

The School of the Spirit

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Chapter One: The Contemplative Life

Love, says Hugh of St. Victor, is the life of a rational soul. Without love, a soul cannot exist. *Vita animae dilectio est et sine dilectione esse non potest.* [The life of the soul is love, and without love the soul cannot exist.] But a soul that gives its love to the wrong object, throws its life away. Love dictates a man's freedom to the object of his love. And if a man consecrates his freedom to something that cannot fulfil the deepest capacities of his rational being, he throws his freedom away. He is a captive. He remains in darkness and in sorrow and his whole life is a defeat.

The secret of life and of happiness is to love a reality in which there is no defect to betray and cheat our love. There is only one such: God.

There are many different ways of loving God: but ultimately they all tend to a perfect and all-exclusive absorption in Him alone. If they do not, then they are not really love of God. Men can dedicate their lives to God by taking care of sick people or teaching in schools: for they see His image reflected in the souls of other men and they wish to serve Him by imitating and carrying on the works of mercy that Christ performed on earth. A married life, lived in a deep spirit of Christian faith, can become a more or less conscious and continuous participation in the mystery of creation, in which the most important and mysterious factor is the cooperation, by human beings, in the shaping of young souls as God's likeness develops in them. Other men can serve God and prove their love for Him by trying to direct the destinies of states or communities according to divinely ordained principles on which peace and justice depend, in the affairs of men. Still

others love God by seeking His reflection in the forms of created things and paying Him intellectual homage by works of their own creation: sculpture, painting, poetry, architecture. And there are others who love God in the intellectual structures of philosophies and theologies which express the deepest and most fundamental realities of the spirit in terms which human reason deals with as its own.

These ways of loving God bring men peace on earth, and satisfy, to some extent, their free souls: but they are not final. And the satisfaction they bring with them, at certain moments of high intensity and connatural fulfilment, is the satisfaction rather of hope than of possession. The joy that comes with the exercise of talent, the peace that belongs to human love, fulfilled in line with the vital economy of the Church's sacramental system, and the deeply rewarding happiness that accompanies the performance of God's will and in doing good on earth: all these things are only pledges of a greater and more perfect fulfilment. They satisfy us not because they are ends, but because they bring with them the assurance that they can be adequate means to the only true end—something which lies beyond and above them and belongs to a much higher order.

Transient activity, however good, only satisfies our souls in so far as it is the promise of a supreme activity that transcends the passage of time, an activity without labor and frustration, in which there is no longer any shadow of obstacle: an activity which is pure, spiritual and full, and entirely realized in one instant which will remain forever and never cease. Transient moments of human love are only pledges of a spiritual love that can unite our souls with the infinite Truth forever: for the marriage of human lovers has this dignity, that it is able to remind us that we were made to love with our whole being in a love which endows and enriches us in proportion to our gift and abandonment of ourselves. The clean creative fire that furnishes incandescent intellectual forms to the mind of the artist should symbolize, for him, the fire of the Word which blazes forth from the depths of the infinite God, and is the glory and the truth of God, and is God. And we were made to play for ever in the flame of that eternal and uncircumscribed intuition, where all causes are gathered in the Art of God. All the art that is on earth can only satisfy us in so far as it draws us inward and delivers us from the cravings of sense and leaves us for a moment in the depths of that intellectual peace which can foreshadow, even in the order of nature, the eternal contemplation of heaven.

And now we have come to the concept of contemplation.

There is possible, on earth, an experience of the highest reality, an obscure but immediate contact with the very substance of Him Who is Truth. At the moment of such contact the intellect and will of man, drawn down into their own depths, meeting one another in the soul's essence, in which they are naturally united, are, as it were, liquified, dissolve and flow into the spiritual immensity Who is darkness to us because He is Pure Light. In a tremendous and fruitful silence, an abyss of pure freedom, the soul discovers, in an incommunicable experience, what is going to happen to it, one day, when it passes over into God forever to be transformed into Him and become one spirit with Him forever.

The return of such a soul from the unity and peace of its contemplation into the multiplicity and movement and unfulfilment which mark the activities of earthly life brings with it the keenest anguish of exile. But there remains some savor of the experience of an unforgettable pledge of the contemplation for which we were all created to which we are destined in heaven if we make use of the means God has given us to get there.

All these are ways of loving God on earth: ways that involve action of the body or of the spirit: ways that traffic in pledges of eternity. The most perfect of these ways, by far, is that which concerns itself most exclusively with contemplation.

All the other lives dedicated to God's love are good, but they are imperfect because they only reach Him indirectly. The active lives (unless they flow from the very fullness of contemplation) only direct our minds and wills to God obliquely. They occupy us chiefly with created things and with transient movements and intermediary ends. Ultimately they end in God, but it often requires some effort to recover the memory of that end by a reflex movement of the mind. The contemplative life, simple, perfect, in its unified tendency to the one supreme end, seeks God in Himself alone. Creatures have to be used as means as long as men are outside paradise: but the mind does not so easily stop in them or allow them to cloud it over. The whole existence of a contemplative is regulated by successive active or passive movements of interior purification in which the mind overleaps the multiplicity of created images and seeks God in an obscure and unified gaze of love. And, when God wills, it finds Him and clings to Him resting immediately in Him somewhat as it is destined to do in heaven. For contemplation attains to God as He is in Himself, in the obscurity of faith, and it is the beginnings of eternal life: *quaedam inchoatio vitae aeternae*. [a kind of beginning of eternal life.]

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The contemplative life, then, is a life of the most perfect love—the love of the highest reality, for the contemplative seeks nothing but to lose himself in the fruition of the supreme actuality: God's Truth. St. Thomas situates the essence of the contemplation at its intellectual peak, but the marriage of the intellect with infinite light can only begin and end in love, and therefore it is a vision which is cradled in the heart of a furnace of infused love.

How could it be otherwise? *Deus caritas est!* [God is love! 1 Jn 4:16.] Since God is love there is no other way of knowing him by experience than by loving. "Everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is charity."

To say that the contemplative life is one that is constantly aimed, in the most direct way, to immediate union with God as He is in Himself, is to say that it sums up and includes every other human striving and aspires to the one adequate fulfilment towards which all other aspirations of our soul either blindly or consciously tend.

Indeed, wherever there is love, there is bound to be some kind of contemplation. Even loves whose objects are unreality or sin, tend to occupy and obsess the mind with the images of their objects. The man who loves physical pleasure is obsessed with the idea of the things he enjoys, and his obsession ends up by being a caricature of the contemplative life. This is not surprising: he was given a soul that was made for nothing else than to be obsessed with the supreme object of all love. Divorced from Truth, the soul still has to love something and devote itself to something, even if its object is bound to deceive and frustrate it.

And that gives us the explanation of the term contemplative life. How is the word "life" used in such a context? Life, in general, is the capacity for self-motion, self-determination. Living things are distinguished from inanimate beings by the fact that they are the principles of their own vital acts. Plants nourish themselves and grow because of something inherent in themselves. Animals do not get up and move around only when they are pushed. The characteristic of rational life is a higher self-movement still: for our acts are free. We can determine ourselves to one action or another on the basis of rational choices. The highest expressions of rational life are intellection and love. Which brings us back to where we started, when we said that love is the life of the soul and that without love the soul cannot exist.

To say that a man lives the contemplative life is to say what he lives for, what he loves. The act of contemplation, in which the whole being of man is united to God's Truth in a union of vision and fruition, in the one thing to which his whole life tends. It is this object, that unifies and directs all other strivings of that one life. This work, or "operation", is what is characteristic of the contemplative. It identifies him. It dominates him by its attraction. And thus it gives him his name.

In the same way the active life is principally concerned with temporal activities. A man who lives for his work, whether it be teaching or writing or healing the sick or governing a community—or even sanctifying his own soul by the labor of virtue, is concentrated in the active rather than the contemplative life. But it must be remembered that in each of these lives, what is principally intended does not exclude a secondary intention.

The contemplative life does not exclude all external activity, but it regulates that activity in view of contemplation. In fact, the contemplative life, in its highest degrees, tends to overflow into apostolic action in which the fruits and truths of contemplation are shared with others. But even this activity itself can be so closely related to contemplation that it is almost another form of love and union with God and of vision of God. A contemplation that would freeze and congeal in total incaptivity would cease to be a life at all: and the union with God Who is Love means participation in one of the characteristics of that Love, which is to share itself and pour itself out and communicate itself to others. But this activity is so much in the service of contemplation that it tends to perfect it, by bringing us back to the depths and the silence of God's light, richer in love, richer in merit, rich in the fruits of our apostolate (that is to say in souls) and with our own being dilated and renewed in a profounder capacity for vision and for love.

On the other hand, an active life that does not include in itself some element of contemplation, cannot be called Christian, because it is not directed to God. Obviously, if our activity is directed ultimately to God as our last end, we must keep Him in view and do whatever we do at least virtually for the love of Him. This involves contemplation in the broad sense of cultivating a deep interior life, meditation, recollection, prayer, reading, as a reservoir for strength and resources in fruitful activity.

One does not have to be in a cloister or a hermitage to lead the contemplative life. It is possible to professional men in the world, to be

married people: although for these it will always be more difficult, because of the division in their lives which St. Paul foresaw. "He that is with a wife is solicitous for the things of the world . . . and he is divided."

Just as theologians speak of the "state of perfection" in the technical, juridical sense of the religious state, in which everyone is bound to the pursuit of perfection (although many may, in fact, be far from perfect) so they also speak of the contemplative state, in which men bind themselves, for instance, to some religious Order which has, as its end, the contemplative life only in theory. And do not mistake me: they may sanctify their souls by doing so, if what they are doing is imposed upon them by the will of God, and if they do what they can to maintain the essential balance between the interior and exterior lives.

It is necessary to get these abstract terms clear, and not to assume that no one in an active state of life can be a contemplative, or that everyone in a contemplative Order is a contemplative in actual fact. The contemplative state is merely one in which obligations and rules conspire to make the contemplative life easy and safe. In fact, they should make it so easy that it ought to become a matter of course. Outside the special ambiance created by enclosure, silence, poverty, obedience, and constant prayer, the act of contemplation is not impossible and there are, in fact, many contemplatives in the world. For the Spirit blows where he wills, *ubi vult spirat*, and forms contemplatives wherever He pleases, without consulting human wisdom or the opinions and judgements of men.

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The contemplative life, wherever it may be had, whether in a cloister or out of it, is the most perfect life that a man can lead on earth because it brings him into the closest and most immediate contact with God Who is our last end.

This was clearly stated by St. Thomas. *Vita contemplativa simplicitate est melior quam activa*. [The contemplative is simply better than the active life.] He gave the same reasons for thinking so that Aristotle had given before him. The contemplative life calls into action the highest faculties of man, and applies them to their highest object. It delivers him, at least to some extent, from vicissitude and change and movement, fills his soul with a deeper peace and a purer delight than can be found in physical action, frees him, at least partially, from dependence on material things, brings him closer to his end and elevates him to a higher degree of participation in the life of God.

And since the contemplative life is principally concerned with the love of God, it is the most meritorious life that we can lead because love is the root of merit. *Radix meriti est charitas . . . Deum diligere secundum se est magis meritorium quam diligere proximum . . . Vita contemplativa directe et immediate pertinet ad dilectionem Dei . . . ideo ex suo genere contemplativa vita est majoris meriti quam activa*. [The root of merit is love . . . Loving God in and of itself is worth more than loving one's neighbor . . . The contemplative life directly and immediately leads to the love of God . . . thus, but its very nature, the contemplative life brings greater merit than the active life.]

To sacrifice the pleasure of contemplation for the sake of an action demanded by duty or charity can be accidentally more meritorious than contemplation itself, but only in so far as it represents a greater and purer love for God. And since the root of merit is not work or hardship or difficulty but love, St. Thomas answers those who think the active life more meritorious because of the labor it involves: "to undergo external labors for Christ may be a sign of the love which is the basis of merit: but a much more evident sign of that love is for a man to turn aside from everything pertaining to this mortal life and to take his delight in nothing else but the contemplation of God."

In short, the contemplative life is the most perfect that a man can lead because it is the evidence of a more perfect love, gives scope for more perfect love, sets a man free from things that are apt to be relatively trivial and concentrates all that is best and most vital in his soul upon the purest of God.

That this life is not selfish we have already seen to some degree and we shall see later on in greater detail. It is enough to repeat, here, that this love, in its highest intensity, tends to pour itself out and gather other souls into the circle of its one tremendously fruitful activity that is purely of the spirit and shares in the society of the blessed and the infinite beatitude of God.

It is because the preaching life should be, by rights, the overflow of the fulness of contemplation that St. Thomas said that the Orders devoted to preaching and teaching were, in the abstract, the most perfect in the Church of God.

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It is clear that the contemplation of which we speak is more than the highest intuitions of the artist or philosopher. It goes beyond intellectual speculation to possess truth, not merely with the mind but

with one's whole being and to grasp reality not in its abstract and speculative reduction to an idea, but by an affective identification of the whole soul with Truth as such.

But it is something more: it is supernatural. And therefore it must not be confused with the highest forms of natural "contemplation" which sometimes resemble mystical experience and are often called "mystical" by the uninformed. Since the romantic revival in literature sought to liberate the deepest springs of artistic perception from what were felt to be the trammels of formalism, anyone who was capable of manifesting some immediate artistic grasp of the concreteness of things by a short-cut that ignores the processes of discourse, was apt to be called a mystic. What is even worse, it is not unusual to find people calling anyone whose thought or writing is a bit obscure, a mystic. The term mystic has, in fact, so far degenerated that it is given to all those who exalt the emotions and human passion over the intellect. The name, thus corrupted, has been applied to people like Hitler, D. H. Lawrence, Nietzsche, Robert Browning(!), Mary Baker Eddy, and a hundred others. By such standards every fortune teller becomes a mystic.

Contemplation as it is understood in the Catholic Church, is not a denial of the intellect in favor of the deification of "dark forces" and inexpressible urges that well up from the depths of a man's being. It transcends and sublimates the speculation of the mind by lifting its operation to a higher place where, drawn into unity with the will and directly moved by the infused light and power of God, it receives a supreme perfection of wisdom and understanding which "the eye hath not seen, nor the ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive."

While stressing the absolute primacy of the supernatural Order, Catholic philosophers and theologians take nothing away from nature that is really due to it or really perfects it. Consequently, they are also the ones who preserve intact all the highest natural rights of the intellect and will. In fact, the Church is practically the only teacher who still defends an epistemology that allows the intellect any valid knowledge of exterior things in their objective reality. Therefore it is the Catholic philosopher who generally holds the highest estimate of what the unaided natural powers of man can do in the way of contemplation.

Besides teaching that human reason can arrive at a perfectly valid knowledge not only of the existence of God but also of many of His attributes, through the analogies offered by His creation, Catholic

philosophers have not forgotten the heights of natural contemplation that were reached by Plato, Aristotle, Proclus, Porphyry, Plotinus, and others who are called mystics—in a loose but with far more justice than those we listed a moment ago.

Jacques Maritain has analyzed, with singular accuracy and acuteness, that "metaphysical intuition of the act of existing" which is the root of all real philosophy and the one thing capable of making the philosopher's vision an analogue of the contemplative experience. This vivid and concrete and personal intuition of existence, immediately apprehended in existing things or in one's own soul, is one of the most exciting and beautiful experiences of which our nature, left to its own resources, is capable. So vital is this experience that it cannot help communicating something of the peace and satisfaction that comes with true and supernatural contemplation. Psychologically it resembles the act of simple contemplation in some of its elementary forms: but the big difference is that it does not produce the same living and lasting effects in the soul.

This apprehension of existence as such sounds esoteric, perhaps, in the language of the philosopher: but it is accessible to any intelligent child. It is an experience which, like so many others of the same order, happens to many who are incapable of understanding it. It fills them with wonder and leaves them inarticulate. It is something the untrained mind cannot cope with, and it tends to remain intact, inviolate in the memory. One does not tell anyone about it because one cannot find any words in which to begin to talk about such a thing.

Typical of this experimental grasp of existence in its concreteness is the sudden awareness of one's own identity that may come over a child as it enters the years of reason. In the middle of play, a little boy of seven or eight becomes suddenly and unaccountably aware that he is a person. His little soul, fresh and clean and made for deep and beautiful illuminations, suddenly becomes radiant with the appreciation of its own being and capacity and dignity. Do not mistake me: this is not a movement of coarse self-assertion. It is intellectual and pure. It is a simple reflection of the truth, and because it is so purely and clearly true it arouses a movement of wonder and gratitude and love, which is in its beautiful candor and immediacy, a profound homage to the God of truth.

A child whose soul has been struck by this warm flash of reality can never forget it. When it strikes him, it leaves him under a spell.

For several minutes he stops his play; he can hardly move, held prisoner by the beautiful inarticulate wonder of the thought that he *exists*. His whole being feels as if it were momentarily caught into a golden cloud. It is an intellectual act of the greatest natural simplicity, a pure intuition, involving no steps of reasoning, and in which the whole soul is suddenly assembled in one active light and there rests.

I wonder how many there are in the world who have had something like this happen to them and have never been able to tell anybody about it. Perhaps they have never even been able to tell themselves about it. They have not realized what a potency for supernatural contemplation and prayer was implied by this capacity for a direct and simple view of existence as such. It has never been developed. Grace could have made something wonderful out of that power. The Holy Spirit put this image of the godhead in us precisely in order to develop it and endow it with tremendous riches. He means to endow us even while we are on earth. It is His plan to enlarge this natural capacity, by contemplation, in this life, in order to fit us for the supreme weight of glory which is the contemplation of God in the beatific vision of heaven.

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Not even the highest and purest natural contemplation can be called mystical in the strict sense. Mystical contemplation implies the direct intervention of God Himself, moving the intellect and will immediately. The metaphysical intuition that was just described is the product of a natural act: it is a reaction, if you will, of the intellect in the presence of a datum of sense experience. The mind, acting on a light of the senses, and realizing its own activity by something more than a mere reflection, apprehends its own peculiar identity in the concreteness of its own action. All this implies the natural course of God, of Whose light the human intellect is a participation.

In mystical contemplation the soul reacts to an altogether different light and impulsion, and these are communicated directly to the mind and will, without the direct influence of any sensible species. God Himself produces the effect in the soul without the intervention of any natural agent, except perhaps as an accident or condition or occasion. In a truly mystical experience, the soul cooperates indeed with God, but only passively. That is to say, it acts, but is not the principle of its own action.

The details of all this must be left to a later chapter. What is important here is to understand that human nature, by virtue of its

intellectual and spiritual character, is radically in potency for the highest of mystical contemplation and the economy of divine grace is clearly established in such a way as to endow every baptized Christian with the seeds from which can grow the fullness of supernatural and contemplative life.

The baptized infant begins already to share in the inner life of God. The Christian who lives up to his faith, who loves God better than he loves business and money and reputation and pleasure, is certainly developing this participation of God's life in his soul. Neither he nor the infant realizes what is going on. At best, it is a matter of dark belief, of an assent without any sensible appreciation of what he possesses in his soul.

There comes a stage in the spiritual life in which faith gives place to a deeper and spiritual understanding. At this stage the Christian may be gifted with a new and quasi-experimental sense of the presence of God in his soul. Psychologically the same natural forces are apt to be called in to play as in the metaphysical intuition of existence. The faculties of the soul are unified into a mirror which receives the intimation of Being in a simple and undivided light, baffling analysis. But here is the difference. The being apprehended is not the fact of one's own existence, or of existence concretized and seized in one's own mind; nor is it Being as such, nor even infinite Being, Pure Act. Considered as philosopher's abstractions. In this simple light, which is not evident because it is an intensification of the inevident "light" of faith, is "seen" God. In this simple light is grasped something of the meaning that can lie hidden in a mystery of faith. The light is not the product of any natural act. It is produced in the passive soul—a fact which sometimes gives it a breathtaking simplicity and clarity which makes the laborious knowledge acquired by human effort seem gross and slightly absurd. In fact this, which is one of the highest supernatural perfections of the natural faculties, so far transcends the operations of nature as to apparently supersede and "annihilate" them altogether. All the paradoxes of mystical language have to be brought into play to explain this mode of "seeing without seeing," "knowing in darkness," "possessing without possessing" which fills the soul by emptying it. In the end, what is grasped is "touched" rather than seen: what has taken place is an obscure and vital contact with Truth Itself, not the Truth of the Philosopher but the Living God, One in Three Persons, in Whose presence all other truths and judgements vanish into insignificance.

Most important of all, this mystical contact with God is effected in the immediacy of personal love. I stress the word personal; the Truth is Three Persons. All Three giving themselves at once in mystical love to the soul which, perhaps, does not at first realize them as Triune but only as One. But what is realized is the fact that the *purest Truth comes to us only in the form of love.*

It is only because you love that you "touch" or "realize" or "grasp" the most absolute of all Truth in the blind obscurity of transfigured faith which, under the influence of God's vitalizing presence, is endowed the most profound and penetrating conviction and power. And all this is communicated to the depths of the soul without reflection, without effort, without strain, without hesitation, without doubt or the slightest shadow of uncertainty.

Finally, this mystical perception of God is a pure gift of God. We can do nothing to obtain it or to deserve it. Our acts of virtue, of faith and supernatural love, our trust in God, our humility and our acceptance of trial, can dispose us for its reception but cannot strictly merit it, still less provoke it. True, the purest intuitions of the philosopher and the few clean flashes of genuine inspiration that come to a poet are also beyond the immediate command of the will. Yet they can be remotely "willed" in the sense that anyone with the proper gifts can prepare the way and warm himself up to the pitch at which his own faculties, stimulated by favorable circumstances, can produce the final flash of genius out of their own resources.

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The contemplation of God is the reason for our creation. And this contemplation demands the conscious fruition of God made present to the soul in mystical experience. In its perfection it coincides with the integral perfection of charity in which we are "transformed" into God and become "one spirit" with Him according to the language of St. Paul. *Qui adhaeret Domino, unus spiritus est.* [Whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit (with the Lord) 1 Cor 6:17.]

Adam, in Eden, was the type of the perfect contemplative. The Fathers of the Church all considered him as such, and looked on the whole Christian life on earth as a laborious effort to recapture, through the merits of the Passion of the Second Adam, the liberty and integrity and contemplation, the *apatheia* and *gnosis* that were enjoyed by the first. [*apatheia* = absence of concupiscence, passionlessness] [*gnosis* = knowledge of God].

The essence of beatitude, our last end, is described by the teaching authority of the Church as a "vision of God and fruition of His beauty . . . it consists in two things: that we shall see God as He is in His nature and substance and that we shall become as gods. For all those who have fruition of His substance, even though they retain their own substance, they take on a marvelous and almost divine form so that they seem to be gods rather than men." The same authority continues and explains that this is effected by an immediate union of the soul with God, and concludes that the essence of beatitude is to be sought in the actual possession of God.

It would be easy, but perhaps tiresome, to multiply the statements of Fathers and Doctors of the Church that man is created for contemplation.

No one could be clearer than St. Thomas on this point. Speaking of the contemplative life in the question of the *Summa* which treats it *ex professo* [officially], he says that the contemplative life is concerned above all with the contemplation of God's truth because this contemplation is the end of all human life, *finis totius humanae vitae*. [the end of all human life.] He quotes St. Augustine to the effect that the contemplation of God "is promised to us as the end of all our actions and the everlasting perfection of joy," and concludes by telling us that the contemplative life on earth is the beginning of the eternal beatitude of heaven *quae hic incipit ut in futuro continuetur*. [which, beginning here, will be continued in the future.] This leaves us no doubt that he is talking of contemplation in the strict sense.

St. Bonaventure and Richard of St. Victor, along with St. Thomas himself, find in human nature itself the testimony of the end for which it was created. If we have minds and wills, it is because we were meant to know and love the most perfect Truth and Goodness of God. Indeed, as St. Augustine said, and every Christian mystic repeated after him, "Thou hast made us, O Lord, for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." And the Bishop of Hippo adds, very succinctly that just as the soul is the life of the body, so the blessed life of the soul is God Himself. *Ut vita carnis anima est, ita beata vita hominis Deus est.* [Just as the spirit give life to the flesh, so the blessed life of man is God.]

This statement is strictly accurate. In fact it is more correct to say that the end for which we are created is not contemplation but *God Himself*. Contemplation is, after all, a created activity. It is the characteristic activity by which free and intellectual beings are united to the

God Who is, Himself, the last end of all things. The end of all our strivings is outside the created order. The last step in the line of created things by which we arrive at Him is contemplation: but it is really God who is the end of the journey. Contemplation is simply the station where we alight and pass out into the city of heaven, which is God's own substance and essence.

But besides being the end of our journey, God is also the way. He Himself told us: I am the way. It is the Truth of God made Man Who is, strictly speaking, the way. And yet we cannot even travel by that way, to the Father, through Christ, unless another Divine Person comes to help us and endow us with light and strength. The Holy Ghost comes down to us by the way which we must take to go up to the Father: through the Son, through Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost is sent to "teach us all things." He purifies our hearts, teaches us love, teaches us prayer, by being Himself our purity, our love and our prayer. He above all is the teacher of the Divine Contemplation for which we were created. It is through Him, and is the bond of His Love, that we will be destined to be married to the Word, Who is the Father's glory and contemplation. In Him, we shall not only contemplate Truth and possess it, but we shall *become* Truth. We shall not only love Truth, but truly *become* Love, in the Spirit of Love Who united Light with His Father and Glory with the Father of Glory.

Chapter Two

O Israel, How great is the house of God and how vast is the place of His possession! It is great, and hath no end. It is high and immense. There were the giants, those renowned men, that were from the beginning, of great stature, expert in war. The Lord chose them not, neither did they find the way of knowledge: therefore did they perish. And because they had not wisdom, they perished through their folly.

There are words the prophet sang knowing that the wisdom and the power and the craft of men is madness and weakness and ineptitude compared with the wisdom that is taught by God alone. And yet it is only in that highest of all wisdoms that we can find peace and fulfillment.

For if thou hadst walked in the way of God, hadst surely dwelt in peace forever. Learn where is wisdom, where is strength, where is understanding, that thou mayest know also where is length of days and life, where is the light of the eyes and peace.

But man can not find that wisdom by himself alone. The great men of the world have never known it—or else they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. To the pagans it is foolishness, and to the self-complacent doctor of the law, who trusts in his own learning, God's wisdom is scandalous and dark.

Who hath found out wisdom's place and who hath gone into her treasures? Where are the princes of the nations and they that rule over the beasts that are upon the earth, that take their diversion with the birds of the air, that hoard up silver and gold, wherein men trust? . . . They are cut off and gone down to hell and others are risen up in their place. Young men have seen the light and dwelt upon the earth: but the way of knowledge they have not known . . . The children of Agar also that search after the wisdom that is of the earth, the merchants of Merrha and of Theman, and the tellers of fables and the searchers of prudence and understanding: but the way of wisdom they have not known, nor have they remembered her paths.

How can anyone scale heaven and capture that wisdom which is inaccessible to the minds and thoughts of men? Can any merchant bring back contemplation in ships from the ends of the earth?

Who hath gone up into heaven and taken wisdom, and brought her down from the clouds? Who hath passed over the sea and found her and bought her, preferably to chosen gold? *There is none that is able to know her ways, nor that can search out her paths.*

But if no man can find out the wisdom in which all our happiness is hidden, we are condemned to die in a strange land, defiled with the dead, feeding our souls with the husks of swine. There is One Who knows wisdom because He is Wisdom. It is He Who can, if He so wills, pour out into our hearts something of His own tremendous light. More than that, He can come down from heaven and teach us Himself the ways of wisdom. And all the Old Testament prophets cried out to Him imploring Him to "tear open the sky and come down." For they too realized that "No one knows the Son but the Father, and no one knows the Father but the Son and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal Him." The anguish and urgency of their impatience was born of their realization that God had, indeed, decreed to come down to men, for His delights were to be with the children of men. He would take flesh and dwell among us, and whoever would then see Him would see the

Father in heaven. So Baruch sang of Him, of the only One Who really knew wisdom:

He that knoweth all things knoweth her and hath found her out with His understanding. He that prepared the earth for evermore and filled it with cattle and fourfooted beasts. He that sendeth forth light and it goeth: and called it, and it obeyeth Him with trembling. And the stars have given light in their watches and rejoiced: and they were called and they said, Here we are: and with cheerfulness they have shined forth to Him that made them.

This is our God, and there shall no other be accounted of in comparison to Him. He hath found out all the way of knowledge and gave it to Jacob His servant and to Israel His beloved.

Afterwards He was seen upon earth, and conversed with men.

* * *

The anguish and the desire of the prophets of the Old Testament is lost in the triumph and exultation of the Apostles and Evangelists of the New who went forth to the four corners of the earth proclaiming that God had indeed come down, the Word had in all truth been made flesh and had dwelt among them, and that they had seen His glory, the glory of the only-begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Gospel must be looked at in its wholeness, to be understood. It is something far more than an ethical code, more than a mere body of theological doctrines. It is more than the record of mystical teaching, and a set of practices for arriving at perfection. It is not sufficient to believe that Jesus was the Son of God and to accept the Gospels, therefore, as a unique witness to His life on earth. The Gospels are more than a witness, more than a mine of apologetic and dogmatic proofs for the truth of Christian faith.

The Gospels are the word of God, *Verbum Dei*. And "word" here, *Verbum* [Word], *Logos* [Reason], is something more than a sign of an idea. The word of God is dynamic; it is a force. By means of this force, God produces an effect in the soul. He reveals Himself to the mind that accepts His word and preserves it to "bring forth fruit in patience." For the Words spoken by Christ "are spirit and life." *Verba quae ego loquor vobis spiritus et vita sunt*. [The words that I spoke to you are spirit and life. Jn 6:63.] They do not die with the sound that conveys

them: "heaven and earth shall pass away, but My word shall not pass away." The word of God in the Gospel is an instrument by which God effects salvation in the soul that accepts it fully, in the simplicity of faith. And since salvation is the possession of God, God really and actually communicates Himself to the soul in His word, His revelation of His will for men.

When men speak to men, they communicate ideas from one mind to another but when God speaks to men He communicates Himself, His own Truth, in its wholeness, to the wholeness of their being: if they "hear" His words, He enters into their lives and transforms their spirit so that now their whole existence is centered on Him. He becomes the life of their life, and their lives from then on are "built" upon Him.

The Gospels are therefore a sacramental. *Per evangelica dicta delectantur nostra delicta*.

[Through the spoken words of the Gospel (proclamation) may our sins be erased. (Roman Missal)]

But the word of God does not merely justify men. Justification, sanctifying grace, is only the beginning of God's economy of salvation. Salvation is not merely a negative thing: the liberation from sin and from enslavement to the devil and to the passions of our flesh. It is also positive. The positive element is far more important than the negative. God does not separate us from the world, the flesh and the devil merely in order to leave us to ourselves: He endows us with a new life in Him. He is Himself that new life. He gives Himself that new life. He gives Himself to us in order to be the blessedness of our souls, illuminated by His glory.

The word of God, in the Gospels, is eternal life. *Verba mea spiritus et vita sunt*. [My words are spirit and life. Jn 6:63] Eternal life is to know the One true God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent. The word of God in the Gospel is therefore the seed of the highest and most perfect contemplation. Just as it effects faith in the properly disposed soul, so it will go on and produce much higher effects still, in those who receive it in a "good and perfect heart, in which it will bring forth fruit a hundredfold."

Or, to change the metaphor, the word of God is "living water" and in everyone who receives it, it becomes a "fountain of water springing up into life everlasting." More than that, the word of the Gospel becomes a "river of living water" which is not of this earth but of heaven, and is nothing less than the Holy Spirit, or God Himself.

Therefore the new life promised by Christ to His disciples was not merely a new morality. It was not merely the cessation of sin, followed by normal natural activities performed with a certain piety and decorum. True, our natural life is sanctified by charity, but the economy of the Gospels does not end there. The fulness of Christian life is something more than the sanctification of naturally virtuous acts in view of a reward in the other world. The word of God should begin here on earth to flower into the life of heaven. *Quae sursum sunt sapite, non quae super terran.* [Savor what is above, not what is earthly.] The Douay version translates this as "seek the things that are above." But there is more in *sapite* than seeking. It means savoring, and suggests fruition. It is the classical term for the loving knowledge that is at the heart of contemplation. No doubt it does not have all the fulness of contemplation in this context, and in that respect the notion of "seeking" is justified. What it really means is: "realize that your last end is to know and enjoy the things of heaven, and aspire to that knowledge and enjoyment, rather than the fruition of earthly satisfactions."

Christ did not leave His Apostles any doubts about the fulness and dignity of life that had been communicated to them. "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven." And "all things, whatsoever I have heard of My Father, I have made known to you." He told them they were no longer His servants but His friends, sharing in His own heritage, His own knowledge and love of His Father. More than that, they are the Sons of God and it has not yet appeared what they shall be . . . for they shall be like Him, because they shall see Him as He is. But this sonship, this promise of transformation, is more than an extrinsic qualification: it is the expression of an interior sanctity that flows from union with God Himself, and this union is guaranteed within us by the Holy Spirit of God, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, Who is given to us and Who constitutes us sons of God, crying out in our souls "Abba, Father!" Indeed, it is through Christ, the Word that we are actually united, by the Holy Spirit, to the Father *per ipsum habemus accessum in uno Spiritu ad Patrem.* [through him we have access to the Father in one Spirit. Eph 2:18.]

* * *

The Apostles and Evangelists and the Disciples of Christ came forth from the cenacle at the third hour, the first Pentecost after Christ ascended into heaven, and the crowd that listened to their preaching

and recognized all the tongues of the known world soon realized that these Galileans were filled with something that was more than an ideal.

St. John, the greatest of the Evangelists, the Eagle, and the Son of Thunder, began both his Gospel and his first Epistle with summaries of the whole content of revelation. Theologian and contemplative that he was he wrote out a theology of contemplation in words of fire that are still the foundation of all Christian doctrine. *In principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum.* . . . [In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. . . Jn 1:1.] The tremendous chords that open the fourth Gospel and close all Masses, echo what John heard of eternity when he rested his head upon the Heart of Christ. Purer, clearer, more speculative than the first sentences of his Epistle, the Prologue of St. John's Gospel nevertheless lacks one thing which we find in the first Chapter of the *Epistola Prima*. [First letter.] There is a matchlessly urgent power of conviction in the simplicity with which he announces his subject: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, of the word of life." The Word of Life is not merely the Gospel, but the Second Person, the Fire whose sparks the Evangelists were to scatter all over the earth in their writing and the Apostles in their preaching, and mark, they have *touch*ed the uncreated Word, "seen with their eyes," "handled with their hands". It is from the immediacy of this experience that their preaching draws its dynamism, for they had touched Him from Whom power went out to heal all. *Virtus ex illon exibat et sanabat omnes.* [Power went out from him and healed all. Lk. 6:19.]

From then on, the Apostles could only go through the world crying out as John the Baptist cried out on the banks of Jordan: "Ecce!" "Look!" and as John the Evangelist repeats time after time in the few pages of his epistle: *Vidata!* "Look! See!" *Apparuit!* He has appeared! They are conscious of their mission to wake up the whole world not to the secrets of some esoteric cult but to a glory and magnificence which are all about us, in the midst of us, and which we know not.

What is this glory that we are to lift up our heads and see? What is this that we are called to look upon and understand? The Apostles bombard us with huge, fundamental terms which to us are distinct from one another but to them seem to meet in one central focus of synonymous meaning: Life, Light, Truth, and *Caritas*, Love. These, it appears, are all one. They are God, and they are made flesh in Jesus Christ. Light, Life, Truth and Love are so much one that to Love is to

be enlightened, to live, and to possess the Truth. "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." To be more exact, to Love Christ, the whole Mystical Christ, Jesus and all those who share His divine life, is to see and possess God. Why is this? Because Christ is the Word of God, eternal, "Who was in the Beginning."

Now the Word of God is the glory of the Father, the splendor of the divine substance, proceeding from the Father by intellectual generation from all eternity. The Word and the Father are one substance, one nature: they are one infinite Truth, but they are distinct in their personal relations for the same Truth begets itself as Father and proceeds intellectually from itself as its own Word or idea or contemplation of itself. Thus this infinite Truth is One and at the same time distinct not in two persons only but in three, for there is another relation of origin springing forth from the relation already existing between the Father and the Son. For now the Truth having generated itself intellectually, proceeds from itself freely, in the mode proper to volition, or in our language, by an "act of will." This third Person is the love of the Truth for its own Splendor. And so there is One God in Three Persons: the Truth, Father or Origin; the Splendor and Glory and Figure of the Truth, originating in the Truth; and the Joy, the Exultation, the uncompassed and magnificent of the Freedom of the Truth which proceeds, as an act of Love, from the twin origin of Truth reflected in Truth.

This is the contemplative Life which is God. Infinite Actuality realizing Himself in a blaze of absolutely unlimited intelligence and manifesting His perfection in a Freedom, a Love, an uncompassed substantial generosity which is so magnificently pure as to be absolutely inconceivable to anyone but Himself!

The spiritual genius of the Apostles, illuminated by the Holy Ghost, saw through the wide open doors of revelation into the furnace of contemplation which is the mutual relations of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. They ran out into the streets shouting like men who were drunk. Spreading the news of what they had seen, they overthrew a whole empire of seemingly invincible darkness and error and sin. They broke the whole tremendous power of hell with the words of their Gospel, with a little clean water and the sign of the Cross, with bread and wine and some words spoken by the Savior, with oil and chrism and with a few simple sentences and gestures of prayer. For, "last of all in these days God has spoken to us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the world. Who, being the brightness of His glory and the figure of His substance,

upholding all things by the word of His power, making purgation of sins, sitteth at the right hand of the majesty on high.

* * *

The Apostles were not content to share with others the Truths they themselves had learned in contemplation. Their mission was also to teach others how to learn the same truths from experience, as they themselves had learned them. It was not enough to make known the doctrines of revelation merely as abstract and speculative truths: for as long as these things were only theories, to be reduced to practice through the medium of an ethical code, Christianity would not achieve its full maturity in the souls of men. For Christianity, let us repeat, was not another philosophy like the stoicism of the ancients or a mystery cult like those of Orpheus and Mithras. It was not to be a "system" of thought completed by a code of action. It was something infinitely more: a Life, a more abundant Life which was a sharing in the infinite Life of God, and contained in itself the meaning of all existence and all activity. For the Christian, to live this highest of all lives in its fulness also automatically brought with it the contemplation of the highest truth and the enjoyment of the most perfect joy.

Ultimately, Christianity does not even teach a way to God that is distinct from God Himself: for Christ—the Word of God—revealed unmistakably that He is both the end of all our strivings, the Truth in which our minds rest, containing in Himself all doctrine, and the way to the Truth our end. *Ego sum via, veritas et vita*. [I am the way, the truth and the life. Jn. 14:6] St. Bernard paraphrases and explains: "I am the way leading to Truth: I am the Truth, Who promises Life: and I am the Life which I give."

The Christian Life is not so much a doctrine, even a doctrine practiced and lived. It is Christ Himself, living in us. *Vivo, iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*. [I live, now no longer I, but Christ lives in me. Gal 2:20]

This life begins at baptism, and it can be lived in the depths of our souls without our having any consciousness of being different from what we were before. Nevertheless, the fulness of the Christian life is achieved when grace possesses the highest faculties of the soul, illuminating the intellect, purifying and transforming the will and raising both above the normal operations of nature, unifying them in a supernatural activity in which they become at least obscurely conscious of the new existence which is theirs.

Not only do we accept the fact of divine revelation and the new life of faith blindly, on the authority of others, but we begin to realize what all these things mean, we enter into ineffable communion with the Truth dwelling in our souls, and we find ourselves gifted, through absolutely no merit or effort of our own, with an insight into divine things which is rightly called "understanding" although its mode of penetrating the divine mysteries makes their content accessible to us without making it any less obscure.

This understanding is sometimes called a "sense," *sensum*, in the Vulgate. "We know that the Son of God is come and He hath given us His understanding, *dedit nobis sensum* [he gave us meaning], that we may know the True God and may be in His true Son." This "sense" is what Jesus gave to the Disciples with whom He walked to Emmaus on the day of His Resurrection. They did not know Him at first. He spoke to them of the words and prophecies of Scripture, and while they were talking together, their "hearts burned within them"—in the first unrecognized movements of the contemplative gift. The significant thing is that although they had already begun to have an interior and experimental recognition of the Divine Word, it did not yet make them contemplative because they had no means of appreciating what it was. It took another and more definite infusion of the Gift of Understanding and Wisdom—in the reception of the Holy Eucharist—to open their eyes altogether. St. Luke also tells us in the same chapter how Jesus, before His Ascension, opened the understanding of the Apostles and Disciples: *aperuit illis sensum* [he opened this meaning to them. Lk 24:27], to give them a sure and affective knowledge of the meaning of Scripture. Contemplation, in the New Testament and among the Fathers too, is inseparable from Scripture. It is through the word of Scripture that we reach the Word Who is God. The Gift of contemplation, to the early Church, meant the acquisition of an inward eye to which the obscure, outward envelope of Scripture became transparent and the word of revelation gave place to the Word Who is generated eternally in the Bosom of the Father, and Who comes to us hidden in the words of Scripture as though in a Sacrament.

St. Paul repeatedly urged his converts—many of whom had been numbered among the wildest inhabitants of the seaports of the Levant—to aspire to this contemplative insight that would unite them with the Word in deep vision and love. He prayed the Father of Glory to give them "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your heart enlightened (*illuminatos oculos cordis*)

[enlightened eyes of the heart. Eph 1:8] that you may know what the hope is of His calling. That Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts; that being rooted and founded in charity you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, to know also the charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge that you may be filled unto the fulness of God." Over and over again the Apostle urges them on by telling them of his prayers that they may abound in this mysterious inward gift of enlightenment which is inseparable from the perfect love of God, which increases with love and penetrates the mysteries of revelation with the vision of love to possess God *in omni sapientia et intellectu spirituali* [in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Eph 1:8], to become, at last, one spirit with Him.

The mystical contemplation of God is clearly associated in the doctrine of St. Paul, with the fulness of the Christian life and the integrity of Christian perfection.

St. Thomas epitomizes Christian tradition on this point by interpreting the word *sensus*, "mind", as the *wisdom* of Christ. When St. Paul says that those who are mature in the Christian life have the "mind" of Christ, he means that they share the contemplation of the Word. It is no merely abstract, intellectual knowledge of God, but a concrete apprehension of Him, by that loving and fruitive knowledge properly called wisdom. The Angelic Doctor explains that the term *sense* (*sensus*) in the Vulgate is philosophically correct even though there is question here only of spiritual and intellectual perception, and nothing within reach of the interior or exterior senses. And he gives a deep reason. It is appropriate, he says, that this loving knowledge should be called a *sense*, for although it is intellectual and therefore above all sense or feeling, it apprehends God, its object, in His singular, particular being.

This wisdom, this "sense of God" says St. Thomas, is one of the elements of Christian perfection. He flatly declares: "He who has this sense is perfect." *Qui sentit quae Dei sunt, perfectus est.* [Who understands what is of God, is perfect]. On the other hand, the "sense" the appreciative knowledge of worldly things, which seeks fruition in them as ends in themselves is a wisdom damnable in the eyes of God, because it makes union with Him impossible. *Qui non sentiunt nisi carnalia Deo placare non possunt.* [Those who only understand what is of the flesh cannot please God.]

The perfection conferred on the soul by this wisdom is twofold. It fulfils all the capacities of our highest faculties: intellect and will. It

separates both of these from earthly things and unites them with God. It delivers the intellect from a knowledge depending on sense species and human discourse, and it frees the will from attachment to created things and dedicates it entirely to God. *Est perfectio caritatis ubi nulla est cupiditas*. [It is perfect love when there is no attachment.] Finally, this perfection is evident from the fact that in this "sense" of God, the soul apprehends the things of God and judges all other things under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Just as carnal wisdom proceeds to its conclusions under the guidance of the "spirit of the world," so Christian wisdom, impelled and illuminated by the Spirit of God arrives at God Himself. What is more, this wisdom is not only from God, but it *is* God. *Haec sapientia Deus est et a Deo*. [this wisdom is God and is from God. 1 Cor 1:30.]

Hence it is quite understandable that St. Thomas should describe this "sense" of God as the contemplation of those who "being subject to the spirit of God, enjoy a most sure and certain knowledge of spiritual things."

It is certainly not surprising that this should be so, when Jesus Himself so clearly determined this bequest to His Church when opening to His Apostles His spiritual testament at the Last Supper.

"From henceforth you shall know Him, (the Father) . . . Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more, But you see me, because I live and you shall live . . . you shall know Him (the Spirit of Truth) because He shall abide with you and be in you . . . You shall know that I am in my father and you in me and I in you."

He does not say that we are merely to *believe* these things, but that we shall have a deeper and greater certitude even than the assent of faith can give us. The term *knowledge* is not considered too strong to apply to this penetration of the deepest of all mysteries, the inner life of the One God in Three Persons. There can be no doubt that this implies a real manifestation of the Divine Life, because Jesus uses that very word: "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father and *I will manifest myself to Him* . . . and my Father will love him and we will come to him and will make our abode with him."

Finally, lifting up His eyes to His Father in heaven, Jesus declared that He had communicated to men the very glory which is His own infinite Truth, the reflection of His Father, and that by this communication they would be drawn in to the circle of subsistent relations which are the contemplation and love of God Himself, in the Most Blessed Trinity:

"The glory which thou has given to me, I have given them; that they may be one as we also are one: I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one."

* * *

There is a problem about Christ's promise of the Holy Ghost to His Apostles. After all, they certainly had faith in Him, they loved Him with a supernatural love. They possessed sanctifying grace, they were living supernatural lives. All these things would have been impossible unless the Holy Ghost were already present in their souls. Why did Christ tell them that He would send them the Holy Ghost?

The answer is that although their faith had made them Christians the supernatural life was simply in an embryonic, or at least an immature state in their souls. They had faith, charity, their lives were virtuous enough, but their outlook was still too human. They judged all things according to the values of the world, according to the life of the senses or, at best, of reason, and as a result they had no real appreciation of their supernatural calling. They could not yet conceive what it meant to be heirs of the Kingdom of heaven. They had no sense of their great spiritual destiny. On the contrary, they wrangled among themselves about precedence in the messianic kingdom. They wanted to know who would have first place, who would sit at the right and left of the King. The supernatural life meant, to them, casting out devils and working miracles and they thought themselves entitled to make use of their power to punish their enemies: it was St. John himself, he who was later to become the eagle among contemplatives, who, in his spiritual immaturity wanted to call down fire upon some Samaritans who had hurt his feelings.

Before Pentecost, and above all before the Resurrection of Christ, the Apostles were in pretty much the same condition as those Corinthians and Hebrews whom St. Paul rebuked for their imperfection and their superficial Christianity.

And therefore St. Augustine explains why the Holy Ghost had to be "sent" to them when they already had Him in their souls. The reason is this. Since the Apostles did not possess the Spirit of God in the measure in which they needed to possess Him, they might as well not have possessed Him at all. In other words, the Holy Spirit was dwelling in their souls, but since He did not exercise a sufficiently strong influence in their lives it was as if He were not there. He was obscured and hidden. He could not manifest His presence to them

because they were still guided by a totally different wisdom, a wisdom which is contrary to the wisdom of God. They had the Spirit of God in their hearts by grace, but in all the practical conduct of their lives they were largely guided and dominated by quite another spirit, which the Scriptures call the "spirit of the world," the "wisdom of the flesh." And the "Wisdom of the flesh is the enemy of God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor can it be."

St. Augustine contemplates this sorry situation, and his line of reasoning follows that taken by St. Thomas in the consideration we have just quoted on the "sense" of Christ. St. Augustine comes to much the same conclusion. The perfection of our supernatural life depends on our love of God and our union with the will of God. This love and obedience depend, in turn, on the action of the Holy Ghost in our souls. And the action of the Holy Ghost increases in proportion to our appreciation of His presence, His love and His power to assist and perfect us in the ways of divine love. Hence, where there is no thought of the Holy Ghost, no awareness of God's presence, no interest in His love, no concern for His help, and no desire to see His face, our supernatural life is bound to be feeble and obscure. But where infused love has awakened our souls to a deep and constant desire of God and where the light of faith, knowledge and understanding keep our minds awake and we tend to grow rapidly in the secret life which we have from Him, in Christ, and our supernatural stature increases beyond measure and beyond all human accounting, without our being half aware of what is going on. And so, St. Augustine argues that Christ promised to give His Apostles the Holy Ghost in such a way that they would *know* His presence and live in intimate union with Him and be taught and directed by Him. This awareness, this intimacy, this wakeful and attentive appreciation would transform their lives. It would introduce them into the fulness of Christian perfection.

In the economy of salvation, it is the Holy Ghost Who is charged with the sanctification and the perfection of men. This work is appropriated above all to the Third Person, Who is the love of the other Two Persons of the Blessed Trinity and thus, in a sense, the "perfection" of the Trinity, for "charity is the bond of perfection."

In the first place, the Spirit of God is given to us by Christ to deliver us from the blindness and hopeless futility of passion which makes us the slaves of our natural desires and fears. Dominated by emotion and the confusion of conflicting appetite man cannot have peace until he is set free from this servitude of corruption. The Holy

Spirit sets us free from sin, and, indeed, without His direct intervention there is no escape from the "law of sin and of death". But this is only the beginning of the work of grace in our souls. The Holy Spirit does not liberate us from sin merely in order to leave us on the human plane of existence, leading humdrum lives of bourgeois virtue, practicing thrift, not eating or drinking more than we can decently contain, and being cheerful in our relations with people who really annoy us intensely. No doubt it is an asset to be able to be pleasant as well as civil under trying circumstances: but the Holy Ghost has much more to do in our souls than produce such tame effects as these.

His work of liberation does not stop with the checking of grosser disorders. It is God's will that we should be completely purified of all the motives which turn us away from the peace and clarity of His own wisdom. We must be completely and immovably established in His will, so that nothing may cloud the clarity of our vision of Him, nothing may shake the peace of our wills united with Him and resting in His infinite peace. Therefore the Holy Spirit makes war without respite upon all the forces that oppose His complete domination of our souls. He is the Spirit of Life, and as long as there remain in our soul the faintest traces of those elements of death which manifest themselves as the "wisdom of the flesh," He will be at work counteracting their influence and purifying the mind and will of their infection. Nevertheless we remain free under His action, and if we choose to prefer sickness and death, to health and life, He will not compel us to live. He will not force His happiness upon us. But if we receive His grace—a thing which we cannot do without grace itself, working efficaciously in us—He will move us to deny the "prudence of the flesh" and to serve as His instruments in the work of our own salvation by "mortifying the deeds of the flesh."

The Spirit of God, then, is the chief Master and Guide of all Christian asceticism. He is the only safe guide. Without Him, asceticism is a distortion, a form of spiritual gymnastics, and as such it is nothing but another form of the "wisdom of the world" which is our own worst enemy and His. But the work of the Spirit does not end in the negative labor of self-denial and correction. His chief function is positive. Besides removing whatever is harmful or even merely useless in our interior life, He strengthens and fosters everything that is good: He develops in us the nascent capacities for spiritual and contemplative life. He helps our weakness, *adjuvat infirmitatem nostram* [Rom 8:14] and while we are too blind and too stupid to know what is good

[line missing ms. p. 37]. In fact, it may happen that he asks God to send us quite the opposite to what we ourselves would naturally ask for. As long as we are only superficially Christian, our prayers tend to be formulated according to the standards of human prudence, and they express our ambition, our sluggishness in spiritual things, our fear of labor, our love of comfort and pleasure. The Holy Spirit sometimes obtains for us things that our nature does not at all desire.

The Holy Spirit, Who lives in our souls by grace, demands insistently to be allowed to work in us without impediment. If we listen to Him, it is bound to cost us many sacrifices. He will lead us into difficulties, and make us do hard and unpleasant things. He will begin to cut away our pride and self-complacency. He will starve out our love of pleasure, and shame our cowardice by carrying us through trials we never dreamed we could stand. He will do all this in order to burn and purify our souls and cast out the wisdom that is opposed to His wisdom. He will exercise, with the sign of the Cross, all the prudence of the flesh and of the world. And in proportion as we allow Him to cleanse and empty our souls of this false wisdom, He will fill them with His own wisdom, and we will begin to learn something of the peace which the world cannot give, the peace of the children of God.

In proportion as we give ourselves over to the power of the Spirit of God, Whose love urges us on through the darkness of hardship and sacrifice, where the price of every advance is with great faiths, we begin to acquire an unexpected sense of freedom and ease, a mysterious sureness and capacity to perform difficult and unfamiliar actions. And this liberty, carrying with it a deeper assurance of supernatural life, begins to make us obscurely aware of that connaturality with God which merits for sanctifying grace the qualification of "divine sonship." For the Spirit of Liberty gives testimony to our spirit that we are the Sons of God, provided we suffer with Christ, that we may be glorified with Him.

The more we are subject to the movement and guidance of grace, the more we are liberated from the influence and direction of selfish and sensual motives. The whole object of the economy of grace is to perfect our liberation from the flesh by completing our subjection to the Holy Spirit, so that all our motives may become supernatural and all the activity of our minds and wills may be directed by an immediate influx of intellectual light and spiritual energy from the depths of the divine Truth and Love. This progressive divinization of our interior activity elevates us above our own natural plane and gives

us participation in God's life which is no mere metaphor, no mere moral union but a real and physical actuality. *Qui Spiritu Dei agantur, sunt filii Dei.* [Those who are moved by the Spirit of God are sons of God. Rom 8:14]

St. Paul, whose exposition we are still analyzing, clearly shows that the Holy Spirit develops in us a keener and more lively sense of our supernatural participation in God's life, as He gains a surer grasp upon our souls. The two normally go together: union with the Holy Spirit, by love and obedience to His secret guidance might logically be expected to bring with them an experimental appreciation of the new life that is flooding our spiritual faculties with its energy. *Qui secundum spiritum sunt, quae sunt spiritus sentiunt.* [Those who are according to the Spirit are those who understand what is of the Spirit. Rom 8:5] The classical chapter in which the Apostle works out this doctrine is in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, where the contrast between the Spirit of God and the Spirit of the world is accompanied by a clear statement that the perfection of the Christian life brings with it a conscious participation in God's own contemplation of the splendors of His divine essence. And this vision of divine things is given to us in the gift of the Holy Spirit "who searcheth all things, even the deep things of God."

The term of this activity of the Holy Spirit in the Christian soul is described as a mystical transformation into God. This transformation terminates not in a complete physical identity of the soul and God in one substance, because that would be metaphysically impossible. The abyss that exists between an infinite Being Who is Pure Act, and a contingent creature held in being by His power forbids a substantial union between the two. A human nature cannot become the divine nature. Yet in the miracle of the Incarnation the two natures, divine and human, were united in one divine Person. Next to this hypostatic union, which is the unique privilege of Christ alone, the closest possible union between God and a created substance is the mystical transformation in which a soul capable of contemplation becomes perfectly identified with God in *all its spiritual activities.*

To love God as God loves Himself because you see Him as He sees Himself: this is the inconceivable exaltation which is promised to the Christian as the term of all the work of the Holy Spirit in his soul. Such a consummation means, for all practical purposes, that man becomes a god in everything except by right. He is a god in fact because he is living the perfect life of God, in God and with God. The only thing that God retains for Himself is the fact that this life is His by

nature, while it is granted to the beatified soul only by participation. This perfect union, consummated in heaven, and already realized to a great extent on earth in the lives of the greatest saints, is summed up by St. Paul in the words: "But we, beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."

The word image reminds us here that one most important thing remains to be said about the role attributed to the Holy Ghost, by Scripture, in raising men to the perfection of the contemplative life. It is this: Just as the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son, all his operations in the souls of men are explicitly referred to the Father through the Son. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son and the work attributed to Him outside God takes its character from the internal origin of the Holy Spirit within God. By His Love He reaches out from the depths of the Godhead to draw us into the divine life and fix us, as it were, in the two Persons Who are the One principle of His own procession. It is therefore his function, above all, to draw us to Christ, because all our destiny begins and ends in Christ. It was from the Word that the Holy Spirit drew forth the exemplar causes for our creation, and it is in the Word that we are to come to rest at last, beholding the Father in the mirror of His glory. "Through Him, Christ, the Word) We have access in One Spirit to the Father."

The whole work of the Holy Spirit on earth is centered and focused on the Person Who is the Word, Jesus Christ. His function begins with his "testimony" to Christ in Scripture continues with reminding us of everything Christ taught and teaching us all things by His unction, that is by His infused light and love. The final term of the work is to fulfil the purpose of our creation by glorifying us, in the Word, in heaven. The place of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation is then to make us saints, to make us contemplatives, in Christ. That is, to unite us to the Word of God in a union of perfect likeness by contemplation. His purpose in our regard is that we, in the words of the Vulgate, may be identified with the image of the Son: *conformes fieri imaginis Filii*. [conformed to the image of the Son. Rom 8:28]