

Seven Dialogues By Bernardino Ochino

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Translator's note

This translation is based on the introduction, text and footnotes which were published by P. Costanzo Cargnoni O.F.M. Cap. In I Frati Cappuccini: Documenti e testimonianze del primo secolo, Edizioni Frate Indovino, Perugia, vol III/1, pp.445-530. The only additions to the notes made by the translator are references to Francis of Assisi: The Early Documents, edited by Regis Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., J. A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. and William J. Short O.F.M. Conv., New York City Press, New York, London, Manila, for an English version of quotations from the Writings or Biographies of St Francis.

Introduction by Castanzo Cargnoni O.F.M. Cap.

In the world he was called Tommasini but became known as Ochino because his father was a barber in the district of Oca in Siena. Having entered the Observants at a young age, he passed over to the new reform of the Capuchins in 1534 and because of his gifts he was elected superior general twice (1538 and 1541). He studied scholastic philosophy and in 1510 received a doctorate in medicine in Perugia. He was a famous preacher who was idolised by the masses. Because he wanted a kind of reform in the Church that was based on the Gospel he slowly became captivated by heretical reform teachings which forced him to flee to Switzerland to the Calvinists in 1542. The excessive independence of his teachings put him at odds with the various Protestant confessions and his life became a continual flight from one place to another until obscure and abandoned he died at Slavkov in Moravia in 1564.

Bernardino Ochino was one of the most influential architects of the Capuchin Constitutions which were drafted in Rome at S. Eufemia in 1536. However, the writings that he produced before his dramatic flight to Geneva are still of great importance in defining the very dynamic influence of evangelical spirituality amongst the early Capuchins. Between 1536 and 1542 Ochino produced booklets of Dialogues and

Sermons that contained various spiritual approaches within the Catholic reform movement, especially those of the group of Italian “Spirituals” who followed tendencies of “evangelism”, a “Pauline” approach and the teaching of the “benefit of Christ”. (“beneficio di Cristo”).

Even if the greater part of modern historical research tends to see in his writings many doctrinal ambiguities that anticipate the heterodox choices that Ochino made, they still remain substantially within the ambit of Catholic teaching and document many of the religious and spiritual characteristics of the early followers of the Capuchin reform.

Because it is so scarce and difficult to consult we reproduce the entire work of the Seven Dialogues. The Dialogues were produced between 1540 and 1542. Some of them contain conversations that Ochino had with Caterina Cibo in March of 1538. In April of 1539, Tullio Crispoldi, a relative of G. M. Gilberti the Bishop of Verona, had already had a copy of this work prepared for Fredrick II at Verona. The topics were resolute and had their basis in Christ Crucified with uplifting suggestions of a style of mysticism that stressed a journey of faith which was ascetical and deeply interior and that led to a radical spiritualism without excluding expressions that were more characteristic of the Franciscan and Capuchin method of devotion.

1. Dialogue on the method of loving God

This is the first of a series of seven Dialogues and it clearly expresses the spirit of a spirituality which nourished the aristocratic circles which were common in the early sixteenth century in Italy, such as the Company of Divine Love and the Viterbo Circle.

To be in love with God meant not seeking the vane and curious teachings of proud speculation, but to seek in pure simplicity whatever might kindle the fire of divine love in the heart going beyond natural, sensual and rational love. The means of achieving this are listed by Ochino in ascending sequence: creatures as a ladder to God, “lectio divina”, devout books, the lives of the saints and especially the life of Christ, His virtues and perfections. However, it is necessary to believe that God loves us and thus to savour the divine perfections. The best means of loving God always remains meditation on the Passion of Christ, since the greatest instance of love is the suffering and death of Jesus on the Cross. The important elements of the Franciscan and Capuchin method of Christocentric and Trinitarian devotion can be most adequately summed up in these techniques as an extemporary commentary on numbers 3-4 and 63-64 of the Capuchin Constitutions of 1536.

Conversationalists: The Duchess and Father Bernardino

4013 *Duchess* – Since everything depends on the love of God as Christ says in Matthew chapter 20,¹ it means that all perfection consists in loving Him. I would be obliged if you would tell me what I ought to do in order to love my Lord God.

Father Brother Bernardino – No one enquires how they should love creatures, indeed they love them even too much without a teacher. We are so cold in loving God that many not only do not love Him but blaspheme, despise and vilify Him.

Duchess – Indeed there are many to whom it appears impossible to love Him, even though all goodness comes from God: all creatures are at our service and are the effects and flame of love. Because of this every soul should feed and nurture itself on love as the salamander lives in fire.²

4014 *Father Brother Bernardino* – Your Ladyship consider how dark our blindness is when even though all things are contained in God we love only one of them. In the first place there is no malice in God, nor any defect, what is more (He is) infinite goodness. Indeed, as Christ says in St Matthew chapter 19 “There is only one who is good”,³ that is of His essence, and in Him alone is real goodness. There is some small amount of goodness in creatures, but it comes from God and is shared out by Him. In God there is the highest and infinite wisdom, beauty, truth power, mercy, love, charity and sweetness. If He tests us sometimes it is because He loves us.⁴

God says: “You have cost me too much; I gave my own Son up to death for you. I saw that you were going to hell and I did not want you to be lost, even though at times I send you some adversity that is contrary to your sensuality”. What more can I say! God is all goodness.⁵ All the sweetness and beauty that is to be found in creatures is contained in God, purified of all evil and of the highest perfection. Your Ladyship, consider how you should love.

[To love God is easy]

4015 *Duchess* – The greatest thing is that loving God is easy since there is nothing that we are more capable of doing than loving. This is good since it is only by means of love that we can acquire grace, grow and reach heaven. God does not expect blood from us, nor our life, but love, which is all that will make us happy and in the present life the love of God is sweeter and gentler than anything else. Love is so unadulterated, that whereas

¹ In fact Matthew chapter 20 speaks about the workers who were sent into the vineyard. The passage refers rather to Matthew 22, 36-40.

² The passage is copied from the *Dialogue* by B. Cordoni [Milan 1539], f. 135v: “Our delight is composed totally of love. Like the salamander it glows in fire and feeds, is nourished and lives on the same fire.” - Regarding the meaning of the symbol of the Salamander cf. F. Pincelli, *Mondo simbolico*, Venetia 1670, 307; Ugo di S. Vittore, *De bestiis et aliis rebus*, c. 16; “Salamanda ... vivit in mediis flammis sine dolore et consumptione, et non solum non uritur, sed etiam exstinguit incendium”. (*PL*. 1771, 65); S. Isidoro. *Etymologiarum libriXXII*, lib. 8, c. 3 (*PL* III, 233).

³ Mt 19, 17 (not Mt 19, 19 as in *I frati cappuccino* p. 488, note 3).

⁴ Cf. Heb 12, 6; Rev. 3, 19.

⁵ Compare this with the prayer of St Francis: “All powerful, most holy, most high, supreme God: all good, supreme good, totally good, you Who *alone are good* ...”. The Praises to be Said at All the Hours, FA:ED I, p. 162.

the other virtues are made up of a certain amount of mediocrity, which once it passes they forfeit all their value, love of God is without limits. The greater it is the better it is. Therefore, everyone should love Him and put Him above anything else, and never leave Him in good times or in bad, whether convenient or inconvenient, in pleasant or unpleasant circumstances, for the sake of honour or dishonour, but rather as Paul says in chapter eight of Romans: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?”⁶

Father Brother Bernardino – The three Divine Persons always love the supreme good with intense love. The angels and saints never desist from loving with perfect love. Even visible creatures always turn to loving God in the way that is possible for them, even though they lack mature judgement. The human person who is so greatly loved by God and for whom God made all things and endowed with the capacity to reason ought to love Him above all else, was the only one to pervert the order of charity by not only not loving Him above all else but by placing the vilest of creatures above Him, despising Him, treading on Him and treating Him contemptibly.

Duchess – Perhaps this is because we do not love Him more than we love ourselves.

Father Brother Bernardino – If this was the case we would not be to blame.

[Natural, sensual and rational love]

4016 *Duchess* – Let us turn a little to acts of natural reason. We are inclined to love ourselves with greater love than anything else. Indeed all other love is based on the love of self. Perhaps the reason why we love ourselves above everything else is because natural things never change, nor can we find a creature to which love does not come naturally. A person would not love God by nature if his nature had not come from God. An eagle may fly as high as it likes but cannot go beyond its powers, especially if it has no wings or is tied to the earth. In like manner a soul can rise on high in love as much as it likes but not go beyond itself in such a way as to love something more than itself especially without the wings of virtue or if bound to base things by inordinate affections.

Father Brother Bernardino – I am not referring to the natural love by which we should love ourselves and the things which are good, useful and pleasing to us. Nor am I speaking about sensual love through which we cannot reach God because He is not a sense object. Such kinds of love are natural for us and do not depend on our free choice. They are neither worthy of praise nor blame. I am speaking about free and rational love through which we can love what we chose, especially God, above ourselves, as reason directs us.

On the wings of love the soul can fly above itself even to the point of loving the infinite God and hating and despising itself.⁷ If a good citizen can and should give his

⁶ Rom 8, 35.

⁷ This is the Augustinian principle of the love of God to the point of despising oneself. Ochino distinguishes between natural and sensual love and free and rational love, a distinction that is often to be found in tracts on divine love. It is also present in Giovanni da Fano, B. Cordoni, and Henry Herp. The

very life for the nation and love the nation more than himself leaving aside every other love as many who act out of natural motivation propose, say and do,⁸ how much more can and should a good Christian offer his life for the heavenly fatherland, indeed for God, and love Him more than himself as did the martyrs and all the saints. Furthermore, every great sinner can raise himself to love God more than himself in the present life by means of divine grace which is never lacking to anyone. If this were not so, how could a sinner be brought back to loving God above himself? No one who was in sin could make peace with God and regain the grace that had been lost. Is there anyone who if he rejects the senses and nature that cannot overcome himself for the love of God and give up material things, children, delights, honours, friends and status and even his very self and his own life,⁹ his existence and all that he has or would have,¹⁰ if not in deed at least in intent?

Duchess – I love creatures without effortlessly yet I cannot love God in the same way.

[Those who are true friends of God]

4018 *Father, Brother Bernardino.* - It is a natural and sensual thing to love friends and relatives as well as everything that is useful, convenient, delightful and honourable. However, it is easy to love things like this and this is how those who are sad love God. Not as a father on account of His goodness but like a slave because it is useful and procures temporal goods as an avaricious person would.

There are many who love Him because of the pleasure it brings to certain experiences. This is lustful love and not sincere, pure, divine, spiritual and holy love. There are others who love God for some honour or dignity which they gain as if they were acknowledged by God. Finally, there are those who love God not in as much as he is goodness itself, not for his honour and glory, but only because He gives them something good, or they hope that He will. In the end these people do not love God, but themselves, regarding themselves as the final good. They have become gods in their own opinion, and do not enjoy God as their ultimate end, but think of themselves. They make use of God to serve their own purpose. Such love is not difficult, nor meritorious or virtuous but vicious.

God should be loved more than anything else and more than ourselves and with sincere and pure love for His honour and glory alone.¹¹ In spite of the reasons which have been stated, our emotions are not inclined towards this, nor are our natural appetites which tend towards our own welfare and even repulse perfect love which despises everything on account of God. Thus, love is opposed to how we feel and all our appetites and natural desires and it is virtuous, meritorious and holy with great difficulty. Loving

latter defines intellectual love as love by choice: “quia fit cum propria cognitione et libera electione” (because it is made with one’s own knowledge and free choice), a love that, according to Bernard, has four degrees (cf. *theologia mysticae* lib. I c. 89, ed. Coloniae 1556, f. CXIII va).

⁸ “Naturali” means those who live by natural law without yet having Christ’s grace.

⁹ Cf Lk 14, 26; Mt 19, 19.

¹⁰ In the text; *puollo*.

¹¹ This is the search for pure love, which is the fundamental principle of Franciscan and Capuchin ascetics and mysticism as noted in Giovanni da Fano’s *Art of Loving* and other writings.

God is much more difficult because through the sin of our first parents we have fallen into a frenzy of loving present things and ignorance of divine things. Although it is difficult to love God above ourselves it suffices that it is possible for everyone with the assistance of divine grace which is not lacking to anyone.

[Perfect loving is difficult]

4019 – *Duchess* – So loving God above everything else is not easy, but difficult.

Father Brother Bernardino – Indeed, to regard oneself as nothing for the sake of God is very difficult. It surpasses and goes beyond all difficulties.¹² However, loving God perfectly is very meritorious. It is so difficult for us because it includes all the other difficulties in the present life. However, the person who climbs to this degree of love of God does not experience difficulty in anything else, indeed all else is sweet and gentle. However, because every other good depends on the love of God, every difficulty and evil comes from not loving Him. Even the Angels, although they were spiritual substances, found it difficult to love God above self when they were on their journey. Still it is much more difficult for us. By means of the great help of divine grace it is easy for the saints and many in the present life to give all their love to God.

Duchess – I always want to love God more than creatures, and yet sometimes I find more enjoyment in created things and greater sweetness than in God.

Father Brother Bernardino – God does not require us to offer sweet love but love that is constant and strong; not a love that is sensual but spiritual. Love does not consist in enjoyment. Indeed, a person can love God perfectly without enjoyment. Love consists in strength and power, not in enjoyment which often comes from self love.

4020 – *Duchess* – I love many creatures and I cannot love others and you will say that is because they are not to my taste. However, we have no control over what we like.

Father Brother Bernardino – If sensual love is not under our control, spiritual love is completely deliberate and thus we can still love our enemies. Who is there who is not able to do good things to those who do him evil? If he cannot do this by deeds, he can at least do it in his heart and freely say to himself: “If I can do it I will not omit it.” To do this is being Godlike. We can all give¹³ our all for Jesus Christ at least from the heart and say: “If I could I would give my life for God, if I had the chance, and out of love for Him when required and God wished it to be so. I would choose any suffering forever and deprive myself of all wellbeing, as long as I knew that it pleased God.”

Duchess – I see that it is possible for us to love God even though it is difficult. I want to know what I should do to give Him all my love.

¹² This verb (annichilare = to annihilate) is often used by Ochino. I believe he was inspired by Cordoni’s *Dyalogo*. Ch 35 which says, “How a person discovers perfect peace and by means of this finds God through annihilation of himself” (f. 218v – 222v) and other chapters.

¹³ Possiamo = we can.

[The best way to love God]

4021 – *Father Brother Bernardino* – What dose Your Ladyship think is the best way?

Duchess – A person cannot divide himself into two parts. Christ says in chapter six of St Matthew: “You cannot serve two masters.”¹⁴ He is referring to people who are opposed to him and his enemies. It is impossible to serve God and the world with all your heart. The more love we give to the world the more we take away from God. Therefore whoever wants to approach God with all his heart should leave himself and all creatures behind! It is impossible for a person to remain bound by earthly love and rise up to God in heaven. The soul that stands alone and lives for love is a force that rises¹⁵ towards his Creator being stripped of every other love.

Father Brother Bernardino – A wise person always considers the motive that moved him to act. However, what objective moves a person to despise the world?¹⁶

Duchess – The praise and glory of the world.

Father Brother Bernardino – In that case they would not be philosophers if they did not act for the sake of virtue.

Duchess – Many indeed were motivated by virtue.

Father Brother Bernardino – However, at first they loved that virtue or human glory and were motivated by that to despise the world. A good Christian should be motivated by the love of Jesus Christ to despise everything, and consequently come to hate himself out of love for God, because hatred is always brought to birth by love and not love by hatred. It is true that a person could despise the world without loving God and this is because compared to God the world is nothing and lacks any goodness while being filled with all kind of evil. Whoever does this will soon discover the love of God. This is the first way of coming to love God, that is, as He is in Himself. However, I would like Your Ladyship to tell me what else you think.

[Knowledge precedes love]

4023 *Duchess* – You can love something that you do not see because you have some knowledge of it. However, it is impossible for us to love something of which we have no knowledge. In this matter the intellect does a service for the will which is the queen. The intellect goes ahead of the will and sheds enlightenment of the kind that is impossible for the will to give to something if the intellect has not in the first place imparted this knowledge. Therefore, whoever ascends towards God must first of all reach the state of

¹⁴ Mt 6, 24.

¹⁵ In the text *saglia*

¹⁶ This is an important concept that is completely positive. Love is the source of detachment and mortification.

the Cherubim and after that of the Seraphim, that is, he must be like the Cherubim before being like the Seraphim, having enlightenment of knowledge concerning God first and then Loving Him.¹⁷

In the celestial hierarchy the Holy Spirit presupposes the Son of God, just as love presupposes knowledge. Thus, we are only able to love what we know. The better we know the good qualities of someone, the more we love them, as we know from experience. If we see a person from a distance, we only love him a little because we do not know him well. This is the way it is when I only see a shadow or an image. If I see him personally I love him better. In practice I love him more when I see his virtues in the goodness of his life. I love these good qualities more the better I know him. This is why I think we love God so little, because we are so poorly enlightened concerning God, pay Him little attention, do not think about Him and do not study anything beyond the present life.

This is just what Paul wrote in the eighth chapter of the First Letter to the Corinthians: “Now we see God dimly, imperfectly and in an unclear way through the mirror of creatures”.¹⁸ He said this again in the first chapter of Romans.¹⁹ We are like owls²⁰ that cannot look at the light of the sun. God is infinite, immense and boundless while our intellect is finite and limited, locked in the prison of this darkened body and infected by the sin of our first parents,²¹ and many times by our own malice that blinds us. Yet in the midst of such great darkness we imperfectly see God, who, as it is written, “Lives in unapproachable light, adorned with light imperfectly, making darkness His hiding place.”²² We see from experience that God is so little loved because He is so little known.

4024 The Three Divine Persons who have one and the same perfect and infinite knowledge of the divine essence love it with an infinite love that corresponds to that infinite enlightenment. Because they dwell in the brightness of day, the Blessed see God with the brilliance of midday and thus love Him perfectly. The person who sees that infinite goodness more clearly loves more intensely. On the other hand, since those poor souls who are damned dwell in the darkness of night without the living enlightenment of God they do not love Him.

The rest of us live in the shadows and have little enlightenment concerning God even though we partly know Him as Paul wrote in chapter three of the First Letter to the Corinthians²³ and thus we love Him only a little. In the earthly paradise we would have

¹⁷ According to the celestial hierarchy as described by the Pseudo-Dionysius the title Cherubim denotes an attitude of contemplating God, while the title Seraphim denoted the adoration and fervour with which the spirits of the first and highest angelic hierarchy dwell in the presence of God. Cf. Dionysius the Areopagite. *Complete Works*, 99 ff.

¹⁸ Cf. 1Cor 13, 12.

¹⁹ Cf. Rom 1, 18-22: it is because of the sin of our first parents that we find ourselves subject to God’s anger since they did not ascend to know and adore the Creator by means of creatures which are the sign of divine perfection.

²⁰ *Nottue* = nottole

²¹ The first parents are Adam and Eve.

²² Cf. 1Tim 6, 16; Ps 17, 12 (*Vulg*): *Et posuit tenebras latibulum suum*” (*He made darkness his hiding place*).

²³ Cf 1Cor 13, 9.

had more enlightenment and we would have loved Him more.²⁴ However we are now closer to hell than to paradise, we know Him only slightly and love Him slightly.

Those who in the present life have greater enlightenment concerning God have greater love, for example, the Madonna, Paul, the Apostles. Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Gregory, Francis and others.²⁵ We love Him so little because we do not try to know Him. We are attentive to nothing but the world. We talk, enjoy and think about nothing else but the world. We do not study Sacred Scripture or the life of Jesus Christ. There are people who forget about God and His love and His many gifts. We do not believe any longer and we live for things in the present as if there were no other life but this one. This means that we have little love for God. However, as far as I can see, the best remedy for loving God would be for people to make the effort to know Him and to contemplate Him sometimes.

[How to contemplate God so as to love Him]

4025 *Father Brother Bernardino* – What should we think about God?

Duchess – The God is completely simple, eternal, necessary, infinite, immense, enlightened, and unlimited. We ought to think about how the Father was not generated, how by means of his fruitful memory he brought forth the Son and communicated all his perfections to him so that they will all be in him. We should also think of how the Father and the Son breathed and produced the Holy Spirit by means of their fruitful will and communicated everything to him so that he lacked no perfection. We should think of how the three divine Persons possess the identical essence even though they are distinct individuals each on being absolute.²⁶ We should consider how among the three divine Persons there is identity, simultaneity and equality, unified thinking in the divine mind and what this implies. We should consider how it is possible for God, with sure and certain knowledge, foresees *ab aeterno* future contingent things that depend on our free will because we are free. We should consider how God having determined everything *ab aeterno* is immutable in what he had determined. When we think about God we ought to think about things like these that will give us the strength to ascend towards divine love.

[The simple are stealing the Kingdom of God]

[“*Indocti rapiunt regnum Dei*”]

4026 *Father Brother Bernardino* – If the situation was as your Ladyship describes it then only those who were educated could love God. I maintain that a simple old lady

²⁴ *Aremo* is an ancient form of *avremmo*.

²⁵ Note this hierarchy among the saints. Paul the Apostle comes directly after the Madonna (Ochino was infatuated by St Paul after the manner of the “Paulianism” of his day), then the Apostles (the mention of the Apostles was fundamental to the key movements of reform in the Church), then the four Western Fathers and finally Francis as the special witness to seraphic ardour and all the other saints.

²⁶ This is scholastic theological language roughly translated into simple expressions. The last adjectives resemble those used in the *Circolo* by Francesco di Jesi.

could love God as much as the best educated person in the world.²⁷ Having information like that does not help love. It leads to speculating, which is an obstacle. When the soul is occupied with such exalted matters it does not think of love and so remains arid and cold just like those who are worldly wise concerning whom Paul speaks in the first chapter of Romans and says that although they have some speculative knowledge of God, they do not glorify him as God or thank him but become vain in their thoughts and their hearts become darkened.²⁸

Lucifer enjoyed great enlightenment from God, and we read in Ezekiel chapter twenty-eight that he was filled with wisdom.²⁹ However he did not turn towards God with love. What is the benefit in speculating about everything that concerns God in order to understand it when we do not love God?³⁰ Therefore it is wrong to want to know curious things about God that do not help to make us love God. We call such knowledge speculative because it supports understanding. Useful knowledge is that which helps us to love,³¹ because it thinks about God as the supreme good, who loves us and takes care of us and who sent his Son to the cross just out of love for us. These thoughts help us to contemplate in a way that we come to love God. This knowledge can easily be acquired by those who are simple and uneducated for theirs is the kingdom of heaven as Christ said in chapter three of Matthew.³² Too much education and subtle speculation impede the love of God. That is why David said in the Psalm: “Because I have not known learning, I will enter into the powers of the Lord and into the foreseen stigmata of Christ.”³³

Duchess - Please tell how can knowing such things help towards divine love?

[Creation is a staircase to God]

4027 *Father Brother Bernardino* – Firstly, we do not consider created things just under the aspect of them being nothing when compared to God and so we despise them, but we should also consider them as a shining mirror of the divine goodness, wisdom, power,

²⁷ Note St Bonaventure’s famous reply to Brother Giles: “Brother Giles said: “Can an ignorant person love God as much as an educated person?” The General replied: “A little old lady could love God more than a master of theology.” Then Brother Giles got up and with a fervent spirit went into the part of the garden that faced the city and shouted; “A little old lady who is simple and uneducated can love the Lord God more than Brother Bonaventure.” (Cf. *Chron. XXIV Gen.*, in *AF III*, 101).

²⁸ Cf. Rom. 1, 21. See also B. Cordoni *Dialogo* f. 231r-v. *Love*: The reason is this. Since the knowledge and wisdom of the world creates an obstacle between God and the soul because of which the soul cannot come close to God nor receive divine enlightenment. Worldly wisdom advances by means or argumentation and, reasoning and syllogisms and other such things and does not trust God as much as it trusts what can be proved by human reason ...”

²⁹ Cf. Ez. 28, 12. Christian tradition applies this passage to the fall of Lucifer.

³⁰ In the text it says *nullo amore (without any love)*. This is a concept that underlies all Franciscan and Capuchin intellectual activity; study and knowledge without charity does not amount to anything, rather it destroys. Cf. *Const.* 1536, n. 123; *The Imitation of Christ* Bk 1, ch. 2, 4, “If I knew everything that was in the world and lacked charity, what would that profit me before God”?

³¹ The distinction between speculative and helpful knowledge is important to Ochino’s way of thought. Cf. B. Nicolini, *Il persiero di B. Ochino*, Napoli, 1939.

³² Actually it is Mt. 11, 25. This thought is also included in *Const.* 1536, n. 4 and well developed by Cordoni e.g. in chapter 24 of the *Dialogo*: “To the extent that a faithful soul loves God consummately and completely, God loves her and increases his treasures in her.”

³³ Cf. Ps 70, 15-16 (*Vulg.*)

beauty, love and the other divine attributes which we come to know through creatures (as in chapter one of Romans).³⁴ Your Ladyship ought to visit the beauty of creatures, not stopping with this, but being aroused and lifted up by this to the beauty of what is divine, thinking that all the beauty of creation is nothing when compared to the beauty of God.

You should make a ladder out of the creatures and use it to rise up in thought to the divine beauty in heaven, saying: “If such sweetness can be found in the turbulent streams and bitter bareness of creatures what will happen when I taste the infinite ocean of love? What will it be like to behold the divine wisdom by means of which an infinite number of worlds could be governed, if the governing of this world seems to be amazing? O how great is God’s tireless power and strength by means of which he created the universe out of nothing and preserves everything and could instantly produce and destroy an infinite number of worlds? For certain God’s goodness, mercy, clemency and sweetness are great, that while foreseeing our great sins, not only waits for us, but is always calling us to repentance, forgiving each mistake if we change.

4028 Who could express even a thousandth part of the love that our sweet Jesus Christ who is God has shown and continues to show towards us? As our good Father, he not only gave us existence, but by always preserving us he governs us and cares for in a special way catering for us by means of his creatures. Raising our minds to the divine attributes helps us to love God.

Sometimes you need to think about the beauty and variety of so many flowers and fruit, pearls and jewels, and precious stones, gold, silver and other lower creatures. Going up from this you should contemplate the light of the stars, the sun and the other heavenly bodies. From this go on to contemplate the beauty of the soul especially when it has been clothed with virtues and enriched by the spiritual gifts of enlightenment and grace, With the mind’s eye go on to see the blessed and the angelic spirits, and beginning with the angels go on to the archangels, from choir to choir until you reach the Seraphim.

If you are still able you might cast a glance at the Mother of God and behold her beauty. This would be enough for our strength at first and they would have been well rewarded. Your Ladyship, if you were happy to see what you did on earth what will it be to see what is in heaven? If you permitted to rise in vivid thought, I would not say to Christ’s divinity, but just to his glorious humanity and to see his holy stigmata and great love, to behold his loving, happy, divine face, on which the angels desire to look,³⁵

Nevertheless, the beauty, sweetness, goodness, love and all the creatures as they are³⁶ here amount to nothing when compared with God. Indeed, the divine attributes exceed all created things infinitely and beyond all proportion.

Duchess - Is there another of coming to know God that will help with loving him?

Father Brother Bernardino - Without doubt and it is more perfect.

Duchess, - How?

³⁴ In the text *N I Ch*. The quote from St Paul in Titus 3, 9.

³⁵ The text has *vardare* (for *videre* – to see) which is obviously Veneto dialect. This passage contains the Franciscan spirit of contemplating the beauty of creatures up to the supreme love of the Seraphim. The beauty of the Madonna and the beauty of Christ’s humanity go beyond tis. The last sentence is a quote from 1 Pet, 1, 12.

³⁶ The text has *é not sono*.

[“lectio divina” devout books and the example of the saints]

4029 *Father Brother Bernardino* - It consists in reading books, not those that contain poetry, history, philosophy and the wisdom of the world, but Sacred Scripture, the lives of the saints and their actions and work, their great fervour and their wise and burning words.³⁷ The sparks of the fire are contained in these books as well as the fervour of the individuals.³⁸ Thus as we read them they light a fire within us. Therefore, the Prophet said: “In my meditation a fire shall flame out”³⁹ that is of divine love.

If books about the dead arouse us so deeply, stories about the living will do so ever more. O how greatly listening to talk about someone who burns with divine love helps us to love God! Just as when heated iron is taken out of the furnace it sheds sparks everywhere, someone who is on fire with the love of God sheds sparks of love through all his emotions, especially by words that come from the heart, like burning flames that ignite the person who hears the words. Living example moves more than words alone. Thus, acting like the saints and those who are perfect greatly helps falling in love with God.⁴⁰

Duchess - I believe that this would be most helpful for quickly coming to know God’s goodness and his divine attributes, and for offering him all of our love, thinking about the life of Christ and what he said. This agrees with what he said in chapter nine of John: that he is the door through which one enters into divine love.⁴¹

[Converting ourselves to the life of Jesus Christ]

4030 *Father Brother Bernardino* – Although in creating and safeguarding the world God had shown a spark of his power, goodness, justice, mercy, wisdom and some of his other attributes, nevertheless to unite himself to mankind he used very humble words and loving emotions, living and dealing with us for thirty three years, teaching us the way to heaven, and suffering a lengthy and shameful death for us; he had only revealed a spark of his goodness, mercy and love, that is an infinite ocean. Therefore, by means of creatures a simple Christian can have a thousand times more enlightenment about God and his attributes than all the philosophers and wise men in the world. Therefore, we should all ask pardon from creatures and say to the world: “I leave you aside and I go to Jesus Christ.” Thus, as it is impossible for fire to remain alight in water, it is also impossible for divine love to burn and abide in a worldly heart.

Thus, you should set yourself and everything else aside if you want to approach Jesus Christ. It is necessary to collect your thoughts and your strength which, up to the present have been dispersed over creatures, and fix them on God and say to yourself: “I

³⁷ These are important elements of Capuchin pedagogy and formation. All who wrote the annals of the Order were inspired by these topics. See also: *Alb.* N. 67; *Const.* 1536, nn. 4, 122, 135 etc.

³⁸ *Ebbono* is an ancient form of *ebbero*.

³⁹ Ps. 38, 4 (*Vulg.*)

⁴⁰ This is a fundamental principle of Capuchin pedagogy that can be seen clearly in the ancient, traditional practices of the noviciate and the chronicles and annals of the Order. The same thought is put forward by Cordoni; “In putting these loving aspirations into practice the more words that are produced the more flames will be generated that will lead the soul to God.,, This is the Spirit of the Lord, which enters into the word that has been spoken and turns it into a flame of fire.” *Dialogo* (f. 184v, 190r).

⁴¹ Cf. Jn. 10, 9.

have served the world too much; I am also one of God's creatures who is obliged to love him in various ways. O being a worldly person, I have known you all my life and you have always tricked me! O putrid body, which will soon be a vile sack of worms, up to the present I have laboured for you, and done nothing for you sister my soul, may you be damned and whatever power you still have. It is better that I change my way of life and conduct. Arise I do not wish to sing about vanities, wealth, pleasures but, from now on, to speak about nothing but God. I have spoken for a long time about the world. I do not want to hear, taste, smell or think about anything but God. Therefore, I always want to have him before my eyes."⁴²

Duchess – What ought we to think about Christ in order to be enlightened by God so that we may give him all of our love?

[Think about the virtues and perfections of Christ]

4031 *Father Brother Bernardino* – Think about his deep humility, exalted and sublime wisdom, extreme poverty, long-lasting patience, humble obedience, ample charity, sweet mercy, bitter penance, vigils, abstinence, fervent prayers and other virtues that can be contemplated in his words, deeds and actions.

If, like a real spouse, the soul longs for Christ and gazes into his eyes and experiences a little of his love and what he has suffered for her, when she sees his burning tears, the warm heart-felt sighs that are coming from his breast, the loving blood and his great thirst for her salvation it will be impossible for her not to love him. O that we would be able to recall Christ's entire life with our mind, pondering it until his ascension into heaven, recalling all his words, tears and sighs, fasting and abstinence, journeys, prayers, disgrace, shame, persecution, scourging, buffeting, blows, heart-felt sadness and all of his love and have all of these come together in a treasury of memories that would do nothing but kindle divine love.⁴³

Why is it necessary to say so much? All that Christ suffered and endured was always out of love for us. O how blind, cold, obstinate, and hard you are not to be always on fire with divine love, since the entire world is filled with fire; all creatures are at your service! There is no better way to start a fire than with fire and no better way to kindle divine love than with love.

We would receive countless benefits, gifts and graces in addition to what we have received if we had not turned them down.⁴⁴ The Eternal Father gave his only Son in the flesh to be an example, light, mirror, payment, food, life, death which was an act of love by any standard. He gave us everything.⁴⁵ He has not given us some kind of benefits, but

⁴² This is a wonderful page that combines the basic attitude of Franciscan detachment with Capuchin concrete popular expression. It contains the teaching of *docta ignorantia*, "(learned ignorance)" saying goodbye to creatures, farewell to the world, while the expression "my putrid body" is an expression taken from the literature of "human misery". Cf. C. Cargoni, *Fonte, tendenze e sviluppi* cit. 355 note 195. The method of always thinking and speaking of God is set out in the *Const.* 1536 nn. 3, 45, 65, 90 etc.

⁴³ Thus recalling, meditating on and holding Christ's virtues in our heart, especially the thought of his Passion and death, will give rise to divine love.

⁴⁴ That is stopped, blocked, obstructed them.

⁴⁵ Cf. Rom. 8, 32; Col. 2, 3. Compare the praise given to Christ here with *Const.* 1536 and the *Circolo* by Francesco da Jesi together with note 52. Cordoni wrote "... The Eternal Father could not have done

some of the infinite love by means of which the soul could experience the kind of sweetness that would provide strength for what the body had to endure as it went towards God. Yet we think very little and in a superficial manner about this.⁴⁶

[To believe in the love of God]

4032 *Duchess* – I believe that this is more advantageous than anything else for gaining perfect faith in divine love and its benefits, and that we believe that God always loves us with infinite, continual, sincere, gratuitous love and that he does everything out of love for us, and that he gave his precious Son for us on the cross, and that everything that is good for us depends on him and that we are bound to love him. However, we think very little about this and are wanting in faith. We think that it is enough if we profess it occasionally with the lips.

Father Brother Bernardino – Your Ladyship has revealed all that we are doing wrong. I think that our love is as strong as our faith. Because our faith is weak, our love is weak.⁴⁷

Duchess – Tell me is there anything other love that a gentle spirit could think about to help him to give all his love to God?

[To meditate on the divine attributes]

4033 *Father Brother Bernardino* – One could think about the goodness, justice, mercy, sweetness, compassion, wisdom, beauty, truth and power of God and other similar divine attributes. Avoid thinking about how infinite they are and about other subtleties and unusual aspects of these things and other useless things. These make divine love seem stupid. We should be like a baby who is drinking milk from his mother and is embracing and hugging her and is all taken up with the taste of the milk. He is not concerned whether it is white or black, if it is hot or cold, all his attention is on the taste. Our soul should forget itself, be absorbed in God and forget what does not pertain to the love of God. It ought to be completely immersed in love and in what will help to acquire it.⁴⁸

Duchess – is there anything else in God that might help in making us love him besides his love and attributes?

Father Brother Bernardino – His nature is an infinite source, ocean and spring from which all the divine attributes come. Everything good is rooted in these.

anything better for us than to give us Christ his blessed Son, since in giving him to us he was giving himself. When he gave us his beloved Son he was giving us everything and all goodness.” (Dialogo, F. 147v, 148r).

⁴⁶ Here *vi*, in the text *si*.

⁴⁷ Believing in order to love is a typical expression of St John, cf. 1 Jn. 3, 16; 4, 16. Faith is one of the basic points in *The Art of Union* by Giovanni da Fano (cf. ch 13 where he is writing about the Purgative Way). In chapter 42 of the *Dialogue* Cordoni wrote: “God will look for faith and love rather than any other kind of knowledge. The one who can really penetrate God’s deepest secrets is the one who humbles himself the most and submits his intellect to faith.” (and can unite himself to God by means of faith, since faith is stronger than any other virtue). (f. 70v-83v; f. 78v “Love, - Whoever possesses perfect faith will possess perfect love.”)

⁴⁸ This is the meaning of the anti “intellectual” approach of the Capuchin Reform. Cf. *Const.* 1536 6, 123 and 125.

[The primacy of love over knowledge]

4034 *Duchess* – There are many who say that although creatures know and understand and then love, nevertheless this is not how it is with respect to God, for indeed you cannot love him perfectly except by means of love. The Prophet said, “Taste and see:”⁴⁹ in order to know his great sweetness taste his love first. Therefore, as⁵⁰ God is disproportionate to our mind we cannot understand him perfectly unless our will rises up to God in perfect love transforming itself by becoming enflamed. Then once the soul has been enflamed it becomes capable of understanding God perfectly.

Therefore, just as the grace that the Seraphim have comes down to the Cherubim, in a similar way our will needs to have what the Seraphim have to come down through the Cherubim. Then our intellect through the input of the Cherubim can ascend to being prepared for the coming of the Holy Spirit who is the Third Divine Person, who raises the mind to the Son of God firstly by means of love before knowledge. Indeed, if the love of the world makes us blind, and the love of what is divine enlightens and allows us to recognise the divine love, which cannot be perfectly known by any other means, then the more we love, the more we will experience and know and the more we know the more we will love. Thus, love fosters perfect knowledge and knowledge fosters more knowledge.

Thus according to this view to come to perfect love it is not only necessary to forget creatures, yourself and all kinds of the subtle questions that the worldly-wise raise concerning God, but it is also necessary to forget about scrutinising the divine love and the divine attributes and everything and to think of nothing while applying all your energy to love. Just as a blind person has perfect taste and applies all his energy to tasting the sweetness of honey and can taste it perfectly and much better than those who have their sight and a healthy palate, so the simple soul who is totally dedicated to God can experience and taste God better than all those who are enlightened by the world.⁵¹

4035 *Father Brother Bernardino* – It is true that God can produce love in the will without enlightening the intellect about the object of that love. However, it is not probable that the will would operate by means of such love, or that it would even produce it in part as a secondary cause without the intellect knowing about that love. However, it is necessary that before we can love God that we should have some enlightenment. As I have said, it is certainly true that we should not occupy ourselves with understanding love, except for the things that foster love. We ought to concentrate on what enlightens love and come to know by experience the goodness, sweetness, charity and wisdom of God and his other attributes which are better understood by practice than when known by being taught.

Duchess – I want to know if experiencing God’s sweetness is conducive to love.

⁴⁹ Ps. 34, 9.

⁵⁰ The text has *per* which should be *poiché* or *perché*

⁵¹ This is a clear reference to Corconi’s teaching, and through him, or even better, directly to “The Mirror of Simple Souls” by Porete. Most of all, completely “forgetting” is in line with not seeing, not experiencing, not thinking etc. is reminiscent of the illuminative spirituality of the Alubarados and the movement of the “Free Spirit” and of what was later Quietism. Cf. C. Cargoni, *Fonti, tendenze* sviluppi cit. 371-135.i

[Knowing about God is not the same as loving him]

4036 *Father Brother Bernardino* – To know about God is not to love him: just as to know does not mean to love. Knowledge leads towards real love. A soul that is searching is not a spouse of God, but rather a prostitute. All kinds of mortal sin can still accompany knowledge of God. God grants knowledge to imperfect souls, as one gives milk to lambs since they are unable to take solid food (as was the case in Hebrews chapter 5)⁵² like new plants that are not firmly rooted. Is there anyone who would be prepared to set aside the sweet things of the world for the sake of Christ? This would mean setting aside the world for improprieties, shamefulness and persecution, poverty and abstinence and the cross of Jesus Christ.

How many there are who think that they are seeking Jesus Christ but who are seeking themselves, their comfort, their pleasure and paradise!⁵³ True love of God makes a person unconcerned about what is pleasant or unpleasant, praise or blame, what is good or bad, and concerned only with the glory of God. Whoever loves God perfectly is not concerned or perturbed about himself, but considers himself to be unworthy of anything good without thinking he has lost God's love because of this. These things are the reason why he loves God more perfectly when he considers that God has taken them away so that the person may love him with a more perfect love.⁵⁴ If you are still concerned about such things may this make you humble enough to say: "may God help me as I am imperfect, so that I may not stray from God's way. May he feed me milk like little children because of my imperfection". May this cause me to have more love for him in thinking about his divine goodness even though I am imperfect! God will not falter in giving what is good in every way possible.

Duchess - I understand all of this. However, talk often rouses me.

Father Brother Bernardino – In chapter two of the Acts of the Apostles⁵⁵ the Holy Spirit descends in the form of tongues of fire. In the last chapter of St Luke,⁵⁶ when speaking about the two disciples on the road to Emmaus it says: "Was not our heart burning within us as he spoke to us on the way?" In the tenth chapter of Hebrews we read: "The word of God is living and effectual and penetrates and enflames the heart."⁵⁷

[Think about the sufferings of Christ]

4037 *Duchess* - The thought of Jesus Christ and of what he suffered for me is much more helpful to me.

⁵² Heb. 5, 12-13, se also 1pet. 2, 3.

⁵³ Cf. Phil. 2, 21.

⁵⁴ Perfect and pure love is the basis of Franciscan and Capuchin spirituality. We also note the influence of Cordoni, for example: chapter 36 of the *Dialogue*: "As Christ supplies for all the defects of the soul, we should not be concerned about sensual matters."

⁵⁵ Acts 2, 3.

⁵⁶ Lk. 24, 34.

⁵⁷ In fact this is from Heb. 4, 12.

Father Brother Bernardino – Christ came from heaven to earth to bring fire. He wants it to burn as he said himself.⁵⁸ He could have healed and redeemed the human race without suffering. However, to demonstrate his great love, which he could achieve more clearly by suffering,⁵⁹ he wanted to die so that because of his death we would be obligated to love him.

Duchess – I wish to love him somewhat even if I do not love him as much as I should.

Father Brother Bernardino – Whoever wishes to love him loves him very much. However, because we do not want to love him absolutely we only love him a little.

Duchess – Is it not enough that I wish to want to love him?

Father Brother Bernardino – Yes, if that act of will is intense. The beauty and sweetness of the things of this world deceive us, however let us think about the beauty, kindness and goodness of the Creator, not thinking about creatures, but about beauty and goodness in itself and we will become blind to lower creatures. This love is the bush of Moses,⁶⁰ the fiery chariot of Elias,⁶¹ and the divided tongues of fire.⁶² It is here alone that the love of God rests at peace and at the very happy haven of our longing; true rest from our labours, real healing for our miseries and the very effective remedy for all that is evil. Your Ladyship I want you to practice these exercises, by annihilating yourself as you are being transported into God.⁶³ This will be achieved for you by the One who was placed on the cross for love if us. *Alleluia.*

2. Dialogue about the manner of becoming happy.

In the fourth Dialogue, the second in the series, quoting Plato, Seneca and Cleantes, Bernardino Ochino states that happiness is not to be found in earthly things, pleasure or honours. True joy, even when it is imperfect, can only be obtained with peace of soul when the soul is absorbed in God who alone can pacify our desires.

Speakers: Father Brother Bernardino and the Duchess of Camerino

Father asks the questions and the Duchess replies

⁵⁸ Lk. 12, 49.

⁵⁹ Cf. Jn. 15, 13.

⁶⁰ Ex. 3, 2-4.

⁶¹ 2 Kgs. 2, 11.

⁶² Acts 2, 3.

⁶³ This saying is taken from the spirituality of Cordoni and Porete. Keeping in mind that Ochino's *Dialogue* is concerned with "the manner of loving God", the influence of Cordoni who wrote *The Dialogur of Spiritual Union* is evident. This had been printed in Perugia in 1536 and in Milan in 1539, and published by Girolomo da Molfetta, a famous disciple of Ochino. Chapter 49 of this mystical work has the title "How the state of the loving soul is described as seraphic and called the state of Perfect Charity in the condition of annihilation" and chapter 27 "Concerning the exercise of love and freedom in the soul that is in love" etc.:

4038 (I can see that Her Excellency the Duchess is worried and exhausted, and I think that she is searching for something that is very important. I wish to reassure myself and ask her about all that is occupying her mind.)

Father – Your Ladyship please tell me what you are looking for so impatiently, so painstakingly and so anxiously in the world.

Duchess – I am looking for a little peace and quite and I cannot find it.

Father – How long have you been looking for this?

Duchess – For my entire life I have always struggled for only one thing and that is to have peace and I have been anxious to find it. I have been continually active trying to find quiet and I have still not even found an hour of quiet. After seeking happiness in this way, I have found nothing but misery so that I think that I will never find happiness in this life.

Father – We cannot yet have the happiness that the blessed in heaven experience, but we can have the kind of happiness that is appropriate to our state. It would be too much for a person if he could not obtain some relief from misery.

Duchess – So do you think that a person can have some happiness in this world?

Father – I do not think that a person can find happiness already in this world, but I am quite certain that while a person is in this world he can find what is appropriate for wayfarers.

Duchess – You cannot think this about everyone.

Father – Anyone who wishes can be happy.

Duchess – This does not appear to be true to me.

Father – Why?

4039 *Duchess* – Because everyone wants to be happy. This is our foremost and greatest desire, so if it was within our power whoever looked for it would find it.

Father – Perhaps they do not look for it in the proper way.

Duchess – Perhaps it takes a long time to find it?

Father – Indeed, everyone can find happiness immediately.

Duchess – Then, if you wanted it today could you be happy?

Father – Without doubt!

Duchess – I beg you to show me the way, for even though some people know how and have the opportunity, yet happiness has eluded me.

Father – Yes, I shall do that.

Duchess – Do you perhaps think that I have been a hindrance to myself and prevented myself from being happy and been the enemy of my own wellbeing?

Father – That is what I fear.

Duchess – Is it possible that I wanted to be happy so much that although it was within my power to be happy I chose the wrong means?

Father – If you want to see if being happy is within your power, Your Ladyship, in your circumstances in Camerino, consider what Christ said in chapter seventeen of Luke: “The kingdom of God is within you.”⁶⁴ Perhaps you have a long way to go.

Duchess – I have sought it everywhere but could not find it.

Father – Perhaps you have not looked where it is to be found.

Duchess – I searched where I thought it was.

⁶⁴ Cf Lk. 17, 21.

Father – Where was that?

Duchess – It was in health, wealth, status, being in command and being Lady of the house, in seeking pomp and vanity, in bodily comfort, in sumptuous, sundry and delicious food, in joyfulness, dress and adornment. I sought it in honours, acclaim and position, in the pleasures of this world in seeking to get what I wanted. I sought it in family and friends and helping them all. I sought it in knowledge, eloquence, the moral virtues, in speculating about truth, in contemplating God, in experiencing everything especially God, and finally, I experienced everything and found misery where I thought that there would be happiness.

Father – You have failed to find it because you were not looking where it is.

Duchess – Yet I sought it everywhere.

4040 *Father* – It is within us. There is no need to wander outside ourselves. Whoever wants to find it is able to do so.⁶⁵ If there were an infinite number of worlds they would not satisfy the soul. This would put it beyond their capacity. Nothing beside God can content a soul. This is because of who God is. An apple or a round object cannot fill a triangular vase: the points will always remain empty. The soul which is made in the image of the Trinity will never be satisfied by the world which is round it. The Trinity is the same shape as the soul and the Trinity can fill the soul.

While we are wandering through creatures with our mind we go from one desire to another without ever stopping and this is because we find something in this world that is so perfect that what we desire cannot go beyond it. Yet it reaches beyond and passes by every creature and stretches as far as God and stops there because it cannot go any higher to anything that is more perfect, neither in thought, nor desire.

Whoever thinks that he can be satisfied by creatures is thinking of eating tasteless salt. The more we experience of this world the more we want and yet creatures cannot give us peace or satisfy us, in fact they excite us and foster our desires in such a way that the more we have the more we want. Indeed, we could say that we have become poorer since our desires are born from our deprivation and poverty. Thus, whoever possesses much is not happy and desires what he does not possess. We need to fill our heart not our tomb.

4041 The wheels of the world spin continuously, without stopping. Thus, whoever is bound with the chains of love and with the fog of desire is forced to spin and be in continual motion. He must detach himself from the world by love and not desire created things that will spin him as they want to and buffet him. Whoever does not love, or desire will not feel sorrow, upset, fear, anxiety and not be contrite and, indeed, will make fun of everything. Thus, you need to end desires if you wish to put an end to misery, as Cleantes said.⁶⁶ We should not increase honours, wealth and pleasure, but ‘diminish cupidity’ as

⁶⁵ This is reminiscent of the famous saying of St Augustine: *Do not go outside yourself, remain within, truth lies within the person.* Cf. *De vera religione*, c. 39, n. 72 (PL 34, 153).

⁶⁶ In the text *Cra*. This does not mean *Kato* as the 1884 edition said. It means Cleantes from Athens, a disciple of Plato, the last exponent of the First Academy.

Seneca said.⁶⁷ No one can possess everything, but since everyone can despise everything we can all be easily happy, not in possessing, but in despising.

Whoever wants to be happy should not become bound to that which changes, can decay and is transitory. He ought to look to what is eternal, stable and immutable. Thus Plato⁶⁸ said: he will be happy who depends on no one but God. Our greed is infinite and is always seeking something new. However, the Gymnosophists⁶⁹ discovered happiness in renunciation and privation of everything. Thus, the person who wants less is wealthiest in happiness. As Cleantes⁷⁰ said, such a one has self-control.

4042 *Duchess* – It is just as you say. Almost everyone is deceived in thinking that he can satisfy the insatiable appetite of desire by accumulating things. They head towards misery thinking that they can find happiness.

Father – Whoever wants to slake his thirst forever must go to the well from which all the sweet, pure, limpid, clear and infinite water may be drawn.

This is the end and praise be to God.

Even though the stream brings him gold,
Delivering great wealth to one who is rich,
Who possesses land that is good and fertile,
Gems and pearls the have come from the Red Sea,
Will this prevent him from making foolish decisions?
While he is alive his troubles will not vanish,
When he dies his wealth will vanish.

3. Dialogue – The manner in which a person should conduct himself appropriately

This dialogue, which was the third to be published, was probably one of the first to be written. It was printed by Ochino in Naples between 1534 and 1538 or perhaps during the Lent of 1536. The booklet, which consists of sixteen pages, bears the title: The Manner in which a Person Should Conduct Himself Appropriately Written by the Reverend Father Brother Bernardino da Siena from the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin, a Devout and Enlighten Theologian. It is held in the Vatican Library (Ferraiol V, 7622). Nicholini, who was the first to note it, says that this work is of a different character to the

⁶⁷ It is difficult to identify the quote. However we see something like this, for example, in *De tranquillitate animi*, especially in chapter 8,10 (Cf. *L. Annaei Senecae opera omnia I*, Augustae Taurinotum 1822, 300-309).

⁶⁸ Cf. *Il dialogo di Fedo*, 115 D. *Grande antologia filosofica I*, Milano, 1954:286-92. in this regard see also I. Stefanini, *Platone*, I, Padova, 1932, (ediz. 1949) 65, 228.

⁶⁹ This is a reference to the Indian sect known as the Gymnosophists (nude sages) who, for example, are spoken about by Strabo, Luciano, Philo, Porphyry and others. Cf. *Enciclopedia filosofica III*, Firenze 1982, 1013; *Grande dizionario de la lingua italiana VI*, Torino 1970, 780.

⁷⁰ This is the stoic philosopher who was a disciple of Zeno of Citium. See note 2 in the third Dialogue in n. 4044.

other Dialogues for two reasons: 1) because of its complete adherence to the Scholastic teaching and method; 2) because of its eminently educational tone, in which Ochino reserves their role of being the principal narrator to himself whereas in subsequent Dialogues he assumes the roll of the teacher. It is an important writing for establishing the anthropological depth of the interior life as it was usually understood in the past and which was adopted by a great part of the traditional Capuchin spiritual literature. Here too we observe many aspects of the penance lived by the early Capuchins.

The basic principle is profound and simple: God is man's destiny; the means to reach it are summarized in the journey towards loving God; the road which is "the safest, shortest, easiest, clearest and most genuine". This mainly consists in recalling the divine gifts, in detachment from worthless guesswork, in always thinking about God, recognising and controlling the emotions, mortification of the five senses, fleeing the occasion of sin, being humble, docile to inspirations, having clear, simple intentions, trusting God completely and persevering, living each day according to his will. In this Dialogue it is also easy to find the underlying spiritual theology contained in many of the statements in the capuchin Constitutions of 1536.

Conversationalists: Master- Disciple

4043 *Master* – I do not believe that there is anything in the world that means more to a person than being able to know how to control himself well. Just as all movement depends on the prime mover, so all of our activity depends on having good control over ourselves. It is not possible for someone to govern a region, a kingdom, province city or family if he cannot control himself well. Thus, it is impossible for us to change our shadow if we are bent over if we not first change our own stance and will be impossible to change our neighbour if we do not have control of ourselves. Someone wrote that if a person is not good to himself he cannot be good to others.⁷¹ What could be worse than not knowing how to live properly?

Disciple – Therefore, I wish to know how a person could control himself in order to do things most correctly throughout his entire life.

Master – With the exception of rational creatures, all other creatures were designed for what they do and left to be directed by God. Thus, they proceed towards the purpose for which they were made. However, man, because he is free, often resists divine inspiration and, as if he were God on earth, wants to take control himself, deviating from the divine will. Thus, it happens that whereas he ought to be following his intelligence in everything, he becomes unsettled throughout his entire life. There are few who know how to control themselves and even fewer who want to learn. Almost everyone thinks that they are the masters in this regard. To be wrong about our way of life is the biggest mistake of all inasmuch as whoever takes the wrong road loses his soul, paradise and everything.

4044 In the first place, each of us has to take care of himself since, according to Cleanthes⁷² true happiness consists in the self-assurance, domination and control of

⁷¹ Cf. Sir. 14, 5.

⁷² Cleanthes (+ 231) was a Stoic philosopher who was born in Assos in the Troad and was a disciple of Zeno of Citium. He died from refusing food. Concerning him cf. *Encicl. Filosofica* I, Firenze 1968, 1452s.

oneself. Whoever achieves this is really a king. In this life the ones who are the most miserable are those who cannot control themselves and are the slaves of their passions. People such as these do not deserve to be free or to be called persons. Thus, as Plato says in the book of wisdom,⁷³ no art is worthier and more necessary for us than knowing how to live well. So too nothing is more vile and detrimental to us than upset and discord in our own souls. God does not interfere in the world to the extent of impeding the work of the Three Persons *ad intra*. We should not interfere with the running of the world until we have become perfect within ourselves. There are many who try to control my affairs and who do almost nothing about their own business. Let us not become involved in what are the affairs of other people rather than being involved in our own affairs. How many people there are who are wise, helpful and respectful with regard to their neighbour without caring about themselves! They care about their position, their family and their neighbour, or about their own body but not their soul. There is nothing about which we should be more ashamed than about not knowing how to live and control ourselves. Since the real triumph and the real victory consist in concurring ourselves, and since real dominance consists in dominion over self I want to show how a person can achieve this.

Disciple – I confess that I do not know how to practice this are well. Therefore, I would willingly speak about it with someone who knows so that I could learn something.

[The soul is like a realm]

4045 *Master* – Our soul is like a realm in which the queen is the will and her job is to manage herself well and to make all the other faculties of the soul subject to her and to direct them to God so that they love what is good and hate what is evil. However, because she is free she can do what she pleases, and because she is blind, it follows that she can neither see nor is equipped to see. For this reason, God has placed a great agent of wisdom within her. This is the intellect. He did this so that by means of its discernment she is able to rule even though the intellect is subject to what is pleasing to the will as it considers one thing or another.

Disciple – I would like to know about all its different functions.

Master – Because the intellect is enlightened by natural enlightenment, this is how it sees what it needs to see for the good government of the soul. Sometime this takes place by means of an acquired enlightenment that is infused and supernatural. Then turning towards the will it tells it all that it should do, commanding it with respect all that is required for its salvation. It also forbids it to do the things that impede it advancing towards God. It persuades it to undertake what is useful but not mandatory, such as the evangelical counsels, and dissuades from what is useless and thus always stimulates it towards what is good and restrains it from what is evil. When the soul does what it has been told to do it praises it, applauds it and congratulates it, saying: “O what a good thing you have done by obeying me.” However, when it does the opposite it strikes it, disturbs it, complains and protests. What can I say? Reasoning and intelligence are just like a ship’s rudder. They control and guide the ship to port. In the same way we go towards paradise by means of reasoning.

⁷³ Ochino must have read the Dialogues of Plato in the translation by Marsilio Ficino. Cf. e, g., *Theages, vel de sapientia*, in *Omnia divini Platonis opera traslazione, Marsilii, Ficini*, Lugduni 1548, 6-9.

4046 Following this I want you to know that the intellect contains two books. All the good that we do is written down in one; all the evil in the other. These two books will be opened on Judgement Day and we shall be judged according to what they contain. These two books preserve memory which is the repository that holds all the treasures of our knowledge and retains all the images that the intellect is aware of.

There are other maidservants in this realm such as the cognitive and imaginative faculties and the faculties of estimation and fantasy that all serve the intellect and, ultimately, the will by means of the intellect. It is their function to adapt the image of the things that enter by the windows of the senses so that they can come to the intellect which is entirely spiritual without any mixture of components.⁷⁴ There is another manager.⁷⁵ That would be common sense which takes up all strangers, that is whatever comes in through the gates of our inner senses. There still remain our exterior senses, such as sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, which like messengers and ambassadors of the soul, bring in all the news with all of them being subject to the will.

[It is difficult to control the realm of the soul]

4047 *Disciple* – I think that it would be a difficult thing to rule this realm since all the soul's strength and natural faculties, including the will, always thirst for and strongly desire, by their nature, things that comfort, serve, delight and appear honourable to them, without having any regard for what is right, and they are like untethered horses, when they are not restrained by the brake of reason. It is very difficult to restrain unfettered faculties that are corrupt, stained and infected by the sin of our first parents and accustomed to what is evil.

The will not only has a affection for these worldly things by nature, but is torn by all its emotions that instinctively delight in them even though it would be better to resist them. On the other hand, we are continually in the midst of these objects of the senses which are constantly around us. They present themselves to our senses moving and inciting them to what is delightful in them. On the other hand, divine things are very far away, and the intellect is only poorly enlightened. We do not see them, feel them or experience them as they are. If we do experience something we should not love God because he is sweet and gives us help, but rather, to honour him and give him glory.

Master – There is no doubt that it is difficult to master yourself well and to control yourself like magnanimous, generous and remarkable people.

4048 *Disciple* – What should be the first thing that I do to control myself?

Master – Understand the objective. Our intelligence knows and recognises that God is our ultimate objective and that this is the reason why he created and preserved us.

⁷⁴ *Immisto* in the text = *semplice*.

⁷⁵ This is a person who is in control of the running of the house, a major-domo. The soul is described as if it were a realm. The will is the queen, who is blind, and is in need of a wise person, the intellect, which writes down what is good and evil in two books that are preserved in the memory. The house maids of intellect and will are the cognitive, imaginative, estimative and fantasy faculties. Common sense is the major-domo of the realm, while the soul's messengers are the external senses. This imagery was already present in St Augustine *Conf. X, c. VIII, 9. Enarr. in ps. 146, n. 13. (PL. 32, 783; 37, 1905 s.)*

This is why he redeemed us and did everything so that we might turn to him. Therefore, we ought to direct our entire life towards him, turn all our love towards him, all our actions, thoughts and desires.⁷⁶ A person should not live in a thoughtless manner. Like a wise man he should place his ultimate objective before himself and say: “This is my objective and I am going to pursue it.”

Disciple – There are many who are so blind as to think that God created us to eat and have a good time in the present life and they consider this to be their ultimate objective. I want to leave this aside and follow our prime objective. What more is required?

[Dialogue on the final end]

4049 – *Master* – The second thing that is required is that when the intellect has established its final end that it turns to the will and says: “I have found a great treasure. I have discovered the ultimate end for which God created us and placed us in this world. I have found that which is our real mother country, our kingdom, our father, our friends, treasures, real honours, pleasures and our greatest and perfect happiness!

Thirdly, the will should say to the intellect: “What is our end? So that I will be willing to set out for that I want you to carefully investigate all that is involved, what I have to do to aspire to it and then to tell me about them. May sure that I know everything.”

Fourthly, the intellect obeys the will and seeks out all that is in God that could lead the will to love.

Fifth, it turns to the will and says: “I have discovered that God is our final end and that he is the supreme good, beautiful, sweet, gentle, merciful, clement, just, truthful, omnipotent and wise. I have found that he has always loved us, loves us and will love us with the highest, infinite, eternal, everlasting, gratuitous, sincere and pure love and that in himself he possesses all perfection. I have found that he is your real and legitimate spouse and that he created the world out of love for you and that he will send his own Son for you and that he will suffer for thirty-three years and shed his own blood on the cross. He has prepared paradise for you and is waiting for you in heaven.”

4050 Sixth, greatly admiring the supreme excellence of the end, which possesses such goodness and infinite love, the will says to the intellect: “See if would be ever possible for me to acquire the end and lead me to it.”

Seventh, the intellect begins to consider our strength, divine grace as well as all the other things that would help in going towards God and sees that it is possible for the soul to be most perfectly united to God.

Eight, it says to the will: “although all your accomplishments are small and weak, nevertheless God will provide help with his grace which will never be missing. This will carry you to God and make you happy as long as that is what you want and never stop wanting.

⁷⁶ *Const.* 1536, n. 63.

Nine, the will must accept this as being its final end and say: “If this is the situation, I want this and accept it as my final end and wish to dedicate all my actions, thoughts, love and my entire life to him.”

[Dialogue concerning reaching the end]

4051 Ten: turning towards the intellect the will commands it to seek out all the necessary and useful resources that might help it to achieve the end and set it on the way. It should also show the will all the harmful things which could impede it or hurt it on its journey to God without paying attention to the impediments.

Eleven: Because the intellect is being pressured it begins to review all the ways that it had found for going to God and says: “Perhaps it is advisable to be cunning in order to protect you”. He goes on considering. However, when he sees many dangers he says: “It would be easy for me to accompany you. However, it might be better if I were a priest. Indeed, no because I might easily become involved with benefices. It might be better were you to become a religious and yet you might not endure such a weight hanging around your neck.”⁷⁷ The intellect is pointing all the ways of going to God.

Twelve: When you have discussed everything make a judgement and say: “I judge that it is better for me to take this path rather than another.”

Thirteen: Go back to the will and say: “I have discussed everything and can find no better way than this.”

4052 - Fourteen: the will says: “Since I do not trust you too much, I want and command you to confer with others in order to understand and know which way is the best, shortest, most safe and most pleasing to God. Look for wise persons who have been instructed in divine matters, who are good and who love to live properly and who are willing and able to give you good advice. Look once again at how the saints lived. Let them, especially Christ be your mirror. He was a light, a norm, a rule an example of every virtue, the way and leader for all of them.” He is the book from which we learn how to live properly. By means of Sacred Scripture and by other sources discover how to live more according to what God wants and to become more perfect. Make sure that you run well since living correctly is very important. You need to create the right circumstances for if one thing is missing it affects everything. A person goes to hell because he is blind, but to go to paradise one needs to be able to see the light clearly.

Fifteen: the intellect obeys all of this and goes about seeking all avenues of knowing the best means of achieving salvation.

[The way of love of God]

4053 Sixteen: The will says: “I find that an act of love for God is better, more safe, comes more quickly, more direct, easier and more honest than any other of approaching him. Indeed, there is no other way. The distance that a person travels corresponds to the amount he loves God and nothing else. This is the road that the saints trod. This is what the loving Christ taught by his life and teaching. It is pleasing to the divine will which is

⁷⁷ Compare this passage with what Girolamo da Molietta and B. Cordoni wrote. (See above n. 3995).

the ruler, queen and mother of all created wills. This is way it is well to be conformed to it.”⁷⁸

Seventeen: the will says: “If this is the way that things are I want to love God with all my might. I do not want to live any longer following the ideas of those who are common. Since you have shown me the reasons why I should not be ashamed to obey I no longer want to contradict the intellect but to follow it as my guide.” Thus, the will should choose to act on what the intellect tells it. It ought to make such a choice immediately and not delay the correct judgement saying: “I shall start tomorrow,” as many people do.

Eighteen: Once the will has chosen to love God it instructs the intellect to go and seek all the things that can incite and move it towards perfect love of God.

4054 Nineteen: the intellect obeys and looks for all suitable methods and ways for the will to reach and ascend to the highest love of God.

Twenty: the intellect says to the will: “I have found in God consummate goodness, infinite wisdom, incomprehensible sweetness, superabundant charity, immense mercy, supreme clemency and all perfection to the highest degree. I have found him to be the one who created everything for love of you. He gave you such a noble nature and preserved you down to the present. He became man for you and came on earth. He suffered, fasted, wept for you, preached for you, toiled for you, went in search of you personally and, finally, willed to be arrested, bound, scourged and placed on the cross for love of you. Now see that you should love him.” In this way it reviews all the gifts that have been received and the infinite love that accompanies them.

4055 Twenty-one the will stirs itself to be drawn by God into most intimate acts of love. It compels and forces itself by saying: “Lord, what can I give you for such great gifts? I have nothing other than my love and I willingly give that to you. Accept it, even though it is unworthy. Lord, I want you alone as my spouse, friend and father. You are my sole refuge, my only hope and unique comfort. I want my enjoyment, my garden, my recreation to be in you. I want my treasures, my pleasures, my delight and all my glory to be in you. O sweet God, behold I am satisfied to abandon everything for you and leave all my worldly friends for you, my dear parents, all honours and vanity, pomp, wealth and all that delights me. I am content to surrender all my emotions, as far as possible as well as all the delights of the world.

I am content to give my life for love of you an infinite number of times were you to give it back to me an infinite number of times. I am contented to restrain my senses and natural inclinations, even if I possessed an infinite number of worlds and was master of them all and could enjoy them and all their pleasures and glory that they could possibly offer forever without dying. Lord, I would give up all of this out of love for you and be satisfied to be a poor little one to make me able to serve you by giving you all of

⁷⁸ Cf. Francesco da Iesi who uses this imagery but applies it to the human will (cf. above note 81 in the *Circolo*), cf. also Cordoni, *Dialogo*, f. 220r: “*Ragione*.: Hor perché adunque ci dteet Iddio la volontà? *Amore*: Accioché con quella volessino la sua divina volontà, la qual volontà solamente et perfettamente volere, non è altro che unire l’anima sua con Dio”; parla anche della via del amore come “via lata, diritta, breve et sicura che mena a Dio, et è una arte veloce , che presto mena a Dio, et a perfettione.” (ibid 119v, 121r)

my love. All the calumnies, shame, disgrace, persecutions, adversities, weaknesses, penances, discomforts, hardships, poverty and all the sufferings of the present life could never separate me from you.

If it were necessary to go to the middle of hell for love of you I would do it immediately in your honour and it would seem to me that I had done nothing in comparison to what you deserve that I should do for you. What can a tiny creature do to repay your infinite love? I want to be dissolved forever. On the other hand, I wish that I were divine so that I could love infinitely. If I were God I would want to return to nothing, if this gave you glory.⁷⁹

4056 Twenty-two: the will turns to the intellect and says: “From now on I do not want you to have any bad, impure or dishonest thoughts. Put aside all unhelpful, vain and useless thoughts. Put a stop to speculative and investigative knowledge. If I want to become friendly with God, I need to become the enemy of sad thoughts so that I can turn my back on everything. From now on I do not want you to think of anything but God. Let him alone be before your eyes always, so that you gaze on him lovingly so that I may burn the more with love. By doing this may it come about that you that you do not go on scrutinising subtleties and oddities that are useless and which impede love very greatly. Only think with vivid enlightenment and all your might about his attributes because they stir up love. Try not to be deceived so that you do not deceive yourself.⁸⁰

Twenty-three: the intellect obeys by focusing its thoughts on God as much as it can.

Twenty-four: by means of these diligent thoughts the will continues to burn with love for God.

[Recognition and restraint of the appetites and emotions]

4057 Twenty-five: When the will experienced some resistance in the senses it commanded the will to think carefully about its natural inclinations, emotions and passions in order to moderate, restrain and turn them to God as far as possible. It said: “Consider well in which way the fortress is more inclined towards ruin and take care of that. Keep watch on all the gates of the emotions and see all that is needed so that we are kept safe from our enemies. I do not want anyone to enter except God. The fortress stands apart and he is the only one who ought to abide there. I want this to be fully in order.”

Twenty-six: the intellect obeys and while scrutinising everything, it perceives that our sense faculties and natural appetites are like unbridled horses that run towards honours, distinction, praise and the glory of the world, laxity, pleasure, sensuality and the good things of the present life with the great danger of falling over the precipice of pride,

⁷⁹ These statements are hyperbolic and paradoxical and come from the idiom of the mystical description of holy indifference. They are reminiscent once again of the *Dialogue* by Cordoní f. 160r-v; “...I offer myself as an act of love, out of zeal for the divine honour and for the salvation of mankind, to undergo what all creatures put together have suffered, are suffering or shall suffer. As an act and exercise of love I offer to undergo an infinite number of deaths with long, harsh, bitter and painful martyrdoms. What is more, if it pleases him, I offer to endure all the pains of hell, and of as many hells as would please him, presenting my nothingness on my part, with him giving his most holy grace on his part.”

⁸⁰ These thoughts were already expressed in the previous dialogue (cf. nn, 4026, 4033).

greed, lust and other mortal sins. Therefore, they are in great need of being restrained by temperance. On the other had it sees that the difficulties of the virtues are like bridled horses. They do not move towards such things; indeed, they fly from them and even draw away⁸¹ from them since there is a great need to restrain them.

4058 Twenty-seven: the intellect reports everything and says: “Our appetites are very wild and like horses run toward the precipice without needing to be spurred, like a person who has an inclination towards gluttony and still indulges in delicate food. They need restraining cutting back their fodder. When they relapse mortify them and give them just enough life as is necessary to lead them to God and do not omit stimulating them to doing what is good. O will! You need to be on guard, to watch and be diligent mostly where the fortress is weakest. We need to resist more what we are most inclined to do.

Twenty-eight: the will says: “You, O intellect, know well how necessary it is for each one to be acquainted with his inclinations, emotions and passions and to understand his own self since without such knowledge no one can control himself.”

[*Disciple*] - I want you to explain to me more clearly how I can control my emotions and thus the entire rest of my soul.

[*Master*] – Twenty-nine: the intellect goes about inspecting everything: where the enemy might enter, where the fortress is most vulnerable, the guards,⁸² what is to be done and the weaponry that is required in order to conduct our life in the best manner.

[How to manage the realm of the soul]

4059 Thirty: The intellect says to the will: “I find that the eyes are two very dangerous gates. You should be very careful to shield them from the enemy. You should not open them to see anything that is improper, strange or vain. If you focus your eye on the beauty of creatures, you may easily come to love them. Therefore, you should not open them to see anything but what is necessary for human life and what contributes to loving God, such as the devout images of the saints, the Madonna and especially Christ, holy and devout books, in which as in clear mirrors and vivid images, you can see their virtues and exemplary actions and the life of Christ, of Mary and of the chosen ones. Contemplate Christ on the cross and his entire life. If some created beauty presents itself to you through the eyes, you O will, should immediately order me, as your intellect, not to dwell on such beauty, so that you will not desire to have it and it rob you of your love of God who should be your only love.

You ought to stop me from falling, seduced by created beauty, into impure and sad thoughts, dragging you into evil desires. You should immediately prevent me from being aroused by vane, crafty,⁸³ and fallen beauty and really raise me up and enflame me with the true beauty of God, and set me there, inviting me to love God. Stop my eyes from seeing and choosing all bad, unworthy, vane, odd, useless and impudent things. By means of your influence may we not seek anything but what is necessary, useful and profitable to the love of God.”

⁸¹ Here *tirano*, in the text *tirannosi*.

⁸² That is the surveillance.

⁸³ Here *abile* in the text *habile*.

4060 Then turn yourself to the ear and say: “From now on I do not want you to allow scandal, murmuring or detraction, dishonest words, vengeful words or sad words that arouse evil to enter your ears. Fly from listening to any of this including anything that is useless, odd or vane. Put aside all gossip, fiction and worldly news including worthless knowledge and all talk that is detrimental to loving God and serves no purpose. Shun such things and be deaf to all of them. Be only open to the word of God and try to hear this alone. I want you to associate only with people who have the love of God at heart and whose words, when they are talking about Christ, are like flames of fire which move me when they come into you. It is something lovable, sweet and gentle when they come into me through you. When something comes to you, O intellect, that is lovable, sweet and gentle alert me immediately quite loudly and say wake up and contemplate this spiritual thought,⁸⁴ and the heavenly, hierarchical harmony of the Three Divine Persons.”

4061 Say to the sense of smell: “I do not want aromatic odours to enter through you anymore if they, like enemies, move the senses towards what is evil, or entice me towards sad love and the intellect towards evil thoughts, control the imagination and my other attendant maids and inner faculties. However, if they enter as friends, arousing and moving me to contemplation and the love of divine things, in that case only, allow them to enter.”

Command the sense of taste to take with moderation the food that is necessary for the preservation of life for the honour of God. “It is enough that our body eats sufficient to live and carry its weight. However, take care that it does not harm you, that because it is too delightful it offends the mind and you fall over an impure precipice. O intellect, by means of the sweetness of the things of the world, rise to the sweetness of the things of God so that you can incite me to the love of God. O tongue: do not utter sad, useless, vain or impertinent words any longer but, in the first place, think carefully and consider only those that give honour to God. Because you can easily ruin me I want you to speak very few words which are useful and necessary, filled with the spirit, that comes from the depths of the heart as it experiences and honours God.”

4062 You should command the feet not to take a pace unless it be for the humour of God. In a similar manner regulate the hands not to do sad, strange, vain and useless things but only what is necessary for a life that is directed towards God, for the salvation of our neighbour and the glory of God. “You too, O will, our queen, you should control the entire body so that it is circumspect, serious, mature and disciplined in all of its deeds, acts, movements and operations. Always keep your maids in a state that they are not thinking, imaging, wondering and are busy in the service of God. If some reflection⁸⁵ or image of something sad comes up brush it aside⁸⁶ immediately and turn to considering divine things.” Thus, the intellect tells the will all the things that it should do to control the person in every part of his life.

⁸⁴ Here *concentro* in the text *conchetto*.

⁸⁵ *Spera* in the text is the same as *sphere, globe, mirror*, but here it would be better to have *ray, reflection* or *reverberation*.

⁸⁶ That is change direction.

Thirty-one: The will commands all the faculties and they obey.⁸⁷ What the will says arranges their life every day as if each day was its last.

[To escarp from the occasion of sin]

4063 Thirty-two: the intellect tells the will that to be safer it should avoid all the occasions of evil seeking what leads to something good.

Thirty-three: the will commands the intellect to be careful in the first place to consider things well.

Thirty-four: the intellect complies with this by exploring all of the details and the snares of such occasions, all those who are associated with them and how they can gain an advantage.⁸⁸

Thirty-five: it tells the will: “You have many enemies. However, they cannot hurt you if you are a friend to yourself. You hold the key to the fortress and no one can enter without your consent; you cannot be overcome. You should avoid all bad company and keep the company of good people from whom you may acquire virtue.

When you are dealing with a person and you realise that you love that person too sensually, leave her alone. Have nothing more to do with her. Make sure that all your love is ultimately directed at God. When another person is not really pleasing to you do not let that stop you from helping him. Overcome yourself and the repugnance that you are experiencing. When you are inclined to seek honours make out that you despise yourself. When you are inclined to seek wealth give a lot of alms. When you look for pleasure afflict your body with continual penance,

Detach yourself as much as possible from love of the world. Do not become involved with it, especially as it is completely corrupt. When you must live with people and deal with them do not do this out of love but make everything a leap towards God. Be magnanimous, so that all that is in the world will appear to be nothing to you so that you despise it all.

Thirty-six: the will begins to carry this out and to do well.

[Growth and perseverance in divine love]

4064 Thirty-seven: the intellect says; “Do not turn back.⁸⁹ But as you follow the path of love do not stop until the end. Make sure not to be distracted by the honours of the world, false pleasures or vain treasures or by friends, by family or by the crowd or by bad example. Make Christ your model and rule.”

Thirty-eight: the intellect says; “Make sure that the divine love increases in you every day, and that you never think that you are perfect so that every time that you feel that you have arrived and you stop and do not continue to walk you may have the strength to begin again.”

Thirty-nine: the intellect says: “See that you are in good spirits and do not become despondent because you have not reached the end quickly.

⁸⁷ They carry it out and put it into practice.

⁸⁸ That which can be of assistance to them and aid them.

⁸⁹ *Adrieto* in the text = *indietro*.

Forty: walk with even steps so that when things are going well and when they are not going well you will never stop loving God. If you become tepid, you will falter if you dwell on the pleasures of the present life which you have given up. You will regain fervour by looking to God alone.

Forty-one: the intellect says: “While you are in the present life, even if you were holier than the saints, still have doubts, do not trust yourself, be afraid and place all your hope in God. “

Forty-two: always obey divine inspiration and the movements of the Holy Spirit.

Forty-three: frequently commend yourself to God with all your heart.

4065 Forty-four: When you have done all that you could have done, think that you have never done anything that was good. You should attribute to God everything that was good and give him the glory and claim the sins for yourself. There would have been many more of these had God not assisted you by means of his grace.⁹⁰

Forty-five: Make sure that you are not ungrateful. Recognise that God has given you all that is good and offer him praise, honour and glory.⁹¹

Forty-six: Try to draw towards God all creatures that you can by your entire life, good example, and words.

Forty-seven: throughout your life do not be concerned about yourself or your comfort, what is useful or what brings honour or gives pleasure. Make sure that your intentions are not distorted but that they are simple and straightforward, directed towards pleasing God alone and giving him honour and glory.

Forty-eight: make sure that all your hope and trust is placed on God and that you hope that every good thing will come from him.

Forty-nine: When you live in the proper way by the grace of God and the good habits that you have acquired, the path towards God will begin to appear easy where it seemed to be bitter in the beginning.

Fifty: the intellect applauds you and congratulates you because you have obeyed it and are living in accord with the will of God and have begun to possess paradise in the present life.

4. Dialogue of the thief on the cross

Dialogue four, which is significant also as a piece of literature, breaks away from the “rhetorical” and traditional form of presenting the image of the good thief and instead offers an “evangelical” presentation of this astonishing and moving event from which one can draw a specific lesson. This allows us to relive the way Christ remembered his death by recalling his bitter passion and death with a spirit of love.

Conversationalists: A man and a woman

4066 *Woman* – Who would not be astonished at seeing the extent of divine justice, having witnessed Christ on the cross covered with wounds, near to death, not

⁹⁰ This thought is worthy of St Francis. Cf. *RNB* ch 17, 5-8; 2 *Cel.* 133, [FAED, I p75; II, p359.]

⁹¹ Another very Franciscan thought.

acknowledged⁹² by Peter, betrayed by Judas, abandoned by the others, persecuted by the Jews, mocked by the Gentiles and everyone, the glorious Virgin Mary, with the exception of the sorrowful Mother, losing faith?⁹³ A poor thief began to believe while others lost faith even though they had spoken with Christ, listened to his Gospel teaching, witnessed his innocent life, his superlative virtues, his outstanding charity, his uppermost, holy and profound humility, his prodigies, signs and miracles? They had read the Prophets, studied Scripture, seen the images completely fulfilled in Christ and yet with all of that they did not believe.

He not only hung on the cross without performing miracles, but did not display his glory by divine works, yet a poor thief, who was blind and ignorant, without having seen or read Scripture, without signs or miracles, never having seen Christ previously, or heard him, while experiencing such pain and sorrow on the cross, seeing Christ suffering so much and close to death, believed that he was God and hoped to win paradise from the one who said from the cross: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”⁹⁴ I want you to tell me where such great faith comes from?

Man – There are those who say that Christ’s shadow came over him and that this enlightened him in the same way that Peter’s shadow cured the sick woman.⁹⁵ Thus Christ enlightened him. Christ, who is the light of the world,⁹⁶ has enlightened us sufficiently by his teaching and life. He has done so also by his shadow that is the Old Testament which is the shadow of the New and sufficient to provide enlightenment concerning the divinity of Christ. There are those who say that the Madonna stood on the side where the thief was and that when she looked at Christ and he looked at her the shining rays that passed between them enlightened the thief.

4067 While looking at Christ the good thief saw that he suffered very greatly without complaining. Indeed, his face was so happy that he appeared to be enjoying shedding blood. He saw the hot tears falling to the ground. He heard his words. He contemplated his actions and divine gestures, his admirable patience, his great charity, his extended perseverance, and other divine virtues. From this he came to believe that he was really the Son of God.

God does not withhold himself from someone who opens himself. When he opens himself with his frailty, Christ enlightens him. Without doubt he was also as disposed as he could have been, by means of divine grace, which is never missing. This would have enlightened him since Christ, who is the true and divine sun, was born, lived and died for all. He gazed on him with his merciful eye, and perhaps with his bodily eye, just the same as when he gazed on Peter.⁹⁷ It was also symbolical of the elect who will sit at his right hand and go into paradise not by means of their own merits, but by those of Jesus Christ and of the perverted on his left hand who will go to damnation because of their evil deeds. It shows how no one ought to despair in the end when they see such a great thief as he was hanging on a cross and being saved. As we read in Mathew 27, what he said to

⁹² It is strange that in the 1884 edition it says *by Pontius Pilate*.

⁹³ Victoria Colonna wrote wonderfully about the faith of the Virgin Mary at the foot of the cross. Cf, Vol II, nn. 2050-2055.

⁹⁴ Mt. 27, 46.

⁹⁵ Cf. Acts 5, 15

⁹⁶ Cf. Jn. 8, 12; 9, 5; 12, 46

⁹⁷ Cf. Lk. 22, 61.

Christ was really spoken on behalf of mankind.⁹⁸ At that time he represented all of the elect who are saved by God's goodness, kindness and mercy.

Did not something grand take place on the day of Good Friday, when the windows of the divine treasures were opened, and when Christ shed blood with such fervour, as the blood that poured froth from his wounds became the liquid⁹⁹ of divine love and grace was rained down so abundantly that a thief was enlightened and was saved? How great were his faith, hope and love!

He offered Christ his heart and all of his love, his thoughts, his tongue and words. More than that he offered himself upon the cross, firstly by confessing his sins, not only his own but the sins of all sinners of whom he was the representative. Therefore, this is what we read in Luke 23: "We are suffering justly for we are receiving what is due to our deeds and so we ought to be suffering." Those who are sad do just the opposite and think that they are doing the right thing and say what the bad thief said; "If you are the Christ (putting him under pressure) save yourself and us." They do not want to suffer what is uncomfortable for them as if to say: "What need do you have to pray to your Father? If you are the Christ save yourself and us." As if to say: "You are not the Christ and therefore cannot save yourself."

4068 The ones who are bad appear to be the worst, while those who are good open their eyes and recognise Christ just like the good thief did when he was on the cross. By confessing his sins, he showed that he was suffering justifiably and he paid honour to Christ when he said: "He has not sinned and he is suffering for us and for our faults obliged to do so merely by his goodness and extreme charity. Therefore, we ought to feel compassion towards him and thank him seeing that he is suffering for us and not for himself and excusing us while he prays for us." He rebuked the bad thief and said: "You do not fear God even now that you are on the cross near death." Then breaking into prayer, he said: "Christ, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Behold, he is confessing his divinity by calling him Lord. Behold faith full of divine wisdom. He does not ask for fallen things, but divine and only that he be remembered. Behold profound humility, as if to say: "I do not deserve that you admit me into heaven with the other saints, nor to live in paradise with the blessed. Let me at least live in your memory which would mean very much to me, even if I were damned. At least remember me sometimes. When I know this, I shall regard myself as being blessed, even if I were in eternal punishment."

O what great strength and steadiness in that while being on the cross in such torment rising above himself he did not think of himself but only of Christ! With great self-control he placed himself at the disposal of the divine will setting everything out in accord with utmost justice to the glory and honour of God, while regarding himself as being confused, suffering and being corrected as the worst kind of thief. Therefore, Christ answered him so gently: "Truly, today you shall be with me in paradise." He did not just promise him paradise, but so that the promise would be really definite he added "Truly",

⁹⁸ Actually Mathew 27, 38, 44 only says that two thieves were crucified with Christ and that they were blaspheming. The episode concerning the good thief appears only in Luke 23, 39-43. The rest of the passages quoted in the text refer to these passages.

⁹⁹ In the text *musto*. This Biblical image (cf. Is. 49, 26) was frequently used by mystics. Here it means "juice" or "substance".

as if saying: “Be assured, have no doubt, even though you were a bad person, a thief and saw me suffering so much on the cross whatever comes today we shall be together in paradise.”

Consider the great gift of being in his memory that he asked of him, and Christ promising him paradise. When? That very day! Who with? With Christ! What company! How long? Forever! To whom did he promise such great good? To a most wretched thief who was on the cross for his offenses and who was blaspheming him only a short while ago. Why did he promise him paradise? Because he asked him to remember him!

4069 *Woman* - I am certain that he is in paradise because Christ told him so. I also think that he is a great saint and that he has great privileges.

Man - Firstly, among all of the saints he alone merited to suffer the torture of the cross and keep him company. He alone kept company in his heart with the Madonna in her faith in Christ. He alone on the day when others fled publically proclaimed Christ’s innocence and his divinity from the pulpit of the cross, and reproached the thief, and perhaps other Jews. I believe that he would also have said words of compassion to the Madonna even though they were not written down by the Evangelists. I also believe that when the Madonna heard that he would be with Christ in paradise on that very day that she accepted him together with St John as her sons and as more pleasing to her than all of the other elect.

As he asked for grace when Christ was shedding it and giving it to everybody by dying, it is credible that he received an abundance of grace especially as he was next to where the fortress of Christ’s side was opened as the place from which it came to all the elect. Thus, I believe that he is at Christ’s side in glory just as he was on the cross. There could not be a greater show of gratitude towards a person, such as the thief, who, when everyone was speaking calumny and accusations, was the one person to make excuses, defend and witness to Christ’s innocence and goodness. When we are beset by tribulations we can learn from him and say: “We are suffering justly according to what we deserve. Only Christ suffered unjustly.”

4070 The thief meant to say: “I have read about Abel and Cain and how one was pleasing to God and the other was not and indeed despaired.”¹⁰⁰ When he was hanging on the cross like the other thief he did not wish to despair and said: “Perhaps you will forgive me? In a similar way I read about Noah who was found by his son Cham and covered by Sem. Because of this he cursed one and blessed the other.¹⁰¹ It is my duty to beg you to perhaps give me your blessing.

Abram also had two sons, one by the free woman, the other son by the slave.¹⁰² My companion might have wanted to become the son of the synagogue and possess the spirit of fear and servitude, but he is too impatient. I want to try to be the first son of the Church, your new bride and to possess the spirit of love like good children.¹⁰³ Isaac had

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Gen. 4

¹⁰¹ Cf. Gen. 9, 18-27.

¹⁰² Cf. Gen. 16, 15-16; 21, 1-7. What Ochino recalls comes rather from Gal. 4, 22.

¹⁰³ Cf. Rom. 8, 15

two sons, Jacob and Esau, one of whom mocked his inheritance while the other cherished it.¹⁰⁴ Thus if my companion is not concerned about heaven, I want to try and possess it.”

Then he meant to say: “When I am in your kingdom, where you are the natural heir, and which we have gained by means of your precious blood. You were not great in the present life because your kingdom is not of this world.¹⁰⁵ However, when you will dwell in your heavenly kingdom, remember me, not my sins, or misdeeds, my wretchedness or the thefts that I committed, but remember that I am a frail, weak man, that I am your creature made in your image and likeness, made for beatitude. Remember that you made everything for me, that you took on human flesh for me, that you preached, fasted, prayed and slept on the ground and toiled for me, suffered for thirty-three years for me. Remember that I belong to your family and that you died for me.

I do not ask for great things because I am not worthy. I feel ashamed to beg you to place such a great scoundrel such as I am in paradise. I know that that is not the place for me and that you have a thousand reasons for not wanting to see me. I do not ask you to come to paradise so that I may be of service to the citizens who are there. I only ask to remain in your memory. You should not forget those for whom you have shed so much blood and for whom you suffered so much, those who were your companions on the cross. Do not consider my wickedness, but your supreme goodness and then open the windows to your treasures. Thus, in the hope of obtaining grace I ask for alms and as in life I was a thief of worldly goods, if it is possible, I ask in this final hour, to steal heaven.

4071 I heard that you prayed for those who placed you on the cross, excusing them with such tenderness, saying that they did not know what they were doing,¹⁰⁶ therefore you should not wonder that I dare to pray to you. I see that you have made your Mother the mother of all sinners and burning with love you thirst for our salvation. This is how I have the confidence to beg. As you can see I am on the cross and in my heart I have three crosses that are bitterer than this. One consists of the sorrow that I feel for my companion who is not responding. The second is the fear that I have of hell. The third is the compassion I feel for you and your Mother. Yet with all of this if I knew that you would remember me in paradise all crosses would be sweet.”

Then Christ replies: “Today is a day the like of which has never been, is now or will be seen for all eternity. This is because although we are still living in time, you shall be with me in paradise and you shall see my divine essence. You will see me strip Limbo of all the saints from the Old Testament, open the gates of heaven, and have them then ascend with me into the highest heaven with all the other saints. I will flourish there forever in triumph and glory.”

4072 Christ wanted to address sweet words to those who were weak and close to death. In Matthew¹⁰⁷ it says that he began to give the daily wage to those who had come last’ and he is beginning with the thief. He says to the first thief: “You are earth and unto earth

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Gen 25, 19-34.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Jn. 18, 36.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Lk. 23, 34

¹⁰⁷ This refers to the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard. Mt, 20, 1-16.

you shall return”¹⁰⁸. He says to the other: “Today you will be with me in paradise.”¹⁰⁹ He truly is in paradise for he is on the cross for Christ and is suffering to the point of death only for love of him.

Like Christ, we too find ourselves on the cross, crucified to death between two thieves namely the good and bad angel of death. Very often it is family members who stand around like real thieves to take our belongings without any concern for our soul,¹¹⁰ Therefore, at present it is better to dispense with this and prepare ourselves so that we may be ready for death.

Indeed, the conversion of the thief, as it was the last miracle that Christ performed; was the greatest of all. Therefore, when Your Excellency finds that you are in a similar situation you must not delay or despair. Then, following the example of the good thief, without calling to mind worldly persons, who can be of little help, and who will forget about you, try to live happily by recalling Christ by means of love and good deeds. Christ cannot forget us when he is in glory if we recall his bitter Passion.

5. Discourse concerning timely conversion

This dialogue which is the fifth in the Venice edition is an ongoing, passionate exhortation about conversion of heart and doing penance at “the end of days”.

It demands a speedy decision, absolute immediate urgency and instant execution, points that are clearly endorsed in the debate between Christ and the soul.

Conversationalists: Christ and the Soul

4073 *Christ* – Is it possible that you are so wicked that when I, the Son of God, and supreme beauty, am calling you to paradise every day, and have been doing so for a long time, not for my benefit but for your advantage, remain deaf, rude and ungrateful in not responding? Is it true that you are polite and thankful with respect to things of the world and pay all your debts but do not pay any attention to me alone?

Soul – Even if I am very late in turning to you, I have good intentions.

Christ – If you have good intentions, show me.

Soul – Things like this need to be considered very carefully. They are something that only happen once and so they need to be discussed.

Christ – It is well to obtain advice concerning things that are doubtful and so, when you want to do something that is evil, you ought to think about it carefully, but everyone ought to be immediately determined to serve God.

Soul – At the moment I cannot put aside this evil world and preserve my reputation. I know very well that it would say that it would cast me out. So I want to wait a little for some security which will serve me well and then I will cast it under my feet

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Gen. 3, 19.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Lk. 23, 43.

¹¹⁰ These are traditional images which appear repeatedly in the *Artes moriendi* (The Art of Dying). Cf. A. Tenenti, *Il senso della morte e l'amore della vita nel Rinascimento (Francia e Italia)*, Torino 1978. See also in the Introduction section II/4.

and show everybody that I recognise what it is and that I depart from it not out of fear or contempt but for love of you.

Christ – What if it never smiles on you?

Soul – I will leave it just the same.

4074 *Christ* – Whoever relies on what men think will never be happy. Whoever is bound by so many judgements cannot move towards God. To want to come to me with an intact reputation is a desire to serve two enemies. He needs to not only surrender his reputation and everything, but, if he really wants to come to me, he must try to also surrender himself.¹¹¹ Now your reputation has more force in holding you back than my love has to make you give up everything. If you loved me perfectly the world and its chains would not be able to hold you back for the blink of an eye. That is not how I have acted towards you. Indeed, I despised everything for your sake and let it be thought that I was wicked. There was not much honour in doing that. With respect to the good and evil that the world talks about, wrap it up in a bundle and throw it over your shoulder, giving it the treatment that it deserves otherwise you will not enjoy anything good. Following this we propose that you bid the world farewell, perhaps you would have been more bound by its accolades than you are now.

O what a great thing it is to say and boast: “I conquered delights where Lucifer, Adam, David, Solomon and others among God’s great captains fell.” People change as the world changes and the person who does not use grace well while he has it, renders himself unworthy to have any more. Since time is so precious we ought not throw it away, especially as the future is uncertain.

4075 *Christ* – When a person commits sin he loses his good name in the world. Honour and all the rest are to be loved when they lead us to God, but when they impede this and are useless and dangerous cast them aside and disregard them.

Soul – I do not want such as this to bring about my ruin.

Christ – I understand you. You want to have your feet on two footrests. You want to serve me without making an enemy of the world which is something that is impossible.

Soul – I do not think much of its embrace. It is true that I do not want it to think ill of me. Therefore, I am detaching myself from it gradually.

Christ – This is a sure sign of what a modest amount of love you have for me. If you really loved me you would not care about it being your enemy; indeed you would feel wonderful about it. What about the agony and injuries I suffered for you for thirty-three years? For your own protection talk to me in order to see how they are tricking you. You have forgotten the shame and the many false accusations that they said about me and the scourges, thorns and the cross. These have always been your enemies, but they were my friends. Seek to enjoy them or at least not to dislike them. Is this the beautiful way you pay back your spouse, the faith you placed in me at your baptism; the promises, the gratitude and mutual love that I get from you as a reward and payment for all my hard work and the way and method of following me with your cross?

4076 Let us suppose that you do not care about me or my honour and have forgotten about all the injuries that the world has inflicted on me and the saints as they continually

¹¹¹ Cf. MT. 10, 37-39; Lk. 9, 23-24; Mk. 8, 34-35; Jn. 12, 25.

persecuted us because it was the enemy of all that is virtuous, in your own best interest you should hate the world and recognise that it has not done anything good for you. When you open your eyes, you will see that it had always made things worse for you. Is it not possible that it has not made things better for you and that all of its charades were false in order to trick you even more? To this very day it tries to harm you as much as it can to the point that in many cases it becomes necessary for me to perform a miracle to set you free. In spite of all this you still look for peace and if you had a kindly heart you would not even consider looking at it. I allowed it to kick you when you thought that it was improving you so that you would recognise what a traitor¹¹² it was. Because of your hardness, I did not move you and I ordered you to leave so that you were forced to depart as you were not responding to love.

Go, do not be unhappy with the world, respect it greatly; see to it what it does not speak ill of you, be courteous to it, show it your smiling face, do not abandon it too quickly, put up with it a little longer, perhaps this is how death will find you. Do not listen to me. Do not worry about upsetting me and hurting me. Indeed, the better I treat you, the worse you treat me.

4077 *Soul* – A few days ago I began to disentangle myself from the world little by little and I shall come to you soon.

Christ – Whoever thinks that he can at once shake off the chains, that bind him to the world, is thinking of doing the impossible. This is always one of its tricks. When one is broken, seven more bind. Thus, one piece of work becomes five. It is necessary to cut them immediately, immediately and break yourself away from the world. This is a bond which the more you try to break from it, the more it grips you. This world is just like an angry, violent and fast-running river. Whoever wants to cross it little by little and go slowly is dragged in. He is deceived many times and may end up being submerged. For our entire life we should act with violence, drive and strength without losing our breath.¹¹³

Soul – At the end of so many struggles I hoped to find myself in port and at peace.

Christ – If that in what you want your ship is decked out in such a way that every wind could blow it into port. However, it would be better when things are rough that you are in control. If you think that the world will provide you with peace and that things will go your way, and everything will fall into place you are very mistaken. That will never happen. Your desires are so insatiable, and the countless worldly matters will never cease. Therefore, you should not expect that the sea will become calm and the pitching will stop. Take hold of yourself and of your desires and you will find the port. Still place your hopes on me and you will be at peace; otherwise all your efforts will be in vain.

Soul – Even if I delay, above all I want to come to you.

Christ – Certainly you have been lazy and full of doubt when coming to me. Perhaps you did not make the time, crying over what you have thrown away and not about what you have gained, for God is a very large port. However, I know how to bring you to safety and do not always be saying: “I shall do something good” without making a

¹¹² This topic is treated full in the sermons of Bernardino Ochino. Cf. for example sermon four at Lucca in 1538, nn. 5649-5661.

¹¹³ This is the kind of violence that is also mentioned in *Const.* 1536 n. 139, 5-6 (n. 408).

start. Almost all those who are in hell thought about repenting, but they went ahead offending. Beware that the same thing does not happen to you.

Soul – Come, let us begin.

Christ – Not yet, but when I am ready. You are late and so you have lost something.

Soul – Do you want me to set aside everything that is complicated?

Christ – Do you think that you can solve the unfathomable labyrinth¹¹⁴ of the complicated world that has been and will be most confusing chaos?

Soul – In the midst of my miseries and anxieties I had only one refuge.

Christ – What was that?

Soul – The firm hope of being set free one day, otherwise I would have been in a desperate state.

Christ – It is characteristic of misery that it feeds and gluts on hopes that are often vain. This need not be an obstacle for you. It will never happen to you. That day will never come. If you follow your sense appetites, you will have neither the time nor the method for coming to me. You can already see that the world pursues you and it does so in such a way that though you feel happy it does not make you smile. Indeed, if something unpleasant or threatening happens think about what you would do if it appeared to be a really miserable situation. On the other hand, I would not be absent from you in any way or at any time. What would it be like if I had not given you enlightenment concerning myself and my sincere, great love? Do I not know that you often experience how very sweet I am even though you are unworthy of this; why do you delay? I have already taken away the obstacles, removed the impediments and broken the chains. The world will not miss anyone who cares about it, and the day, on which you boasted of being free, has come. What are you doing then, why delay, what are you waiting for? Perhaps you think that I should drag you by force from the wicked world. I do not need you, nor will your arrival add to my glory, nor does your postponement upset me.

4079 *Soul* – If, as you know, I wanted to make a leap and come to you, when I was bound by more chains than you could count, tell me what should I do now that I am free.

Christ – O how often are you going to repent about the delay!

Soul – In chapter twenty-two of St Matthew you said: Render first to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and then to God.¹¹⁵ Therefore we should satisfy the world in the first place and give it what is due to it.

Christ – That is pomp, pride, vanity, ignorance, ingratitude, cheating, lying, betrayal, pleasures, concupiscence, avarice and the other vices and their wickedness. These are what you should render to it so that becoming immaculate and pure you may give God praise and glory.

Soul – In my postponement I thought that I could save something.

Christ – Save yourself first. If you are in a dangerous situation and go about attending to the salvation of your friends, it will result in death for yourself and your friends. First bind yourself to me inseparably. Can you not see that the boat is sinking,

¹¹⁴ Labyrinth is a word that has great importance for Ochino. He used it many years after his sad experiences after becoming “protestant” in his important book of sermons: *Prediche nomate Laberinti*, Basilea, 1563.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Mt 22, 21.

and it is everyone for himself? This is not the time to think about possessions or friends but for thinking about you.

Soul – I want to fulfil my obligations first.

4080 *Christ* – I will be happy when you rid yourself of the things that have bound you in the past or could do so in future. It is better that you give up everything than that you remain in debt for even a small amount. You should make yourself safe and not be dependent on honour or wealth as you advance to honour God. When a sick person has not been adequately flushed out he is unable to take any food, indeed everything will upset him. This is the same for you. Therefore, empty the stomach of your conscience completely and then come to me. Do it soon, without letting your head spin. Set sins aside. Indeed, let them leave you. The more that you delay, the longer you will remain separated from me and the more difficult it will be to come back. Your bad habits will continue to grow. What will you do then? Gaze on my love and do not allow all my efforts to pass on in vain and the blood that I shed be wasted. Have compassion on me. You know that you no longer own yourself. I gave my life for you. I wait for you with outstretched arms on the cross. I invite and call you to paradise. If you truly come to me, I will forgive everything. You will be the love of my heart, my delight and my dear spouse and triumph with me forever.

6. Dialogue concerning the journey to paradise

The last but one of the seven Dialogues attempts to provide a spiritual explanation of the tradition and the wide-spread devotional practice of the pilgrimage as well as the meaning of “flight from the world”. It consists of a penitential spirituality in the modern biblical sense of metonoia (conversion) which uses the image of the journey to heaven to explain the Christian’s need to walk the path of divine love, It begins with a very strong resolve or conversion of the will (“the point of departure”) and takes on a profound interior dimension and a strong mystical experience (“rest in Christ’s side”) which comes to maturity by means of spiritual poverty and complete detachment (“farewell to the world”).

The reader would not find it difficult to discover many references and terms used in the Capuchin Constitutions of 1536 even if the religious lifestyle appears to be more appropriate to the laity than to religious.

Conversationalists: The Guardian Angel and the Pilgrim Soul

4081 *Pilgrim Soul* – I find myself being on a journey in this world and I realise that my homeland is not in this world and so I never feel at rest because I live here for a day but forever in paradise. O wretched one that I am, where am I to go? How blind have I been to come to a halt with love as it is in this world! I sought to make a home while in exile and sought to stay on top of the water with the many anxieties that it brought me when it showed and let me see its wickedness and disasters. In spite of all this I still did not step away from loving it, indeed I continued to have more love for it.

. When God enlightened me showing me that paradise was my homeland and called out to me, I remained deaf and did not respond. I only accumulated possessions,

built palaces, planted gardens, went in search of honour and status and being loved by persons in the present life as if this would last forever. In the long run I was that blind that I tried to make this world my paradise whereas staying there for three days it is hell.

O how wretched was I in that I was still not coming close to God or to my homeland during the long time that I remained submissive to the world. Indeed, it was not only that I was not coming close but each day I was going further away from true life. It is time that I opened my eyes and became aware of my grave mistake. I want to really change my life by leaving this wicked world, taking leave of all my friends and setting out on the way to paradise. However, because I could easily be deceived, and fall short of life, I must find a good guide. Since I cannot find anyone who would be better than the angel who has guarded me and always been my companion I want to say to him briefly: "My dear brother and companion on the road to God, what should I do to advance towards my homeland?"

4082 *Guardian Angel* – The three divine persons have never been pilgrims, they have always been in their homeland, always in paradise in supreme glory and happiness. They have never walked the road of merits. They have never progressed from virtue to virtue. Indeed, they have been always perfect *ab aeterno*, and always loving God infinitely. They could not come closer to God by means of greater love. Therefore, they cannot journey towards God by means of the road of love.

We angels were once pilgrims. We were created and placed outside paradise and had to walk to God along the road of love. When walking alone the very road of love the bad ones turned themselves towards the city of Babylon, while the good ones, by taking the road of divine love, entered the city of the heavenly Jerusalem, the lofty city of paradise.

Your first parents were also pilgrims in the earthly paradise, but, because of the sin of disobedience, they were cast out and confined to this world. Indeed, because they had been rebellious the gates of paradise were locked in such a way that until Christ came there was nobody who could enter. Even many saintly people knocked on the doors of divine mercy, they were not opened. Yet, seeing that they were holy, they were sent to Limbo.

In so far as Christ was human he was partially a pilgrim and partially not. Thus, in so far as he was one of us and a pilgrim on the way to the homeland he won merit, not for himself, but for us. He always belonged to the homeland by means of the higher portion of his soul but was a pilgrim by the lower portion. By means of his suffering he opened the gates of paradise and once more restored a blessing on you. Thus, you were no longer rebels but were reconciled by Christ's precious blood. You are all pilgrims and can save yourselves. Therefore, God wants me to take special care of you. Thus, I am to be a special light to you and to give you all the help that I can to lead you to God.

4083 *Pilgrim Soul* – If I want to go to paradise, to my homeland, I think that I will need the strength to leave the world and to turn my back on it. Now I want to know what it will take for me to do this.

Guardian Angel – Before you break away you must repay all that you owe. If you have something that belongs to your neighbour, return it. If you have robbed him of his honour or reputation, retract your words. If you have taken his life, damaged or injured

his body make reparation in the best way that you are able. If you have sown weeds, caused discord between people and destroyed the good and holy love and peace that was there before you need to make up for this and restore the former situation. If you have induced your neighbour to sin in some way by word or example and thus taken him away from God, paradise and divine grace you should first put all this right in the best possible way that you can. Finally, you ought to repay all your debts. If you have to satisfy obligations, fulfil them. If you have made vows or promises, fulfil them all, because if you are under obligation you cannot journey on towards God until you are free and have fulfilled your obligations.

Pilgrim Soul – If I cannot do this?

Guardian Angel – Do what you can and where this is impossible make up for it with good will. Do you understand what you have to do?

Pilgrim Soul – What?

Guardian Angel – Let everyone know that you are prepared to suffer and if anyone feels that you have hurt them tell them to let you know and you will give them satisfaction. This is so that if you have incurred any debt without knowing it you can make amends.

Pilgrim Soul – I feel ashamed to publish something like that.

Guardian Angel – It would indeed be a generous and noble act. When the lords of this world have visited a place for awhile and wish to depart, they make an announcement that anyone to whom they owed something during their stay should make this known and be paid since they are about to leave. Now it is more important for you to do this as you have spent a long time in the world and are about to go on a greater journey. If through your fault you are in debt, you cannot move or take a step on the road to God. Therefore, you are bound to satisfy such debts as are owing to the world the obligations of which make it impossible to advance towards God.

Pilgrim Soul – Come, what else do I need to do?

Guardian Angel – Sell all that you have, palaces and furniture

Pilgrim Soul – This is much!

Guardian Angel – What do you want to do? Whatever it takes you should do, indeed you must, just as Christ said in chapter nineteen of Matthew: “Go sell everything”.¹¹⁶ Whatever you retain is lost. You must leave everything¹¹⁷ if you want to be rich in paradise. Christ said in chapter six of Matthew: “lay up treasures for yourselves in heaven.”¹¹⁸

4085 *Pilgrim Soul* – To whom should I give my possessions, who knows if this will bring me to heaven?

Guardian Angel – Give them to Christ and his little ones.

Pilgrim Soul – What shall I have?

Guardian Angel – You cannot walk with such a weight. You need to be light and swift to undertake such a walk. If you hold back then during the journey, you will be robbed by thieves and put to death quickly and lose everything.

¹¹⁶ Mt. 19, 21.

¹¹⁷ The sixteenth century edition, which the 1814 edition followed mistakenly, has *carrmaggi* instead of *cariaggi*.

¹¹⁸ Mt. 6, 19-20.

Pilgrim Soul – Will I save nothing?

Guardian Angel – Just what you need to live and nothing else!

Pilgrim Soul – I have children, family and many friends: must I leave everyone of them?

Guardian Angel – Indeed, I do not want you to leave any of them, but that you lead them then all into good company.

Pilgrim Soul – What if they do not want to come?

Guardian Angel – Leave them alone and depart, even from your father. Do you not know what Christ said in chapter ten of Matthew: whoever loves father or mother more than Christ, is not worthy of him?"¹¹⁹

Pilgrim Soul – So then do you want me to go alone?

Guardian Angel – It is better for you to saved on your own than that you be damned having company.

4086 *Pilgrim Soul* – I have a sister who is the apple of my eye. What if she does not want to come?

Guardian Angel – Throw her over your shoulder. Do you not know what Christ said in chapter five of Matthew; "It is better for you to go to paradise with only one eye, than to go to hell with two eyes."¹²⁰ Even though your sister is the apple of your eye, pluck it out of your head, take it out of your heart and turn to God.

Pilgrim Soul – I have a brother who does everything. He manages the house and without him I would not know how to live. It appears that I shall be left with nothing.

Guardian Angel – If he does not want to come and holds you back and stops you from walking on God's way, cut him off from you as Christ told you in chapter five of Matthew even if he were your right hand.¹²¹

Pilgrim Soul – What could I do to lead him along with me?

Guardian Angel – Enlighten him and induce him to follow Christ. Help him, win him over, correct him and, as much as you can, act well towards him in word, setting an example, in the way you live and in prayer.

Pilgrim Soul – I feel that I have responsibilities.

Guardian Angel – If that is impeding your journey set it aside.

Pilgrim Soul – What about the pleasures I had in this world?

Guardian Angel – You need to leave everything with love and take leave of all creatures. You should not wait until you are dying when you will have to leave everything behind or you will not please God.

[Love's journey]

4087 *Pilgrim Soul* – Tell me how does a person walk towards God?

Guardian Angel – By means of love! The more you love God, the more you move. If you love creatures more than God you are taking one step forward and two steps backwards,¹²² and therefore you will never start. If you love God with the same amount

¹¹⁹ Mt. 10, 37.

¹²⁰ Mt. 5, 29.

¹²¹ Mt, 5, 30.

¹²² This thought comes from St Augustine. Cf. *Enarr. in Ps. 9*, n.15 (*PL* 36, 124).

of love as you love creatures, you will never move. However, if you want to come closer to God each day you must love God more than yourself and all other creatures. If you love creatures but love God more, you are taking two steps forward and one step backwards. You are still always going ahead even though you occasionally return to creatures. However, when you love¹²³ only God you are walking without impediment, and the more you love him interiorly the more forcefully you are going towards God.

Pilgrim Soul – When should I start?

Guardian Angel – Start at the first hour of the morning if you want to succeed during the day. Start when you are young if you want to walk with greater fervour.

4088 *Pilgrim Soul* – I am already of advanced age.¹²⁴

Guardian Angel – Do not delay any longer.

Pilgrim Soul – I do not want to lose my life.

Guardian Angel – Always take the shortest road. Do not deviate to the right or to the left, neither during prosperity or adversity. Make it your aim to go by the shortest way. Keep your eye fixed on God and always move to honour him and you cannot go wrong. Your friends and relatives will approach you with their promises, and the pleasures of the present life, and they will say: “Why are you leaving us behind, why are you abandoning us, why do you not stay with us?” They will try to make you return to them. You need to be careful and on your guard to divert your eyes and turn away so that they do not stop you with love. Follow the example of other pilgrims who¹²⁵ as they passed through a beautiful city cast a glance at it and went on. That is what you should do to this world.

[The parting step]

4089 *Pilgrim Soul* – I think that it would be difficult for me to undertake such a long journey.

*[Guardian Angel]*¹²⁶ – The first step, that is the one of departure, is the most difficult. It entails making a decision. However, when a person is really ready to live a good life and begins to walk the road to God the further he moves away from the world and the closer he comes to God nothing is difficult to him. It is very easy for love to carry any weight and to endure all labour with ease. If you stumble at some time act like someone who is coming back to his homeland and when he is feeling the burden of his journey thinks of how he is coming back to his father, mother, brothers, relatives and friends and of the great reception that they will give him and then walks as if he did not notice the effort.

You must do the same. Think about Christ for a while, of the Madonna, of the Saints, of the glory and of the celebration that will take place in the whole of paradise when you arrive.¹²⁷ Be always happy as you walk. Go along singing and with a joyful heart and mind. Try to always have company and talk about God. Walk as if you did not

¹²³ *Amasti = amassi.*

¹²⁴ *Senettù* in the text is from the Latin *senectus* old age or very advanced in years.

¹²⁵ *Quai* in the text = *l quali*

¹²⁶ By mistake the identity of the speaker was omitted in the text.

¹²⁷ Cf. S. Berbaro, *Dics. 2: Op. omnia*, ed. Cister. 58 [1968] 364-368 [cf. *Breviario*, vol. 4, 1521].

have a care and, if you want,¹²⁸ to rest enter into Christ's side and you will immediately regain your strength and grow in fervour. Take care not to turn back as the people of God wanted to return to Egypt. You should go ahead each day making better progress on the road to God. Halting without wanting to do better will only make things worse and be retracing your steps.

Pilgrim Soul – Tell me, what to wear!

[The poverty and detachment of a pilgrim]

4090 *Guardian Angel* – Dress in something lowly and shabby,¹²⁹ just enough to satisfy necessity.¹³⁰ Learn from the pilgrims of this world who even if they are great masters of the house still go about in disguise and plainly dressed so that they will not be taken prisoner in some place. Do likewise hiding your treasures, the graces and the spiritual riches that the eternal God has given you so that vainglory will not rob them from you.

Pilgrim Soul – What if they become apparent and give glory to God?

Guardian Angel – In that case there is no need to hide them but show that they come from God.

Pilgrim Soul - What if I am injured on the journey?

4091 *Guardian Angel* – Do not stop or turn back to take revenge. You should be totally intent on going ahead in order to reach God without being concerned about anything else.

A pilgrim does not stop to argue, or pay the price for awkward situations, or be concerned with scheming or with what is going on in the world or acquire honours or friends or wealth while he is walking because his mind is on going along the road. He does not see any beautiful city that is more beautiful than his own. He regards the conduct of the citizens of the world as foolish when compared with the conduct of those who live in paradise. As a means of contentment, he does not look for wealth or treasure, honours, status, pleasure, friends, relatives or anything connected with the present life. He continually sighs for his homeland and, like Paul, desires to die and be with Christ,¹³¹ and says: “When will that day arrive when by dying I will enter paradise?”

It feels like he is in a stable while he is in the present life. The entire world is not worth three grains of millet. He is there by necessity. He cannot sleep because of his great desire to go to God. He eats only when necessary to sustain life and his journey to God. He is careful not to be weighed down by eating too much since this would interrupt his journey. He is careful not to become weak. To save time he often eats while walking with an intent mind. When he does stop he thinks as if he were at an inn where in the end everything has to be paid for.¹³²

If he finds a spring of spiritual liquor he comes to a halt as he tastes a little but goes on more hastily to reach the sea. He avoids walking in the mud. He goes slowly to avoid falling and becoming dirty. He flees all the occasions of evil. If he has to pass a bad

¹²⁸ *Volessi* in the text *ti volesti*.

¹²⁹ In the text *grassamente* = grossamente.

¹³⁰ This echoes the Franciscan spirit of *Const.* 1536, n. 51 and 67.

¹³¹ Cf. Phil. 1, 23.

¹³² Cf. *Const.* 1536, n. 67. “... Let the friars also remember that they are at an inn and are eating the sins of the people. However, we have to pay for everything.”

spot, he goes around it and always avoids whatever is bad. He quickens his step when there is wind, hail or rain.

4092 At the time of adversity you should do the same in order to come closer to God. You should not walk at night so as not to fall over a cliff in the absence of Christ, as John warns¹³³ in chapter eight.¹³⁴ One cannot go to God by the light of the world. If due to frailty or blindness you fall into error while walking you ought to get up immediately like a pilgrim and not say: “I shall go to confession at Easter”¹³⁵. You should always make yourself more clean while in the mud. The deeper you sink the harder it will be to come out. Confessors are available to help you to get up. Once you are on your feet, in order to make up for lost time and to catch up with your companions who have gone on ahead, you should run with greater fervour than you had before.¹³⁶

You have to forget all the beautiful things of the wicked world and not be concerned about them and regard them as of little worth and think of them all as being shadows and consequently not love them but love what really pertains to our homeland where our Father lives who has given us life. This is where we have come from. This¹³⁷ is where the real treasures, the true pleasures, the real glory, the real relations and friends are.

Even Anaxagoras knew that this world was not our homeland. Therefore, as he was a pilgrim in a foreign land someone told him that he showed no care for his homeland. Pointing his finger towards heaven and indicating our real homeland he said; “In fact I care very much for my homeland and I love it very much and, as much as possible, I carry it in my heart and in my thoughts.” When Socrates was asked where his homeland was he pointed to heaven and said: “It is there.”¹³⁸

[Let us walk while we are in the light]

4093 *Pilgrim Soul* – The fathers of the Old Testament saw the heavenly homeland by means of faith as Paul wrote in Hebrews chapter two,¹³⁹ and yet they walked with love. We who follow them are so negligent. Paradise was closed to them and though it is open to us we are not moved.

Guardian Angel – However our sin is much worse.

Pilgrim Soul – I am very weak, and I do not know how I can finish the journey.

Guardian Angel – It is enough for you to stay strong for the love of God, not just by force or being heroic but out of love.

Pilgrim Soul – Now that I am old and near death I cannot do much.

¹³³ This passage was added in the reprint of 1884 but was not contained in Venice edition in 1542.

¹³⁴ Cf Jn. 8, 12.

¹³⁵ This challenges the literal and formal observance of the precept of the Church.

¹³⁶ He is supporting frequent confession.

¹³⁷ *Gli* in the text = *li*

¹³⁸ Anaxagoras (+ 428-428 BC) was a Greek Pre-Socratic philosopher who came from Clazomenae in Asia Minor. He brought philosophy to Athens. He was a friend of Pericles. He was accused of impiety and had to leave Athens. According to him the world is made of small particles that are eternal and immutable. Socrates (+199 BC) pioneered moral philosophy.

¹³⁹ There is an error in this quote, or better in the reading of the original. It should be Heb. 11, 13- 16.

4094 *Guardian Angel* – You should be all the more careful to arrive before night when the doors would be closed.¹⁴⁰ You need to forget about yourself when you love so that your spirit may be with Christ more freely.¹⁴¹ If God gives you grace be satisfied with nothing else. You will be accountable for every gift. Therefore, be sure that you appreciate it and use it all for your journey. If while you are on your journey you find that you have come to a halt or gone backwards or perhaps fallen into a ditch, use it to help you to rise and continue your walk. Do not give up. Act so that you can lead everyone to walk towards God. Do what you can to be the leader. Strip yourself of everything that is worldly so that you are light and more swiftly. Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.¹⁴²

Strip yourself even of yourself having your heart, mind and all your love set on your homeland. Do not be faint-hearted but with a magnanimous heart go on to the end and you will always be happy in the present life, if not because of anything else at least because you have the lively and sure hope of your salvation. However, you will be more glorious in the next life when you behold all in paradise and rejoice and celebrate your happiness so very much. In that situation you will rest and bring all labour to an end. There you will feel satisfaction and all your desires will be fulfilled. There you will live without care, preoccupation, anxiety sorrow, without sinning any more, but in the state of divine grace forever. You will experience God as you have never experienced him without any worry. You will not be afraid but eternally fervent in wanting to love. Then you will rejoice over your efforts and also over those of Christ. Then you feel pleased about what you have suffered for the love of God.

Do not neglect to continue your walk with as much fervour as you can. I will be with you always showing you the way and helping you to walk. Do not resist the divine inspirations and when Christ calls you to paradise respond by walking more quickly. Remind¹⁴³ yourself that he became a pilgrim in the present life for love of you and then your present journey will make you feel better.

[Farewell to the world]

4095 *Pilgrim Soul* – Now that I have come to recognise that this life is an exile, indeed hell, and that paradise is my homeland, I do not want to waste any more time but rather to go to paradise, and I want you, my Angel, to accompany me. Away world, I go to God! I go to him and leave you behind with all your wealth, with all your cares, with all your shame and poverty. I leave all my friends, my worldly relatives and beg all of you not to be offended by what I am doing and forgive me if I have offended you or my Lord.

Pray to God for me and I shall pray for you.

¹⁴⁰ The gates for entry and exit in the ancient cities that were surrounded by walls were closed at night.

¹⁴¹ This is the meaning of annihilation which, following Cordoni, Ochino often spoke about. Cf. *Dyalogo* c. 24: “A person can be united to God by annihilation of self, that is by the annihilation of his own will.” C 27: “Concerning the exercise of love and freedom of spirit.”

¹⁴² Cf. Mt. 27, 21; MK. 12, 17; Lk. 20, 25.

¹⁴³ Here *ricordati*, in the text *raccordati*.

7. Dialogue about the divine profession

This dialogue is the last in the series however as U Rozzo has demonstrated it was the first that can be dated with certainty that was put into print by Ochino. In fact, there is an Asti edition of 1540 which has the title: Dialogo della divine Professione di il Padre Bernardino da Siena della congregazione de' Capuccini. The conversationalists in this edition are a Preacher and a Gentlewoman [10 ff,n, n]. It states the date as being "iiii di Settembre M. D. XXXVI" (4th September 1536). It says on the front piece: "Printed in Asti for Francesco Garone de Livorno and a citizen of Asti in the year of the Lord M. D. XXXX on 7th May." Thus, we are confronted with a text that was composed before 22nd September 1536 which is the date of the General Chapter that took place in S. Eufemia in Rome during which Bernardino Pili d'Asti was elected General Superior and the first Capuchin Constitutions were approved.

This text was edited again as the last of the seven Dialogues that were printed in Venice by Zoppini in 1540 and 1542 and again in the seven Dialogues that were published three times in Venice in 1549 and 1542. The conversationalists were changed in these editions and became "Man and Woman" or Bernardino and the Duchess of Camerino Caterine Cybo. It would seem that the relationship between the famous preacher and Cybo went back to 1534-35 in Rome where the extraordinary preacher preached the Lent of 1535 in S. Giovanni di Damaso.

In this Dialogue we certainly see some ambiguous theological language and also an escalation in the conviction that faith in Christ Crucified is the only basis for being saved. It is here that Ochino's understanding of the spiritual life comes out in terms of the delicate and risky subject of faith. It is a spiritual testimony that he develops in an ardent and radical declaration concerning faith that recognises that without Jesus Christ one can do nothing good. It is also a way of energetically making a act of love that is "pure and sincere" and comes from the depth of the heart in union with the Three Divine Persons following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, with perfect contrition for sins, renunciation of one's own will and complete faith in the Crucified, reckoning oneself to be nothing in his "merciful arms", and hiding oneself in his side ("annihilating myself to be transformed into Christ"). Having an attitude like this it is possible to make solemn profession of the three evangelical counsels interpreted in their spiritual meaning.

The text is theologically significant and should be compared with the Dialogue of his teacher and disciple Antonio di Pinerolo (nn. 6790-6860).

Conversationalists: A man and a woman

4096 *Man* – In short, for the honour and glory of God, I want the salvation of your soul and that you have supreme happiness.

Woman – You know well that I have placed my soul in your hands.

Man – I want it to be in God's hands.

Woman – Tell me what I should do and should not do.

Man – I want you to become a religious person.

Woman – I have not thought about doing this for many reasons.

Man – What if I were to show you a type of religious life that will touch your heart?

Woman – Perhaps I would take that up, but up to now I do not know of one that I would like.

Man – I know of one which once you come to hear about it I know that you will accept and like it.

Woman – Perhaps it would be so, but I do not believe it.

Man – This is a way of religious life that it so perfect that it is divine.¹⁴⁴

Woman – However this does not suit me.

Man – Indeed it does since everyone is obliged to tend towards perfection. Here there is no need to change place, but behaviour. One has to change one's way of living not one's clothes, to cut away all bad thoughts and desires not one's hair and to pray to God from the heart and not the lips; to obey God not men, to be prudent in heart and mind, having no affection for earthly things and having all the virtues as one's companions.

Woman – I really want to become perfect but I do not want to have to make too great an effort.

Man – This is the way. There is not in the world any way of living a religious life that is easier and more perfect than this.

4097 *Woman* – This obliges a person under pain of sin and I think this is to expose oneself to danger.

Man --Yes, but there is no more certain way of going to God.

Woman - So that I may undertake this way of religious living can you at least tell me what it is called.

Man – Divine.

Woman – It could not have a better name.

Man – The same may be said of the way of life of those who follow it.

Woman – If you tell me about it I may enter into it.

Man – There are no novices in this way of religious life. You only have to make profession. This is not a bad thing since the obligations are not difficult.

Woman – You can go ahead. In the end I will do what you advise me to do.

Man – I advise you to enter and to make profession immediately so that you do not delay any longer and once you are settled in doing the right thing your work will be pleasing to God.

Woman – You can see that I am thinking it over carefully. Such things happen only once and should be well considered. When you decide that this is the better option, I do not want you to fail to carry out what you tell me.

¹⁴⁴ In the Asti edition of 1540 we read: “This way of religious life is so perfect that you could not add to such perfection as it has the highest degree of perfection.” The Dialogue, as you will see in what follows, introduces a change in the way of thinking about what is required to consecrate oneself to God in a divine and perfect religious life where there is not a need for a change in place, but in behaviour, It is necessary to change one's life, not one's garb, to cut away all bad thoughts and desires, not one's hair and to pray to God from the heart, not on the lips [cf. *Const.* 1536 n. 36 and 42], to obey God rather than men, to be prudent of heart and mind, without being attached to earthly things and keeping company with all the virtues ...” Ochino wishes to stress perfect life in the spirit as the soul of all religious thinking and of all regular observance. The lady whom he is addressing is convinced and makes her solemn profession immediately using a form of words that are suggested by Ochino himself. The text of this Dialogue should always be compared with the first Asti edition which is the more certain and authentic.

Man – There is much to be gained in this way of life and there is no danger because only gentle spirits take it up. I will help you with everything.

Woman – Come, enough talk! I am happy to do as you wish.

4098 *Man* – I want you to make your profession now and because I want to be certain, I want you to put it in writing so that it will be perpetual and permanent.¹⁴⁵

Woman – I shall write down all that you tell me on my heart. Let us begin in the name of Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁶

Man – My Lady, in your mind you have been lifted up to paradise,¹⁴⁷ indeed to the throne of the highest Trinity, to Christ’s feet, in the presence of the Madonna and the whole of paradise, abandoning yourself in complete humility and united to God in faith, hope and charity say these or similar words¹⁴⁸ with all your heart.

[Declaration]

4099 Let it be known and clear to all who read this that I C.D. di C.¹⁴⁹ by divine grace and heavenly enlightenment, being of sane mind, having seen on the one hand God’s great goodness and his love for me, and on the other, the wickedness¹⁵⁰ of this world and my miserable circumstances resolve to turn to God with all my love.

[Profession of faith]

I acknowledge now and for my entire life by means of faith and I confess with my heart, my soul, my mind, with all my might and strength, with my life, my actions, my words and all of the other means possible that there is only one God and three Persons. I confess that God is most simple, most pure, eternal, immense, necessary, immutable and omnipotent. I confess that he is infinitely beautiful, wise, just, merciful, goodness, sweetness, truth love,¹⁵¹ and all the other attributes which could pertain to perfection. I confess that God created everything completely new and out of nothing¹⁵² and that he cares for everything with the utmost providence and that he preserves everything, and that he maintains and governs everything with the greatest goodness, wisdom, justice, mercy and love. I confess that there can be no error or defect in what he does and that he does everything extremely well.

¹⁴⁵ In the 1542 Venice edition there is a doubtful reading e.g., it says: “*I want you to write it in your own heart so that it will be more perfect and not able to be erased.*”

¹⁴⁶ In the Asti edition: “*I shall write in the name of Jesus*”.

¹⁴⁷ In the Asti edition: *Lift your mind up to paradise.*

¹⁴⁸ The phrase ‘*similar words*’ was added in the Venice edition. The preceding phrase *in complete humility ... united with God* was evidently taken from Cordoni’s *Dialogue* c. 8 “Since by means of humility the soul can come to union with God.”

¹⁴⁹ The initials stand for Caterina Duchessa di Camerino. In the Asti text there are no initial simply *N*.

¹⁵⁰ Here *malignità* in the Asti edition *Malitia*.

¹⁵¹ The last two divine attributes appear in first place in the Asti edition.

¹⁵² *Out of nothing* was added in the Asti edition.

4100 I confess that he sees *ad aeterno* and continuously everything with clear, confident and infallible knowledge and that he loves us with everlasting,¹⁵³ continuous, infinite, gratuitous, sincere,¹⁵⁴ paternal, purest, most simple and divine love. I also confess that the eternal Father out of excessive sheer love¹⁵⁵ as well as for our salvation sent his only Son to become man, to be conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit, to be born of the Virgin, to live and die for all on the cross, descend into Limbo to free the saintly fathers, to rise on the third day and to ascend to heaven to sit at the Father's right hand.

I confess that he sent the Holy Spirit down to the Apostles. I believe in his teaching and by means of faith I am sure¹⁵⁶ that I will never lose his grace. I confess that the life of the saints in the Church of Christ is immaculate and holy. Finally I believe and confess all that I am obliged to believe and, if because of my malice, weakness or ignorance I have been lacking or mistaken in something I now and forever admit my fault and retract it all because my intellect has to believe only what is true and that alone is what I adhere to and believe.¹⁵⁷

I still intend to remove from myself all impediments to the enlightenment and rays of the true faith, and to believe by means of making a most perfect act of faith. I intend to do this now and always and for every instant of my life particularly at the moment of death. What is more, I intend that if I were to live forever to do this for an infinite amount of time and during every instant. If I ever lacked faith, erred, had doubts, hesitated or wavered I now declare and profess before everyone that I do not want to believe anything other than what the holy Church of Jesus Christ commands me to believe with all the firmness and certainty of which I am capable. Now and forever I offer myself to the most holy Trinity ready and willing to endure any kind of martyrdom an infinite number of times, as often as required and is necessary.¹⁵⁸

4101 So that my belief will be pleasing to God, I pray with heart and will that this faith will significantly reassure all my faculties and prepare me to always carry out what I have promised without me ever thinking that I have achieved this perfectly. I intend by a great act of love, backed by all Christ's merits,¹⁵⁹ to always take it to my heart and to grasp it most intensely, conscientiously, lovingly, fervently to the highest degree of perfection so that I can feel that I have conquered my instability, my weaknesses, doubts and lack of confidence,¹⁶⁰ and other created things, since I have ceased to trust any of them and lost

¹⁵³ Cf. Jer. 31, 3

¹⁵⁴ Here *sincero* in the Venice edition *sicuro*.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Eph. 2, 4. *Sheer* was added in the Asti edition.

¹⁵⁶ Here as he was copying the original Asti document the editor of the Venice edition forgot that a woman was speaking and wrote *certo* whereas it should have been *certa*.

¹⁵⁷ The Venice edition completely changes the meaning when it says: "thus it is my intention to believe only what is true I adhere and believe that alone".

¹⁵⁸ Here too the Venice edition has made many changes: "I do not want to believe anything but what the holy Church of Christ commands...." Further ahead: "prepared to endure every kind of martyrdom possible in this life an infinite number of times." Note that the terms Catholic Church or Roman Church are not used but only the Church of Christ. Some see in this a cryptic form of Protestantism. Cf. U. Rozzo, *Nuova contribute* cit. 71 and 75.

¹⁵⁹ The Venice edition of the *Dialogi sette* has *merits of Our Lord*.

¹⁶⁰ That is my unworthiness. This concept is also present in the Dialogue of Cordoni ch. 20. "Just as a man no matter how good and just he may be can and should regard himself as unworthy." (cf. 67v-70v) It was already present in Ugo Panziera.

confidence in all creatures, placing all my hope in God and from now on always depending on him and placing my hope in him alone,¹⁶¹ anticipating and recognising that he alone provides all that is good through the merits of Christ.

I now recognise forever that I have done nothing, do nothing or can do nothing. I recognise that I have known nothing, loved nothing. I know and love in order to know or to desire. I have not owned anything, do own or will own anything. I want nothing, have nothing or wish to have anything.¹⁶² Thus I had lost hope and confidence and now by means of a complete act of hope I intend to always for all my life to only hope in God's goodness.

[Irrevocable intentions]

4102 If it should ever happen that out of malice, frailty, or ignorance I might despair or lose confidence in God and not recognise that he is all goodness for me and because of this take pride in my own achievements and not give all the honour, praise and glory to God I pray¹⁶³ about such a thing taking place. I pray that I may always be thinking about God and his creatures. If this would happen I would consider that I had become blind,¹⁶⁴ and not myself. If I had similar foolish thoughts and concepts I would not be thinking logically but wrongly. I revoke this, take it back and nullify it. I mean to always hope with all my heart by means of a supreme act of hope in the divine goodness never to depart from that. I propose with vivid enlightenment to recognise all goodness in him and all evil in me and to offer to him alone all thanksgiving, honour and glory while regarding myself as nothing.¹⁶⁵

If it ever happened that I was praised by people, I intend now and forever to recognise that such people do not intend to praise me but God. Thus, with respect to such praise it is my intention not to attribute any of it to me with a sacrilegious mind, but to send it all up to God while I remain in my wretchedness and apart from all my merits. Indeed, by rendering everything to God, by remaining poor in myself, I profess and always promise to observe poverty that is to admit that I have nothing that is my own. Then stripped of all my own merit and virtue I shall hide in Christ's side forever and never wish to leave, but to always hope in him. At the moment of death, I intend to

¹⁶¹ These expressions echo *Const.* 1536, n. 48. "Since true friars should have faith in their merciful and best Father "and n. 81, "We should depend on divine generosity in everything and relax in his infinite goodness."

¹⁶² Here evidently Ochino has been inspired by a passage in Cordoni's *Dialogue* where he described the loving soul as a seraph who has six wings, the first two of which are faith and love "the other four are the following, *nihil esse, nihil sciere, nihil posse, nihil volle*. He covers himself with these wings, keeps himself upright with them, that is to say, that he always has four things fixed in his memory, namely that he is nothing, knows nothing, cannot do anything and cannot wish for anything. This is the reason why I say that he holds himself upright so that he will not become proud, or fall into disgrace before God, and so he keeps himself humble, beautiful and kind." (c. 48, f. 234 r-v)

¹⁶³ Asti edition has: *Now I pray for*.

¹⁶⁴ This is another example of a false version in the Venice edition which has: *If this would happen I would be stupid, blind and not myself*.

¹⁶⁵ Here too we see the abundant influence of Cordoni. Cf. *Dyalogo* c. 20 cit.

purchase the throne of the Holy Trinity with nothing but the blood that Christ shed and enriched with his merits I wish to enter paradise and the next life.¹⁶⁶

4103 If, because my mind is confused or obstructed, it appears to me that something is good at that time and I trust a little in my work and merits, I declare to all the faithful souls, to the Angels, to the Madonna, to Christ and the Trinity that this is not what I want because I am mistaken and have been tricked. If that happens I now retract it, apologise and place all my hope in God's hands for ever. If I were to live forever, at every moment, whether eating or drinking and in every time and place, I want to hope in God alone with a very high act of hope that is accompanied by all the merits of the saints and of Christ and accepted by the most holy Trinity.¹⁶⁷

Because I know that only Good is good,¹⁶⁸ and that he alone deserves my love, I therefore give him all of my love forever. I never intend to love anyone except him since he is the highest good and loves me with infinite love. Thus, I know that I owe this to him and should give him infinite love. This means that I ought to love him with continuous, eternal, infinite, gratuitous and sincere love in the same way that he loves me. However, since I cannot love him with that kind of love, I now intend to make an act of love in as far as that is possible for me which is sincere and pure simply out of love for him. I intend to make such love continual and, if this is possible,¹⁶⁹ to have it increase for infinity. Since my love is imperfect I wish that it always especially accompanied with all of Christ's merits. Indeed, as I become annihilated and transformed into Christ, I want to love him always with the love that is in the heart of Christ and to persevere in this always. By means of love I ask you to make me always intimate with the divine Persons in heartfelt love. Make me abandon myself, and all creatures and life for God alone.¹⁷⁰

[Breath of divine love]

4104 I also chose to be self-annihilated and completely transformed into God so that I may love God in a divine way the same way that I chose to love him with love that is infinite, eternal, continual, gratuitous and consummate. I also intend always, at all times and in every place, whether eating or sleeping, to always breath love, the same way as the Father and the Son constantly breath the Holy Spirit.¹⁷¹ If it were ever to happen at some

¹⁶⁶ This is a wonderful page because of its mystical character which however comes close to a Protestant opinion according to which justification come about through faith alone without works. There is also a close resemblance to Catherine of Siena.

¹⁶⁷ The Venice edition did not use the feminine adjectives and wrote *accompagnato, accettato*.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Mt. 19, 171 Lk. 18, 19; Mk. 10, 18.

¹⁶⁹ There are many variations in this passage in the Venice edition. It says: "*eleggere*" instead of "*elicere*" and adds the words "*sincero e puro*" etc up to "*se è possibile*."

¹⁷⁰ These thoughts greatly resemble what is contained in chapters 34, 35, 36 and 45 of the *Dialogo del Cordoni*, f. 165v, 171r. "Since this exercise of love contains all of the attributes": f 171v, 174v "As the soul has recourse to Christ as the living source of what it lacks"; f 175r-183r; "Since Christ supplies for all the defects of the soul, there is no worry about experiencing grace". F 218v, 222v; "Just as by annihilating himself a person discovers perfect peace and discovers God by means of this."

¹⁷¹ Once again this is Cordoni's teaching which appears in chapter 33 of his Dialogue. "*Reason*: What is this act of love that takes place between God and the soul? *Love*: This is the same act that is produced *in divinis* (in the Godhead) between the Father and the Son to sigh and breathe love ... When the faithful soul begins to have union with God it welcomes the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit into itself, the entire

time that I loved a creature I do not intend to have my love stop with the creature but to send it all ultimately to God.

If I were to stop loving him to the highest decree for a time I now repent for that time and ask forgiveness and do everything so that my intention may always be to persevere Now and for the future I choose to love him with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind and with all my might and strength. I set and fix my will on this.¹⁷² I am determined to always recognise that all good resides in him, and to see infinite power and wisdom,¹⁷³ charity, mercy, beauty, justice and perfection in all his works, and to always think that he does everything well and in short to never stop thanking him with my heart, works, life and words and in every way possible and thus to always praise him, exalt, magnify and glorify him.¹⁷⁴ I also intend to always bless him, praise him and as far as possible honour him. I intend to always and continually keep God in my thoughts, having the most excellent ideas about him.¹⁷⁵

[For God's honour and glory]

4105 I intend to never think about any creature unless it means giving honour to God.¹⁷⁶ I intend to mortify myself with regard to the entire world with all my soul's faculties and make them live for God as I abstain from everything, from creatures and the entire world with my whole heart and mind. I do not want to see, hear, perceive or know anything unless it will help me to give honour to God.¹⁷⁷

I intend to have God as my final end and to connect everything to him. Everything that I desire will be focused on him. I shall organise my entire life around him. I intend that in everything that I do my purpose will be simple, sincere and upright and always aimed at endeavouring to honour God. Thus, I now propose that I shall always and in every moment of my life to see to it that whether I sleep or eat, or do whatever is required to sustain life, that it will be done in the service of God so that I will ultimately die for his honour and glory.¹⁷⁸

Holy Trinity. It says in the Gospel: We will come to him and make our abode in him. At the moment when the soul is filled with God and divine love it is given the capacity and great privilege, of producing the Holy Spirit. He is the love of the Father and the Son, the one *who proceeds from the Father and the Son* and who is breathed unceasingly, ineffably and infinitely from one to the other." (f. 162r – 163v). See also chapter 37: "Just as the breath that the soul takes in God so it yields great fruit and merit." (f. 179r – 183r). See also all the closing chapters of Cordoni's Dialogue that deal with the doctrine of breathing.

¹⁷² Compare this text with *Const.* 1536 n. 63. It contains the same thought and inspiration.

¹⁷³ *Wisdom* was added in the Venice edition.

¹⁷⁴ *Glorify* was added in the Venice edition.

¹⁷⁵ The last sentence reminds us of the first concept in *De regimine animae* (On the Government of the Soul) by Bonaventure. "First of all, my soul, it is necessary for you to have a very exalted, pure and holy regard for God." St Bonaventure repeated this in many other works. Cf. *Decem opuscula ad theologiam mistica spectantia*, Ad Claras Aquas [Quaracchi] 1949 [4] 310. See also *Const.* 1536, n. 63 "... we exhort all the friars to direct all of their thoughts to this sign [= God] and to turn all their intention and desire towards him..."

¹⁷⁶ The Venice edition has Love.

¹⁷⁷ This is the *nihil scere* which was dealt with in note 136

¹⁷⁸ See above concerning the *Arte della unione* by Giovanni da Fano which contains the same teaching concerning simple upright intentions which was taken by him from Enrico van Herp. However, we read the same in Corconi: "*Spouse*: The love that is pure, free and divine in every act and operation has God for its object because its purpose to unite me to God simply and uprightly. The lover wants to be joined and united

I also intend to lead and bring every creature to God, as far as that is possible, by word, discourse, example and way of life. I intend out of love to enlighten, admonish and correct, tolerate, and console everyone and to pray for them, forgive them and to do them every possible good. I intend, choose and desire to provide to everyone the corporal and spiritual things that they need. When I obtain infinite treasures, pleasure, delight and glory in paradise, I am determined to give it all up and go to hell if that was what was pleasing to God.¹⁷⁹

4106 I would do the same thing if I had consummate beauty and ability, supreme eloquence, as much generosity and refinement as anyone in the world, was perhaps very highly regarded, honoured and revered and regarded as being holy by everyone, had all the knowledge one could have about created things, all wisdom, enlightenment,¹⁸⁰ and sensitivity about things divine, foresight about things to come and recall of what is past, knew all the secrets of the heart as well as of divine matters, had all that a person could wish for. Now and forever I choose to deprive myself of everything if that gave honour to God and to always remain blind and ignorant,¹⁸¹ lacking in judgement and conversation, having the worst reputation, being hated and rejected by all creatures, regarded as bitter by everyone and lacking feeling, persecuted by all and ultimately being in every kind of wretched condition imaginable.¹⁸²

[Contrition for the sins committed]

4107 I propose, declare and promise never to offend the divine majesty now and for every moment of my life and I am really sorry for all my faults, and *also* for all the insults that creatures have offered to my Lord God. Now and forever, whether I remember it or not, I regret this for every moment of my life only for the honour of the

to her beloved God and she neither wants nor looks for anything except God and his honour and what is his divine will." {*Dialogue* chapter 24.} "How a person can unite himself to God by self-abnegation and annihilation of his own will. (f 109r).

¹⁷⁹ This is the type of hyperbolic language that is often found in mystical treatises. Cordonì wrote: "*Spouse*: "At this point, that is with regard to this subject, it is necessary for you to come to understand that there is nothing as grand or strong, or bitter, or punitive in time or in eternity that a person should not be prepared to endure for the love of God. out of perfect love he ought to offer himself to God wishing to endure the eternal pains of hell just as much as wanting to receive the eternal glory of Paradise if this was carrying out the will of God. Although it would be impossible that God would ask this of a creature, nevertheless he wishes that a person be always prepared, out of utmost love, for total self-resignation without any reservations." (f. 113v – 141r in chapter 24).

¹⁸⁰ The Venice edition added *lume* (enlightenment).

¹⁸¹ The Asti edition has "blind, dumb and ignorant." However, being "dumb" does not make sense. The Venice edition omits it and has "blind and ignorant with the tongue".

¹⁸² These expressions are like those used by Jacopone da Todi. However, one also notes a resemblance to the famous conversation concerning "perfect happiness" that was attributed to St Francis. One might also refer back to chapter 18 in the *Dialogue by Cordonì*: "Like going up different steps towards true humility and peace." [f 66r – 67v]. He also wrote in f 60r: "Perfect hatred of self caused me to experience holy desires, especially, that everyone would take out the Creator's revenge in my regard because I am a wicked sinner. For this reason I would be very happy to be mocked, struck and persecuted by everyone and deservedly embarrassed to the same extent that other people are delighted by honours, as I have often been., on account of which I ought to be the more despised by others, showering me with abuse, and making me gulp down shame as if it were the water of life."

divine Majesty, and I am really sorry for not being as sorry as I ought to be. I want to be capable of being infinitely sorry, indeed to the infinite extent that would measure up to the infinite number of my sins. I want to be really sorry and willing to be transformed into Christ. Since if I had the necessary¹⁸³ time, the circumstances, the opportunity, the disposition and occasion when I lived for a period of time without divine grace I would have¹⁸⁴ committed an infinite number of sins, and I would have been guilty, I am sorry and want to perform the required penance that is according to the divine will.¹⁸⁵ In the present life I choose to endure all the pains that the Lord pleases to send me, including those that could be sent to a creature while he lived in the present life.

Because this would not be enough to repay the debt, I choose and accept now and forever all the punishments of Purgatory. Because these would not suffice if I were not in God's grace I choose to endure not only all the pains of the martyrs, disgrace, exile, imprisonment persecution, crosses, death and annihilation, even all the pains of hell and an infinite number of hells for as long as I was able to suffer.¹⁸⁶

[In the merciful arms of the Crucified]

4108 Since all of these punishments put together would not atone for my sins I desire to be self-annihilated and transformed into Christ and choose to suffer all that he suffered for thirty-three years. Since even this would not suffice, I place everything in the merciful arms of the Crucified, and hope, through him alone to obtain forgiveness of my sins.¹⁸⁷ I offer congratulations and rejoice over all the good that God has done for me and for what he will work in future, and for all the good works, merits and virtues of those who live or will live in future, even if the world were to last for an infinite duration of time, for all the virtues, merits and glory of all the Angels and saints who are in paradise, for the Madonna and her happiness and glory, for the merits of Christ and his triumph, for his victory and all his happiness. I rejoice over all the divine attributes, the infinite glory and happiness of the three divine Persons now, always and for infinity and will continue to do

¹⁸³ Here *atto* but in the Venice edition *aperto*.

¹⁸⁴ Here *avrei* but in the text *havesse*.

¹⁸⁵ The Venice edition states it like this: "so that I may perform the required penance that corresponds to the divine will I choose ..." This makes the meaning clear. In this case the Asti edition is not as clear. It might be that one "voglio" (I wish) is missing and I have inserted this so that the sentence makes sense. It might also be that the adjective "divina" may have slipped in by an oversight so that it was meant to refer to divine predestination which would give it a Calvinist meaning.

¹⁸⁶ These are paradoxical expression as we have noted above. In chapter 16 Of Cordoni'e *Dialogo* we read: "*Reason*: I am amazed. How is it that if it is for the greater good that one thinks that he will never merit the pains of hell, that now you think that you will merit them because of your sins? *Spouse*: If I saw a hundred thousand hells in my soul and these would not punish my sins completely but only partly, and if by means of a profound revelation I was given a clear vision of myself, by means of divine enlightenment I would see that I was infinitely guilty." (f. 59v – 60r).

¹⁸⁷ In addition to the doctrine of annihilation this is also clarification of the doctrine of "beneficio di Cristo". (The Benefit of Christ) as contained in chapter 3 of "Trattato utilissimo del beneficio di Gesù Cristo crocifisso verso i cristiani". Cf. G. Ginzburg-A. Prosperi, *Gioebi di pazienza. Un seminario sul "Beneficio di Cristo"*, Torino 1975, 218-223.

this forever and without ceasing. I promise to do this forever and in every instant of my life.¹⁸⁸

I also intend and thus determine now and forever to avoid all occasions of evil and to seek opportunities for doing good. I also forgive all the insults and offences against duty and justice that I have received simply out of love for Christ. I am prepared, I resolve and promise that if I were to live for an infinite space of time and be insulted by an infinite number of people to forgive this and I intend that such forgiveness would apply at every instant and after being transformed into Christ I would forgive everyone for his sake. Indeed, I love them deeply and am prepared to suffer with Christ and shed my own blood and endure an infinite number of deaths. Thus, having been transformed into Christ I shall intercede for them with Christ to the Father.¹⁸⁹

[Solemn Profession of the three Evangelical Counsels]

4109 I make profession and take a public and solemn vow promising poverty, chastity and obedience. In the first place I promise to always live in poverty that is without loving created things and with the genuine enlightenment of always knowing that I do not have, own or desire to own anything. I also promise complete obedience to God and to always follow divine inspirations with all my might and to never reject them. I resolve to act in this way forever. I also promise God complete chastity so as to always have an immaculate heart and mind and not think about any creature or love them but to always remain united to God and recollected. In this way I promise to serve my Lord while being always immaculate and pure, drawing all the maids in my house to serve him as much as possible that is all my faculties.¹⁹⁰

Thus, by kicking away the world I choose him who created me to be my sole and only Father, his Son who redeemed me to be my brother and the Holy Spirit to be my spouse giving him all my love as a dowry. I promise to do this at all times and in all situations. I do not want anything apart from what is pleasing to him. Since I cannot achieve anything without God I now beg forever that he will grant me the grace to be able to carry out what I have promised and am with all my heart ready to perform. I entrust myself to him now and for every instant of my life everyone who is in need. I seek and want charity.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ When he was speaking about a soul who was in love B. Cordoni said: “*Love*: It does not experience joy, but rejoices, indeed converted into love itself. It does not experience ardour. Indeed, it is holy, ardent, and burning in the furnace of love. It has become inseparable from him like warmth and glow in a furnace. Thus, she has transformed herself into him.” (f. 227r).

¹⁸⁹ Conformity to the Crucified brings about loving fidelity in the soul that extends to death and martyrdom.

¹⁹⁰ Poverty is understood in its spiritual dimension. *Const.* 1536 n. 67. “Evangelical poverty consists in not having attachment to earthly things ...” according to the mystical meaning of annihilation (see above). Obedience becomes being obedient to the workings of the spirit while chastity is pure love and mortification of heart. The “maids in the house” are the faculties of perception, imagination, intuition and visualisation as Ochino has already described in *Dialogo in che modo la persons debba regere bene se stessa*. (Cf. above, n. 4046).

¹⁹¹ The Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit the Spouse are the only object of love. Once again, we note the influence of B. Cordoni and the teaching of the mystics as well as the teaching of the “benefit of Christ” which maintains that “every faithful soul is a spouse of Christ and Christ is the Spouse of that soul.” (*Trattato utilissimo* ..., in G. Ginzburg-A. Prosperi *Giochide paziensa*, cit. 223).

4110 Because I do not want to offend God I neither wish nor intend in any promise that I have made, or will ever make, to oblige myself under pain of mortal sin. I mean that with respect to all vows. I only want to be bound under mortal sin by what God has laid down.¹⁹²

All of the things that were mentioned above, I choose, as far as I can, to do now, as well as everything that I could do to honour God. Therefore, if I were to live for an infinite amount of time, for every instant of that time without interruption, I determine and wish to act and suffer with the right intention. Therefore, I choose with firm resolve, intention, disposition, faith, union and grace so that once I have been annihilated I shall be transformed into Christ to share as much as possible in his merits. Once I have been completely absorbed into God I do not want anything but him for eternity.¹⁹³ If it happened that I ever regretted this, lost faith or revoked what I have professed, for that time I now protest to God and to the entire world that it was never my intention to fail or to take back what I gave now promised. Therefore, I cancel this, annul it and ask God that I will never do it.

[Final ratification]

4111 Let this wish be my final wish and that all my wishes end here. Thus I promise to always remain strong and firm, while confessing now and for the moment of my death and forever that I am a great sinner, and that I place all my trust in God. I do not think that I can be saved except through Christ.¹⁹⁴ As witnesses to this I call upon the most holy Trinity, Christ, the Madonna, all the saints and every creature, including my own conscience. To assert the truth of this I, D. D. C.,¹⁹⁵ wrote this in my own hand in 1539.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Because he was completely devoted to freedom, Cordoni never accepted legal or moralistic restrictions. Cf. Cagnoni, *Fonti, tensenze e sviluppi*, cit. 129. The intent not to bind under pain of mortal sin was also stressed in *Const.* 1536, n. 145.

¹⁹³ Here again we note the influence of Cordoni, for example in this passage: “*Love*: We need to cleanse that affections once again, so that they are rid of all that is below God, so that once they have been freed and are totally committed we may rise up to God easily anytime that we want to ... *Spouse*: If we have only divine love in our hearts, our minds will think only about that and this will make us rise up on high and become completely absorbed in divine charity.” (f. 124r; 123r-v in c. 26). “How man can be united to God by means of love and loving emotion.” Once again: “*Spouse*: When the soul has achieved real peace of mind and has learned by practice how to become totally elevated into divine love, so that it has absorbed all the divine goodness, then the spirit of God draws our spirit to the heights of love, and, being happily immersed it is plunged into fruitful love and welcoming the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, it is transformed into the divine nature.” 9f. 127v-128r).

¹⁹⁴ This teaching was promoted by “evangelism” and proposed in the “benefit of Christ”.

¹⁹⁵ D. D. C. Lady Duchess Caterina.

¹⁹⁶ This date is not trustworthy. The Asti edition has “a dí 4 di settembre 1536”.