore in all temptations at least this should be observed: that if it is felt, it is not consented to, and that it is borne patiently and with equanimity, with humility and long-suffering. But if they are blasphemies and most foul things, hold this altogether firmly: that you can do nothing better or truer against those same things than wholly to reckon phantasies of this kind as nothing:

However wicked, most foul, and horrible the blasphemies may be, only do not care about them, but reckon and despise them as nothing, and do not impute them to yourself, nor wish to form for yourself a conscience about things of this kind. Without doubt the enemy will flee far away, if you despise him and his factions in this way. For he is very proud; he does not suffer himself to be despised and scorned. Therefore wholly not to care at all for such things is the highest remedy, as with flies flying before one's eyes against one's will.

Therefore let the servant of Jesus Christ take care not so easily and importunately to flee from the face of the Lord, and then to be indignant here and there, to murmur, and to complain over the vexation of one fly, namely of a light temptation, suspicion, sadness, detraction, insufficiency, and whatever adversity; for with the hand alone of good will raised up into God all these things can be put to flight. Indeed, through good will man has God as defender, and the holy angels as guardians and protectors. Moreover, through good will every temptation is overcome, just as a fly is driven away by the hand from the baldness of the head.

Peace, therefore, to men of good will ^[1]. Therefore nothing richer is offered to God than good will. Indeed, good will in the soul is the origin of all goods and the mother of all virtues; he who begins to have it securely has whatever is necessary for him for living well. Therefore if you have willed the good and cannot do it, God compensates the deed.

Therefore according to this the eternal law has established with unchangeable stability that merit is in the will; in beatitude or in misery there is reward and punishment. For love is a great will of serving God, a sweet affection of pleasing God, a most fervent desire of enjoying God. Finally, to be tempted is not sin, but material for exercising virtue, so that man may advance to many goods by temptation, since the whole life of man upon earth is reckoned as temptation.

Notes

[1] Luke 2:14. (*Luc. II, 14.*)

Chapter XII. On the love of God, how efficacious it is.

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Indeed, all the things said above, and whatever things are necessary for salvation, cannot be accomplished better, more nearly, or more wholesomely except through love. Through love every lack of what is necessary for salvation can be supplied, and in it there is the abundance of every good, nor is the presence of the highest desire lacking. For love alone is that by which we are converted to God, are transformed into God, adhere to God, are united to God, so that we may be one spirit with him, and may be beatified here in grace and there in glory, by him and through him. For love itself does not rest except in the beloved, which happens when it obtains him with full and peaceful possession. Indeed love itself, which is also charity, is the way of God to men and the way of man to God; and God cannot have a dwelling where charity is not. Therefore if we have charity, we have God, because God is charity ^[1].

Therefore nothing is sharper than love, nothing subtler or more penetrating; nor does it rest until it has naturally penetrated the whole power, depth, and totality of the lovable one, and it wills to make itself one with the beloved, and, if it can be done, so that it itself may be this same thing which the beloved is. And thus it suffers no middle thing between itself and the beloved object which it loves, which is God, but tends vehemently into him. And therefore it never rests until it passes beyond all things and comes to him, into him.

For love itself belongs to unitive and transformative power, transforming the lover into the beloved, and conversely, so that one of the lovers is in the other, and conversely, as inwardly as it can be. This is clear first with respect to the apprehensive powers, how the beloved is in the lover: namely insofar as he is recalled sweetly and delightfully in the apprehension of the lover; and on the opposite side, insofar as the lover strives to discern each thing that pertains to the beloved, not superficially, but inwardly, and as it were to enter his inner parts. But with respect to the appetitive and affective powers, the beloved is said to be in the lover insofar as he is in the lover's affectionate complacency and in his pleasant delight rooted inwardly. Conversely, the lover is in the beloved by his whole desire and conformity according to the same willing and not willing, and by rejoicing and being saddened in the same thing, as the same one himself. For love draws the lover outside himself, because love is strong as death ^[2], and places him in the beloved, making him adhere to him most inwardly. For the soul is more where it loves than where it animates, because thus it is in the beloved according to its proper nature, reason, and will; but in that which it animates, it is only according as it is form, which also belongs to brute animals.

Therefore there is nothing else that draws us from exterior sensible things within ourselves, and from there into the inward and divine things of Jesus Christ, than the love of Christ, than the desire for the sweetness of Christ, for sensing, perceiving, and tasting the presence of the divinity of Christ. And so it is nothing other than the force of love that also leads the soul from earth to the high summits of heaven. Nor can anyone arrive at highest beatitude unless love and desire provoke him. Love itself also is the life of the soul, the wedding garment, and its perfection, in which the whole law and the Prophets and the command of the Lord hang. Hence the Apostle to the Romans: The fullness of the law is love ^[3]. And in the first to Timothy: The end of the command is charity ^[4].

Notes

[1] 1 John 4:16. (*I Joannis IV, 16.*)

[2] Canticles 8:6. (*Cantic. VIII, 6.*)

[3] To the Romans 13:10. (*Ad Roman. XIII, 10.*)

[4] 1 Timothy 1:5. (*I ad Timoth. I, 5.*)

Chapter XIII. The quality and utility of prayer, and how the heart is to be gathered back within itself?

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Furthermore, since for these things and for whatever other goods we are wholly insufficient from ourselves, and we can show nothing from ourselves to the Lord God himself, from whom alone is every good, that is not first his own, with one thing alone excepted, which remains, as he himself through himself, by his blessed mouth and also by example, deigned to instruct us: namely that in every case and event we should recur to prayer itself, as accused, miserable, poor, beggars, infirm, needy, subjects, servants, and sons, and totally desolate in ourselves. With most humble prostration of mind, in fear and love, recollectedly and composedly, with mature, true, and bare affection of shame, with greatness of desire and ardor, and also in groaning of heart and simplicity and sincerity of mind, let us supplicate and expose to him with full trust the dangers threatening us from every side. This is only so that readily, securely, and nakedly we may faithfully commit

and offer ourselves totally to him down to the last thing, as truly and in all respects his own, reserving nothing for ourselves, so that there may be fulfilled in us that saying of the blessed father Isaac, who speaks of this very prayer, saying: « Then we shall be one in God, and the Lord God will be in us all things in all and alone, when that perfect love of his, by which he first loved us, has passed also into the affection of our heart. » This will happen in such a way when every love, every desire, every study, every effort, finally every thought of ours, and everything that we see, speak, and hope, will be God for us; and when that unity which now belongs to the Father with the Son and the Son with the Father has been poured into our sense and mind, so that just as he loves us with sincere and pure and indissoluble charity, we also may be joined to him by perpetual and inseparable love: namely, joined to him in such a way that whatever we hope, whatever we understand, whatever we speak and pray, may be God.

Therefore this intention, this effort, and this end ought to belong to the spiritual man: that he may deserve to possess the image of future beatitude in this corruptible body, and in a certain manner begin in this age to foretaste the pledge of that heavenly beatitude and way of life and glory. This, I say, is the end of all perfection: that the mind, thinned away from every carnal condition, may be daily raised to spiritual things to such an extent, until every way of life and every will of the heart becomes one continual prayer. And when the mind has thus, with the earthly dregs laid aside, breathed again toward God, in whom alone the intention of the spiritual man ought always to be fixed, and for whom even a small separation from that highest good must be believed to be present death and most destructive destruction; and when founded tranquility has been sent ahead, or the mind has been absolved from the bonds of all carnal passions, and has adhered with most tenacious intention to that one and highest good, it will fulfill that apostolic saying: Pray without ceasing ^[1]. And: Pray in every place, lifting up pure hands, without anger and dispute ^[2]. For by this purity, if it can be said, when the sense of the mind has been absorbed and transformed from an earthly condition to a spiritual or angelic likeness, whatever it has received into itself, whatever it has handled, whatever it has done, will be most pure and most sincere prayer.

Accordingly, if you continue these things uninterruptedly, as we have discussed from the beginning, it will now be easy and ready for you in your inward turning and recollection to contemplate and enjoy, just as to live in nature.

Notes

[1] 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (printed: 1 Thessalonians 1:2). (*I ad Thessal.* V, 17 (printed: *I ad Thessal.* I, 2).)

[2] 1 Timothy 2:8. (*I ad Timoth.* II, 8.)

Chapter XIV. The attestation of conscience is to be required in every judgment.

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Finally, for obtaining spiritual perfection, purity, and tranquility of mind in God, it seems to profit not a little for this: that in everything that is said, felt, and done concerning us, we always silently run back to the inward secrets of the mind, and there, withdrawn from all other things and totally recollected within ourselves, set ourselves before ourselves in the knowledge of truth. And certainly we shall find and see that it profits us utterly nothing, but harms us very greatly, if we have been praised or honored from outside, and from within, in the thought of truth concerning ourselves, we exist culpable and guilty. And just as then it profits nothing if men praise someone from outside and conscience accuses from within, so on the other side it harms nothing if someone has been despised, blamed, and persecuted from outside, provided that within he exists innocent, irreprehensible, and harmless. Indeed, very greatly over these things, with patience and silence and quiet, he has reason not undeservedly to rejoice in the Lord, since no adversity will harm where iniquity does not rule. And just as no evil goes unpunished, so no good goes unrewarded. Nor should we wish with hypocrites to expect or receive wages and reward from men, but only from the Lord God, not in the present

but in the future, not in transitory time but in eternity.

Therefore it is clear that nothing is greater or better than always, in every tribulation and event, to go to the inward secrets of the mind, and there to invoke the Lord Jesus Christ himself, helper in temptations and tribulations, and there to be humbled in confession of sin, to praise God himself and the Father, correcting and consoling; and moreover to receive all things, each and all, in oneself or in others, prosperous or adverse, with equanimity, readily and securely, from the hand of his infallible providence or ordered disposition.

From these things there also follows remission of sins, expression of bitterness, bestowal of sweetness and security, infusion of grace and mercy, attraction and strengthening of familiarity, and abundant consolation in him, and firm adherence and union. But let us not wish to imitate those who through hypocrisy and in pharisaic manner strive to have themselves seen, held, and appear more dearly and otherwise from outside before men than they have learned themselves to be from within in truth. This indeed belongs to extreme madness, namely thus to seek, desire, or seek after human praise or glory from oneself or from others, when nevertheless inwardly one is filled with enticements and very grave sins. And certainly he who runs after vainest things of this kind will have the aforesaid goods flee from him, and will incur disgrace.

Therefore always have before your eyes your evils and your unsuitability, and know yourself, so that you may be humbled, and so that, as a most unworthy, most vile, and most abject offscouring, you do not shrink from being held by all on account of your very grave sins and greatest evils. For this reason reckon yourself among others as dross among gold, dandelion among wheat, chaff among grains, a wolf among sheep, Satan among the sons of God. But do not wish to be revered by others or preferred to others; rather, with your whole heart and spirit flee the virus of this pestilence, the poison of praise, the reputation of boasting and display, lest, namely, according to the Prophet, the sinner be praised in the desires of his soul ^[1]. And Isaiah 3:12: Those who call you blessed, they deceive you and scatter the way of your steps. And the Lord, Luke 6:26: Woe when men have blessed you.

Notes

[1] Psalm 10 according to the Hebrew, verse 3. (*Psal. X sec. Hebr.*, 3.)

Chapter XV. Contempt of oneself, how it is caused in man, and how useful it is?

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Accordingly, the more someone knows his own vileness, the more and the more clearly he is a beholder of the divine majesty; and the more someone, on account of God, truth, and justice, is viler to himself in his own eyes, the more precious he is in the eyes of God.

Wherefore let us strive with the whole effort of desire to reckon ourselves most vile, and to believe ourselves unworthy of every benefit, to displease ourselves, to please God alone, to be reckoned by others most unworthy and most vile; moreover not to be moved over tribulations, afflictions, and injuries, nor to be disturbed over those inflicting such things, nor to be entangled in thoughts against them or to be indignant, but with an even soul you should wish to believe that you are worthy of all injuries, acts of contempt, scourges, and abandonments.

For in truth, he who truly repents and mourns according to God abhors being honored and loved by all, nor does he avoid or refuse in a certain manner to be hated, trampled, and despised unto the end, so that he may truly be humbled and with a pure heart sincerely adhere to the Lord God alone.

Nevertheless, for loving the Lord God alone, abhorring oneself above all things, and desiring to be despised by others, exterior labor is not required, nor bodily health, but rather solitude of body, labor of heart, and quiet of mind, namely so that by labor of heart and affection of the inward mind, it may rise, and bodily tear itself away from those lowest things, and thus rise and ascend to heavenly and divine things.

Indeed, by doing this we change ourselves into God; and this happens especially then, when from the heart we choose, without judgment, condemnation, and contempt of neighbor, to be esteemed by all as offscouring and reproach, indeed to be abhorred by all as foul mud, rather than to abound in whatever delights, or to be honored or elevated by men, or to enjoy any bodily and transitory safety or advantage; and to desire no other consolation of this present mortality and bodily life than without ceasing to mourn, lament, and weep over our offenses, faults, and sins, perfectly to despise and annihilate ourselves, and from day to day to be held by others as more and more vile, and daily to become unworthy in every vileness in our own eyes, so that we may please God alone and love him alone and thus adhere to him. Nor should we wish to be affected around anything except only around the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who alone should lie in our affection; nor to be solicitous and care concerning anyone, except concerning him in whose dominion and providence the universe and each thing run and subsist.

Therefore from now on it will not be yours to delight, but truly to mourn with the whole heart. Wherefore, if you do not mourn, mourn because of this; but if you do mourn, lament more because of this, that you have brought upon yourself the cause of grief, because of your greatest offenses and infinite sins. Therefore, just as one who receives sentence as condemned does not bear solicitude over the arrangement of the executioners, so he who laments and mourns efficaciously should never attend either to delights, or to anger, or to glory, or to indignation, or to anything of this kind. And just as the dwellings of citizens and those of the condemned are different, so the station and institution of those mourning and having crimes binding them to punishment ought to be utterly alien and remote from the harmless and those not bound. Otherwise there would be no difference between the guilty accused person and the innocent one in the punishment of compensation and satisfaction, which nevertheless was great in the guilt of transgression, and injustice would be freer than innocence.

Therefore all things are to be denied, all things despised, all things shaken off and avoided, so that with full faith a good foundation may be laid for the mourning of penitence. Therefore one who in truth loves Jesus Christ, and mourns after him, and bears him in heart and body; who in truth has grief over his sins and offenses; who in truth seeks to receive the future kingdom; and also who in true faith possesses memory of torments and of eternal judgment, and firmly and perfectly takes back fear and memory of his own departure, will not further strive, nor care, nor be solicitous about anything else. Because of this, he who hastens to blessed impassibility and to God should judge that he has sustained much loss on every day on which he is not cursed and despised. But impassibility is freedom from vices and passions, cleanness of heart, and adornment of virtues. Therefore esteem yourself already dead, whom you do not doubt must necessarily die. And let this be for you the final test of all your thoughts, speeches, and works, whether they are according to God, namely if by them you have become more humble, and more recollected and strengthened within yourself and in God. But if you find otherwise in yourself, let it be suspect to you, lest it be not according to God, nor acceptable to him, nor profitable to you.

Chapter XVI. The providence of God, how it extends itself to all things?

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Nevertheless, so that, according to the things said before, without impediment, readily, securely, and nakedly, we may be freely and tranquilly carried into our Lord God, joined and united, and firmly adhere to him, with equanimity in prosperous and adverse things, in life or in death, it is necessary that we indubitably and most certainly commit all things, each and all, to his undiscussed and infallible providence.

Nor is it marvelous, since he alone is the one who gives to all things being, power, and operation, that is, substance, virtue, and operation, species, mode, and order in number, weight, and measure. Especially since, as the work of art presupposes the work of nature, so the work of nature presupposes the work of God

creating, conserving, ordering, and administering, because infinite power, wisdom, goodness, and essential mercy, justice and truth, and charity, unchangeable eternity and immensity, belong to him alone.

Therefore no thing can subsist by its own power, nor act, unless it acts in the power of God himself, namely of the first mover, the first principle, who is the cause of every action and works in every agent. Indeed, as far as the notion of order is concerned, God immediately provides for all things, even down to the last singular things. Therefore nothing from the greatest down to the least escapes the everlasting providence of God, nor even declines from it, whether in voluntary things, or in casual things, or in fortuitous things and things not intended of themselves. But neither can God do anything that does not fall under the order of his providence, just as he cannot do anything that is not subject to his operation.

Therefore divine providence extends itself to all things and each thing, even to the thoughts of men. For this reason Scripture, according to that saying of 1 Peter 5:7: Casting all your care upon him, because he has care for you. And again the Prophet: Cast your care upon the Lord, and he will nourish you ^[1]. And Ecclesiasticus 2:11 and 12: Look, sons, at the nations of men, and know that no one has hoped in the Lord and been confounded. For who has remained in his commandments and been abandoned? And the Lord says: Do not be solicitous, saying: What shall we eat ^[2]? Therefore whatever, and however great a thing, we can hope from God, we shall without doubt receive, according to that saying of Deuteronomy 11:24: Every place that your foot shall tread upon will be yours. For however much anyone could desire, so much he will receive; and as far as he has extended the foot of trust, so far he will possess. Hence Bernard says: « God, the author of all things, abounds with such bowels of piety that, to whatever extent we shall be able to extend the bosom of trust toward grace, so much we shall without doubt receive. » Hence, Mark 11:24: All things whatsoever you ask when praying, believe that you will receive, and they will come to you.

Moreover, the stronger and more urgent this trust in God is, and the more violently it raises itself in God with humility and reverence, the more securely, abundantly, and quickly it will ask and obtain what it hoped.

But if, among these things, because of the multitude and magnitude of sins, trust in God delays in tepidity to raise itself, let the person of this kind notice that all things are possible with God; and that what he wills must necessarily happen, and that what he does not will is impossible to happen; and that it is as easy for him to remit and destroy so many innumerable sins, however enormous, as one sin. And just as a sinner cannot, as far as lies in himself, rise from innumerable sins and shake and absolve himself from them, so neither can he rise from one sin. For not only can we not do good from ourselves, but we cannot even think good from ourselves, as if from ourselves; rather this is from God ^[3].

Yet certainly it is much more dangerous, other things being equal, to be ensnared by many sins than by one alone, because no evil is unpunished, and to each mortal sin an infinite punishment is owed, and this according to the rigor of justice, because any such sin is against God, who is of actually infinite reverence, dignity, and honorableness.

Furthermore, according to the Apostle, the Lord knows those who are his ^[4]; and it is impossible that any of them perish amid whatever windings and waves of errors, scandals, schisms, persecutions, discords, heresies, tribulations, adversities, and temptations of whatever kind, because the number of his elect and the limit of their merits has been foreseen by him eternally and immutably, so much so that even all good and evil things, their own and others', prosperous and adverse, work together for their good, unless perhaps in this, that they may appear more glorious and more tested in adversities.

Therefore securely and readily let us commit all things, each and all, with full trust to divine providence, which for this reason permits evils of whatever kind to happen in whatever way: and it is good, and is done well, that he allows them to happen; nor would they happen unless he permitted them to happen; nor can they happen otherwise or more than insofar as he permits, because he knows, can, and wills to convert and dispose them for the better. For just as by his operation all good things are made, so by his permission all evil

things become good, so that certainly from this his power, wisdom, clemency through Christ the restorer, mercy and justice, the virtue of grace, and the defect of nature, the beauty of the universe by comparison of opposites, the praise of the good, and the malice and punishment of the reprobate may appear. Similarly in the converted sinner there appear contrition, confession, and penitence, the gentleness of God, piety and charity, and his praise and goodness. Nevertheless, for those who act badly it does not always fall out for good, but commonly into great danger and the greatest evil, namely the privation of grace and glory, and the incurring of guilt and punishment, sometimes even eternal punishment, from which may Jesus Christ guard us. Amen.

Notes

[1] Psalm 54:23. (*Psal. LIV, 23.*)

[2] Matthew 6:31. (*Matth. VI, 31.*)

[3] Compare 2 Corinthians 3:5. (*Cf. II ad Corinth. III, 5.*)

[4] 2 Timothy 2:19. (*II ad Timoth. II, 19.*)