

The Circle of Divine Love¹ of Francesco Ripanti da lesi

Colpetrazzo said about Francesco da Jesi, who was one of the pillars of the Capuchin reform, and who, together with Bernardino d'Asti and others, was one of the advocates of a reform movement within the Observants, that "in his day he was considered to be outstanding in the Franciscan Order and well qualified in the teachings of Scotus". (MHOC III, 74) Following a period during which he was occupied in preaching, he committed himself totally to the life of a contemplative hermit following the approach of Bartolomeo Cordoni from Città di Castello. After he had transferred to the Capuchins with Giovanni da Fano in 1534, he took part in the General Chapter in Rome at S. Eufemia in 1536 and was chosen to be the sixth definator receiving fifty one votes. He was elected Vicar Provincial of Tuscany in 1537, elected Vicar General again in the Chapter of 1538 and was Vicar Provincial of Umbria until 1542 when he became Commissary General following the apostasy of Ochino. He subsequently became Vicar General and governed the Order at the most dramatic time in its history. He retired to Montemalbe in 1545 and died there on 7th September 1549 at the age of 80 after 58 years in the Order.

He brought a striking variety of the idealism of the spirituals to the reform that went beyond what was typical of the radical attitude of "literal" observance of the Franciscan Rule which prevailed among the leaders of the reform. This variety of idealism was manifested most of all in the special method of contemplation that he developed during long retreats at Monteluco in Spoleto, Cibottola al Buon Riposo near Città di Castello and other Umbrian hermitages.

This text which contains this method is published here for the first time. It is taken from a rare 1539 edition of the *Dialogo* by Cordoni which was edited by Girolamo of Molfetta, where this writing appears in the fifty third and last chapter under the title: *Epilogue of the whole exercise of union reduced to a very brief summary and splendid technique*. However its real title appears later in the Latin sentence: *Iste est Circulus charitatis divinae*, that is *The Circle of Divine Love*. In this work Francesco da Jesi collects and summarises all his theological, biblical, ascetical, mystical, religious and Franciscan expertise.

He was convinced that only by means of the spiritual contemplation of the love of God may one manage to survive in a Franciscan reform which is in complete union with Christ and the poor little seraphic Francis of Assisi. He acquired this conviction by means of what he experienced in hermitages and it turned him into a propagator of the spiritual life and impelled him to personally teach his method of contemplation to the brothers who came together in small friaries during his canonical visitations as Commissary

¹ The introduction and text are translated from Costanzo Cargnoni, *I Frati Cappuccini III/I*, Edizioni Fra Indovino, Perugia, 1988, p 265-297. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: There are many Latin expressions in the Italian text. In this translation they appear in *italics*.

General. This was in fact a time when the Capuchins, who had been suspended from preaching for a year following the sad departure of Bernardino Ochino, concentrated on contemplation. What Ripanti discussed was focused entirely on the love of God, inner abnegation, complete spiritual poverty, and the Franciscan Rule which was seen to have contemplative life as its goal.

This method of prayer, which is explained with evocative originality, is one way of understanding the act of perfect love which is the ultimate aim of the religious and Christian life. Its absolute and entire objective is Jesus Christ considered under the aspect of His divinity and humanity and contemplated by means of the sign of the cross in as much as His Cross communicates this love to us. The image of the circle diagrammatically depicts the movement of God's love for humanity in the form of a diagram, since in loving Himself Christ appears to move beyond Himself to love us, but also returns to Himself by means of His love, thus tracing the double movement of going out from a point and returning to the same point as depicted by the image of a circle. As Saint Bernardino of Siena said: "Amare autem amorem circulum fecit, ut nullus debat esse finis vel mensura amoris". (Cf. De evangelio aeterno, Serm. 3, a. 3, c. 1: Op. omnia III, 34. "Loving makes love move in a circle, so that there can be no end to love or measure of love"). The soul struggles to duplicate this "circular movement" by repeating the same process that is exhibited on the cross, the vertical line of which is the act of love which is direct and pure, which fixes its gaze directly on the Crucified Jesus feeling sympathy for Him in everything; while the horizontal line is the indirect act of love which is carried out through the medium of the complete annihilation and purification of self and the nail which holds the two beams together is the habit of divine love.

Thus by gazing into the mystery of Christ, the contemplative enjoys Him in His infinite divine perfection in the abyss of the Trinity. The contemplative admires Him in His most perfect humanity "which is crucified in penance consecrated in the sacrament and glorified in glory". In Christ the whole Church is represented as an act of jealous love that is ecstatic and excessive and shared with creatures. The Ten Commandments and the gospel beatitudes find their reason for being and their application in this act of personal and ecclesial love. The contemplative offers himself and his own freedom as a submissive instrument to the will of Christ, to the Church and to creatures in time and in eternity, desiring nothing more, since he has become one with Christ, "one in spirit and in will"; and desires that Christ should be loved by the Son, by the Father and the Holy Spirit, by the Church whether triumphant, militant or being purified and all creatures.

The entire visible and invisible universe vibrates with the exercise of contemplation. Christ's Trinitarian and Crucified love is experienced once more in the Church and in the individual soul as the action of an endlessly expanding circle, a spiral of loving, by means of which the contemplative is like Christ on the Cross, "completely turned into love." We see in Ripanti's Trinitarian Christocentrism the combined influence of Saint Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, Ubertino da Casale and Bartolomeo Cordoni. With Christ at the centre, the Cross and the Church are the fundamental points on which the contemplative experience of the early Capuchins hinged, as it is defined by Francesco da Jesi. Obviously echoing the ideals of the spirituals, he described it as *reformatio fratrum*

meorum christiformis perfectissima (the reform of my brothers which is closest to the image of Christ).

The archaic style, which is thickly interspersed with Latin expressions and broken up, as if it was crafted out of hasty points made up of divisions and subdivisions in the jumbled fashion of scholastic theology, mysticism and spiritual experience, makes these pages perhaps the most complex and difficult of all early Capuchin ascetical literature. Jerome of Molfetta must have copied the text without adequately understanding its meaning, running together phrases which were originally set out according to a plan. Because of this it is very difficult to reconstruct the original division of the text and its meaning. However, beyond a hurried glance which might discourage the reader there lies very powerful and evocative stimulation.

This is a Circle of Divine Love

*A seraphic technique. Apostolic life. The superabundance of love. A most solemn Mass. The harmony of divine love. The Eucharistic banquet and meal. The delight of delights of the Spouse and the Bride. The greatest joy of God and of the soul. The supreme happiness and peace of God and the intelligent creature. The sound of sounds, song of songs with the sweetest mingling of harmony. The fragrance of fragrances, the most fragrant of all spiritual aromas.*¹

This is a spiritual circle which depicts the loving activity of outstanding divine friendship, which is experienced in the exceptional love between God and a person and a person and God, which is mutual and reciprocal; most perfectly intense and unlimited. It is the highest form of divine worship. It is perfection and the perfect human preparation for something higher by means of an amazing technique and superlative method. It is a single action but it continues to progress efficiently in a circular movement. It is infinitely precious and of immense value. It is clearly divided,² in an orderly and succinct manner, into two main sections:

The first section deals with the most perfect, *that is*, the most efficacious and developed quintessence of this exercise of cyclical love.

The second section deals with the art (of loving) and the way in which one is initiated into it and carries it out.³

¹ These Latin expressions are a descriptive, short introduction to Ripant's contemplative method and, in their mystical language, are reminiscent of many aspects of the spiritual life. It is a seraphic exercise of love because, as Bartolomeo Cordoni wrote, the soul takes on the condition of a seraph and withdraws all mediation between itself and the beloved (Cf. *Dyalgo della unione*, f. 140v). It is an apostolic life because it is the soul of the apostolate. The expression "very solemn Mass" comes from Ubertino da Casale, from whom Cordoni copied it (Cf. *Dyalgo* cap. 52). "It is as if this loving act is an extension of a very solemn Mass which has been celebrated with great solemnity with all the strength and power of Christ." (f 24 ss). The other terms also recall expressions which are dear to mystical and biblical language. For example, Saint Bonaventure says that Christ "is the highest harmony, fragrance and most desirable". (Op. omnia IX, 92b). However, it is not known whether these words were written by the brother from Molfetta or are the original words of Ripanti.

² In Italian the expression *se pone* should be *se pongono*. The expression used here is clearly part of the dialect of the Marches.

³ This is the main division of the spiritual treatise, which once it has explained the structure of this "loving act", teaches how to put it into practice. Note the superlatives: "excellent love", "most perfect", "supreme divine worship", "perfection", "infinitely precious and of immense value" which would have left a bad taste in the mouths of theologians in the Holy Office around the end of the sixteenth century. These superlatives appear in Cordoni's *Dyalgo*, and also demonstrate a more than casual link with the teaching of the Observant friar minor from Città di Castello, who was well known to Ripanti, and show, at least, his indirect influence. Cordoni refers to "a state of perfect charity" and says that "a work carried out in God is as good as God Himself" (Cf. f. 146v), etc.

[The objective of this method]

With respect to the first of the two sections three things are to be considered¹ in succession.

Firstly, (we speak of) the most perfect object which is considered *only* in itself and which is called the absolute object. (See under the heading the principal, most perfect and complete object, Christ who is God and Man, which begins: “Your (Christ’s) nature as it exists in itself” etc., in the sign of the Cross). This is also considered as it is related to us, *that is* as it is communicated (to us), *and then* it is described as an object in its relationship to us. (See from the end of where the principal, absolute, most perfect object is dealt with, which begins: “With respect to the relational aspect” etc., under the letter A – up to the secondary object and the one who loves with associated subdivisions).

Secondly (we consider) the natural, *supplementary* perfection, in both its primary and secondary aspects, which prepares (the one who loves) to be able to love the said object most perfectly. (See under the heading of the less important object and one who loves that begins: “The direct source” under the heading B).

Thirdly, (we consider) the most perfect act of love which is characterised by eight very important properties, which are moral activities which are freely conferred, seraphic and almost divine, and are carried out spiritually in union with holy Church. (See where it begins: “In the end what is finally *most important* for you”, under the letter C).²

[The practice of this method]

Secondly, and *importantly* there follow eight so-called characteristics in seeking the orderly process, the art and the method of preparing to undertake this exercise by means of the memory, the intellect and the will with its capacity for desiring.³ (we shall consider) each *characteristic individually* as they make up the one circle, as a *completely* substantial and rewarding teaching which suffices *for everything* as a model covering all of Sacred Scripture and theology.⁴

¹ Same as note 2.

² This is the outline of the first part of the treatise which in turn is divided into three sections: 1) the contemplation of Christ the God Man considered a) in His absolute perfection; b) in how He communicates Himself to humanity; 2) the basis of perfect love for Christ by means of the natural and supernatural perfection of man (*superaddita* = supernatural); 3) the most perfect act of love that is identified by eight properties or modalities, which are lived out in spiritual union with the Church of Christ.

³ These are the three faculties of the soul which are at work in the spiritual life. “Desire “is the element that is specific to the will. In fact in order to understand the greater part of the spiritual literature of the past we need to be familiar with classical and medieval anthropology. With respect to this see the *Dialogo tra il maestro e Il discepolo* by Bernardino Ochino.

⁴ Thus, as far as Ripanti is concerned, this teaching is the “marrow” of the Bible and theology.

Therefore, while following this method and technique, supported by divine grace, continually develop yourself in this, always excellently aiming to be more perfect, and to become an instrument of your Saviour and a mystical member of the holy Church by journeying with her in this circle, which is rightly called the *Circle of Divine Love* wherein Christ by loving Himself, reaches beyond Himself and loves you. Ultimately, however, by loving you for Himself He comes back to Himself thus always *circling* as if spinning around.¹

By imitating this and journeying with it we become *one with him* in this circular movement, becoming filled with desire as Dionysius says.² Leaving what is natural aside, according to one way of thinking means taking up the cross of the Gospel to which the Saviour invites us. This is the act of undeviating love, which embraces Christ *immediately*, wanting to love Him completely. The cross beam of the crucifix is the activity of reflecting on direct love, *especially* on being naked, *which* means hating, detesting all that offends his divinity or humanity. The nail that holds the beams together, on which they depend, is the habit of divine love.³

[*The author and dedication of the Circle*]

A certain Poor (follower) of Christ composed the Circle (*at God's initiative*). He is average and despicable, one of the greatest sinners, a member of the Friars Minor of the seraphic Francis known as Capuchins.⁴ Such a person dedicated this work completely to the honour, praise and perpetual glory of Jesus Christ, to His beloved bride holy mother Church, and especially to His Vicar and by divine providence our Lord His Holiness Pope Paul III, at whose feet and correction he prostrates and submits himself in

¹ Note the depth of this concept. Christ is the person who loves. It is Christ who gives meaning to the circle of love. According to the degree of grace which we receive, we are simply instruments of Christ's love and mystical members of the Church. Therefore it is only while we are united to the Church that we are able to contribute to the circle of love.

² When we are united to the Church and united to Christ by imitating His love we are drawn towards performing this "action of love". One may also see here an interpretation of the thought of Saint Francis who wanted the brothers to have "the spirit of the Lord and its holy action" above all else. It is obvious that as far as Ripanti is concerned, just as it is the mysticism of Cordoni, the action of the Spirit is love. For the passage from Dionysius the sense of which is hinted at here see *The Divine Names* Ch IV, 10 and 18. "The Beautiful and the Good is desired and beloved and cherished by everyone". (John Parker, *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite* First published 1897, republished 2007 by Forgotten Books, pp. 35 and 39).

³ I believe that the image of the Cross as it is depicted in the *Circle of Divine Love* was taken from Ubertino da Casale and applied here. (Cf. *Arbor vitae* IV, c. 26: *Jesus intumutatus*: "The image of the cross which alone within itself is able to capture the whole of the surface of a circle, clearly stands for the fact that the mystery of the cross contains the whole range of grace within itself and the whole sphere of our enlightenment. Thus in the two beams of wood, one upright and the other horizontal, the representation is complete...": *ibid.*, Lib. IV, c. 37: *Iesus cruce ditatus* "...Just as two beams held together by a nail intersect to form a cross, two elements are joined in the act of love as if by a nail and what is more they reach out equally from the same source." Many similar allusions can be found in Saint Bonaventure and Saint Bernardine of Siena..

⁴ It is clearly stated that the author is a Capuchin, or, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, Francesco da Jesi. Cf. C. Cargnoni, *Fonti tendenze e sviluppi ...*, in CF 48 (1978) 335-347.

everything and *in every way* for ever, always, from the bottom of his heart forever, sincerely accepting the Catholic faith, and being ready to *shed his blood and forfeit his life (with God's help) for that cause*¹

The Object of the “Circle of Divine Love”

*This is the reform of my brothers which is most perfectly Christlike.*²

1. *The God-Man, Jesus Christ, is the principal, absolute and most perfect and all-embracing object (of the act of love), through personal union and not by combination of elements.*³

GOD

Firstly, your (Christ's) nature as it exists in itself that is, of itself, not sprung from seed or having no origin or even a cause.

Secondly, as it exists in itself and from itself *that is* of its nature, and so not *ex nihilo*.

Thirdly, as it exists in itself, *that is*, independently, *simply* the first and not a *consequence of anything*.⁴

Broadly speaking you are being *itself (simpliciter)*, an ocean of substance and infinite perfection which is formally, basically, identically and eminently equal to being.

¹ Ripanti dedicated his method of contemplating to Christ, to the Church and to the Pope of the day who in 1539 was Paul III, who had been elected on 13 October 1534. At this point one might raise the question of the date of this edition. If it is dedicated to Paul III this might mean that it was not printed before 1534, that is, unless Girolamo da Molfetta changed the dedication on his own initiative to bring it up to date. If in fact Ripanti had published it in Rome in 1521, while he was still a Friar Minor, he would have dedicated it to Leo X who died on 1 December 1521. For certain the closing words are those of Ripanti and clearly reflect his characteristic love for the Church and his doctrinal and ascetical inflexibility.

² This is translated from Latin. Note the influence of the spirituals in this phrase. The Capuchin chroniclers, notably Bellintani, speak of the “final and most perfect reform” which is rather reminiscent of Angelo Clareno and Ubertino da Casale's use of the adjective “Christlike”. Cf. C. Cargnoni, *Sviluppo della riforma cappuccino nella storiografia dei primi cronisti*, in IF 54 (1979) 389-408.

³ The object of contemplation is Christ in His divinity and humanity by means of the hypostatic or personal union that is in the unity of the Person of the Word.

⁴ This is scholastic terminology which means that God has no cause or beginning but has always existed, is independent, completely free and transcendent. Cf. Duns Scotus, *Oxon*, I. d. 36, n. 11: “God is not just he for whom it is impossible not to exist, but is being itself”.

Concentrating on you specifically, you are ultimate perfection itself, *that is* the essence of being itself, of spirit itself, of life itself, of reason and liberty itself, the author of species, of individuality and singularity itself, by means of your intrinsic perfection, because you exist in act, are infinite in perfection, purest act having no potency, most simple and not composite, eternal and not bound by time, perfection itself and the primary power.¹

The Acts of the Faculties and their Properties

The faculty of memory which makes (you) joyfully present.

The faculty of intellect which enables me to grasp your wisdom, to have knowledge of the things you have created, to know about the providence which governs everything and the entire skill of the crafts and of the primary infallible truth.

The faculty of will (enables me to contemplate) your omnipotence, goodness, charity, mercy, justice etc. together with their operations and properties of peace, tranquillity, happiness, joy and delight in the same intrinsic and perfect ways *that were mentioned above*.²

Consequently, because of your eminence and identity with being you are all the perfection which has been created or could be created, above and beyond all creatures, transcending them *infinitely*.

Therefore, you are happiness itself and beatitude by your essential *nature (signo naturae)* both in yourself and in the Persons (of the Trinity) and thus you are complete.³ Because of the order (within the Persons of the Trinity) as it is in itself (*ex se*) your nature

¹ Once more we are in the environment of high scholastic theology which is characteristic of Anselm, Bonaventure, and Scotus. Cf. Scotus, *Oxon*, I, d. 8, q. 4, n. 18 – IV, d. 46, q. 3, n. 4ss where the saying of John Damascene “ocean of infinite substance” is cited. (*Quodlib.* Q. 5, n. 25 – q. 6, n. 6. “Specificazione”, or the one who establishes species, that is the substantial form and specific varieties of being, “individuazione” that is indivisibility, or the rejection of any division (Cf. Scotus, *Oxon*, II, d. 3, q. 2, n. 5 (1); “singularità” in the terminology of Scotus is the actual existence of God. Note the constant use of Scholastic Latin expressions: “perfection itself”, “being itself”, “spirit itself” etc. to stand for “essa perfezione,” “essa essenza”, “esso spirito” in Latin *ipsa* perfectio, etc.

² The three faculties of the soul are presented here: the faculty of memory (= “virtù memorativa”) is exercised in the presence of God which produces joy: the Psalm says “Total joy in your presence”; the faculty of intellect (= intelletto) tries to grasp the wisdom of God, his knowledge which is spread among creatures, his providence which controls the world etc.; and finally the faculty of will (= virtù volitiva) which contemplates God’s attributes such as omnipotence, goodness, charity, mercy etc. with their attributes of peace and joy exalting them all to an infinite degree since God possesses them to the most perfect degree.

³ Cf. Bonaventure, *Sententiarum* I, d. 42, q. 1; II, d. 26, q. 3 (*Op. Omnia* I, 747°; II, 638b) etc. These are standard expressions in scholastic theological terminology and are based on the principle that the concept of God must be of one who is infinitely perfect. – *Signo naturae*... means that as God Jesus is happiness and beatitude itself, through the perfection of His nature in itself, independently of His relationship with the Persons of the Trinity. Cf. also Scotus, *Oxon*, IV, d. 49, q. 8, n. 7.

intimately (*immediate*) exists in your Person and in the Person of the Father and the Holy Spirit producing the property of paternity communicating it outside itself constituting it formally as distinct from the other Persons.¹

Secondly, this same nature is generated in you, Christ, by the power of the Father by means of (his) intellect.²

Thirdly, through them both this nature is breathed by means of the will in the Holy Spirit, when the Persons do this supreme goodness and divine perfection is manifested.³

Because your person together with the person of the Father and the Holy Spirit are one and the same in nature, you are God. Your Father is God and the Holy Spirit is God. Thus there are three distinct Persons and one God, bound together in one identical nature and intimate presence, with the most beautiful infinite ideas, set out in a most orderly manner in their genus, species and individuality as that exists in your nature *or* mind. I know that these Persons are one with your nature but I experience them as being distinct.⁴

MAN

As it exists in human nature as an individual your person supports and sustains you in three ways, *namely*, as crucified in penance, as consecrated in a sacrament and as glorified in glory.⁵

Here *too* the above mentioned orthodox cult is to be offered to you, by loving and adoring you *everywhere is a special way*. However, this human nature enjoys this and is adored with worship *only by association and because of its union* (with your Divine nature), in the same way as his regalia is associated with the King, and as wood is associated with fire, but not as a distinct object or as an object in its own right.⁶

¹ That is God communicates his paternity to the person of the Son and in doing so constitutes him as His Son and distinct from the other Persons of the Trinity.

² One and the same nature is generated in the Person of the Father and the Word according to the Augustinian analogy of the three faculties of the soul in which the intellect is attributed to the Word.

³ The Holy Spirit is breathed from the one, holy will of the Father and the Son. (Cf. Scotus, *Oxon.* I, d. 18, n. 5) and this displays divine perfection.

⁴ This is the doctrine of the Most Holy Trinity as it is applied to the desire, longing, and experience of the faculty of the will during contemplation. Among the string of Latin expressions note the adjective “pulcherrime”, that is, most beautiful.

⁵ That is the Word as it is united to human nature is incommunicable (= suppositante and sostanticante). Cf. Scotus *Oxon.* I, d. 26, n. 52. The union of Christ-Man, the complete Christ, is expressed in three specific states: Christ Crucified, the Sacramental Christ (= the Church), the Glorified Christ, which is the equivalent of what we would call today “the Paschal mystery”.

⁶ “L’ordinate culto” (= orthodox) is an expression which is especially reminiscent of the “devotion moderna”. There are many allusions: to love, to adore with the addition of “*everywhere*”. This is also reminiscent of the prayer of Saint Francis: “We adore thee here and in all thy churches,” in which Christ the God-Man is *especially* present. There is also the expression “to experience the union” which is always

Your human nature is most perfect

The basic, natural perfection of the body, of the soul and all that is connected with them is most excellent, but it is nothing without your human person with the infinite grace of your personal union by means of which you are a human being, *that is*, a person with a human nature and a child of a human being, *that is* of Mary, and a child of God, the Son of God.¹

The second aspect of this perfection concerns the acts of your faculties and their properties, namely the intellect, will and the most perfect execution of all their capabilities which have been operative from the very first moment of their conception to the end. They were constituted sinless divine properties with not *even* indifferent acts.²

Therefore you possess the richest³ of the highest merits, which always existed in your memory and retention together with the grace of being the head (of the Mystical Body), *that is* being the foremost in dignity and perfection, secondly, the source of meriting the sense of faith and the act of love, thirdly, the ruler and director of everything⁴

Therefore I love and adore you with the adoration of hyperdulia, adoring you in your very humanity itself.⁵

I love your human nature, which is most singularly perfect, considered independently in itself and leaving aside its connection to (Your divinity through) the hypostatic union. However, I love it, but I do not take pleasure in it with a greater degree of love and greater hyperdulia (than for Your divine nature). I love such perfection by

the objective of contemplation. “Latria adorando” means that the adoration of worship which is offered to Christ’s humanity cannot be distinguished from the adoration which is offered to the divine nature of the Person of the Word, just as when we honour the person of the King we make no distinction concerning his robe and his person. When we flee from fire we make no distinction between the flame and the wood which feeds the flame.

¹ Here Ripanti brings together theological arguments for the perfection of the Man Christ in his human nature and the grace of the hypostatic union. The reference to Mary as the mother of Christ who is both God and Man is a basic reason for such perfection.

² This is another reason for the human perfection of Christ which is the basis of all the most perfect virtues in him as man from the moment of conception without any act being indifferent. Every internal or external act of Christ is always a most perfect virtue.

³ “dittissimo” is a Latin expression meaning “richest”.

⁴ That is Jesus Christ is the source of all merit in so far as He is the Head of the Mystical Body which flows into the act of faith, love and the governance of everything.

⁵ It seems that what emerges here is the Scotistic thesis or that of the Scotistic tradition, according to which Christ’s humanity on the Cross deserves the highest worship and nothing less. In any case Saint Bonaventure says that the highest worship is due to Christ’s humanity (*Op. omnia* III, 220: “dulia maior debetur solum humanitati Christi”: *Sent.* III, d. 9, art. 2, q. 4). Usually *dulia* is the honour reserved to the saints, *hyperdulia* to the Blessed Virgin and *latria* to God.

believing, by loving it and by hoping in it and by perusing it by means of appropriate exterior acts.¹

2. *The principle which is productive beyond itself (ad extra), as well as the object of the relationship and communion, the most perfect principle that brings everything together by means of a personal union and not by the mingling of elements*²

A *Eight properties of this act (of love). Eight musical tones and keys.*³

With respect to the relational aspect (of the circle of love) as the principle which produces it and communicates it beyond itself most perfectly, the God-Man is the basis, origin and most abundant source of every creature and created thing that has been created or could be created. Your nature (as the God-Man) is clearly represented and apprehended best of all as it is present, and as it confers what it represents. Secondly, by knowing each one perfectly, your intellect confers on them that which is known. Thirdly, by your will loving them they receive the gift of being loved.⁴

But as for you, my Church, I love you effectively and love you most perfectly.⁵

[The first property of this act of love]

Finally, the *main* and ultimate reason for my love of you *is that* because I love myself, therefore I love you and I want to communicate with you, share with you and be embraced and possessed by you.⁶ I want to be loved, recognised, remembered and represented in my image, likeness and vestige and honoured, praised and glorified *almost* reciprocally by you.

¹ The conclusion of this meditation on the human nature of Christ is an act of love, leaving aside the hypostatic union (= “non attenta detta unione personale”). In such circumstances a person cannot experience enjoyment since “enjoyment” is connected to union with the divine. Thus the soul produces interior acts of the theological virtues with corresponding signs of exterior lesser commitment. “Maiores dulcia” means hyperdulia, Cf. Scotus, *Oxon.* III, d. 9, n. 2 and 9.

² Under this heading we contemplate Christ as “principio produttivo *ad extra*” (the principle which is productive beyond itself (*ad extra*), which is Scotist and scholastic terminology that means: the source of everything that has been created or could be created, as will be explained below. “Oggetto respectivo” (the object which can relate to) or which expresses a relationship to persons and therefore forge a fruitful communion by means of personal unity without a merging the elements.

³ We find the explanation of the “eight properties” of the cyclical act of divine love in Ubertino da Casale *Arbor Vitae* lib. IV, c. 11 *Iesus circumi rotatus* where he says that the number eight is a cyclical number in the computation of days in which the eighth day is the first so that it returns to the beginning of the circle.

⁴ The act of love is always explained in terms of the three faculties of the soul. In a creature the characteristic of being represented is the object of memory, the characteristic of being known is the object of the intellect, the characteristic of being loved is the object of the will.

⁵ Christ loves the Church by means of a most perfect and efficacious act of love. There are eight varieties or “properties” of this act of love.

⁶ In the text “habito et possesso” are obviously Latin expressions.

As a consequence I want to grow, to be germinated and multiplied *ad extra* as far as possible.¹

The *lesser*, but not ultimate (objective of this act of love), is my Church and each of its members and creatures, *that is*, its real welfare, happiness and promotion, so that it can be united to me personally and *immediately*, embrace and possess me by means of belonging to me in love, knowledge and memory, as its immediate object of fulfilment and perfection, which is your ultimate goal and which is based upon natural ability, moral behaviour and grace.²

Through taking on (my) image and likeness I want you (to display) my divine image and my divine being.³

[*The second property*]

(My love is) free and unconditional, without obstruction and simple, with the option to love or not love, *or even* to hate over a period of time. *However*, I love you with a greater and sweeter love.⁴

¹ The synthetic and technical character of the words that Ripanti uses always makes the meaning of the text difficult and obscure. The author wishes to say that the principal and ultimate objective of Christ's love for us is Christ Himself as the object of His love *ad extra*, expressed in His wish to share Himself with creatures so that they may share in His life. They possess Him and portray Him according to the capacity of the three faculties of the soul. They portray, know and love Him and in loving Him they can honour, praise and glorify Him. In this way Christ can grow and multiply beyond Himself. Portrayal by means of an "image, similitude and clue" is a classical scholastic doctrine. Cf. Giovanni de la Rochelle, *Summa de anima* c. 8, ed. T. Tominichelli, Prato 1882, 147; Bonav. *I Sent* d. 3, p. 1, q. 2 near the end (*Op omnia* I, 37ab; also *DS* VII/2, Paris, 1439s, 1443s.).

² Note how the analysis is very subtle in its attempt to include every possible shade of meaning in the act of Christ's love. As a second aspect of the first property Ripanti adds how as head of the Church Christ loves the Church, which is His body, and each one of the members of His body, but not as His final goal, because He is our perfection, the one who fulfills our existence. The language is so tightly packed that the words collide in successive groups of three which bring to mind specific philosophical and theological teachings: the doctrine of what is real, enjoyable and beneficial; the traditional teaching associated with the three faculties ("recordazione" = memory. 'cognizione' = intellect, amore = will); the doctrine of the three levels of sharing: which are natural, moral and grace-filled (or supernatural). Cf. S. Bonav., *Coll. In Hexaemeron*, coll. 223, n. 14 (*Op. omnia* V, 445).

³ Christ wants His church to take on His "image" and His divine "being", that is become divine and become consistent with His image as Son and with His life of infinite love, so that He would become the firstborn among many brothers, as Saint Paul says. (Cf. Rom 8, 29).

⁴ This is the threefold scholastic understanding of the concept of liberty. Jesus Christ loves us generously, voluntarily and on account of this His love is great and sweet.

[The third property]

(My love is) freely given and conferred by means of grace bestowing great things on you, without expecting anything in return, since it is *simply* perfect and *I have no need of your goods*.¹ Nothing could measure up to this because nothing is good until I wish and accept it. *Therefore* I alone am generous.²

[The fourth property]

(My love) unites people in a similar way to that in which my nature unites me to the Father and the Holy Spirit, by loving each one uniquely, simply and with perfect love, and with intent and effect in creatures, directing it all to the one individual, as if loving that person alone, so that I may love each individual in loving all.³ *For my love is always singular. One is my dove, my perfect one is but one*,⁴ *I said to Mary through the Angel: Blessed are you among women*.⁵

[The fifth property]

I love you superabundantly, firstly, through the intent of my infinite love. This is more than the resolve with which creatures can love or operate.⁶ Secondly, from the point of view of quantity *that is* in the number and the multiplicity of acts, considering the various aspects of my love which are bound up into one, as it exists in my nature and my Person and that of the Father and the Holy Spirit and the love of creatures which is beyond calculation as far as we are concerned.⁷

Thirdly, with respect to duration, my love is of the highest quality and longest duration because it is eternal: *for I loved you with an everlasting love*.⁸ I loved you before you existed and after you existed. I foreknew that you would be my enemy but I loved you even to the end and in hell, preserving you in existence and conferring on you

¹ Cf. Ps 15,2 (*Vulg*) = Ps 16, 2., Jesus loves us freely. This is pure gift. It is completely free.

² This is a very beautiful thought; only what God accepts and wants is good.

³ This is the simplicity of God's love who loves us personally in union with the Holy Spirit and in the Persons of the Trinity.

⁴ Cf Song of Solomon 6, 8.

⁵ Cf. Lk 1, 28.

⁶ That is Jesus Christ loves with an immense love which outdoes by far in intensity the love and activity of all creatures put together.

⁷ This means that Christ loves us immensely also in the number of acts and their multitude which are beyond counting as far as we are concerned.

⁸ Cf. Wrong in Costanzo's footnote. The text is from Jeremiah 31, 3.

the gifts of justification and mercy, notwithstanding any obstacles and difficulties. Indeed I changed everything into love.¹

[The sixth property]

I love you in a divine manner, *that is* from a divine perspective or as being divine in a special and immediate way, through the activity of the intellect, the will and the memory seeking and possessing me as perfection that is completely external, objective fulfilling and ultimate and the formal intrinsic cause, *that is*, of the activity of the intellect, will and memory already mentioned, which transform you into me through the action of God.²

However I wish to share my divine nature with you by means of the standard representation or the reproduction of an image.³

[The seventh property]

My love is efficacious, in the first place, in giving you my intrinsic love, then in giving you myself as Creator when I created you, as the one who preserved you in existence by caring for you, in conferring dignity on you by me assuming human nature, by redeeming you by becoming your Redeemer, by teaching you, by becoming your Master, by bringing you to perfection and by bringing you to maturity by giving you grace, in bringing you to glory by giving you glory.⁴

Thus I gave myself to you as Lord, Father, spouse, brother, friend, shepherd, advocate, procurator, confident, sustenance, door, pathway, goal, ultimate and perpetual beatitude and happiness, in this life through grace and in the next through glory.⁵

¹ Christ's love is immense because it is eternal, of the highest quality and duration (Cf. Gal 3, 8). The thinking is very clear. Even if a person or creature is in hell God's love always triumphs either as justice or mercy.

² The text is very complex. It means that Jesus Christ loves us in a divine manner even in the activity of the three faculties of the soul, an activity that achieves complete extrinsic and intrinsic perfection.

³ This means that Christ loves us in so far as we are made in His image and likeness.

⁴ Christ's love is efficacious because by loving us it creates and infuses goodness into us and by various loving activities such as creation, preservation, Incarnation, Redemption, instruction, grace and glory it provides for us.

⁵ These are titles of Christ which are taken from the Bible. It is interesting to note that He is also called "Father", a title which is also used with the same meaning in the *Constitutions of 1536* numbers 6 and 94. Where we read "in porta" ("door") the original text here had the Latin expression "in hostio".

[Eighth property]

(Divine love) returns to me, in the first place because it is through my pleasure that you are loved by me and by others. Secondly, I wish that whoever does not love you should love you and by doing so grow according to the just decree of my will. Thirdly, I am displeased with those who fall short of doing this and act against my stipulations mentioned above.¹

[The seven commandments of the second tablet]

I am continually at work through the seventh property (of this act of love), namely the characteristic of it being efficacious, taking care of you and accompanying you with my grace, and moving others to do likewise, by presenting them with the seven commandments of the second tablet.²

In the first (of these commandments of the second tablet) I ordain that the fourteen works of mercy, the seven spiritual works and the seven corporal works, should be exercised on your behalf³

In the six negative (commandments) I ordain that no injury happen to your own person, either, in the first place, with regard to your life (*do not kill*), or, in the second place, with regard to other things (*do not bear false witness*), or with regard to your spouse, whether in thought or deed, as it is stated there, or with regard to other things which belong to you whether through desire or action, as is stated there, so that you may persevere and grow in being perfect and becoming a participant in the divine nature.⁴

¹ Jesus Christ loves us and wishes that others always grow in loving us according to the decree of His will and various stipulations and He wishes that it is their ambition to do this by means of a voluntary, free, single-minded, outgoing, divine and concrete act of the will.

² In the context of God's act of love, Ripanti inserts a short tract dealing with Christian doctrine, beginning with the commandments of God's law. Perhaps this is the nucleus of "the rules for Christian living" which Ripanti preached to certain learned and spiritual people during the Lenten Sermons at Montepulciano, which were later written down in a small booklet which Cardinal Cervini, who was later Pope Marcellus II, deposited "in the Papal library". Cf. MHOC III, 85 at the end; IV, 129.

³ That is, Ripanti places love of neighbour as expressed in the fourteen works of mercy, under the fourth commandment concerning the honour due to parents

⁴ Thus the observance of these commandments is seen as an opportunity for perseverance and growth in a person's perfection.

[Nature and circumstances of God's love]

Therefore, I add that I love you and wish you well and that I am jealous over you and ecstatic about you. *Because of this* my love for you is jealous, ecstatic and disproportionate as my saints would have told you.¹

In fact I have shown myself to you, even though I am infinite in myself. I gave myself to you *also* in a particular way as an object and the ultimate extrinsic perfection, since it was not possible for you to know me *fully* (in any other way).²

Thus while I was on the cross, in that furnace of immense love, the greatest and most complete manifestation of that love, I became thirsty and I said: *I thirst*, that is to suffer even more, since out of an excess of love my Father had sent me to you to provide outstandingly great proof of his most ardent love, so that from this cross, I might draw you to me sweetly and *eagerly* for your salvation, through the power of love. This is why I said: *I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!*³

O human person, I surrender to you, I embrace you, I delight in you, and you delight me,⁴ with your natural and supernatural accomplishments,⁵ and with the eight properties associated with this act of love and its method of initiation (into the act of divine love) where it begins: "The direct source" under the headings B and C.⁶

¹ The mention of "saints" here refers to the Biblical authors. However it may also allude to spiritual writers such as Saint Bonaventure, for example, who loves the adjective "excessive". God's jealous love for His creatures has echoes in biblical texts and indicates the very excess of divine love. Cf. Dt 4, 24; 5, 9; 6, 15; 32, 16, 21; Ex 20, 5, 34, 14; Num 25,11; Ez 8, 3-5; 36, 25; Zec 1, 14; 2 Cor 11, 2; 1 Cor 10, 22; etc. For "ecstatic love" cf. Is 62, 3-5; 49, 15-16, Ps 139, 13-14; etc.

² That is Jesus Christ has manifested God's name to mankind and has been given to them as a kind of mediator and path to the Father in an act of love that cannot be fully comprehended.

³ The image of the cross returns here as the most effective and clear revelation of divine love. The passage is interspersed with biblical citations which have been interpreted in terms of the most genuine Franciscan and Bonaventurian spirituality, with a touch of Angela of Foligno and Ubertino da Casale. For the biblical citations cf. Jn 19, 28; 12, 32; 3, 16-17; Eph 2, 4; Lk 12,49; Ubertino da Casale, *Arbor vitae*, lib. IV, c. 19; *Iesus amorem sitiens*: "Sed tamen, adhuc sitio, si possibile foret mille millibus modis mortis vobis induratis et insensibilibus, divinum vestrae salutis declare amorem ... Sitio tamen si possibile foret plus facere. Et si tui honoris [= Patris] est et voluntatis in his peonis acerbissimis, tento tempore in holocaustum tui odoris desidero meipsum offere, ut quantum est ex meae charitatis virtute, nullo terminetur fine There is a similar thought expressed by Bernardino Ochino, in his Third Sermon.

⁴ These are verbs that arouse love and which remind us of a spiritual method that was characteristically based on the activity of the will and which was wide spread among Franciscans. Cf. the meditations of Silvestro da Roasano or the sermons of B. Ochino.

⁵ *Superaddita* in the text.

⁶ This is the connection to the following sections of the *Circle*.

3. *The secondary, most perfect and complete object of the act of love and the one who loves as they are combined in the first and second tablets by means of their merging in a most perfect union.*¹

B *“Supernatural” perfection which prepares a person for the act of love.*²

The direct source (of the act of most perfect act of love), which involves me (Christ) per se *immediately* may be both actual and habitual:

- Actual: The (actual source of the most perfect act of love) is the fertile operation which is made clear at the conclusion of this little circle and which produces the habit of love, which might *even* be infused *instantly*, which is the most perfect possible preparation that is available to pilgrims and the most perfect way of doing *what is within their capability*.³

- Habitual: This is the above mentioned act of love as it is contained in the image and likeness to God, which is a supernatural and divine adornment, which, at my command, renders you acceptable as my special child, bride and temple, and makes all the actions which you are ready to perform endowed with grace and love that is pleasing to me, since it makes you my beloved.⁴

[The Gospel beatitudes]

The sensitivity towards acting justly, which is included in your *most* excellent beatitude concerning peace, establishes the perfecting and invigorating habit of acting properly which places you in my most perfect disposition for total love by imitating me and therefore you will be called my child.⁵

¹ The most perfect act of love is seen here from the perspective of the object of the act of love and the one who loves in the Church's love (= "oggetto e amante meno principale").

² The perfection that prepares a person for love is defined as being beyond nature and thus supernatural.

³ The main perfection which is connected directly to Christ is divided into two parts: actual perfection and habitual perfection. The first is the instantaneous product of divine unitive love which produces the habit of loving which can be infused immediately and which is the most perfect method of love that is possible to pilgrim creatures.

⁴ Habitual perfection is love or habitual grace which produces deification and is an adornment of the soul (a concept which is well known among mystics and known also to Bernadino D'Asti) through which a creature becomes God's daughter, spouse and God's temple, three well known Biblical images, and thus becomes pleasing to God. One can find all these concepts well explained in Saint Bonaventure's *Breviloquium*, Ch 1, 4, 9.

⁵ This habitual grace provides direction for a person's actions and makes his will ready for doing good out of a love for justice. This is where Ripanti introduces the discussion of the Gospel beatitudes as a qualifying property of love and he comments on the beatitude of peace (cf. Mt 5, 9) as connected to the theological virtue of charity.

Through the excellent perfecting virtue of hope, together with the comfort of faith, the beatitude of purity of heart enlightens your intellect supernaturally.¹

The lesser, indirect, *per accidens* and mediated perfection (of the act of divine love) involves creatures. It is actual and habitual in excellence and a beatitude excellently rendering you at peace and mentally calm in good rapport with both your neighbour and yourself.²

With regard to your neighbour: note the beatitude of hunger for justice and the beatitude of mercy:³

a) Concerning justice: firstly, (carry out this act of love) by sharing yourself with your neighbour for his salvation through excellent friendship, secondly, by exercising the role of superior over those who are subject to you, as a companion and co-worker, while being at their service in all things, both material and spiritual.⁴

- Material matters: Christ [says] “If anyone takes your coat give your cloak as well. If anyone strikes your right cheek turn the other also” so that you are not in conflict with anyone and become disturbed.⁵

- Spiritual things: not resisting good people because of their spiritual opinions even if your opinions may be better than theirs so as to avoid pride and annoyance. Act like this towards all those who hinder you in things concerning honouring God and promoting your salvation and that of your neighbour, convinced that this is the best way to promote these things, just as Joseph acted towards his brothers.⁶

¹ The beatitude of purity of heart (cf. Mt 5, 8) is indissolubly linked with the theological virtues of hope and faith. The vision of God which follows on from purity of heart is a supernatural light which enlightens the intellect.

² The lesser supernatural perfection which comes to creatures directly and *per se* from God is expressed in the remaining Gospel beatitudes which Ripanti divides into beatitudes which are related to one's neighbour and those related to you, whereas the beatitudes of peace and of purity of heart were interpreted as directed directly to God. This natural accidental perfection creates an attitude of tranquillity and mental quiet that prepares a person for contemplation.

³ Cf. Mt 5: 6-7. These are the two beatitudes which deal with one's neighbour.

⁴ The beatitude of thirst for justice is explained and translated into a number of specific and concrete actions: into the gift of friendship that assists others; then the service of authority and the resulting obedience. In the text the expression “secondo el convicto et operazione” etc is quite obscure. The meaning could be the following: *convicto* = *convitto* = several persons living together in the same place for the purpose of education. In that case one would command and another obey in the service of justice.

⁵ Obedience implies submission to everyone, being “subject to all”. Ripanti considers that such dependence applies to both material things and spiritual things. With regard to material things he quotes Mat 5, 39-40 (see also Lk 6, 29) Thus it implies a non-violent disposition to enable us to be “meek, peaceful, modest, gentle and humble” as Saint Francis says. (LR 3). He stresses the importance of peace, the necessity of not losing composure of heart in order to perform the most perfect act of love.

⁶ The beatitude of justice requires subjection also in spiritual matters. This is expressed here by means of some demanding examples. 1) In order to avoid upset and pride of heart renounce your own point of view, even if this is better, and accept the point of view of others. 2) When others oppose their implementation give up your own plans even when they are aimed at the honour of God or the salvation of your neighbour

b) With respect to the beatitude of mercy, take another's misfortune to heart, by taking care of him¹ and easing his burden by placing yourself in his position, while *only* loathing his sin as God sees it and as it affects him, imitating the example set by Christ.²

With respect to yourself, with regard to your inner emotions and external things.

a) With respect to inner emotions: First of all, by means of the beatitude of mourning, mortify yourself robustly in the matter of spiritual pleasures, both those which involve material matters and those which are a mixture of what is material and what is spiritual, and which touch on any issues, *including* experiences which concern divine intervention. Secondly, with respect to the beatitude of meekness,³ mortify your anger vigorously by means of patience, enduring what is not sinful *with serenity* while rejecting the things that should be rejected.⁴

b) With regard to external activity: Through the beatitude of poverty take flight decisively from the formal honours of symbols of merit and the trappings of dignity and of office as impediments to a greater good. Take flight resolutely from riches,⁵ ownership, possession, superfluous usage, provision for the future, and above all love of such things and what that implies.⁶

So I want you to possess exceptional creative prudence of mind which is judicious and which affords excellent ways of cultivating a disposition for everything mentioned above and for rallying your own abilities.⁷

or your own spiritual advancement. He justifies this attitude towards renunciation and passivity with the example of when Joseph was sold by his brothers. (cf. Gen 37)

¹ "precavendolo" = "cautelandolo".

² Note the direct reference to Christ, as if the method in the *Circle of Charity* was explained by Christ himself in a kind of conversation with the soul. The definition of mercy is striking: "taking another's misfortune to heart ... placing yourself in his position", that is living in the other. Christ's example refers to his attitude towards sinners such as the adulteress, Zaccheus, Mary Magdalene etc.

³ "mittidità" = "mitezza".

⁴ "Reicere" is a Latin expression, meaning "to reject". – The beatitudes of those who are afflicted and of those who are meek (cf. Mt 5, 4-5) are interpreted as applicable to oneself and inner passions. These beatitudes are translated into radical practices and penances to achieve inner spiritual detachment which will facilitate the contemplative experience of pure love.

⁵ "divizie" is a Latin expression for "riches".

⁶ The beatitude which is not aimed at one's neighbour but at oneself in connection with external things is poverty. (cf. Mt 5, 3) The analysis of poverty as a disposition of detachment clearly identifies the preference which was adopted by the early Capuchins within the Capuchin reform and includes many autobiographical aspects. Furthermore compare this passage with Giovanni da Fano's *Short Discourse*.

⁷ That is one need have upright prudence which is capable of creating and suggesting methods which are secretly chosen and suitable for undertaking these ascetical exercises and which provide the spiritual freedom to practice the act of pure love.

The Natural ability which prepares a person for perfection

The main (human) faculty (in the act of love): Your free will, especially when it is active and loving as queen and empress of the whole dominion of the soul.¹

Secondly: Your intellect which explains things and holds things in memory. Note also the inner sense faculties which involve the imagination and the exterior senses, which are windows of your body and soul.²

In many ways the entire universe serves this sacred cyclical exercise, reducing everything to unity by means of two series of relationships. The first series is made up of the relationships of creatures to one another. The second order is brought about through the relationship of the first mentioned member of the relationship (creatures) to me (God), so that they serve to honour, praise and glorify me in various ways.³

This then is the disposition which I want you to possess when you are lifted up so that you may love me most perfectly.

4. *What follows is the act of companionship (with God) and most excellent enjoyment of what is divine, “which prepares the soul and perfects it”: this is an activity which is from within you as its minor source but which is “primarily” given by God from his divine essence.*⁴

C – Eight properties of this activity and its technique of initiation. And eight musical notes and keys.

¹ The natural dispositions for this perfection of love are principally found in free will, which is described here by means of its classical characteristics, specifically as “queen and empress of the whole dominion of the soul”, an image which is also found in Bernardino Ochino.

² The intellect clarifies and explains the perfection of love to the will, while the memory retains and presents the same perfection. The internal and external senses, body and soul, and the entire person are also involved. What emerges here, as a seed, is the classical and scholastic idea of the psychosomatic interaction in the contemplative life in human beings. Note the brilliant description that Bernardino Ochino develops concerning this point in one of his *Dialogues*.

³ The entire cosmos is viewed as co-ordinated and related to Christ who is the unifying principle of creation. Indirectly we see here the flourishing of the Pauline vision of the primacy of Christ in the order of natural creation and in the new supernatural creation, a primacy of excellence, cause and time. Cf. Col 1, 15-20.

⁴ Here we have the act of love performed by a human being as a response to and in imitation of the infinitely perfect act of the love of God as manifested in the human and divine nature of Jesus Christ. The heading which is made up of words which are both technical and obscure simply means that the act of love is excellent both as a natural disposition and a supernatural perfection. Furthermore this act is thoroughly human and yet comes from God and shares in His act of infinite love.

[The first property]

In the end, what *mainly* means the most to you, and pleases you, is appreciating you and the highest good, beyond comparison to any other, delighting in you being God the highest good and perfection and desiring every perfection, happiness and beatitude in you, as you manifest clearly as the principle object (of love) in the sign of the cross, where (the text) begins: The divine nature as it exists in itself.¹

Furthermore, concerning you, *that is* in order to carry out your will, that you wish me to love you with all my heart, with my entire mind, with all my soul and with all my strength (*since the law and the prophets hang on this*)² and *thus* become a person who is most thankful, acceptable and pleasing to you.

Furthermore, concerning you, that I desire that your goodness be multiplied, duplicated and implanted in many ways in your divine and human essence, both absolutely and in relation (to me) in this exercise of loving by means of sharing, attaining and representing you by means of an image, likeness and footprint, thereby achieving the ultimate purpose of both my immediate and reactive experience.³

To a *lesser degree* (this act is accomplished) through your Church, but not as its ultimate cause, *that is* (it is accomplished) through her righteousness, *this happens*, to preserve it, to provide for its growth and to adorn it with your most divine essence as it is absolutely in itself and as it is related to others. (It is accomplished by me) as a member of Church. (It is accomplished) by me being the perfection to which it is formed and by me forming you in a new and deeper participation in the Church since I wish to have you share in its divine essence.⁴

With regard to the accidental glory of joy and happiness in the triumphant church, and the militant church, this value is applied to you and to its other members by me

¹ For a human person there are also eight properties of this act of love just as there is in the love of Christ. The final goal is the love of God the supreme good and appreciating, enjoying and taking pleasure in the fact that God is truly God and every perfect good. Here one needs to recall the acts that were proposed and explained in the contemplation of Christ, the God-Man.

² After the pure intention of directing everything to God and His honour, the first property of the act of love is expressed as the commitment of doing God's will which means observing the law of unrestricted love. "If you love me you will keep my commandments" (Jn 14, 15. 21; 15, 10). This includes love of God and neighbour which is implied in the last quotation from Matthew 22, 40.

³ Another aspect of the first property of the act love is to desire that the Supreme Good, who is God, would be replicated in the Divine and Human nature of Christ, both in His inner and external existence, that is in Himself and in his union with us, in a continual exchange of love, by God loving us and moving us to love. Then we who abide in God will be carried away on the crest of such divine love, as it ebbs and flows. Note that Mattia da Salò describes the ebb and flow of love.

⁴ After Jesus Christ, God and Man, and still as a part of the first property, this act of love has the Church as its objective, that is, there is a love of the church, that is expressed in the first place by the need for it to be established, to be preserved, to develop and be adorned, desiring, by means of such an act of love, that it possess the perfection of Christ, God and Man..

according to the scale of charity. A third of this is held in reserve for them¹ and it is applied at will. Ultimately it all comes to you as long as you persevere, grow and arrive at your most perfect fruitfulness both while on the journey and in your homeland.²

[*Second property*]

(This act of love is) voluntary and by choice, with simple and complete freedom from conditions or hindrance (even though there was the chance to act differently). I want to love you *completely*.³

[*Third property*]

(This act of love is) humble, with the knowledge that a person does not possess the wisdom, the willpower or the strength to perform it since he always tends towards emptiness morally and wilfully and as if he was at the service of nothingness. Therefore, I know less than nothing.⁴ I admit that all good comes from you, at your pleasure through your merits and grace.⁵

With regard to the will, this occurs by means of the abandonment of all honours, positions or offices, by the formal rejection of all signs of honour offered to you and being completely content in your nothingness as your state of true peace.⁶

¹ The abbreviation “glie” stands for “glie la” or, simply, “la”.

² The ecclesial window on the act of love embraces both the Church triumphant and militant. However, the concrete application is expressed here very obscurely. It seems that Ripanti wanted to say that God intended to apply the merit of the act of love to the Church, but always through Christ, since the Church achieves perfect union of love in its members both on earth and in heaven. However we do not understand the meaning of the expression: “la terza parte in sospenso glie applico”. Does this mean that merit is applied to the Church except for a third part? This would appear to be odd unless it was intended to apply it rather to a third part of the *Circle*.

³ It must be a free and voluntary act of love on man’s part, as it is on Christ’s part.

⁴ The text has “nihilò”.

⁵ Humility is another property which corresponds to Christ’s generosity. It is only in this way that the act of love is real. This is where the teaching on “annihilation” (nothingness) of the creature before God, which is so popular with mystics, comes in. This doctrine has a long tradition and is explained with precision in chapter 45 of *The Dialogue of Union* by Cordonì, *How a person by the annihilation of himself discovers perfect peace and God through that peace*. See also chapter 49 *How the state of the soul that is in love is well described as Seraphic and the state of perfect charity in a life of annihilation*. Cf. C. Cargnoni, *Fonti, tendenze e sviluppi ...*, in CF 48 (1978) 371ff.

⁶ This is where a person lives in peace, secure in his “nothingness”. These passages are among the most “quietistic” in Ripanti.

Furthermore, because I admit that I am completely made up of depravity, I wish to experience vilification, poverty and pain according to your good pleasure, while placing myself in complete union with the Church.¹

[Fourth property]

In the first place (this act of love) produces unity. By gathering everything together I unite and gather everything to myself. Secondly (this act of love) unites me to your church by means of faith which is based on charity, adorning me and basing your merit on me, my grace and my acceptance, surging ahead with these and with me and becoming rich and powerful because I love you.²

[Fifth property]

(This act of love should be performed) with generosity, primarily from the intensity which is within me, involving all my emotions, encompassing all the actual and potential plans that I have had, have now or will have concerning all possible creatures and what I think about them.³

And if you will allow me (may I perform this act of love) in accord with your uncreated and infinite plan *as that exists in your essence and will, and as in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*. Furthermore, I love you according to this plan, for it has become my plan because of my union with you, because I have committed everything to you.⁴

Secondly, (The generosity of this act of love) exceeds all the number of the acts of creatures, and, *as far as possible*, is in accord with your divine and human actions, as my actions also are.⁵

¹ This is the radical kind of love that is found in mystics such as Angela of Foligno who wrote in her *Autobiography* "The condition which unites one constantly to Christ is ...the most perfect, continual and supreme poverty, continual, most perfect and highest contempt, most perfect, continual and highest pain". (ed. Faloci, Città di Castella 1932, 231, n 136).

² According to the fourth property the act of love is lived in union with the Church in deep interior recollection ("recogimiento" in the Spanish mystics) and based on the merits and grace of Christ.

³ The act of love should also be magnanimous in the intensity of its personal emotion and its attitude towards all possible or imaginable beings.

⁴ Such love should be expressed according to the infinite intensity with which it exists in the Blessed Trinity, because since God has given His Son to the world creatures possess everything in Christ. (Rom 8, 32)

⁵ The scope of this act of love is explained in comparison to the countless acts of creatures and Christ's infinite divine and human act of love through the mystery of union in the mystical body.

Thirdly, with respect to its duration, (this act of love will progress) by remaining in you and in the Church *habitually*, by means of a love that is so constant and enduring *even if possible*, into eternity, notwithstanding certain obstacles, even as far as martyrdom and the most cruel death, through your grace.¹

[Sixth property]

(This act of love is) divine, personal, absolute.

Firstly, (it is performed) in a divine manner *that is* under the patronage of your divine nature which is its only objective and the unique reason for enjoyment. Other things which exist in you are only secondary and are included as a unit in the objective, that is, in virtue of the primary objective which is not the reason for feeling enjoyment. Therefore such things are only enjoyed in so far as they are divine, since they are *in essence* the same as you.²

Secondly, (this love is experienced) as personal: this means that it is experienced in your own person even though it is impossible to have such a vivid experience naturally. A person can *only* experience this in a general manner. I determine when this is to become personal.³

Thirdly, (It is performed) in an absolute way: *that is* it is preordained by your absolute being, as it exists most nobly in itself.

However, (this act of love is performed) to reach this point and satisfy justice and to arouse me to reach out in a relationship of the loving communication of benefits for no other reason than that you love me as creator, etc. and as beatified.⁴

¹ Finally, the extent of this love is demonstrated in perseverance and remaining in love with Christ and the Church even to the point of martyrdom..

² To love “in a divine manner” means to love God as the sole object of love and enjoyment, while other things are secondary objects of love, since they are connected to God and enjoyable only because of their connection to God. The last sentence is very strong and has the suggestion of a mystical emphasis which is almost pantheistic. However the concept is clear: we should enjoy the things that are outside God only in their relationship to God, since their existence depends on God who conceived and created them.

³ To love “in a divine manner” as God does would mean loving God also in his personal existence. However, the will has to abstract the personal essence of God from a universal concept.

⁴ That is, as Saint Bonaventure says:, we need to have an all-embracing concept of God “to experience God as the best in the most exalted way, most holy and saintly”: cf. *De regimine animae*, 1: “My soul, first of all you need to experience the most high, most holy, most saintly nature of the best possible God”; *Breviloquium*, p. I, c, 2: “Faith .. demands that our thinking about God be of the loftiest and most devout order .” (*Op. omnia*, VIII, 128a; V, 211a). To love God in himself is communicated to us in the Church. – The Latin expression “per allicerme” in the text means “per excitermi”.

[Seventh property]

(This act of love is performed) efficaciously, through acts that have been commanded by the decree of your will, so that I carry out your suggestions, commands and my profession.¹

[The commandments of the first tablet]

With regard to the commandments of the first tablet, the third is contained in the first two, when we approach them as affirmations.²

With regard to the first, by loving you *faithfully*, while discarding all else with my will, I recognise you alone to be God, and believe this firmly with my intellect. As for me putting this into practice even if you could withdraw your assistance in part or in whole (which I do not wish), do not do this. Rather it would be preferable if I could give myself *completely, even* if that implied torment, death or my annihilation.³

With regard to the second commandment, I love you by honouring you:

Firstly, by loving you with my will as the supreme good, and by longing for you in an act of hope as the only adequate consolation, and by offering you Christ,⁴ as an *object and sign*, in an act of devotion.

As a reality, I love you with all your members and everything which exists *in this world and eternity*.

As a symbol, which represents and commemorates everything in the past and the future, such as your active and passive actions, those of your Mother, of the saints and of all creatures, I love you.

What is more I love you *because everything is contained in your eternity*, founded upon your nature, in your concepts, known and loved in its very existence.⁵

¹ Love is effective when, following the divine will, a person listens to God's inspirations, observes his commands and the rule that he accepted at his religious profession.

² Here Ripanti resumes his explanation of the "rules for the Christian living", and comments on the first three commandments as they are related to the property of efficacious loving.

³ The first commandment is expounded as loving faithfully to the point of enduring torments and death, and, if required, to the point of annihilation ("annihilation" is an expression with overtones of "quietism".)

⁴ The second commandment, once more seen as an act of the love of God, is expounded as an act of the will that loves and hopes in God as the supreme good and devoutly offers Jesus Christ to Him.

⁵ This offering up by Christ, which is similar to what Cordoni teaches, and which he would have copied from Ubertino da Cassale, who refers to "a continuous and most solemn Mass offered in Christ" (cf. above, note 1), explains the meaning of *object and sign*, which is classical scholastic terminology. It means that when offering Christ the whole of visible and invisible reality is included as the Mystical body (= thing) and as an expression and synthesis of every act of love both active and passive, both instinctive and

Specifically, as a great joy and offering at the centre of this portion and gift, I offer you my free will, continually regarding it as *only* an instrument that is subject to your will, in time and in eternity, for you, your Church and your creature, wanting only that which you want, to the degree which you want it, as you want it, when you want it, where you want it, and as you wish that I want it, as I become one in spirit and will with you.¹

Secondly, using the intellect, I believe that you alone are the supreme good, that all dominion belongs to you, that you alone are the source of the universe, its beginning and ruler.

I glorify you in yourself and together with your creatures and they bow to your heavenly glory, and direct everything to your honour, and pray to you in an act of reverence in acknowledgement of your personal status²

Thirdly, I put this into practice by adoring you with head, tongue, arms, feet and my whole body and all its faculties.³

[Eighth property]

Responsively, by responding in my will to this directly loving action and other responsive actions. By taking pleasure in being loved by you, your Father and the Holy Spirit, by the Church militant and triumphant which is your spouse and by all creatures. By desiring that whoever does not love you should love you, and continue to grow in this love. By being displeased when this is lacking and even more where something is done against you, through continual transgression in so far as you are God and in your passion and daily offences in so far as you are man.⁴

I include this act among with the above properties.

deliberate, which is performed by the God-Man, by the Madonna, by the saints and by every creature (= sign). What is more, this offering of Christ is expressed in the sheer seize and immensity of the eternal love of God.

¹ In this offering to Christ the soul offers its liberty as the rare pearl of its existence and it becomes an instrument of God's will while loving God, the Church and every creature and it is indissolubly united to God, becoming one in will, one in spirit. As is obvious such expressions are characteristic in the writings of the mystics.

² Note the universal, even cosmic perspective of this adoration and praise of God.

³ Prayer and the act of loving also require the participation of the body that means that it is an activity of the entire person body- soul-spirit, a prayer of the body too. Compare this passage to what Blessed Angela of Foligno wrote when speaking about the way of the cross; "our Head had already walked this path, our hands, arms, shoulders, feet, legs, all our limbs must also walk it." (*Autobiography* [cited above in note 95])

⁴ In other words, when the soul senses that she is loved by Jesus Christ in the first place (= a direct action), it responds by returning that love (= an action in response) and rejoices that this love is in the Three Divine Persons and that it is loved by the Church and all creatures. Then it desires that everyone would love Him more and it suffers because this love is not loved. This was also the mystical meaning of the experience of Saint Francis.

[Commandments of the second tablet]

With regard to the seventh property of efficaciousness, this is fulfilled by implementing your will as expressed in the second tablet, first commandment of which is expressed as a positive command. The statement concerning fathers applies to all our neighbours and the statement about honour applies to all the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.¹

Therefore I share with them and bestow on them all that I am and all that I possess doing as you did with all those who do what you did²

In (observing) the other negative precepts, nothing should impede love, neither towards me or towards others, in thought or desire, in what is done to them or their relatives or by way of damage to what they own.³

[The hard work required to maintain this practice]

Second part in sequence, but first in importance, is the hard work to maintain this practice, and develop it through the memory, intellect and will.⁴

1. Whenever possible by using your memory, always recall⁵ and keep in mind the clear and orderly model and cyclical graph of this practice, which is unusual and admirable, The entire Church and things that *exist and do not exist* are included in this most perfect, most genuine, most sweet and complete exercise, which uses all creatures prudently as a means to assist memory, because they come from God, function according to God and lead to God. God is in them and through them. His image is solidly fixed in the memory, frequently meditated upon in the intellect, experienced with maximum affection in the will and imprinted with heartfelt emotion in the soul.⁶

¹ Ripanti always tends to broaden and consolidate the meaning of the words of the Bible by giving them a wider, more universal and detailed meaning. For example in this passage, the fourth commandment is interpreted as fulfilling the works of mercy towards one's neighbour, an addition that displays deep spiritual sensitivity.

² The result is a sharing and giving of love towards one's neighbour in union with Christ and our other brothers in a ministry of universal love.

³ With regard to the other commandments which are "negative" since they forbid killing, impure acts, theft, converting the possession or the wives of others and telling lies, they are always viewed from the perspective of the commandment to love. They do not impede a life of love of God and neighbour.

⁴ The last part of *The Circle* suggests some concrete rules for the practice of this method of contemplation. These practical rules are divided according to the three faculties of the soul

⁵ "raccordandote" = "ricordandoti".

⁶ If this practice is to function effectively, the function of memory is to recall clearly, to learn the sequence of this 'cyclical' practice which involves the Church and the entire visible and invisible cosmos by heart. It should be present in the mind clearly to help the intellect to meditate and the will to offer itself. "Completendo" is derived from the verb *complector* and means "abbracciando".

2. Secondly, through the intellect with its faculty for probing, or assessing, scrutinises the perfection of this exercise in general and in detail.

Firstly it should scrutinise the object of the practice which is Christ, considered in Himself absolutely and in relationship to us. Dionysius says that this is to consider Him *positively and negatively*. Indeed, one should consider Christ's sayings, which move us to love Him and make us want to love Him.¹

Secondly, consider your place as the secondary object and lover which starts in part B "The direct source". Think about the effective, formal and ultimate union which binds you to him as an individual being to the universal and common good. *Furthermore*, assess your frame of mind in undertaking this practice. *Furthermore* consider your serious obligation as a rational creature, as a Christian and as a religious etc.²

Thirdly assess the great perfection of this cyclical practice, which is moral and free, apostolic, seraphic and like the divine crucifix.³

Fourthly, consider its effects with respect to Christ and with respect to His Church. The outcome for you is that the positive effects of this practice show up what is lacking when they are not present.⁴

3. Thirdly, motivate yourself by using acts of your will:

Firstly, with this direct and mediated act (of love) as the final cause, using the sense faculties, start to desire strongly while using many long loving sighs, ejaculatory prayers, and recapping the entire circle, beginning with Christ as the goal, saying: "O Jesus Christ,

¹ The task of the intellect is to cultivate a great esteem and respect for this practice in all its elements. The first part of *The Circle* is a meditation on Christ, the God-Man, both in himself and in relationship to us. Here Ripanti reveals an important source of his contemplative arsenal, namely Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, from whom he took the concepts of affirmation and negation or abstraction, known as "affirmative and negative theology" to signify a process by which we apply names to God which stand for his attributes (affirmative) or the limits of these names (negative), but add the term "excellent" (an adjective which is frequently used by Ripanti) to indicate that God is far beyond what the name signifies Cf Dionigi Areopagita, *Tutte le opera* Trad. Di P. Scazzosio, Milano 1981, 83s., 407, 411-413.

² The second section of the *Circle* should be considered in its perfection by the intellect, evaluating one's natural preparedness for the act of love (a Scotistic concept), by reflecting on the serious obligation which each person has as a rational creature, but above all as a Christian and even more as a religious.

³ These are the adjectives that describe *The Circle* which achieves a degree of "moral" perfection, that is in conduct, in comportment, which are measured against divine law; a degree of "gratuitous" perfection, or an obligation free gift from God without merit, an "apostolic" perfection which is like the life of the Apostles in having a missionary trend at one with the mission of the Church which is the sacrament of salvation, a "seraphic" perfection because it moves us to love God with burning love which is characteristic of the Seraphim, which is also like Saint Francis; a "divine" love since it comes from God who is Love and makes a person divine; finally, a love which "is like the crucifix" because of its conformity to Christ crucified who is the revelation of God's love.

⁴ The intellect urges the will to become active in loving by challenging it with the positive results of this action contrasted with the negative effects. What emerges is more evidence of the importance and validity of this practice.

who are infinitely admirable, and who want to be loved completely, permit me to love you completely”.

While looking back, say: “O Jesus Christ, you love me so much, make me love you with all my heart”. Lovingly go round the circle in this way.¹

Secondly, arouse yourself using your will by instructing yourself to grow continually.²

Thirdly, you should stir yourself making an effort and using your strength, straining to be totally united (to God) and arousing yourself for maximum exertion for this cyclical activity which conforms to the crucifixion, when performed out of total love, and in conducting yourself in this manner you will become like tinder or kindling.³

¹ It is now the duty of the will to express an ardent desire to achieve this state of union of love with God. This desire should be kept active by repeated “loving sighs”, “ejaculatory prayers”, recapping the entire journey of the *Circle* and the repetition of the prayer to obtain complete love of Jesus Christ. This is affective prayer. While meditating on Christ’s love for mankind, repeat a similar prayer to observe the commandment to love, that is, to love God with your whole heart.

² The will should command from within and arouse a person to grow in loving. Thus desire is joined to resolve.

³ Note how such involvement (in loving) is violent, the decision is a strong one, requiring “maximum exertion”, when exercising this act of love. Therefore this is violent loving such as we find, for example, in Jacopone da Todi. Ripanti explains it by using the example of “tinder and kindling”, analogies which are well known and common in spiritual literature. They are also used by Bernardino da Siena when he says that “the cross is the tinder that feeds divine charity”. [*Op omnia*, II, 190s, 276, 276s; cf. *S. Bernardino*, Venezia 1982, 130). It is well explained by Domenico Cavalca in his widely distributed booklet *Spechio de la croce*, where in chapter 33 (“How Christ is like husks, that is tinder to light a fire”). We read: “Since thinking about the Crucifixion lights the fire of love in our hearts, we may compare Christ to tinder or bellows with which a material fire is lit. Bellows are skin fixed to two pieces of wood with a hole at the front and when you take hold of the wood and squeeze the skin a puff of air comes out of the hole, and lights up the fire. Following this logic and thinking of Christ’s flesh as pinned to two pieces of wood on the cross, and regarding this as squeezed and pinned, we see a puff of breath at the front which lit a fire, and this fire is the words that came from his mouth on the cross, and if we meditate on them we shall catch fire”. (Cf. *Pio et chritiano trattato detto Spechio di croce*, Venezia 1558, 120v).