

SAINT BONAVENTURE

On the Perfection of Life for Sisters

or

«De perfectione vitae ad sorores»

from

*Seraphici Doctoris S. Bonaventurae
Decem Opuscula ad theologiam mysticam spectantia*

in textu correcta et notis illustrata a PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae,
Editio quinta, cum critica editione collata, Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi),
ex Typographia eiusdem Collegii, 1965, pp.221-273

English translation by Paul Hanbridge OFM Cap

November 2012

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Since the first version in 1536, until 1968, chapter three on Prayer in the Capuchin Constitutions included the substance of this passage:

As prayer is the spiritual teacher of the friars, and so that the spirit of devotion not grow cold in the friars but burn continuously and ever more intensely on the altar of their heart, and indeed just as the Seraphic Father desired that the true spiritual friar to pray always – we no less direct that two special times be assigned for prayer for the sake of the tepid.¹

Regarding the sentence: “that the spirit of devotion not grow cold in the friars but burn continuously and ever more intensely on the altar of their heart” a recent commentary on the 1536 Constitutions identified here the influence of Saint Bonaventure and his accommodation of Leviticus 6,12-16 in his authenticated minor spiritual works *De perfectione vitae ad sorores*² and *De sex aliis seraphim*.³

The *Opuscula Mystica* of Bonaventure were published separately in a small volume.⁴ Curiosity ignited by the passage urged a reading of Bonaventure's work. Unaware of the existence of *De perfectione vitae ad sorores* in English, I decided to translate it in

¹ *Capuchin Constitutions 1536*, CHAPTER 3 unpublished translation by Paul Hanbridge OFM Cap.

² Chapter Six n.1. *Opera Omnia* vol. VIII, p.120: Quoniam devotionis fervor per frequentem Christi passionis memoriam nutritur et conservatur in homine, ideo necesse est, ut frequenter, ut semper oculis cordis sui Christum in cruce tanquam morientem videat qui devotionem in se vult inextinguibilem conservare. Propter hoc Dominus dicit in Levitico: *Ignis in altari meo semper ardebit, quem nutrit sacerdos subiiciens ligna per singulos dies*. Audi, mater devotissima: *Altare Dei est cor tuum; in hoc altari debet semper ardere ignis fervidae devotionis, quem singulis diebus debes nutrire per ligna crucis Christi et memoriam passionis ipsius*. Et hoc est quod dicit Isaias propheta: *Haurietis aquas in gaudio de fontibus Salvatoris*; ac si diceret: quicumque desiderat a Deo aquas gratiarum, aquas devotionis, aquas lacrymarum, ille hauriat de fontibus Salvatoris, id est de quinque vulneribus Iesu Christi.

³ *Opera Omnia* vol. VIII, p.139: Tertio, ut nosmetipsos sic assidue *ad devotionem excitemus* et ignem amoris Dei per hoc nobis, ne per desidiam seu alias occupationes tepescat, continue reaccendamus, Levitici sexto: *Ignis est iste perpetuus, qui nunquam deficiet, quem nutrit sacerdos in altari, subiiciens ligna mane per singulos dies*. *Ignis est devotionis fervor, qui semper in altari cordis ardere debet, quem sacerdos devotus semper subiiciendo ligna divinae laudis debet nutrire, ne quando exstinguatur*; Psalmus: *Benedicam Dominum in omni tempore*, etc.

Drawing a parallel between the oil of the wise virgins in the gospel parable and what Francis called the spirit of prayer and holy devotion Bonaventure underlines in the same work the importance of such devout prayer for the whole edifice of religious life: *Deinde cavenda est perturbatio studii devotionis, ex qua fulcitur omnis vera Religio, et omne virtutis exercitium impinguatur*. Arida est omnis Religio, quae non oleo isto saginatur; instabilis est bonorum operum structura, quae devotae orationis frequentia non compaginatur, sicut *paries lapidum sine caemento*. In omni Religione, ubi devotionis fervor tepuerit, etiam aliarum virtutum machina incipit deficere et propinquare ruinae. *Lampades fatuarum virginum sine oleo exstinguuntur, Matthaei vicesimo quinto*.” *Opera Omnia* vol. VIII, p.149.

⁴ SAINT BONAVENTURE, «De perfectione vitae ad sorores» in *Seraphici Doctoris S. Bonaventurae Decem Opuscula ad theologiam mysticam spectantia* in textu correctae et notis illustratae a PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, Editio quinta, cum critica editione collata, *Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi)*, ex Typographia eiusdem Collegii, 1965, pp.221-273

October 2012. An online French translation served as a useful comparison reference.¹

When the translation was completed, two previous English translations came to my attention.² Again, I compared my translation with those. While there is essential agreement among the translations, there are some passages where I offer an alternative meaning. These are indicated in the footnotes. The other translations are polished and elegant, whereas mine tends to be bland and pedestrian, rendered clunky under the influence of immersion in the Latinate constructions. Despite these limitations, and others not mentioned, I offer this as a translation freely accessible in the public domain.

FOOTNOTES

The footnotes produced by the editors of the *Opuscula mystica* are included, though sometimes abbreviated.

OTHER REFERENCES

JOSEPH B. FREY, *My Daily Psalm Book. The Book of Psalms arranged for each day of the week. New English translation from the New Latin Version*, Confraternity of the Precious Blood, New York, 1947. (As a guide to the English translation of the Vulgate version of the Psalms.)

AUGUSTINE, *Confessions* Books I-VIII, with English translation by William Watts, Harvard University Press, 1912, LOEB Classical Library 26, thirteenth reprint 2006

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BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *Song of Songs I*, The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux Volume Two, Cistercian Fathers Series: Number Four, translated by Kilian Walsh, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, 1971

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *On the Song of Songs II*, The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux Volume Three, Cistercian Fathers Series: Number Seven, translated by Kilian Walsh, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, 1976, third printing 1983

¹ *De la Perfection de la Vie* http://jesusmarie.free.fr/bonaventure_de_la_perfection_de_la_vie.html accessed October – November 2012

² JOSÉ DE VINCK (translator), *The Works of Bonaventure. Cardinal Seraphic Doctor and Saint*, Vol. I: *Mystical Opuscula*, St. Anthony Guild Press, Paterson, N. J., 1960, pp. 207-255; F. EDWARD COUGHLIN (translator), Robert J. Karris (editor) *Writings on the Spiritual Life: Works of St. Bonaventure*, Volume X, Franciscan Institute Publications, First edition, 2006, pp.135-195.

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *On the Song of Songs* III, The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux Volume Two, Cistercian Fathers Series: Number Thirty-One, translated by Kilian Walsh, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, 1979

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *On the Song of Songs* IV, The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux Volume Two, Cistercian Fathers Series: Number Forty, translated by Irene Edmunds, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, 1980

Among other citations, Bonaventure refers to two principal glosses on the Vulgate. One is the *Glossa Ordinaria* (Migne. PL CXIII and CXIV), in wide use in the Middle Ages, its author Walafrid Strabo (†849). Walafrid generally sought to establish the literal meaning of Vulgate texts. Thomas Aquinas had a high regard for the authority of the *Glossa Ordinaria* which remained a key exegetical tool until the seventeenth century.

The second important gloss is the *Glossa Interlinearis*, the work of Nicholas of Lyra (†1117). He placed his comment between the lines of the Vulgate.

ABBREVIATIONS

- CFS Cistercian Fathers Series
- FEC F. EDWARD COUGHLIN (introduction and notes), Robert J. Karris (Editor) *Writings on the Spiritual Life: Works of St. Bonaventure*, Volume X, Franciscan Institute Publications; First edition, 2006, pp.135-195. An excellent resource for its introduction and especially its notes, including the indices.
- FREY, *My Daily Psalm Book. The Book of Psalms arranged for each day of the week. New English translation from the New Latin Version*, Confraternity of the Precious Blood, New York, 1947
- GI NICHOLAS OF LYRA, *Glossa Interlinearis*
- GO WALAFRID STRABO, *Glossa Ordinaria*
- JCOM http://jesusmarie.free.fr/bonaventure_de_la_perfection_de_la_vie.html
De la Perfection de la Vie, accessed October – November 2012
- NJB *New Jerusalem Bible*
- VINCK *The Works of Bonaventure. Cardinal Seraphic Doctor and Saint*, Vol. I: *Mystical Opuscula*, St. Anthony Guild Press, Paterson, N. J., 1960, pp. 207-255.

PROLOGUE

1. *Blessed the man you instruct and to whom you teach your law.*¹ I consider no one wise except the one taught by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. According to the testimony of David the Prophet, only that person is truly blessed, only he is truly wise, whose mind the Lord has instructed and whose heart the Lord has taught. Indeed only the *Law* of the *Lord*² is *unsullied*. It alone is blameless, *converting souls* to salvation. However the teaching or instruction of this law is not only to be sought externally in the letter, but rather by love in the devout mind. It is to be desired *in spirit and power*,³ that is, so that the One who alone knows how to change the harsh exterior of the law into sweetness may teach from within. In fact he teaches the law of the Lord: what *to do* and what *to shun*; what *to believe* and what *to pray*; what *to desire* and what *to fear*. He teaches how to be unsullied and blameless. He teaches how to observe things promised and to weep over things committed. He teaches to disdain worldly things and cast off the things of the flesh. Then he teaches to turn⁴ the whole heart, whole soul and whole mind to Jesus Christ.⁵ Compared to this teaching all worldly wisdom is foolish and silly. Bernard: “Someone may say what he wants. I do not call him wise if he does not fear and love God.”⁶ The listener who does not forget this teaching but is its eager doer will be truly wise. He will be truly blessed.⁷ *Blessed the man you instruct and to whom you teach your law.*

Therefore my beloved venerable Mother⁸ dedicated to God, you asked me to draft something from the penury⁹ of my heart and write something conveniently that could instruct your soul¹⁰ in the grace of devotion. However, because of my inadequacy in this kind of instruction, I sincerely acknowledge my neediness instead, especially since my own life is not a shining example. Devotion does not burn within me. Nor does my knowledge recommend me. Challenged though by

¹ Psalm 93,12; See 1 Jn 2,20 and v.27

² See Psalm 18,8

³ See 1Thess 1,5: Quia Evangelium nostrum non fuit ad vos in sermone tantum, sed et in virtute et in Spiritu Sancto. AUGUSTINE on First John, tr,3, n.13: Nolite putare, quemquam aliquid discere ab homine. Admonere possumus per strepitum vocis nostrae; si non sit *intus qui doceat*, inanis fit strepitus noster...Quantum ad me pertinent, omnibus lucutus sum, sed quibus unctio illa intus non loquitur, quos Spiritus Sanctus intus non docet, indocti redeunt. Magisteria forinsecus adiutoria quaedam sunt et admonitiones; cathedram in caelo habet qui corda docet etc; cf. S. BONAVENTURA., tom.V, p.324, n.2

⁴ *convertere*

⁵ Matthew 22,37, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind”; cf. Deuteronomy 6,5. On worldly wisdom cf. James3,13+

⁶ Serm. 73 *De Diversis*: «Discat quantum vult, ego sapientiam non dixerim, dum nec timebit nec diliget Deum».

⁷ See James 1,22+

⁸ Abbess, of Poor Clares as Chapter II, n.7 suggests.

⁹ *penuria*

¹⁰ *animum*

your devout desire I thus humbly obey what you have imploringly requested. I ask your beatitude, holy mother, to consider as much as possible the love in my intention rather than the performance of the task, and consider more the truth of these words rather than their style.¹ And where this does not meet your expectation due to brevity and the lack of time, please be indulgent and excuse me.

2.

To find more easily what you seek, I have put down the chapter headings.

- The first deals with true self-knowledge
- The second, on true humility
- The third, on perfect poverty
- The fourth, on silence and being quiet
- The fifth, on assiduous application to prayer
- The sixth, on remembering the passion of Christ
- The seventh, on the perfect love for God
- The eighth, on final perseverance

CHAPTER I

On the true knowledge of oneself

1. For the spouse of Christ who aspires to the summit of the perfection of life, it is necessary first of all to descend. Having forgotten all external things she may begin to enter by herself the secret of her conscience. There she may investigate,² examine and consider all her defects, all her ways, all her loves, all her actions, all her sins - both those forgotten and those current. And if she finds some wrong within herself, let her weep immediately in the bitterness of her heart.³ Beloved mother, to better reach this knowledge you should know that we commit all our sins and evils through *carelessness*, *concupiscence* or through *wickedness*.⁴ The recall of all your evils should be engaged around these three things. Otherwise you will never be able to reach a perfect knowledge of yourself.

2. Therefore if you desire to know yourself, lament, recognising the evils you have committed. You first should reflect on whether there is or has been any *negligence*. I repeat, you ought to reflect on how carelessly you keep *custody of your heart*, how carelessly you *spend your time* and to what extent do your actions may have a *wicked intention*. Indeed one should attend diligently to these three things, namely: to carefully guard the heart, to spend time usefully, and to have a good and fitting intention for every deed. Similarly you should reflect on how careless you have been in *prayer*; how careless you have been in *reading*; and how careless you have

¹ A play on words: Rogo autem beatitudinem tuam, mater santissima, quatenus magis penses intentionis affectum quam operis effectum, *magis dictorum veritatem quam sermonis venustatem*.

² *discutiat*

³ Compunction and contrition

⁴ aut committimus per *negligentiam*, aut per *concupiscenti ami*, aut per *nequitiam*.

been in *doing your work*. In fact you should work at and cultivate these three things most diligently if you wish to bear good fruit, and in due season,¹ for none of these suffices on its own.² Furthermore you should reflect upon how negligent you are or have been in *doing penance*; your negligence in *standing firm* and in *making progress*. Indeed you should diligently mourn your evils committed, repel devilish temptations and advance from one virtue to the next,³ so that you may reach the promised land. Therefore your understanding should address your negligence.

3. Secondly, however, if you desire to know yourself better, you should reflect on whether *concupiscence*, *pleasure*, *curiosity* or *vanity* flourish in you or have flourished in you. Indeed the desire⁴ for pleasure flourishes in the religious when he hungers after *sweet things*, namely, tasty foods; or when he strives after *soft things*, namely fine clothes; or when he strives after *carnal things*, namely lustful pleasures. Certainly the concupiscence of *curiosity* flourishes in the handmaid of God when she hankers to know *secret things*; when she longs for *beautiful things*; when she endeavours to acquire *rare things*. The concupiscence of *vanity* surely flourishes in the bride of Christ when she seeks out human *approval*; when she looks for human *praise*; when she desires human *honour*. The handmaid of Christ must avoid these things like poison since they are at the root of every evil.

4. Again, thirdly, if you want to have a sure knowledge of yourself you should carefully reflect on whether the evil of *irascibility*, the evil of *envy* or the evil of *acedia* flourish or have flourished in you. Listen carefully to what I say. Irascibility certainly flourishes in the religious who displays even the slightest indignation in his heart or rancour towards his neighbour; either in his mind, his heart or his affection; either subtly or openly,⁵ in word or in clamour. *Envy* reigns in man then when he rejoices over his neighbour's adversity, and is saddened at his neighbour's prosperity; when he is glad about the woes of his neighbour and languishes over

¹ See Psalm 1,3

² See Saint Francis' *Salutatio virtutum* on the unity of the virtues. *Ave, regina sapiential, Dominus te salvet cum tua sorore sancta pura simplicitate. Domina sancta paupertas, Dominus te salvet cum tua sorore sancta humilitate. Domnia sancta caritas, Dominus te salvet cum tua sorore sancta obedientia- Sanctissimae virtutes, omnes vos salvet Dominus, a quo venitis et proceditis. Nullus homo est penitus in toto mundo, qui unam ex vobis possit habere, nisi prius sibi moriatur. Qui unam habet et alias non offendit, omnes habet. Et qui unam offendit, nullam habet et omnes offendit (cf Iac 2,10). Et unaquaque confundit vitia et peccata. Sancta sapientia confundit satan et omnes malitias eius. Pura sancta simplicitas confundit omnem sapientiam huius mundi (cf. 1 cor 2,6) et sapientiam corporis. Sancta paupertas confundit cupiditatem et avaritiam et curas huius saeculi. Sancta humilitas confundit superbiam et omnes hominess, qui sunt in mundo, similiter et omnes hominess, qui sunt in mundo, similiter et omnia, quae in mundo sunt. Sancta caritas confundit omnes diablicas et carnales tentationes et omnes carnales timores (cr 1 Ioan 4,18). Sancat obedientia confundit omnes corporals et carlaes voluntates, et habet mortificatum corpus suum ad obedientiam spiritu et ad obedientiam fratris sui et est subditus et suppositus omnibus hominibus, qui sunt in mundo, et non tantum solis hominibus, sed etiam omnibus festiis et feris, ut possint facere de eo, quicquid voluerint, quantum fuerit eis datum desuper a Domino (cf. Ian 19,11).*

³ See Psalm 86,8

⁴ *concupiscentia*

⁵ *vel signo vel facie*

the good of his neighbour. *Acedia* flourishes in the religious when he has been tepid, in a drowse, idle, sluggish, careless, lax, dissolute, indifferent, sad and wearisome. The bride of Christ must detest all these things and avoid them like deadly poison, since they bring about the ruin of body and soul.

5. Therefore, God's beloved handmaid, if you wish to reach the perfect knowledge of yourself, "return to yourself, enter your heart, learn to weigh up¹ your spirit. Investigate what you are, what you might have been; what you should have been, what you can be; what you might have been according to nature; what you are now by guilt; what you should have been through attentiveness; what then you will be able to be by grace".² "Listen still, Mother, hear how the Prophet David presents himself to you as an example: He says, *I muse in my heart by night. I meditate and my spirit inquires*.³ He *meditated with his heart*. Meditate with your heart. He *searched his spirit*. Search your spirit. Till that field, apply your mind to yourself. By persevering in this practice you will certainly discover a precious hidden treasure.⁴ Indeed from this practice grows an abundance of gold: knowledge is multiplied, wisdom increases. This practice cleanses the eye of the heart, hones talent and broadens understanding. Anyone who does not know himself and does not give a thought to the state of his dignity, judges nothing correctly. Anyone who does not reflect first on his own spirit, knows nothing at all; he knows nothing of what he should think concerning angelic spirits or the divine Spirit. If you are not yet capable of returning to yourself, how will you be able to examine those things that are above you. If you are not yet worthy to enter the first tent, by what kind of impudence do you presume to enter the second tent?⁵

6. If you desire to rise up to the second and third heaven⁶ you have to have passed⁷ through the first, that is, your heart. I have already instructed you sufficiently above on how you can or should do this. Nonetheless the great, blessed Bernard instructs you, saying, "Diligent explorer of your integrity, carefully weigh up and consider your life with constant examination: how far you advance, how much you fail; how you are in your habits and in your loves; how similar you are to God, and how dissimilar; how close and how far away".⁸ Oh how great is the danger for the religious who wants to know many things but does not want to know himself! That Religious, who is assiduous in knowing things and diligent in judging the consciences of others but who is ignorant about and does not know

¹ *aestimare*

² *Tractatus de interiori domo* (in Bernard's works), ch.36, n.76.

³ Psalm 76,7. Frey translation.

⁴ See Matthew 13,44

⁵ RICHARD OF SAINT VICTOR, III, Benjamin maior, c.5+. Cf. *Tractatus de interior domo*, c.5+ (see note to n.5 of this chapter). Cf. BONAVENTURE, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, c.5, n.1.

⁶ See 2 Cor 12,3

⁷ *sit tibi transitus per primum*

⁸ *Meditationibus piissimis de cognitione humanae conditionis*, c.5, n.14

himself, is so close to ruin and destruction.¹ Oh my God, where does such blindness in a religious come from? Listen, here is the obvious cause. Distracted by so many concerns the mind of man does not enter itself through memory. With his mind obscured by so appearances,² the mind does not return to itself through understanding. For allured by forbidden desires, the mind never returns to itself through the desire for interior sweetness and spiritual joy. Totally prostrate to things perceived by the senses,³ it can neither enter itself nor the image of God. Completely wretched it is ignorant of and does not know itself.⁴ Therefore, having disregarded everything else, be mindful and know yourself.⁵ Blessed Bernard used to pray for this, saying, “Grant me, God, to know nothing other than to know myself.”⁶

CHAPTER II

On True Humility

1. Truly, because of the defects in the eye of the contemplating heart it is indeed necessary to *humble oneself beneath the powerful hand of God*.⁷ Therefore, I exhort you, handmaid of Christ, having attained a certain knowledge of your defects, to *humble your spirit intensely*⁸ and deem yourself worthless.⁹ As blessed Bernard says, “Humility is the virtue by which man, in authentic¹⁰ self knowledge, deems himself worthless”.¹¹ With this humility our father blessed Francis saw himself as worthless. *He loved and sought after it* from the beginning of his Order until the end. He left the world behind for sake of humility. He ordered to be carried naked through the city, he served lepers, he revealed his sins in his preaching, he commanded to be reproached.¹² Oh mother so devoted to God, you must learn

¹ Cf. BONAVENTURE, *Soliloquium de IV mentali bus exercitiis*, c.1, n.2; *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, c.4, n.1

² *quia phantasmatis obnubilata*; VINCK: *worldly cares*; JCOM: *Sollicitudes*; FEC: the imagination.

³ *ideo totaliter in his sensibili bus iacens*

⁴ AUGUSTINE, *De Ordine*, c.1, n.3. «Cuius erroris maxima causa est, quod homo sibi ipse est incognitus. Qui tamen, ut se noscat, magna opus habet consuetudine recedendi a sensibus et animum in se ipsum colligendi atque in se ipso retinendi.»

⁵ *Omnibus ergo postpositis tui ipsius habe memoriam et notitiam.*

⁶ Cf. Sermon 2, *De Diversis*, n.1 where he refers to the words of Augustine, «Deus, noverim me, noverim te.» Sermon 40, n.3, where Bernard commends self knowledge. See also Sermon 36, n.5+ and 37,n.1+ in his sermons on the *Song of Songs*.

⁷ 1 Peter 5,6

⁸ Sirach 7,19

⁹ *et tibi ipsi vilescas*

¹⁰ *verissima*

¹¹ *De gradibus humilitatis* c.1,n.2. Instead of *cognitione*, Bernard has *agnitione*.

¹² See Bonaventure’s sermon V on Saint Francis (*Opera omnia* IX, 590-597) which is in fact the source for this chapter.

this virtue from the Son of God especially, since he says, “Learn from me, since I am gentle and humble of heart”.¹ “Indeed anyone who collects virtues, but without without humility, is amassing dust in the wind”, as blessed Gregory says.² Just as *pride is the beginning of every sin*,³ so humility is the foundation of all the virtues. Moreover, learn to be *truly* humble and do not be counterfeit like those who humble themselves wrongly like hypocrites. As Sirach says: “He is one who in a wicked way humbles himself, while inwardly he is full of guile”.⁴ “The truly humble humble man,” as blessed Bernard says, “always wants to be regarded as worthless and not be proclaimed as humble.”⁵

2. Therefore beloved mother, if you wish to arrive at perfect humility you need to travel a triple path. The first path is the *contemplation of God*.⁶ You must contemplate God as the author of everything good. Since he is the author of all good things we ought say to ourselves, “*Lord, you have performed in us all our works*”.⁷ In this way, therefore, you must attribute all good to him and nothing to yourself. Bear in mind that neither *your strength nor the vigour of your own hands*⁸ has performed the good deeds that you have, for *the Lord made us and we did not make ourselves*.⁹ Such a consideration destroys all the pride of those who say, *Our glorious hands have done all these things, and not the Lord*.¹⁰ This pride excluded Lucifer from the glory of heaven. Lucifer did not consider himself to be made from nothing. Instead he gazed upon his elegance and beauty as *his garment fashioned of every kind of precious stone*.¹¹ The pride of his heart exalted him. Since *humility follows the proud*,¹² so he was immediately cast down from the throne of his nobility into the place of extreme vileness. He who had been the most superb of the Angels became the most wretched among the demons.

3. Oh how many lucifers there are today, imitators of Lucifer, sons and daughters of pride whom the Lord patiently tolerates. Moreover “pride is more tolerable in the wealthy than in the poor,” as Bernard says on the Song of Songs.¹³

¹ Matthew 11,29

² Gregory the Great, *Homil. in Evang.*, homily 7,n.4

³ Sirach 10,15: «initium omnis peccati est superbia».

⁴ Sirach 19,23

⁵ Sermon 16 on the *Song of Songs*, n.10: The truly humble man prefers to pass unnoticed rather than to have his humility extolled in public. *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, Volume Two, CFS 4, *Song of Songs* I, p.121

⁶ *consideratio Dei*

⁷ Isaiah 26,12

⁸ Deuteronomy 8,17+

⁹ Psalm 99,3

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 32,27; cf. AUGUSTINE, *Enarrat.* in Psalm 106,15.

¹¹ Ezechiel 28,13. Cf. BERNARD, *De gradibus superbiae* c.10,n,31+

¹² Proverbs 29,23

¹³ *On the Song of Songs*, sermon 54, n.8; CFS 31, p.76

Therefore it is necessary that the handmaid of Christ always resolutely acquire humility. With it she must enter the place of the expelled angel. Indeed humility alone pleases God, whether in an Angel or in a man. Do not believe that virginity, without humility, pleases God. Certainly Mary would not have become the Mother of God if she had any pride in her. For that reason blessed Bernard says, “I dare say that without humility, Mary’s virginity would not have pleased God”.¹ Therefore humility is a great virtue. Without humility no virtue is acquired, but plunges into pride.

4. The second path is to *remember Christ*. You must remember that Christ had been humbled even to a most shameful kind of death.² He became so humble that he was looked upon as a leper. So the prophet Isaiah said, *We regarded him as a leper, humiliated by God*.³ Yes, he was so humbled in his time that no one was considered more worthless than he. Hence the same Isaiah says, *In humility he has been lifted up in judgement*,⁴ as if to say that he was so humble and cast down that no one would give him a just judgement, no one would believe him to be God. *If therefore our Lord and master*⁵ himself says that *The servant is not greater than his lord and the disciple is not greater than his master*,⁶ you who are the handmaid and disciple of Christ ought to be lowly, contemptible and humble. Oh how abhorrent to God is that religious who has a humble appearance but a proud heart! Oh how useless is that Christian who sees his Lord humble and despised, but exalts his own heart and walks among the great and in marvels above him.⁷ Given that the greatest has become the least and the immeasurable the smallest and a man, what should be more deplored in the bride of Christ and more severely punished in the handmaid of Christ, who, though rotten and a worm, *proceeds to magnify herself*.⁸ Blessed Augustine says of such persons, “Oh dead flesh, why make yourself bigger? Oh fetid matter, why puff yourself up? Humble head, proud limb?”⁹ as if to say: this is not right.

5. The third path you must follow, if you wish to reach perfect humility, is *watchfulness about yourself*.¹⁰ You will be watchful about yourself, dear mother, when

¹ Homily *Super Missus est*, n.5

² Philippians 2,8

³ Isaiah 53,4

⁴ Isaiah 53,8

⁵ John 13,14

⁶ John 13,16

⁷ Psalms 130,1

⁸ BERNARD, Sermon 1, *In Nativitate Domini*, n.1: Quid enim magis indignum, quid detestandum amplius, quid gravius puniendum, quam *ut videns Deum caeli parvulum factum ultra apponat homo magnifica rese super terram*? Intolerabilis impudenti est, ut, ubi sese exinanivit Maiestas, vermiculus infletur et intumescat.

⁹ Sermon 304, ch.4

¹⁰ *circumspectio tui*; VINCK has “self-examination”; JCOM has “propre consideration”. *Circumspectio* however denotes caution, to be on the watch or vigilant.

you consider *from where you came and where you are going*.¹ Contemplate therefore and know *where you come from*. For you have been made from the *dough of perdition and the dust and slime of the earth*. You have *lived amid sins* and are an *exile* from the blessedness of paradise. This consideration degrades and impedes the spirit of pride² to the degree that you may begin to cry out with the three boys in Daniel: *Today we are humble in all the earth because of our sins*.³ Also consider where you are heading. In fact you are heading towards corruption and ashes, since *you are dust and to dust you will return*.⁴ Therefore *why be haughty, earth and ashes?* Today you are, tomorrow you will not be. Today you are healthy but tomorrow you will be deprived of strength. Today you are sensible, tomorrow you will be foolish. Today you are rich in distinction; tomorrow you will be a pitiful beggar. Who is that wretched Christian who dares to be haughty while sees himself surrounded by wretchedness and calamity on every side?

6. Learn therefore, consecrated virgins, to have a humble spirit, a humble demeanour, a humble intelligence⁵ and a humble attitude.⁶ Only humility pacifies divine anger and finds divine grace. *In so far as you are great, humble yourself in everything*, Sirach says, *and you will find grace before God*.⁷ In this way Mary found grace before the Lord, as she herself testifies, saying, *He has looked upon the humility of his handmaid*.⁸ No wonder, since humility prepares a place for charity and clears the mind of vanity. Because of this Augustine says, “The more we are devoid of the ferment of pride, the more we are filled with love.”⁹ And just as water flows down into valleys, the grace of the Holy Spirit flows to the humble. And just as water flows more forcefully the steeper its descent, so anyone who remains wholeheartedly humbled draws closer to the Lord to obtain grace. Therefore Sirach says, *The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds, and will not be consoled until it approaches the Most High since the Lord does the will of those who fear him and hears their prayer*.¹⁰

7. Therefore, maidservants of God and handmaids of Christ, be humble so that you *never allow pride to rule in your hearts*.¹¹ For you have had a humble teacher, namely our Lord Jesus Christ. You have had a humble teacher, namely the Virgin Mary, queen of all. Be humble since you have a humble father, namely blessed Francis. Be humble because you have a humble mother, namely blessed Clare, model of

¹ Sermon 304, *De Diversis* or Sermon 3 *In solemnitate Laurentii martyris*.

² *spiritum tumoris*

³ Daniel 3,37

⁴ Genesis 3,19

⁵ *umile sensus*

⁶ *umiles habitum*

⁷ Sirach 3,20

⁸ Luke 1,48

⁹ *De Trinitate*, Book VIII, c.8, n.12

¹⁰ Sirach 35,21

¹¹ Tobit 4,14

humility. However, be humble so that *patience* may witness to your humility. The virtue of humility is perfected through patience. There is no true humility that is not joined to patience. Blessed Augustine clearly testifies to this, saying, “It is easy to veil our eyes, to wear lowly and loathsome clothing, and to go about with a lowered gaze. Patience however proves true humility.”¹ In Sirach, *Have patience in your humility.*² But alas, and I say this with sorrow, we are many who want to be haughty in the cloister, and yet surely we were only humble in the world. Hence blessed Bernard says, “I see, and this grieves me very much, after having scorned the pomp of the world, some in the school of humility learn more about pride and grow gravely haughty. In the cloister they become more impatient than they were in the world. And what is more perverse, that very many, who would only be reviled in their own home, do not suffer being reviled in the house of God.”³

8. Therefore I advise you, beloved mother: counsel your daughters, counsel the virgins consecrated to God, to preserve virginity in humility and humility in virginity. Virginity joined to humility is like a gem set in gold. Therefore blessed Bernard says, “The combination of virginity with humility is beautiful. The soul, in whom humility commends virginity and virginity adorns humility, greatly pleases God.”⁴ Hear then the counsel of your brother. Hear, mother, and may it please you. Flee proud maid servants like vipers. Scorn proud virgins like demons. Disdain the company of the proud like a deadly poison.⁵ Why do this? Hear why. A certain wise person describes the proud and says, “Every proud man is unbearable, superfluous in dress, showy in manner, stiff necked, grim faced, with fierce eyes. He fights for the place of superior. He loves to be preferred by his betters. He blusters his opinions, words and actions. He has no regard for obedience.”⁶ Consequently, maidservant of God, bride of Christ, virgin of the Lord, flee the company of the proud so that you will not become like them. Indeed, as Sirach says, *Anyone who communes with the proud, puts on pride.*⁷

CHAPTER III

On perfect poverty

1. Poverty too is such a necessary virtue for the integrity of perfection that no one at all can be perfect without it, as the Lord testifies and as he says in the

¹ Epist. 17 in Appendice (alias 142; est Pelagii ad Demetriadem et invenitur in Append. operum Hieron. Epist.1), c.20.

² Sirach 2,4

³ BERNARD, *Super missus est*, Homily 4, n.10

⁴ BERNARD, *Super missus est*, Homily 1, n.5

⁵ *virus mortiferum*

⁶ PROSPERO, *De vita contemplativa*, Book III, c.8, n.1+ after Iulianus Pomperius around the year 498.

⁷ Sirach 13,1

Gospel, *If you wish to be perfect go and sell everything you have and give to the poor.*¹ In fact since the summit of evangelical perfection consists in the excellence of poverty, one who has not yet become a perfect imitator of evangelical poverty should not believe he has acquired the height of perfection. For indeed as Hugo of Saint Victor says, “Whatever may be found of perfection among Religious, it cannot be considered to be complete perfection without love for poverty.”²

2. Two things which should move any Religious, or indeed any man, to love poverty. The first is the *divine example*, which is flawless. The second is the *divine promise*, which is beyond measure.

The first thing, I say maidservant of Christ, to move you to love poverty should be the love and the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was poor at his birth, poor in his way of life, poor in his death.³

3. See which example of poverty he left you for you to become his friend by the example of his poverty. Our Lord Jesus Christ was poor to the extent that he had neither lodging, nor clothing, nor food. For lodging he had a stable, for clothing lowly pieces of cloth, and for food virginal milk. Hence the Apostle Paul, considering this poverty, exclaimed in sighs, when he addressed the Corinthians: *You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich was born needy for us so that we may be rich by his poverty.*⁴ As blessed Bernard says, “The eternal abundance of all good things sufficed in heaven, but poverty was not found in those. However this beauty abounded and superabounded on the earth, and yet no man considered it precious. Desiring poverty, the Son of God came down to choose it for himself. By his esteem for poverty he made it make precious for us.”⁵

4. Also as an example of poverty, Our Lord Jesus Christ himself also gave us his manner of life in the world. Listen, blessed virgin, listen all you who have professed poverty. How poor was the Son of God, the King of Angels, while he lived in the world. He was so poor that at different times he had no lodging. Instead he often had to sleep with his Apostles on the outskirts of towns and villages. Therefore the Evangelist Mark says, *Having looked around at everything, and since it was already evening, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.*⁶ The Gloss says about this word: “*Having looked around,*⁷ to see if anyone might receive him into some lodging, no one helped him because he was so poor.⁸ And so he could not find

¹ Matthew 19,21

² Editors: Sententiam ipsam non invenimus.

³ Ipse enim fuit pauper *nascendo*, pauper *conversando*, pauper *moriendo*.

⁴ 2 Corinthians 8,9

⁵ *In Vigilia Nativitatis Domini*, Sermon 1, n.5

⁶ Mark 11,11

⁷ *Circumspectis*

⁸ *nulli adulates*, which I have read this as *nulli attulatus* from *adferro* or *affero*.

lodging in such a city.”¹ And Matthew says, *Foxes have dens and birds have nests. The Son of man, however, has nowhere to lay his head.*²

5. The Lord of Angels was not only poor in his birth and in his manner of life. To inflame the love of poverty in us, he was also absolutely poor indeed in his death. Listen all you who have vowed poverty. Be attentive and listen how poor the rich King of heaven had become for our sake at the time of his death! He was stripped and deprived of everything he had. He was stripped, it is said, of *his clothes* when they *divided his clothes and cast lots for them.*³ He was also stripped in *body and soul* when, in the suffering of his cruel death, his soul was driven from his body. He was stripped of *divine glory* when they *did not glorify him as God.*⁴ Instead they treated him as an evil-doer, just as Job himself lamented in chapter nineteen, *They have stripped me of my glory.*⁵ Blessed Bernard talks about examples of this poverty. He says, “See the poor Christ, born without lodging, lying between the ox and the donkey, wrapped in lowly cloth, in flight to Egypt, sitting on a donkey, hanging naked on a gibbet.”⁶

6. Who then is that wretched Christian, who is that desperate and stubbornly deaf Religious, who would still love riches and abhor poverty when he sees and hears of the God of gods, the Lord of the world, the King of heaven, the Firstborn of God in want for having taken upon himself such poverty? “The pagan, who lives without God, may seek out riches. The Jew who received the Promised Land may seek riches”.⁷ But you, virgin of Christ and handmaid of the Lord, with what idea do you seek riches when you have vowed poverty and live among the poor of Jesus Christ; when you want to be a daughter of the poor father Francis and have promised to be an imitator of the poor mother Clare? Although we have professed poverty, we exchange poverty for avarice by desiring things that are not permitted and things that the Rule forbids. Beloved mother, our⁸ avarice is put to shame because the Son of God *became poor for us.*⁹

7. I know this to be the case: the more you become eager lovers of professed poverty and more perfect imitators of evangelical poverty, the greater abundance you will have in all temporal and spiritual goods. If however you convert to the opposite and despise the poverty you have professed, you will be poor in all temporal and spiritual goods. As Mary, the poor mother of the poor Jesus, said

¹ GI

² Matthew 8,20

³ Matthew 27,35; cf. Psalm 21,19

⁴ Romans 1,21

⁵ Job 19,9

⁶ *In Tempore Resurrectionis*, Sermon 3, n.1

⁷ BERNARD, *In festo Omnium Sanctorum*, Sermon 1, n.7: «Sed qua fronte, magis autem qua mente Christianus divitias quaerit, postquam Christus beatos esse pauperes praedicavit?»

⁸ *tua ac mea*

⁹ 2 Corinthians 8,9

once, *The hungry will be filled with good things and the rich he sends away empty.*¹ The holy Prophet also testifies to this, saying, *The rich grow weak and hungry while those who seek the Lord lack for nothing.*² Haven't you read and heard the Lord Jesus speaking to his Apostles in Matthew's gospel: *Do not worry by saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' Your Father knows what you need.*³ Hear again what he tells them in Luke's gospel, *When I sent you out without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything? 'Nothing' they answered.*⁴ Therefore if among the hard and unbelieving Jews the Lord fed his disciples without any worry, little wonder that among Christian and faithful peoples he feeds the Lesser Brothers and the poor Sisters, imitators of evangelical poverty, who profess perfection itself? *Therefore cast all your care upon the Lord since he cares for you.*⁵

8. Therefore since God the Father is so concerned for us and takes such care of us, it is amazing that we would be troubled by so much worry about curious and fleeting things. I certainly find no other reason for this except avarice, that mother of disorder and damnation. I find no other explanation for this except that our affections take us far from God our salvation. There is no other reason except that the fervour of divine love cools down in us and has frozen. Surely if we were very fervent, naked we would follow the naked Christ. For when men feel very hot they are wont to uncover and remove clothing. That we are attracted to temporal things is a sign of great coldness in us. Oh my God! How can we be so hardened towards Christ *who left his land*, namely heaven, *and his relatives*, the Angels, and *the house of his Father*, that is, from the bosom of the Father, and became poor, abject and despised for us? Don't we wish to relinquish a miserable and fetid world for him? Certainly with our body we have left the world. But alas, all our heart, all our mind, all our desire is occupied and absorbed by the world.

9. Oh blessed handmaid of God, call to mind the poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ. Imprint the poverty of your poor father Francis on your heart. Remember the poverty of your mother Clare, and cling to poverty with all your commitment and effort. Embrace Lady Poverty and wish to love nothing else under heaven than poverty for the sake of the name of the Lord: no honour, no other temporal things, no riches. Take care to firmly observe the holy poverty that you have vowed. Indeed, to have riches and love them is a sterile love. To love riches and not to have them is dangerous. To have riches and not to love them is wearisome. Therefore to neither have nor love riches is profitable, carefree and delightful as well as an act of perfect virtue. Hence both the Lord's counsel about poverty and all Christian example should inspire and inflame the love of poverty. Oh blessed poverty! How loveable to God! How carefree in the world you make your lover! As Gregory says, "Indeed one who loves no thing in the world also fears nothing in

¹ Luke 1,53

² Psalm 33,11

³ Matthew 6,31

⁴ Luke 22,35+

⁵ 1 Peter 5,7

the world.”¹ We read in the *Vita Patrum* that a certain poor friar had a mat he used to cover himself at night. He slept on another. At a certain time, when it was very cold, the Father of the monastery went out at night and heard him say, “I thank you Lord, since there are many, many who sit in irons or who are in iron fetters, or have their feet bound in wood! I, however, am like an emperor, stretching out my legs. I walk wherever I want.” Therefore you have the first thing, namely, the *example* of poverty.²

10. The second thing that must inflame your heart to love poverty is the *divine promise*, which is boundless. *Oh you are the one who is rich towards all*,³ Oh good Lord Jesus! Who can adequately express in word, perceive with the heart, or write about the heavenly glory that you have promised to give to your poor. Indeed those in voluntary poverty merit to stand in “the glory of their Maker”.⁴ They merit *to enter the power of the Lord*, in that eternal tabernacle, in those dazzling dwellings. They merit to become citizens of that city that God has built and made. With your blessed mouth you promised them, saying, *Blessed the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.⁵ Lord Jesus Christ, there is no other *kingdom of heaven* than you yourself. You are the *King of kings and Lord of lords*.⁶ You give yourself to them as reward, as recompense and as joy. They delight in you and rejoice over you, and are satisfied by you. Indeed, *the poor eat and are satisfied and those who seek him will praise the Lord. Their hearts live forever*.⁷ Amen.

CHAPTER IV

On silence and being quiet⁸

1. The virtue of silence helps towards the perfection of the religious man. Just as *sin is not absent from too much talk*,⁹ so to speak briefly and rarely is effective in guarding a man against sin. And just so much talk may offend God and neighbour, the fruit of peace is reaped, as if from a tree, from justice nurtured by silence. As enclosed sisters¹⁰ need peace very much, so too they truly need silence. Silence preserves peace in heart and body. Consequently the prophet Isaiah, on considering

¹ *Moralium*, Book X, c.21. n,39

² See n.2 of this chapter.

³ Romans 10,12

⁴ *Homil. in Evangelium*, Book II, homily 37, n.1

⁵ Matthew 5,3

⁶ 1 Timothy 6,15

⁷ Psalm 21,27

⁸ *De silentio et taciturnitate*; taciturnitas, the love of silence, etc.

⁹ Proverbs 10,19

¹⁰ *cum claustralibus*

the virtue of silence, says, *Peace will be the work of justice, and silence cultivates justice.*¹ It is as if he says: Silence is such a virtue that it preserves the justice of God in man, and fosters and safeguards peace among neighbours. In fact unless a man diligently *keeps guard over his mouth*² he quickly squanders the gifts of grace³ he has and even falls into many evils. *The tongue indeed, as blessed James says in his letter,*⁴ *is a modest member but boasts greatly.*⁵ He continues, *Our tongue is a fire, a universe of iniquity.* Here the Gloss says that “nearly all bad actions are caused or carried out by the tongue.”⁶ tongue.”⁶ Do you want to hear, oh handmaid of God, do you want to know how many evils come from the tongue if it is not carefully guarded? Listen and I shall tell you. From the tongue come blasphemy, murmuring, the defence of sin, perjury, lying, detraction, flattery, cursing, wrangling, strife, mockery of the good, perverse advice, gossip, bragging, the disclosure of secrets, indiscriminate threats, indiscriminate promises, talkativeness and scurrilousness. In truth it is a great shame for the female sex, and it is a great disgrace for sacred virgins, not to exercise *custody of the mouth* and not observe discipline of the tongue since so many evils are committed because of a restless tongue. Certainly I dare to say: that Religious glories in vain who boasts of the possession of virtue in his heart but squanders the discipline of silence through the feverishness of much talk. As Scripture testifies, *If anyone thinks himself religious but does not restrain his tongue is deceiving his heart. His religion is empty.*⁷

2. Oh loveable brides of Christ, gaze upon your lady and mine, gaze upon Mary, the mirror of the virtues. Learn from her the discipline of silence! The silence blessed Virgin is sufficiently obvious. If we browse through the Gospel we find spoke only few times and with few words. We read of her having spoken with only four persons and conversed only seven times: twice with the Angel, twice with her son, twice with Elizabeth, and only once with the servants at the wedding. This puts to shame our talkativeness in which we are bent on the multiplication of words. Nevertheless the benefit of silence is great.

3. One benefit⁸ is that silence *leads to compunction.* The man who remains silent ponders his ways⁹ and has occasion to consider his numerous defects, as well as his his limited progress. Compunction arises from this. Hence the prophet David says, *I kept silence and was humbled. I remained quiet and calm without any relief, and my pain*

¹ Isaiah 32:17

² Psalm 38,2

³ *bona gratuita*

⁴ *Canonica*

⁵ James 3,5 and 6

⁶ GO

⁷ James 1,26

⁸ *utilitas*

⁹ Psalm 118,59

increased.¹ Another benefit of silence is that it shows a man to be heavenly. The argument is almost infallible: If a man in Germany² does not speak German, obviously he is not a German. If he is in the world and does not speak about worldly matters he clearly demonstrates that he is not of the world. *Indeed he who is of the earth speaks of the earth* as said in the Gospel of John.³ Also nothing help a religious man to keep silence as much as flight from the company of men to lead a solitary life. Indeed that man who has already risen above the human condition should have no comforter except God and dialogue with him alone. That is, he should be *solitary and keep silence*. Subsequently he has God as his companion and should not care for human company. And so chapter three of Lamentations it says: *He will sit alone and keep silent, since he has risen above himself.*⁴ It says *He will sit alone*, fleeing the company of men; and *he will keep silence* meditating on heavenly things; and *he has risen above himself*, savouring heavenly sweetness.

4. If silence is necessary for all Religious to perfect the virtues, the observance of the discipline of silence is especially necessary for virgins consecrated to God, the handmaids of Jesus Christ. Indeed just as their *discourse* should be *precious*,⁵ their lips should be modest so that they might never speak except for great necessity. So blessed Jerome says, “Let a virgin’s discourse be modest and rare, precious in both eloquence and modesty.”⁶ The philosopher advises this too: “For the sake of the highest perfection I want your speech to be brief, rare and with a subdued voice.”⁷ Listen, wordy maiden; listen loud and chatty virgin. To grow accustomed to keep silence you should do as the abbot Agathon did, whom we read about in the *Vita Patrum*. “He put a stone in his mouth for three years until he learned to be silent.”⁸ Bind a stone to your tongue, fix your tongue to your palate, *place a finger over your mouth*⁹ to further learn silence. For the spouse of Christ it is a great disgrace for to want to discourse with someone other than with her groom, Jesus Christ.

5. Therefore speak rarely, speak little and briefly. Speak with trepidation and modesty. Indeed *for your own sake speak scarcely*.¹⁰ Cover your face with the veil of modesty. Accustom your lips to the trait of discipline. Let your discourse be brief, precious and useful. Let it be modest and humble. Handmaid of God, speak little and rarely, since *sin is not far from too much talk*.¹¹ Do not speak idle words, because *on*

¹ Psalm 38,3

² Theutonia

³ John 3,31

⁴ Lamentations 3,28

⁵ 1 Samuel 3,1, i.e. rare and worthwhile.

⁶ Appendix, Epistola 1, c.19

⁷ SENECA, Epistola 40

⁸ *Vita Patrum*, Book V, libellus 4, n.7 (MIGNE, PL tom.73, col.865)

⁹ Judges 18,19

¹⁰ Sirach 32,10

¹¹ Proverbs 10,19

the day of judgement men will have to account for idle words they uttered. As the Gloss says, *idle discourse* is what is said needlessly by the speaker or without benefit to the listener.”¹ Therefore it is always better and more useful to remain silent than speak. For as a wise man says, “I sometimes regretted having spoken but never for having kept silent.”²

CHAPTER V

On assiduous application to prayer³

1. It is necessary especially for the bride of Christ who wants to make progress to apply her heart assiduously to prayer and devotions. Truly, the unspiritual⁴ and tepid religious, by not applying herself frequently to prayer, is not only wretched and useless, but presents God a dead soul in a living body. Such is the efficacy of the virtue of devotion that by herself she vanquishes the temptations and deceits of the evil enemy who alone impedes the handmaid of God from ascending to heaven. Little wonder that someone who does apply herself assiduously to the practice of prayer frequently succumbs deplorably to temptations. And so blessed Isidore says, “This is the remedy for the one who is buffeted by the temptations of the vices. Whenever and wherever he is touched by vice, let him submit himself to prayer since frequent prayer destroys the assault of the vices.”⁵ And this is what the Lord says in the Gospel: *Stay awake and pray so that you may not enter into temptation.*⁶ Devout prayer is so strong,⁷ moreover, that it is effective for all circumstances. A man can profit from it at any time: in winter or summer, in sunshine or rain, at night or during the day, feastday or feria, in sickness or health, in youth or old age, standing, sitting or going out, in the choir or outside the choir. Indeed he gains more than all the world is worth in one hour of prayer because with a modicum of devout prayer a man acquires the kingdom of heaven. So that you may know how you should pray and with what kind of prayer, I shall instruct you in so far as the Lord will give me, although in this matter I have greater need to be instructed than you.

2. Know then, worthy handmaid of God, that three things are necessary for perfect prayer. This is the first. When you are at prayer, with body upright and heart elevated, with all the senses shut off and without clamour, ponder *with a bitter and contrite heart all the expressions of your wretchedness, present, past and future.* Indeed you

¹ GI

² Xenocrates, referring to VALERIUS MAXIMUS, *Dictorum factorumque memorabilium*, VII, c.2, n.6, etc.

³ *De studio orationis*

⁴ *indevotus*

⁵ ISIDORE, *Sententia* Book III, c.7, n.1

⁶ Matthew 26,41; Mark 14,38; Luke 22, 40 and 46

⁷ *virtutis*

must ponder first how many and how great are the sins you have *committed* every day of your life; how many and how great are the good things you have *ignored* in the world and in the Order; how much and how great is the grace of your Creator that you have frequently *lost*.¹ Consider how far you are from God because of sin, you who were once *near*; how *unlike* God you have become, you who were once very *alike*; how *beautiful* was your soul, you who now are rather *unseemly* and loathsome. You should ponder where you are heading because of sin, namely *to the gates of hell*. Ponder what is coming towards you because the *day of judgement* is to be dreaded. Ponder what you will receive due to all these things, namely the *fire of eternal death*. For all these things you should immediately strike your breast with the publican.² With the prophet David you should *roar with the groaning of your heart*.³ With Mary Magdalene you should *moisten* the feet of the Lord Jesus *with your tears*.⁴ Nor should you withhold your tears since you have offended your beloved Jesus without moderation.⁵ And this is what blessed Isidore says, “Since we stand before God in prayer, we must groan and weep remembering the gravity of what we have committed and how bitter are the fearful torments of hell.”⁶ Such tearful meditations should be the starting point of your prayer.

3. The second necessary thing in prayer for God’s bride is *thanksgiving*, so that in all humility you may give thanks to your Creator for the benefits you have received or are about to receive from him. The Apostle Paul counsels this in Colossians, chapter four. He says, *Press on in prayer, vigilant in it with thanksgiving*.⁷ Indeed nothing else renders man worthy for divine service than to always return and give thanks to God for gifts received. Hence, when writing to Aurelius, blessed Augustine says, “What better thing can we produce from the mind, bring forth from the mouth or express with the pen than *Thanks be to God*. Nothing briefer can be said, nothing more joyous can be heard, nothing greater can be understood and nothing more beneficial can be done.”⁸ Therefore at prayer you should meditate with thanksgiving because God made you man. He made you Christian. He has been indulgent towards your countless sins. You would have fallen into many sins if the Lord did not watch over you. He did not let you die in the world and he chose you for the highest and most perfect Order. Without any work on your part he fed and feeds you. He became man, was circumcised and baptised for you. For you he became naked, humble and despised. For your sake he fasted, hungered,

¹ Word play again: *cogitare quam, magna et quam multa peccata omnibus diebus vitae tuae commisisti, quam multa et quam magna bona in saeculo et in Ordine omisisti, quam multam et quam magnum Creatoris tui gratiam frequentem amisisti.*

² Luke 18,13

³ Psalm 37,9

⁴ Luke 7,38

⁵ *nec debes aliquem modum habere in lacrymis, quia sine modo tuum dilectum Iesum offendisti.*

⁶ *Sententia*, Book III, c.7, n.5

⁷ Colossians 4,2

⁸ Letter 41 (otherwise 77),n.1

thirsted, worked and was wearied. For your sake he cried out and sweated blood. He gave you his most holy body as food and his most precious blood as drink for you. On your account he was beaten, spat upon and derided and was scourged. For your sake he was crucified and wounded, and was killed by a most disgraceful and bitter death to redeem you. He was buried, rose again, ascended into heaven, sent the Holy Spirit, and promised the kingdom of God to you and all his chosen ones. Such thanksgiving is especially beneficial in prayer. Nor can prayer have any value without it. For as blessed Bernard says, “Ingratitude is a burning wind drying up the spring of piety, the dew of mercy and the flow of grace.”

4. The third necessary thing required for the perfection of prayer is that in prayer your heart ponder what you pray for and nothing else.¹ That one speak to God with the mouth and ponder something else with his heart is truly unseemly, for half the heart is directed to heaven and half is held back on earth. The Lord never listens to such a prayer. The Psalm says about this, *I have cried out with all my heart, Lord hear me.*² The Gloss says, “The divided heart does not obtain its request.”³ From all external cares, from all worldly desires and from all carnal loves, loves, the handmaid of God must recall her heart to interior things at the time of prayer. With her whole heart and mind she must strive for him alone to whom she directs her heart. Jesus your bridegroom counselled you about this in the Gospel, saying, *When you pray, however, enter your chamber and with the door closed pray to your Father.* So then *you have entered your chamber* when you have recalled all your thoughts, all your desires and all your loves into the secret of your heart. You *close your door* when you diligently keep custody of your heart so that none of your fanciful thoughts are an obstacle to your devotion. As Augustine says, “Prayer, in fact, is the conversion of the mind in God through pious and humble love.”⁴

5. *Listen*, oh blessed mother; hear, oh handmaid of Jesus Christ, *and incline your ear to the words of my mouth.*⁵ Do not let yourself be beguiled or deceived. Do not let the great fruit of your prayer come to nothing. Do not lose the sweetness nor be robbed of the delight that you should draw from prayer. Prayer is the vessel⁶ with which to draw up the grace of the Holy Spirit from the spring of the overflowing sweetness of the most blessed Trinity. The most devout Prophet David, who was experienced in this, said, *I opened my mouth and sighed.*⁷ *I opened my mouth*, the Gloss says, “by praying, seeking, knocking”; *and I sighed*, says the Gloss, “That is, I drew in the Spirit”.⁸ Haven’t I already said to you what prayer is? “Prayer is the conversion

¹ *quid precaris*

²² Psalm 118, 145

³³ Cf. AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in Psalmis* on Psalm 118, Sermon 29, n.1

⁴ *De spiritu et anima*, c.50

⁵ Psalm 44,11; cf. Psalm 77,1

⁶ *hausorium*, which I have read as *hauritorium*

⁷ Psalm 118,131; GI; cf. AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in Psalmis*, Ps.118, sermon 24, n.4; translation here follows FREY, p.38.

⁸ *Os meum aperui et attraxi spiritum.*

of the mind to God.”¹ Do you want to know how to convert your mind to God? Ponder carefully. When you are at prayer recollect yourself completely and enter the chamber of your heart with your Beloved. By yourself, linger with him alone. Forget all external things and rise above yourself with your whole heart, your whole mind, all your affection, all your desire, all your devotion.² Do not relax from the spirit of prayer, but rise ever higher through the ardour of devotion until you enter that *wonderful abode, as far as the house of God*.³ And having seen your beloved some how with the eye of your heart and have *tasted how pleasant is the Lord*,⁴ and *the surpassing greatness of his sweetness*,⁵ you hasten there to his embrace. Having kissed him with the mouth of your inmost devotion⁶ you are completely outside yourself and rapt entirely in heaven and totally transformed into Christ. And you are not strong enough to constrain your spirit, but cry out with the prophet David, and say, *My soul refused to be consoled. I was mindful of God and rejoiced*.⁷

6. Also beloved mother, so that your heart may rise towards God more sublimely through the devotion of prayer and be inflamed more fervently, carefully note that three causes draw us into rapture:⁸ sometimes because of great *devotion*, or sometimes because of great *admiration*, or sometimes because of great *joy*.

7. I am saying that sometimes it happens because of great *devotion*, “so that the mind does not contain itself, and elevated above itself it passes into rapture⁹”, “where we are aflame with such a fire of heavenly desire that everything external turns into bitterness and loathing. And the flame of love within increases beyond human limits; a flame that melts the soul like wax; that spreads like the rising smoke of spices and reaches the heights.”¹⁰ Then we are urged to cry out with the Prophet and say, *My flesh and my heart grow faint, God of my heart, God who is my portion forever*.¹¹

8. And sometimes because of great *admiration*: “when irradiated by divine light and uplifted by admiration of supreme beauty, the mind is struck by such fervent astonishment that its condition is shaken to its foundations. According to the depth to which the mind is cast down like flashing lightning into self-contempt compared

¹ Psalm 118, 131. GO: *Oratio est conversio mentis in Deum* citing Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmis*, Ps.118, sermon 27, n.4.

² See Lamentations 3,28; Deuteronomy 6,5

³ Psalm 41,5

⁴ Psalm 33,9

⁵ Psalm 33,9 and 30,20

⁶ See BERNARD, *On the Song of Songs*, sermon 2 on the various meanings of the kiss, CFS 4, p.8-15

⁷ Psalm 76, 3 and 4

⁸ *quod tribus de causis in mentis alienationem deducimur*. Cf. Richard of Saint Victor, *Benjamin maior*, V, c.5. VINCK: *ecstasy*

⁹ *in alienationem transeat*

¹⁰ RICHARD OF SAINT VICTOR, see previous note.

¹¹ Psalm 72,26

to that unseen beauty, the mind is raised more sublimely and more quickly to lofty things. 'The ardour of the greatest desire lays bare the mind, enraptured above itself.'¹ Then the mind is urged to cry out with the most holy Esther, *I see you Lord like and Angel of God and my heart is thrown into confusion in fear of your glory. You are truly wonderful, Lord, and your face is full of graciousness.*²

9. Also, sometimes because of great joy: "When the inmost self³ has drunk from the abundance of inner sweetness and is indeed completely inebriated, the mind forgets what it is or has been. It is transformed into a certain state of extraordinary happiness, into a love beyond this world"⁴.⁵ Then the mind is urged to cry out and say with the Prophet, *How delightful your dwellings, Lord of hosts! My soul languishes and longs for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh exalt in the living God.*⁶

10. Therefore in this way the handmaid of God should exercise her soul in application to devout prayer. Through the frequent practice of prayer, with the eye of heart cleansed and purified, and with a tireless spirit of devotion, she should learn how to become suitable for the contemplation of divine things and taste the contentment of divine sweetness. Indeed, distinguished by the image of God and adorned with the likeness of God, it does not become the soul redeemed by the blood of God and fit for blessedness, to flutter around temporal things. Rather, the soul must *soar above the cherubim and fly on the wings of the wind.*⁷ That is, the soul is to soar above the orders of Angels to contemplate the Trinity itself and the humanity of Christ, and meditate on the glory and joy of the city above, namely that of the Angels and all the Saints. But who are they today who have time for this kind of meditation? Who are the explorers of heavenly joy, who dwell heart and soul in heaven? They are rare. Hence what blessed Bernard says can be applied to such Religious: "Their occupation should be to penetrate the heavens by devotion, to go around the heavenly mansions with the mind, to greet the Apostles and admire the choirs of Prophets and victorious Martyrs. But having left behind all these things, they deliver themselves into slavery of the body to obey the flesh, to sate their gullet and stomach."⁸

¹ RICHARD OF SAINT VICTOR, op. cit.; see Ezechiel 1,14.

² Esther 5,2m-2n (Nova Vulgata)

³ *intima*

⁴ *supermundanum quendam affectum*

⁵ RICHARD OF SAINT VICTOR, op.cit.

⁶ Psalm 83,2+

⁷ Psalm 17,11

⁸ BERNARD, *On the Song of Songs II*, Sermon 35, n.3, CFS 7, p.167

CHAPTER VI

On remembering the Passion of Christ

1. Since the frequent remembrance of the passion of Christ nourishes and preserves devout fervour in a man, the frequent gaze with the eye of the heart at Christ dying on the Cross is necessary for the one who wants to keep his devotion unstified. Because of this the Lord says in Leviticus, *On my altar the fire will always burn, the fire that the priests feed each day by throwing on wood.*¹ Listen, devout mother: the *altar of God* is the heart. On this altar the *fire* of fervent devotion must always burn, the fire that you must *feed* every day with the *wood* of the Cross of Christ and the memory of his passion. And this is what the prophet Isaiah says, *You will draw water in joy from the springs of the Saviour.*² And it should be said: whoever desires the waters of grace from God, the waters of devotion, the waters of tears – let him draw them from the springs of the Saviour, that is, from the five wounds of Jesus Christ.

2. Therefore, oh handmaid, with the feet of your affections approach the wounded Jesus, to Jesus crowned with thorns, to Jesus fixed to the gibbet of the cross. And with blessed Thomas do not look only at *the impression of the nails in his hands*. And do not only put *your finger in the place of the nails* and *your hand in his side.*³ Rather, though the door of his side enter as far as the heart of Jesus himself. Transformed there into Christ by the most ardent love of the Crucified, fixed by the nails of divine fear, pierced to the heart by the lance of love, pierced through by the sword of interior compassion, you then seek nothing else but to die on the cross with Christ. Then you may cry out with the Apostle Paul and say, *With Christ I have been crucified on the cross. It is no longer I who live. Indeed Christ lives in me.*⁴

3. Moreover, by this means you must keep in Christ's passion in your memory so that you may ponder how his passion was so *very disgraceful, bitter, all embracing*⁵ and *long*. Consider first, handmaid worthy of God, that the death of Christ your spouse was *most disgraceful*. Indeed he was crucified like a thief and bandit. In the old law⁶ none were punished by such a death except the worst and most wicked thieves and bandits. Considered further Christ's great disgrace. He was crucified in *a most appalling and loathsome place*, namely, Mount Calvary. There lay many bones and corpses of the dead. Indeed that was the place assigned for the cadavers of the condemned. In that place only the worst of men were beheaded or hung. Be further aware of Christ's great disgrace: he was suspended up among thieves *like a thief* and in their midst like a *prince of thieves*. Hence Isaiah says, *Since he was counted*

¹ Leviticus 6,12

² Isaiah 12,3

³ John 20, 25 and 27

⁴ Galatians 2,19 and 20

⁵ *generalissima*

⁶ Cf. Numbers 25,4; Deuteronomy 21,22+; (Galatians 3,13); 2 Samuel 21,1-9; Esther 7,10 and 9,13+

*among the wicked.*¹ Look still upon the great disgrace of your spouse: he was *consigned to the air* and suspended between heaven and earth as if he were not worthy live or die on the earth. Oh worthy disdain and offence!² The whole world is denied to the Lord of the earth. Nothing in the world is considered to be lowlier than the Lord of the world. And so the death of the Son of God was disgraceful because of the *kind* of death, for he was hung upon a gibbet; because of his *companions* in death, since he *was numbered among the wicked*³ and condemned; because of the *place* of his death, as he was crucified on the foul smelling Mount Calvary.

4. Oh good Jesus, oh kind Saviour, for you are humiliated not just once but many times. The more times and places someone is humiliated, the more he is considered shameful in the world. And behold, you Lord Jesus, are bound in the garden; you are struck in the house of Annas; you are spat upon in the court of Caiphias; you are treated as a plaything in Herod's residence; you are burdened along the way of the cross; you are crucified at Golgotha. Alas, alas. Behold - the freedom of captives is taken captive; the glory of the Angels is made sport of; the life of men is killed! Oh wretched Jews, you have completed what you promised! Indeed you said, *Let us condemn him to a shameful death.*⁴ Because of this blessed Bernard says, "*He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. He was the Son and became a servant. Not only did he take on the form of a servant, but also that of a wicked servant so as to be beaten and punished, though he was innocent.*"⁵ He was not only *the servant of the servants of God*,⁶ like the Pope, but had also become *servant of the servants of the devil*, serving sinners by purging their despicable sins. But this was not enough for him. He chose a death more shameful than any other so you might not suffer similar horrors. *He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,*⁷ "which is the most disgraceful" as the Gloss⁸ says.

5. Secondly, consider and take note, virgin devoted to God, how the passion of Christ was *most bitter*. The cross did not permit any relief from the pain of death to those blessed limbs outstretched upon it, a certain relief or comfort that is normal for tortured hearts

¹ Isaiah 53,12

² Presumably, an irony: *O digna indignatione et inuria!* VINCK: Oh, the worth of such unworthiness and shame! JCOM: O indignité vraiment épouvantable! (O indignity truly terrible!)

³ Luke 22,37

⁴ Wisdom 2,20

⁵ BERNARD, *Sermo in feria 4 Hebdomadae sanctae*, n.10

⁶ The expression is attributed to Gregory the Great.

⁷ Philippians 2,8

⁸ GI

6. . Nor did it consider that venerable divine head when it bowed down at release of his soul.¹ Note still further how bitter Christ's death was. The more tender something is, the more severely it suffers. Never did a tender body endure such sufferings as did the body of the Saviour. Indeed the body of a woman is more tender than the body of a man. However the flesh of Christ was completely virginal, since it was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin. Therefore the passion of Christ was the most bitter of all sufferings since he was more tender than all the virgins. Indeed if at the recollection of death alone his *soul was sad* because of the tenderness of his flesh, so that the *sweat* of his body would be *like the sweat of blood flowing down to the ground*², how much greater was his pain and how much punishment was inflicted in the experience of his most bitter passion? Therefore blessed Bernard says, "The sweat of blood that flowed down to the earth from your most holy body at the time of prayer Lord Jesus Christ most certainly pointed to the anguish of your heart." "What did you do, fair child, to be treated this way? What did you commit, a most lovable youth so that you would be judged in this way? Behold, I am the cause of your pain, I am your death blow".³ Consider carefully the bitterness of the death of Christ. The more someone is innocent, the graver the punishment endured. If Christ sustained that suffering because of his sins, it would have been a little more bearable. However, he *never sinned*, nor was *wrongdoing on his lips*.⁴ Pilate himself testifies to this, saying, *I find in him no case for death*.⁵ Indeed his is the *radiance of eternal light and the spotless mirror of the majesty of God and the image of his goodness*, as is said in chapter seven of Wisdom.⁶

7. Consider still more fully how painful⁷ was the death of your Spouse, Jesus Christ. The more *all embracing* the pain, the more bitter it is. Moreover Christ your Spouse suffered in every part of his body, so that every part of him, however small, would have had its own particular pain. Each place, however small, would have been filled with bitterness. Indeed *from the soles of his feet to the top of his head there was no soundness in him*.⁸ Hence with such vehement suffering he cried out, saying, *Oh all you who pass along the way, look and see, if there is any pain like mine*.⁹ Truly, Lord Jesus Christ, there has there never been suffering like yours. Such was the flow of your blood that your whole body was bespattered. Oh good Jesus, sweet Lord! Your blood flowed so abundantly - not in drops but in a stream - from five parts of your

¹ *Crux enim illa beata membra, in se extensa contrahi in dolore mortis non permisit, quod tamen solet esse quoddam levamen et solatium cordibus anxiatibus, nec habuit illud reverendum divinum caput, ubi ad dimissionem animae se inclinaret.*

² Matthew 26,28 and Luke 22,44

³ *Sermo de vita et passione Domini*, n.6. Also found in Saint Anselm in Meditation 9.

⁴ 1Peter 2,22

⁵ John 18,38

⁶ Wisdom 7,26

⁷ *poenalis*

⁸ Isaiah 1,6

⁹ Lamentations 1,12

body, from your hands and feet at the crucifixion, from your head at the coronation, from your whole body at the scourging, from your heart itself from the opening of your side. It seems a wonder that any blood remained in you. Say, my beloved Lord, I ask, say why you allowed so much blood to pour from your body since one drop of your most precious blood would have sufficed for the redemption of the whole world? I know, Lord, and I know indeed. You did nothing other than this to show with how much affection you loved me.

8. Therefore *what should I render to the Lord for everything he has given me?* “Certainly, Lord, as long as I live I shall remember the works and what you have endured in preaching, your weariness in going about, the tears of your compassion, the sorrows, the invective, the spittle, the blows, the mockery, the nails and the wounds. Moreover *the blood of the just, which has been poured out upon the ground, will be demanded of me.*”¹ *Who will turn my head into a fountain and my eyes into a spring of tears?*² so so that I may weep day and night over the death of my Lord Jesus, which he sustained not for his sins but for mine? *He was wounded for our iniquities, bruised because of our wickedness,* as the prophet Isaiah says.³

9. Lastly consider and look carefully, how the death and passion of Christ were *very long*. From the first day at his birth until the last day of his death he was in suffering and sorrow, just as the Prophet himself testifies, saying, *I am poor in my works and in my youth.*⁴ And elsewhere he says, *I was scourged all day,* that is, for all my life. Moreover consider how difficult the passion of Christ was. For this reason he was suspended, so that he might endure greater suffering. And his pain was not over quickly, so that his death might be protracted and he be tortured longer and tormented more severely.

10. From all these things I have said, you can gather, Oh virgin of Christ and handmaid of God, how shameful, how painful, how all embracing and how slow was the passion and death of your most beloved Spouse, Jesus Christ. He bore all these things so that his love might inflame you, so that for all these things you might love him with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind. Indeed with what great kindness would the Lord take on the form of a servant the sake of his servant’s salvation? What better instructs man about salvation than the example of enduring death for the sake of divine justice and obedience? Indeed what would better incite man to love God than such kindness by which the Son of the most high God, without our merits and rather despite our non-merits, *laid down his life*⁵ for us. His kindness is such that it is impossible to think how someone could more merciful, kinder and more amicable. This kindness is shown the more he bore severe and contemptible things or wanted to suffer for us. Indeed *God did not spare*

¹ BERNARD, *Sermo in Feria 4 Hebdomadae sanctae*, n.11, etc.

² Jeremiah 9,1 in the Vulgate. This translation from the *New Jerusalem Bible*, Jeremiah 8,23.

³ Isaiah 53,5

⁴ Psalm 87,16

⁵ John 10,15

*his own Son but handed him over for us all. How could he not give us everything with him?*¹
From this we are invited to love him and to imitate the one we love.

11. Alas therefore for those who are ungrateful for the benefits of such kindness, in whose heart the death of Christ has no effect! Bernard says, “See the head of Christ bowed down to kiss, his arms open to embrace, his pierced hands to bestow, his open side to love, the stretching of his whole body so as to spend his whole self.”² *On the contrary* woe to those who by their sins *crucify Christ in themselves*³ and add pain to the pain of his wounds!⁴ A third woe to those whose hearts cannot be softened by beating their breast, who are unable to rouse goodwill, and for whom such an outpouring of so much blood, such an enormous cost, is not enough to incite them to the virtue of doing good! Truly as *enemies of the cross of Christ* today they further blaspheme Christ, the Son of God, who sits at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. Complaining about them and the like, the Lord speaks through blessed Bernard, saying, “See, man, what I suffer for you. See if there is pain like that in which I am crucified. To you I cry, I who die for you. See the sufferings with which I am afflicted. See the nails by which I am pierced. Since there is such external pain, the interior blow is more severe since I know you are so ungrateful.”⁵

12. Take care then mother not to be ungrateful for such a benefit, nor indifferent towards such a price paid for you. Rather, place the crucified Jesus Christ *as a seal upon your heart*.⁶ Imprint Jesus your Spouse on your heart just like a seal in soft wax. Say with the Prophet, *My heart has melted like wax*.⁷ Place him *as a seal upon your arm*⁸ so that you never cease to do good and never tire of working for the name of the Lord. And when you have done many things, start at the beginning as if you have done nothing. Moreover if something sad, something grave, something loathsome, something bitter happens; or if indeed something good is stripped from you, hasten back to the crucified Jesus hanging on the cross. Look at the crown of thorns, the iron nails, the lance of his side. Contemplate there the wounds in his feet and the wounds in his hands, the wounds on his head, the wound in his side, and the wounds in his entire body. Call to mind the one who suffered in this way for you, who bore so much for you, who loved you so much. Believe me, at such a sight you will find joy straight away in every sadness; something light in every burden; something loveable in every loathsome thing; and something pleasant and sweet in every bitterness. And so with blessed Job you will

¹ Romans 8,32

² The editors were unable to identify this sentence in Saint Bernard’s works.

³ See Hebrews 6,6

⁴ See Psalm 68,27

⁵ From hymns attributed to Bernard, in FRANZ JOSEPH MONE, *Hymni Latini Medii Aevii*, I, p.172.

⁶ Song of Songs 8,6

⁷ Psalm 21,15

⁸ Song of Songs 8,6

begin to cry out and say, *The things that my heart did not want to touch*, compared to the anguish of the passion of Christ, now *are my food*.¹ This is as if to say, the good things that were insipid to my soul at first, have now become sweet and delightful for me because of the anguish of the passion of Christ that I see. Hence we read about a certain man who had converted to the Order. He became very impatient because of the harshness of the food and the other disciplines of the Order. When he became quite stressed because of his excessive impatience, he went before the image of the Crucified. There he began to reflect tearfully on the intolerable difficulties and works of the Order, the blandness of the food of bread and drink. Immediately blood began to flow from the side of the image. As he was crying and reflected on his difficulties, the image of Christ answered and said that whenever he felt some harshness in food or drink that he season it with the blood of Christ.²

CHAPTER VII

On the perfect love for God³

1. According to what the Lord inspired, handmaid of God, I taught you above about how to exercise you heart so that you can gradually ascend and progress *from strength to strength*.⁴ Now in the seventh chapter it remains to speak about the essence essence of the virtues, namely charity, which alone leads a man to perfection. Indeed to mortify the vices, to advance in grace, to pursue the highest perfection of all the virtues, there is nothing better to say and nothing more useful to ponder than love. Because of this, in his book on the contemplative life, Prosper says, "Love is the life of the virtues and the death of the vices."⁵ And *just as wax melts before the fire, so do the vices perish before love*.⁶ Love is such a virtue that it alone closed hell, it alone opened heaven, it alone gives the hope of salvation, and it alone makes one loveable to God. Love is such a virtue that it alone among the virtues is called *the* virtue. Whoever has love is rich, well off and blessed. Anyone without love is poor, a beggar and wretched.⁷ About the expression in Corinthians, *If I shall have no love*,⁸ the Gloss says, "Consider the greatness of love. If it is absent, all the other virtues are in vane. However if love is present all the virtues are present. The one who begins to have love will have the Holy Spirit."⁹ And blessed Augustine

¹ Job 6,7

² Cf. *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Minorum*, Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi),1897 under Bonaventure's predecessor, John of Parma, under the heading, *Qualiter pavit fraters cibo gloriae*. p.306 (line 25)to p.307 (line 11)

³ *De perfecta Dei caritate*

⁴ Psalm 83,8

⁵ PROSPER, *De vita contemplativa*, Book 3, c.13

⁶ Cf. Psalm 67,3

⁷ See Revelations 3,17+

⁸ 1 Corinthians 13,2

⁹ GO

says, “If virtue teaches us about a happy life, I would say that there is virtue at all except the supreme love of God.”¹ Charity is such a virtue because of all the virtues virtues it is to be pursued. And not just any love, but one love alone where God is loved above all things and one’s neighbour is loved for the sake of God.

2. Moreover in the gospel your Spouse himself teaches how you must love your Creator. He says, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*² Be carefully attentive, beloved handmaid of Jesus Christ, to the kind of love your beloved Jesus asks of you. Your beloved certainly wants you to give all your heart, all your soul, all you mind to his love, so that in all your heart, soul and mind, nothing else at all may possess any part of that love. Therefore what must you do to certainly *love the Lord your God with all your heart?* How should you love *with all your heart?* Listen to what blessed John Chrysostom teaches you. *To love God with all your heart* means that your heart be inclined to the love of nothing other than God; that you take no delight in any kind of splendour more than in God, neither in having honours, nor in having subjects.³ If however the love of your heart is taken up with any one of these, you indeed do not love God with all your heart.”⁴ I ask you, maid servant of Christ, to refuse to be deceived in love. If indeed you do love but not in God, or do not love for the sake of God, you surely do not love him with all your heart. Hence Augustine says, “Lord, he loves you less who loves something else as well as you.”⁵ If in fact you love something and in loving it you do not advance in the love of God, you do not indeed love with all your heart. If you love something, for love of which you overlook the things which you ought to observe for Christ, you do not indeed love God with all your heart. Therefore love the Lord your God with all your heart.

3. Not only is the Lord God Jesus Christ to be loved with *all one’s heart*, but also indeed with *all one’s soul*. In what way does one love God with all one’s soul. Listen to the teaching of blessed Augustine. He says, “*To love God with one’s whole soul* is to love him with the whole will without resistance. You certainly love God with all your soul when without resistance you freely do what you know the Lord your God wants and not what you want, nor what the world advises nor what the flesh prompts. You certainly love God with all your heart when, if it should be necessary, you freely risk your life for the love of Jesus Christ. Therefore love the Lord your God with all your soul, that is, conform your will to the divine will in all things.

4. Love your Spouse, the Lord Jesus, not only with all your heart, with all your soul, but also with *all your mind*. In what way do you love *with all your mind?* Listen again to the teaching of blessed Augustine. He says, “*To love God with all your mind* is to love him with all one’s memory without forgetfulness.”

¹ AUGUSTINE, *De morbus Ecclesiae catholicae*, Book I, c.15, n.25

² Matthew 22,37; Mark 12,30 and Luke 10,27

³ *non in honoribus, non in parentibus*; VINCK: family ties; JCOM: c'est ne s'attacher ni aux honneurs ni à ses propres parents de préférence à lui (not in honours nor in parents).

⁴ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilia in Mattheum 22,37*

⁵ AUGUSTINE, *De spiritu et anima*, c.35; *De diligendo Deo*, c.2

CHAPTER VII

On final perseverance

1. When someone has attained the beginning of all the virtues, he has not yet appeared glorious in the presence of God unless perseverance, the perfector¹ of the virtues is present. For no mortal at all, however perfect, is to be praised in his life unless the first good with which he began concludes in a good and happy end. Indeed final perseverance is “the perfector of the virtues, the nurturer of merit, and the mediator of reward.”² Hence blessed Bernard says, “Take away perseverance and strength will guarantee neither respect, favour nor praise.”³ It would be of little value for a man to be religious, patient and humble, devout and chaste; or that he love God and have all the other virtues, and yet he lack perseverance. Though all the virtues may run together, indeed only perseverance *receives the prize*;⁴ since it is not the one who begins, but *the one who perseveres who will be saved*.⁵ Hence John Chrysostom says, “What the use of the seeds in bloom if afterwards they languish?”⁶ As if to say: none at all.

2. Most beloved virgin of Christ, if then you have the virtues of the other good works, and indeed since you have many, persevere in them, advance in them. Bravely wage the warfare of Christ in them until death. Then when the last and final day of your life arrives, the crown of glory and honour will be given you as the recompense and reward of your work. And so Jesus Christ, your only beloved, speaks to you in Revelations. He says, *Be faithful until death and I shall give you the crown of life*.⁷ This crown is nothing other than the reward of eternal life, the attainment of which should inflame the desire of all Christians. Indeed it is so *great* nothing can equal it at all, just as blessed Gregory says.⁸ Such is its greatness, no one is able to gauge it. Lastly eternal life is so *long* and lasting that it can never end or finish. In the Song of Songs your beloved Spouse Jesus Christ invites you to this reward and

¹ *consummatrix*

² *Consumatrix virtutum, nutrix ad meritum, mediatrix ad praemium*

³ BERNARD, *Epistola* 129, n.2. The text here reads, *Tolle perseverantiam, nec obsequium nec beneficium gratiam, nec laudem fortitudo praestabit*. Strength or endurance. VINCK: Take away perseverance, and neither will obedience or kindness give rise to grace, nor steadfastness earn praise. JCOM: Otez la persévérance, et l'obéissance demeure sans récompense, les bienfaits ne trouvent plus grâce et la force ne mérite aucune louange. (Take perseverance, and obedience remains unrewarded, benefits no longer find grace and strength deserves no praise.) FEC: Take away perseverance, and no amount of obedience or beneficence will guarantee grace, nor will courage warrant praise.

⁴ See 1Corinthians 9,24

⁵ Matthew 10,22

⁶ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilia* 33 on Matthew.

⁷ Revelations 2,10

⁸ *Homilia in Evangelium*, Book II, hom.37, n.1

crown, saying: *Come from Lebanon, my bride, my friend. Come from Lebanon,¹ come and be crowned. Arise, therefore, friend of God, bride of Jesus Christ, dove of the eternal King. Come, hasten to the marriage of the Son of God, for the entire court of heaven awaits you, and everything is ready.*

3. Indeed a *splendid* and noble *servant* is ready to serve you. *Precious* and delectable *food* is prepared to restore you. *Pleasant* and most amicable *fellowship* is ready to rejoice with you. *Arise* therefore *and hasten* quickly to the wedding, because the *splendid servant* is ready there to serve you. That servant is none other than the angelic assembly. In fact, it is the Son of the eternal God himself, as he testifies about himself in the Gospel where he says, *Amen I tell you, he will gird himself and have them recline at table and going round he will serve them.*² Oh how great the glory will be then for the poor and abject when they have as their servant the Son of God, the supreme King, as well as the entire assembly of the host of the heavenly kingdom!

4. *Precious* and delectable *food* is prepared for you there to restore you. The Son of God himself lays the table with his own hands, as he says of himself in the Gospel, saying, *I prepare for you a kingdom just as my Father prepared it for me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom.*³ Oh how sweet and delicious is that food that *he has prepared in his kindness for the poor man of God!*⁴ Oh how blessed is the one who in the kingdom of heaven will eat that bread, who has been baked by the fire of the Holy Spirit in the oven of the virginal womb.⁵ *If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever.*⁶ At his own table the King of heaven feeds and restores his chosen ones with this kind of food and this kind of bread. As the Book of Wisdom says, *You have nourished your people with the food of angels and without any work you have given them the prepared bread of heaven, having in itself all delight and every sweetness of taste – according to each one's wish.*⁷ Behold, such is the refreshment at the divine table.

5. Nonetheless a *sweet* and most amicable *fellowship* has been prepared there to rejoice with you. Indeed Jesus will be there with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Mary will be there with the blossom bedecked multitude of Virgins. The heavenly host of Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors and all the elect will be there. Anyone who not be a member of such a most noble fellowship will be desolate indeed. If someone does not long to join this fellowship his desire is quite dead.

¹ Song of Songs 4,8. For the following references in this paragraph see Revelations 19,9; Matthew 22,4; Luke 14,17.

² Luke 12,37

³ Luke 22, 29 and 30

⁴ Psalm 67,11

⁵ *O beatus est ille qui in regno caelorum manudcabit panem illum, qui in clibano virginalis uteri conctus est igne Sancti Spiritus!* VINCK: this bread, prepared by the fire of the Holy Spirit in the secret of the virginal womb!; JCOM: les cieux ce pain cuit dans le four du sein virginal par le feu du Saint-Esprit ! (that bread baked in the oven virginal womb by the fire of the Holy Spirit!); FEC: the bread baked in the vessel of the virginal womb and fired by Holy Spirit.

⁶ John 6,52

⁷ Wisdom 16,20+

6. But you, Oh most splendid handmaid of Christ, I know indeed that you desire Christ. I know that with all men you strive for how you may join the company and embrace of the eternal King. And “now rouse up your heart and your soul and arouse your whole mind and ponder as much as you can. If there are individual good things to enjoy – think carefully – how delightful is the good that contains the enjoyment of all goods. If created life is good, how good is creator-life.¹ If good health is pleasant, how pleasant is that health that has made all health?”² “Who will enjoy this good? What will it be? And what won’t it be? Surely it will be whatever one wants. It will not be something one doesn’t want. Certainly there will be good things for body and soul, things *no eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor the heart of man understood.*³ Therefore, handmaid of God, why wander about in search of good things for your body and soul? Love the one good in which are all things good are. This good is enough. Desire the simple good, which is every good and is satisfying.”⁴

7. “What you love is there, my mother, and so is what you desire, oh happy virgin. What do you love, my mother, what do you desire happy virgin? Whatever you love and whatever you desire is there. If *beauty* delights you, *the just will shine like the sun.*⁵ If a *long and healthy life* delights you, eternal health is there, because *the just will live forever*⁶ and the *health of the just*⁷ is eternal. If *satiety* delights you, *they will be satisfied when the glory of God appears.*⁸ If *drunkenness* delights you, *they will be drunk from the richness of God’s house.*⁹ If *sweet music* delights you, the choirs of Angels play there, praising God endlessly. If *friendship* delights you, there the Saints love God more than themselves and one another as themselves, and God loves them more than they do themselves. If *harmony* delights you, there shall be one will among them all, because there shall be no will among them except the will of God. If *honour and riches* delight you, God *sets* his good and faithful servants and handmaids *over many things.*¹⁰ They shall be called and in fact will be sons and daughters of God. Where God will be, those *heirs of God and coheirs of Christ* will be there too.”¹¹

8. “What joy, or rather, how much joy where so much good of this kind is? Certainly, Lord Jesus, *no eye has seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man ascended* to this life. How much your Blessed will love you and rejoice over you in that blessed

¹ *vita creatrix*

² ANSELM, *Prologue*, c.24

³ 1 Corinthians 2,9

⁴ Anselm, *Prologue* c.25

⁵ Matthew 13,43

⁶ Wisdom 5,16

⁷ Psalm 36,39

⁸ Psalm 16,15

⁹ Psalm 35,9

¹⁰ Matthew 25, 21 and 23.

¹¹ Anselm, *Prologue* c.25

life.”¹ The more someone loves God here, the more he rejoices in God there. Therefore love God very much here so that you may rejoice very much there. May the love of God increase in you here, so that there you may be completely possessed by the joy of God. “Therefore may your mind ponder and your tongue speak; let your heart love it and your mouth talk of it. May your soul hunger for it and your flesh thirst for it. May your whole being desire it until you enter *into the joy of your God*”² and come to the embrace of your Beloved; until he leads you into the wedding chamber of your beloved Spouse, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns one God forever and ever. Amen.

¹ 1 Corinthians 2,9; referred by Anselm, loc. cit., c.26

² Matthew 25,21 cited in Anselm, loc. cit.