

**RESURRECTIONIST SPIRITUALITY:  
FROM PERSONAL TO SOCIAL RENEWAL**

*The Spirituality of Polish Convents: Message and Communication*

Duchowość klasztorów polskich: przekaz i komunikacja

## Volume XV

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On the Cover:

The Lamb of God, a detail of the stained glass window  
in the Cathedral (Duomo) in Florence, Italy (photo by Rafał Golina, CR).

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the Spirituality of the Media and Social Relations Department  
(The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, Poland)

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FROM PERSONAL TO SOCIAL RENEWAL**

EDITORS

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Wydawnictwo św. Jana Pawła II

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*Christ is Risen! Alleluia!*

*Wojciech Mleczo, CR*






## Foreword

The publication of “Resurrectionist spirituality: from personal to social renewal” coincides with the 175th anniversary of the vows of the first Resurrectionists. This event took place on Easter Sunday, 27th March 1847 in the catacombs of St. Sebastian in Rome. The founder of the Congregation and the inspirator of its spirituality, Bogdan Jański who personally experienced the transformative love of God and a spiritual resurrection did not live to see ‘the birth’ of the first Resurrectionists. On that Sunday morning the vows were made first by Fr. Peter Semenenko, and then the others of the new religious congregation made vows before him. Fr. Peter was not only the first ‘official’ superior but, above all, he was the ‘brains’ of the operation and the author of its rule. His works in philosophy and theology provided the intellectual foundation for new school of spirituality. It is no surprise then that the texts found in this publication concentrate on his ideas, which he himself lived and propagated as a religious writer, spiritual director and homilist.

I thank Fr. Wojciech Mleczek CR, who is the link between our Congregation and The Spirituality of the Media and Social Relations of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków Department, for yet another worthy initiative. By publishing this book in English we make possible the popularization of Polish theological thought to a wider audience. I also extend my thanks to the authors of these articles and texts and to Fr. James Gibson CR,

the secretary general and head of the International Resurrection Studies Commission for his professionalism in helping to prepare the texts in English.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Fr. Bernard Hylla CR". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "F." and a stylized "H".

*Fr. Bernard Hylla CR  
Superior General*

*Rome, March 27, 2017*

*On the 175th anniversary of the religious vows of the Resurrectionists*

Wojciech Mleczko, CR

## **An Introduction to Resurrectionist Spirituality**



Resurrectionist spirituality is rooted in the history of the Congregation of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is based on the spiritual experience of Bogdan Jański, the founder of the community, and on life and teachings of Peter Semenenko, co-founder of the Congregation. Further, this spirituality was adopted by other Resurrectionists (e.g. Jerome Kajsiewicz, servant of God Paul Smolikowski), Blessed Marceline Darowska (foundress of the Immaculate Conception Sisters), Blessed Celine Borzęcka and her daughter, servant of God Hedwig Borzęcka (foundresses of Sisters of the Resurrection) and many other priests, sisters and lay people.

The aim of this paper is to introduce the fundamental issues concerning Resurrectionist spirituality by giving basic information on history of the Congregation of the Resurrection, on Bogdan Jański and Peter Semenenko, as well as by describing the main elements of this spirituality and defining the Resurrectionist school of spirituality.

## 1. Congregation of the Resurrection

In the “Historical Preface” to the Constitutions of the Congregation the beginning of the community are described: “The Congregation of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ began in Parish, France, on Ash Wednesday, February 17, 1836, under the leadership of Bogdan Jański. After the death of the founder on July 2, 1840, his disciples continued to develop his ideas and to live in community under the direction of Peter Semenenko and Jerome Kajsiewicz, the cofounders of the Congregation. On Easter Sunday, March 27, 1842, along with five other clerics, they professed their first religious vows in the Catacombs of St. Sebastian in Rome. The first Rule was written during the Lenten season of 1842 and became the basis for community life and personal sanctification. They were inspired to dedicate themselves to the Risen Saviour and to call themselves *Brothers of the*

*Resurrection*. They were now dead to sin and alive with the Risen Christ in a new life dedicated to truth and charity.”<sup>1</sup>

Over the years, the community became international and is currently present in 15 countries around the world (Australia, Austria, Bermuda, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Israel, Italy, Poland, Slovak Republic, Tanzania, Ukraine, the United States). It consists of priests, deacons, and brothers, involved in various apostolates, among which educational and parish apostolates are priority.

Through more than 180 years of their existence, the Resurrectionists organized from the beginning and administered more than 30 schools: primary, secondary and colleges; more than 120 parishes or other pastoral centers, with many religious, patriotic, educational and cultural organizations. Everywhere they built churches, school, orphanages, homes for the aged as well as places for organizations and institutions, such as: publishing houses, editorial offices, parish banks, and headquarters for larger associations. They spent much of their time on promoting the issue of women’s spiritual renewal by helping in the founding of several new women’s religious institutes (e.g. Polish Sisters of the Immaculate Conception; Sisters of the Resurrection). They also educated many renowned priests, nuns and lay people.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, Rome 2001, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> More about the history of the Congregation can be found in e.g.: John Iwicki, *Resurrectionist Charism. A History of the Congregation of the Resurrection*, vol. I (1836 - 1886), Rome 1986, vol. II (1887 - 1932), Rome 1992, vol. III (1932 - 1965), Rome 1992; James A. Wahl, “Reflections on the History of the Congregation of the Resurrection”, in Michael W. Higgins, ed. *How Could We Sorrow? Essays on the Resurrection*, University of St. Jerome’s College Press, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada 1989, pp. 1-15; James A. Wahl, *In the Hope of Resurrection. An Illustrated History of the Ontario-Kentucky Province of the Congregation of the Resurrection*, Waterloo 2007.

## 2. Bogdan Jański - the Founder

Bogdan Jański was born on March 26, 1807 in Poland and died on July 2, 1840 in Rome, Italy. He can be described as: a professor of economics, a fervent patriot, a voluntary exile, a man of deep interior conversion and spiritual resurrection, a public penitent, a lay apostle of the Polish emigration in France, a spiritual guide for the lost, a protector of the morally and materially careless, an educator of priests, the founder of the Congregation of the Resurrection and initiator of the Resurrectionist school of spirituality.

In 1827 he graduated from Warsaw University with two degrees: a Master's degree in economics and law. The following year, he won a competition for the position of professor of economics in the newly organized Polytechnic Institute in Warsaw. Along with the nomination he received a scholarship for studies abroad in Europe. In this way he found himself in France (November 1828), as well as in London (from September 1830 to February 1831), where he met the philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill (1806 - 1873) and Robert Owen (1771 - 1858), a utopian socialist and pioneer of the cooperative movement. In connection with the outbreak of the November Uprising in Poland against their Russian overlords, he decided to settle in Paris, which he would only leave in the year of his death, when he went to Rome.

Before he became a prominent Catholic figure in the nineteenth century, he went through a period of crisis, including a loss of faith, a total departure from God and moral degeneracy. This period, initiated during his studies in Warsaw, ended with a difficult and lengthy 3 year process of returning to the faith, God, the Catholic Church and a sacramental life. This could only have happened because Jański never ceased to seek the right way leading to perfection, which he considered effective service to others. This cognitive desire led him first to join the utopian and socializing Saint-Simonist movement, and later to find a better

way, when through the intellectual and moral conversion he reached the *living faith*.

Jański's conversion largely was accomplished through the study of the works of such authors as: Nicolas-Sylvestre Bergier (1718 - 1790), René François Rohrbacher (1785 - 1856), Ferdinand d'Eckstein (1780 - 1861), François René Chateaubriand (1768 - 1848), Joseph de Maistre (1753 - 1821), Luis Gabriel Ambroise de Bonald (1754 - 1840), Fr. Felicité Robert Hugues de Lamennais (1782 - 1854), Louis-Marie-Eugène Bautain (1796 - 1867). Of equally great importance for the spiritual transformation of Bogdan Jański was his close personal contact with the most prominent figures of French Catholicism of that time. They were: Fr. Félicité R. H. de Lamennais (1782 - 1854), Fr. Philippe-Olympe Gerbet (1798 - 1864), Dom Prosper Guéranger (1805 - 1875), Fr. Jean-Baptiste-Henri-Dominique Lacordaire (1802 - 1861), Count Charles-Forbes de Montalembert (1810 - 1870), and Frederic A. Ozanam (1813 - 1853).<sup>3</sup>

Being aware that "the reform of society is to be achieved by the coming together of the reborn individuals"<sup>4</sup>, Jański founded a community. On February 17, 1836 in Paris he opened so called 'The House of Jański' ('Maisonette de Janski') for a group of young Poles (Peter Semenenko was 22 years old, Jerome Kajsiewicz - 24 years, and Jański himself - 29 years, and others), for whom he served as a spiritual leader. First of all, the members of the community had to be mindful of their own sanctification and work on their character. A daily fixed schedule and harmonious cooperation in duties helped in this tasks.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Wojciech Mleczo, CR, *Nauka i świętość. Formacja kapłańska w myśli i działalności zmartwychwstańców* [Science and Holiness. Priestly Formation in Thought and Activity of the Resurrectionists], Kraków 2014, pp. 23-24.

<sup>4</sup> Bogdan Jański, *Under the Standard of the Risen Savior. Statements of the Founder on the Theme of the New Community*, selected and arranged by Fr. Bolesław Micewski, CR, Chicago 1978, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Bolesław Micewski, CR, *Bogdan Janski "Founder of the Resurrectionists"*, translated by Rev. Francis Grzechowiak, CR, Rome (?) 1984, pp. 67-78.



From the very beginning of his spiritual transformation, Bogdan Jański wanted to develop catholic values, regarding them as the only way for man to achieve personal, spiritual, social, and even national and political freedom. His desire was that Christian values be present in both private and public life. He believed that a spiritual rebirth of society can be achieved only if it is based upon the accumulated wisdom of the Church. Based on his own emigrational experiences, Jański noticed that people were disadvantaged in various ways by the structures of the world. Hence, he thought that “structures without God” are the most dangerous to man, society and the world, because they led to neo-paganism, and to the acceptance of atheistic and materialistic attitudes. He was convinced that the only help and guarantee for the proper shaping of world structures is the Church (a community of re-born, ‘new-men’). He wrote: “In Christ the Lord, in his divine teaching and in his holy Church is all... all truth, all good for individuals and nations.”<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, in his plans Jański foresaw the foundation of several ‘Houses’, as well as schools of every kind, catholic libraries, the translation of religious books, operating their own publishing and printing houses and workshops for new religious art. He intended to develop a broad effort of taking care of the sick and poor, as well as establishing a Polish seminary in Rome. All of these were to serve for the renewal of society and the creation of a new culture, but first of all, it would contribute to the resolution of urgent problems in his contemporary society: the condition of workers and farmers. It is important to note that Jański’s role model for all of this was the community described in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

Peter Semenenko, Jański’s most faithful disciple, wrote some years later about him:

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<sup>6</sup> Jański, *Under the Standard of the Risen Savior...*, op. cit., p. 10.

Then there arose among us a man of great intellect, a person in every way exceptional, his name – Bogdan Jański. He, too, passed through darkness, but he was the first to greet the rising light. Then he himself gave forth the light like the morning star, which announces the newly arrived dawn, a prophet of that light which is to reign always. Actually he did not carry the torch very long, but long enough to show the way. How many quickly gathered around him! How many found God’s peace through him and greeted him as one sent from God, a guiding angel. Even though their number may not have been great, how great the reality and the results! What a beautiful person... a great soul, unshakable, steadfast, clear, pure and serene. He was the first to be openly illuminated by the light, by grace and peace.<sup>7</sup>

Bogdan Jański was well aware that he would not create a new society without renewing of individual persons. And he also knew that he had to start with himself. He wrote: “Create a new people, having already become new man yourself.”<sup>8</sup> Jański based his strength on God, therefore in prayer he sought the power to renew himself: “I need to pray for extermination of all the habits of the old man, for complete rebirth, for living faith, pure love, and unfaltering hope; for enlightenment of the mind, strengthening of the will, control of the flesh and all lust.”<sup>9</sup> Along his way of spiritual growth, he came to conviction that union with God is the only condition and source of new life in a man. As a result, he made a resolution: “We must work on ourselves so as to realize this holy union [with God]. This is a spiritual and practical task,

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<sup>7</sup> Piotr Semenenko, CR, “Biesiady filozoficzne,” in *Przegląd Poznański* 27 (1859), pp. 113–114. English translation taken from Jański, *Under the Standard of the Risen Savior...*, op. cit., p. IX.

<sup>8</sup> Jański, *Under the Standard of the Risen Savior...*, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> Bogdan Jański, *Diary 1830 – 1839*, edited and arranged by Andrzej Jastrzębski, English translation by Fr. Francis Grzechowiak, C.R., Rome 2000, p. 274.

sincere and peaceful, renewing our entire being, allowing our life to influence the lives of others, uniting ourselves and others with God and Christ. Today, this is our greatest responsibility.”<sup>10</sup>

In his spiritual growth, Jański's transformation in Christ became even deeper, and more complete. Jański strove to make his life more and more similar to that of Christ. And he saw this 'being more alike' as an important moment of growing in sanctity. Therefore, it is not unusual that he wanted to unify his life with Christ.

Although Bogdan Jański lived for only 33 years, the history of his life and his spiritual experience initiated a new school of spirituality. Fortunately, the most important of his writings (from the point of view of spiritual theology), have been translated into English and are available online: *Diary 1830 - 1839* (edited and arranged by Andrzej Jastrzębski, English translation by Fr. Francis Grzechowiak, CR, Rome 2000), *Letters 1828 - 1839* (edited by Fr. Bolesław Micewski, CR, English translation of the Polish letters Fr. Francis Grzechowiak, CR and of the French letters Fr. John Finn, CR, computer edition by Fr. Wojciech Mleczko, CR and Renata Borowczyk, Rome 2011). Many important testimonies about Jański's life and sanctity are included in Fr. B. Micewski's edition *Jański in the Eyes of his Contemporaries* (translated from the original Polish by Natalia Janota and Ben Borek). It is also worth mentioning that Congregation of the Resurrection proceeds with the canonization process of its Founder.

### 3. Who was Father Peter Semenenko?

Servant of God Father Peter (Piotr) Semenenko was born on June 29, 1814 in north-eastern Poland. In 1830 he started his studies at the University of Wilno (Department of Philosophy), but soon interrupted them deciding to join the November Uprising

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<sup>10</sup> Jański, *Under the Standard of the Risen Savior...*, op. cit., p. 9.

against Russian hegemony. He emigrated to France in 1832, where, in Paris, he met Bogdan Jański in 1833, who soon became his spiritual director and master. Under his influence, Semenenko returned to the Catholic faith and became the first member of the "House of Jański" in 1836, the beginning of the Congregation of the Resurrection.

After the early death of Bogdan Jański in 1840 in Rome, Peter Semenenko was elected the first superior and spiritual leader of the new community. When he finished his theological studies (Collegium Romanum, 1837 - 1841), he was ordained to the priesthood on December 5, 1841 (not without difficulties from Russian authorities). As a main co-founder of the congregation, he wrote the rule of 1842, and was the principal editor of the (1850 - 1880) rules. He was also superior general of the Congregation for a good number of years (1842 - 1845, 1873 - 1886).

Fr. Peter Semenenko actively collaborated with the Holy See. He was an expert on Polish and Eastern matters, and was regarded as one of the most scholarly members of the Church in the second part of the XIX Century. Because of his knowledge, he was held in high esteem by Popes Pius IX (pontificate: 1846 - 1878) and Leo XIII (pontificate: 1878 - 1903) and carried out the missions entrusted to him by them. He worked as a consultor for the Sacred Congregations: of the Index (since 1857) and of the Holy Office (since 1873) [now: the Doctrine of the Faith]. His work was highly praised, and his statements were taken as final on a regular basis. He was a member of the prestigious Papal Academies: Accademia della Religione Cattolica (since 1859), and Accademia degli Arcadi (since 1874). He was outstanding in his erudition and freely able to discuss even the most subtle matters.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Wojciech Mleczo, CR, "Sługa Boży o. Piotr Semenenko CR - nota biograficzna," in Wojciech Misztal, Wojciech Mleczo, CR, eds. *Sługa Boży o. Piotr Semenenko i żmartwychwstańcza szkoła duchowości*, Kraków 2011, pp. 165-167.

He founded (1866) and was the first rector (president) of the Polish Pontifical College in Rome. Many alumni of the College (in years 1866 - 1938 the College was run by the Resurrectionists) accepted and adopted Resurrectionist spirituality and became outstanding priests, bishops, archbishops, and cardinals, some have been beatified and even canonized (e.g. the Bishop Saint Józef Sebastian Pelczar [1842 - 1924], the Archbishop Saint Józef Bilczewski [1860 - 1923], and Blessed Fr. Jan Balicki [1869 - 1948]).

Father Semenenko was a highly respected priest, confessor and spiritual leader of many lay and religious persons, e.g.: Blessed Celine (Celina) Borzęcka (1833 - 1913) and her daughter Hedwig (Jadwiga, 1863 - 1906), Blessed Francis (Franciszka) Siedliska (1842 - 1902), Blessed Marceline (Marcelina) Darowska (1827 - 1911), Blessed Mary of Jesus (Émilie d'Oultremont, 1818 - 1878). He helped to found many women's religious congregations, e.g.: Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, Sisters of the Resurrection, Felician Sisters, Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, Consolers of the Sacred Heart (Belgium), Sisters of Adoration Réparatrice (France). He preached in various churches in Poland, France, Belgium, Bulgaria and Rome.<sup>12</sup> Much of his attention went towards the youth. He desired to inspire their devotion to the sciences and holiness. He laid the foundation for the Resurrectionist system of education.<sup>13</sup>

Fr. Semenenko died on November 18, 1886 in Paris, France in the odor of sanctity. His remains rest in the Resurrectionist's church in Rome (via San Sebastianello 11). The beatification process was started shortly after World War II. Pope Leo XIII's

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Mleczeko, CR, *Nauka i świętość...*, op. cit., pp. 43-47.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Lenore V. Kusek, *Peter Semenenko and His Triologism as a Basis for a Resurrection Philosophy of Education* (1972). Master's Theses. Paper 2579. [http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses/2579](http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/2579) (3.02.2017). Sister Beatrice, "The Resurrectionist Pedagogical System," in *Polish American Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1963, pp. 34-39. [www.jstor.org/stable/20147633](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20147633) (3.02.2017).

words about Fr. Peter upon hearing of his death were: "Father Semenenko was so esteemed in the whole city of Rome for his virtues and for his works done for the Church. He was the soul of your Congregation and sacrificed his life for its welfare."<sup>14</sup> Pope John Paul II called him „a great gift for the Church”.<sup>15</sup>

Semenenko was an author of many philosophical and theological works, as well as works on the interior life. He left massive correspondence and a personal diary. Some of his writings were translated and published in English: *The Interior Life. A Study in Ascetical Theology* (Rome 1969, translated by F. J. Grzechowiak, CR), *The "Our Father" - A Commentary* (Rome 1986, translated by F. J. Grzechowiak, CR), *Spiritual Exercises* (with a foreword by Fr. Paul Smolikowski, CR translated into English by Francis J. Grzechowiak, CR, this translation can be found in the Archives of the Congregation of the Resurrection in Rome, no. 25.616.239), *Letters*, vols. I - VII (Rome 1980 - 2010), *Love and Faith. Five Sermons of the Resurrectionist Spirituality* (translated from Polish by Sr. Pascale-Dominique Nau, op, Rome 2014, Lulu Press, Inc), *Autobiography* (translated from Polish "Autobiografia" compiled by Father Jerzy Mrówczyński, CR by Sr. Jeanne Marie Harla, CR, Sisters of the Resurrection, Resurrection Studies, Rome 2004), *Letters of Father Semenenko to Hedwig Borzęcka 1878 - 1886*.

#### 4. The Main Elements of Resurrectionist Spirituality

The foundation of Resurrectionist spirituality is the primacy of love. The whole spiritual life of a Christian should be centered around the virtue of charity, which is at the same time participation in God's love and the foundation of holiness. Father

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<sup>14</sup> Ladislao Kwiatkowski, CR, *La vita di Padre Pietro Semenenko, C. R.*, Roma 1953, p. 501.

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II, Telegram to the Congregation of the Resurrection on the centennial anniversary of Fr. Piotr Semenenko's death, Vatican, November 18, 1986, Archives of the Congregation of the Resurrection in Rome, no. 72909.

Semenenko preached: "God loves each one of us, as if each one of us was the only in the world [...]; and about this truth we must be convinced deep in our hearts. *God loves me*, that is the foundation and summit of the interior life."<sup>16</sup> But what kind of love is God's love? God's love is unconditional. Constant and faithful and for each person. "This love is not only of the best father, but also love of the most tender Mother."<sup>17</sup> The fundamental biblical text which Resurrectionists recommend for consideration on this point is the First Letter of St. John. Indeed, in this letter such words can be found: "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them" (1 Jn 4:16; NIV). Love is the theme of union with God, accepting His will, complete devotion to Him and acts of love towards one's neighbor.<sup>18</sup>

However, discovering the truth about God's love, a person begins to see in him or herself the contradictory desires. Therefore, striving for perfection, one should know the truth about his or her condition.<sup>19</sup> It is here that such terms as nothingness, misery and corruption appear in Resurrectionist spirituality.

The concept of nothingness leads to the understanding that all creation is the work of God's free and unconditional love. Neither the world nor man could exist without God. So everything is God's gift. This applies both to what we have, and what we are (our talents, abilities, virtues, our lives). To recognize this does not lessen their beauty, nor devalue them or us. Rather it opens to us the one and only path to human greatness.<sup>20</sup> This principle invites an attitude, which on one hand leads to the conclu-

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<sup>16</sup> Piotr Semenko, CR, *Ćwiczenia duchowne*, Kraków 1903, p. 94

<sup>17</sup> Piotr Semenko, CR, *Credo. Chrześcijańskie prawdy wiary*, Kraków 1907, p. 237.

<sup>18</sup> Stanisław Urbański, *Duchowość zmartwychwstańcza* [Resurrectionist Spirituality], Warszawa 2003, pp. 17-51.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 53.

<sup>20</sup> *Resurrectionist Formation*, Rome 1993, p. 22.

sion: “we are nothing, have nothing, and can do nothing without God”, but also leads to the acceptance of dignity of God’s child, created in God’s image and likeness.<sup>21</sup>

In turn, the term misery (evil attracts us) refers to the contamination of human nature, that is the heritage of original sin, which introduces confusion into the interior of man. This condition inhibits spiritual transformation. The term “misery” should be understood as “lack of what a man possessed before sin and what he should have, but lost, since the fall of Adam violated existing in him the divine order.”<sup>22</sup> The issue here is the loss of original harmony and order, which results in the propensity to evil. Therefore, mankind is unable to achieve on their own, their ultimate goal.<sup>23</sup> As prof. Stanisław Urbański explains, “misery causes a Christian to replace God with his or her own self, and take all steps arbitrarily.”<sup>24</sup> What is needed is the recognition that it comes easier to us to choose evil than to go for the good. On all levels an attraction to evil and frequent falls are experienced without really knowing why or fully desiring it. Therefore, thorough introspection is necessary to examine whether a person is not attracted by evil under the guise of the good.<sup>25</sup>

Another truth about human condition is the fact that despite his or her best efforts and good intentions he or she sometimes commits sin (corruption). St. John puts it in words: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8; NIV), and St. Paul states clearly: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23; NIV). This personal sin has a harmful effect on us and others since it reduces

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<sup>21</sup> *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, Rome 2001, p. 7, 12 - 13 (Charism Statement; art. 2).

<sup>22</sup> Urbański, *Duchowość zmartwychwstańcza*, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 58.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.

<sup>25</sup> *Resurrectionist Formation*, Rome 1993, p. 30.



and at times even totally destroys our receptivity for love: God's love and the love of others. The term "corruption" attached to this truth means an effect, a consequence of personal sin. The effects of sin in the individual person's faculties are: in mind – penchant for falsehood; in heart – rooted propensity to evil and penchant for what is bad; in will – desire for a new evil.<sup>26</sup>

Knowledge of one's condition (nothingness, misery, corruption; or, in other words, a person's creaturehood, tendency to evil and personal sinfulness) is not an easy experience. However, Resurrectionist spirituality is far from pessimism. On the contrary, it is characterized by hope, which source is the Paschal Mystery of Christ. For God calls us to conversion: to the paschal mystery of dying and rising with Jesus.<sup>27</sup> And only in the perspective of the redemption accomplished by the Lord Jesus, can a person undertake effective cooperation with God in the work of purification of his or her faculties, exploring and elimination of self-love and self-activity, as well as of progress in the virtue of humility. This should lead a person to a newness of life, a life in Christ. As St. Paul states "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20; NIV).

This ideal of a life in Christ is dramatically depicted in a paragraph (no. 9) of the Rule of the Brothers of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ written by Piotr Semenenko in 1850, ten years after Jański's death:

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Resurrectionist Formation*, Rome 1993, p. 41; Urbański, *Duchowość zmartwychwstańcza*, op. cit., pp. 74–75.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Resurrectionist Formation*, Rome 1993, p. 47. The concept is summarized in the first paragraph of the current Constitution of the Resurrectionists: "Our personal participation in the paschal mystery begins with our conversion, the acceptance of the Lord Jesus as our personal savior, and our union with him in baptism, confirmation and the Holy Eucharist. But our conversion is a dynamic, lifelong process. We must constantly die to self (self-will, self-love, self-activity) in order to rise by the power of the Holy Spirit to a new life of love in Christ" (*Constitutions of the Congregation of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, Rome 2001, p. 11).

The Brothers must establish Christ our Lord as the beginning, center, and end of all their activity and of their life; He shall be their sum and substance, the living fulfillment of the Rule. They will have recourse to Him: for counsel in their doubts, instruction in their ignorance, and strength in their weakness. He shall be their consolation in time of adversity, their glory in time of prosperity. He shall be the only one reward they desire for their labors, adversities, and sacrifices. Christ, our crucified and risen Lord, shall be the principle source of knowledge before men; from Him alone shall they derive the beginnings of divine wisdom and power. They shall look to Him as the epitome of the Law, justice, faith, hope, charity, history, and of all things. He shall always be for them: the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega of all things.<sup>28</sup>

Resurrectionist spirituality contains a unique characteristic, the life of Jesus in us. Human being is invited by God to cooperate in the process of purification and sanctification, which not only leads to union with Christ, but also to transformation in Him. This state is called mystical or spiritual resurrection.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, most important biblical passage for the described spirituality is allegory of the vine in the Gospel according to St. John (chapter 15) and particularly words: "apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5; NIV). Consequently, for a Christian Jesus Christ is the ideal, which connects to the human person, and it ennobles.

Fr. Semenenko wrote about this union with Christ answering a question what it means to follow Jesus:

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<sup>28</sup> *The Rule and Constitutions of the Congregation of the Resurrection 1842 - 1967*, edited by John Iwicki, CR, Romae 1967, p. 39.

<sup>29</sup> Paweł Smolikowski, CR, "System ascetyczny X. Semeneki," in Piotr Semenenko, CR, *Ćwiczenia duchowne*, Kraków 1903, pp. 57-73; Urbański, *Duchowość zmartwychwstańcza*, op. cit., pp. 103-202.

Do you know what it means to follow Christ?

It means:

to think like Him, talk like Him,  
feel like Him, act like Him.

Do not go to the right, when He goes to the left;  
nor to the left, when He goes to the right.

Do not stay behind, while He goes forward;  
nor go forward, when He stays behind .

Do not say "no", when He says "yes",  
nor "yes", when he says "no".

Do not love, what He hates;  
nor hate, what He loves.

Do not rejoice with His sorrow;  
nor sorrow with His rejoice.

Do not praise what He humbles;  
nor humble what He praises.

To have everything in common with Him:

common pleasure,

common suffering,

common humiliations,

common glory,

common cross on earth,

common happiness in heaven;

everything, everything in common

heart, mind, soul,

desire, reason, will,

time and eternity;

everything in common,

one, one, one in everything!

That means to follow Christ!

That is the faith that redeems!<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Archives of the Congregation of the Resurrection in Rome, without signature.

Progress in the spiritual life in Resurrectionist spirituality thus consists of three phases:

1. understanding and overcoming of human nature contaminated by sin;
2. cooperation with God's grace;
3. union with God<sup>31</sup>.

There are other characteristic features of Resurrectionist spirituality, apart from those already mentioned (the primacy of love, the need for introspection and hope emerging from the paschal mystery of Christ, Christocentrism) such as integrality, Trinitarian exemplarism and personalism.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Resurrectionist spirituality emphasizes not only work for personal sanctification, but also for the transformation of society. The Holy Spirit enables one to share personal experience of new life (resurrection) with others, encouraging and leading to a deeper sharing in the life of the Risen Christ. United by the Holy Spirit, people can work together to transform (resurrect) society, based on gospel values so that homes, schools, work places, neighborhoods and parishes may truly reflect the kingdom of God.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> A. Baran, P. Piasecki, "Polskie szkoły duchowości w tysiącletniej historii narodu," in S. Urbański, M. Szymula, eds. *Duchowość przelotom wieku*, Warszawa 2000, p. 68.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 66-78.

<sup>33</sup> "We believe that God calls us to work together for the resurrection of society, bringing his life and love to all: through our personal witness, through the witness of our life in community, and through our community apostolates, primarily through parish work and teaching. This also requires that we build, and teach others to build, a Christian community in which all can experience the hope, joy and peace of Christ's Resurrection" (*Constitutions of the Congregation of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, Rome 2001, p. 8, Charism Statement). The Rule of the Brothers of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ, 1850, art. 165: "In a word, what the Congregation proposes as its end - if not in effect, at least in desire - is the resurrection of the whole of human society, its eternal salvation and material prosperity, which is to be found nowhere else except in the search and effort to achieve eternal salvation. In the words of Christ: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all things shall be given

Last but not least in Resurrectionist spirituality is the devotion to Virgin Mary. Each person is to “rely on Mary, follow Mary, and tend to Christ through Mary.”<sup>34</sup> Three Marian feasts should be celebrated in a special manner because have a relationship to the paschal mystery: the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, and the Feast of the Assumption. “In her Immaculate Conception she was freed from sin. As the Mother of Sorrows she shared in the sufferings of her son. In her Assumption she was raised up to share in the risen life of Jesus. If we follow her as our model we learn to share in the passion, death and resurrection of her son and we, too, will be freed from sin and will share in his new life in the Spirit.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, she is our Model and our Mother.

In 1993, the International Formation Commission of the Congregation of the Resurrection issued a handbook titled “Resurrection Formation”. It described eight principles of formation in Resurrectionist spirituality, which were formulated as follows:

1. God loves us unconditionally.
2. God created us from nothingness.
3. Evil attracts us.
4. We succumb to sin.
5. God calls us to conversion: to the Paschal Mystery of dying and rising with Jesus.

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you besides” (Mt. 6:33). To attain this end, the Congregation shall use the means indicated and provided by Christ: teaching and baptizing, that is, the word of God and His holy sacraments. By the former we understand all the means of propagating the divine truth; by the latter, the various means of distributing God’s blessings and His holy grace” (*The Rule and Constitutions of the Congregation of the Resurrection 1842 – 1967*, edited by John Iwicki, CR, Romae 1967, p. 86-87).

<sup>34</sup> *The Rule and Constitutions of the Congregation of the Resurrection 1842 – 1967*, edited by John Iwicki, CR, Romae 1967, p. 155 (*The Rule of the Brothers of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 1850, art. 434).

<sup>35</sup> *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, Rome 2001, p. 16 (art. 8).

6. God calls us to community.
7. God calls us to work for the resurrection of society.
8. Mary: Our Model and Mother.<sup>36</sup>

These principles were summarized in the following prayer written by Fr. Francis Grzechowiak, CR in the 1980s:

O Risen Lord,  
 the way, the truth and the life,  
 make us faithful followers  
 of the spirit of your resurrection.  
 Grant that we may be inwardly  
 renewed; dying to ourselves  
 in order that you may live in us.  
 May our lives serve as signs  
 of the transforming power of your love.  
 Use us as your instruments  
 for the renewal of society,  
 bringing your life and love to all people  
 and leading them to your Church.  
 This we ask of you, Lord Jesus,  
 living and reigning with the Father,  
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
 God forever.  
 Amen.

This prayer is used not only in the Congregation, but also by many lay people on a daily basis.

## 5. The Resurrectionist School of Spirituality

At the end of this introduction a few concluding words about the Resurrectionist School of Spirituality are in order. As has already been stated, the Resurrectionist School of Spirituality was

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<sup>36</sup> *Resurrection Formation*, Rome 1993, pp. 7-92.

initiated by Bogdan Jański and developed by Peter Semenenko. However, among the main representatives of the School (or co-creators) the following persons must be acknowledged:

1. Jerome (Hieronim) Kajsiewicz (1812 - 1873), co-founder of the Resurrectionist, great preacher and writer, spiritual director.

2. Servant of God Paul (Paweł) Smolikowski, CR (1849 - 1926), missionary in Bulgaria, historian, philosopher, ascetic writer, superior general of the Resurrectionists (1895 - 1905), rector of the Pontifical Polish College in Rome, Bulgarian Archimandrite.

3. Blessed Marceline (Marcelina) Darowska (1827 - 1911), co-foundress of Polish Immaculate Conception Sisters (Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary), mystic, beatified by Pope St. John Paul II in the year 1996.

4. Blessed Celine (Celina) Borzęcka (1833 - 1913), co-foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Resurrection, also a wife, mother, widow and grandmother, beatified by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007.<sup>37</sup>

5. Venerable Hedwig (Jadwiga) Borzęcka (1863 - 1906), co-foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Resurrection along with her natural mother, Blessed Celine Borzęcka.

Futhermore, here is a list of people significantly influenced by Resurrectionist spirituality:

1. Many prominent members of the Congregation of the Resurrection, e.g. Eugene Funcken (1831-1888) and his brother Louis Funcken (1833 - 1890)<sup>38</sup>, Wincenty Barzyński (1838 - 1899),<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Catherine, M. "Mother Celine Borzęcka, C. R.: Foundress of the Resurrection Sisters" in *Polish American Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3/4, 1953, pp. 95-103. [www.jstor.org/stable/20147337](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20147337).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. James A. Wahl, "Father Louis Funcken's Contribution to German Catholicism in Waterloo County, Ontario," in *CCHA Study Sessions*, 50(1983), pp. 513 - 531 ([http://www.umanitoba.ca/colleges/st\\_pauls/ccha/Back%20Issues/CCHA1983-84/Wahl.pdf](http://www.umanitoba.ca/colleges/st_pauls/ccha/Back%20Issues/CCHA1983-84/Wahl.pdf)).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. John Radziłowski, "Rev. Wincenty Barzyński and a Polish Catholic Response to Industrial Capitalism," in *Polish American Studies*, vol. 58, no. 2,

Valerian Kalinka (1826 - 1886), Stephen Pawlicki (1839 - 1916), Adolph Bakanowski (1840 - 1916), Archbishop Joseph Weber (1846 - 1918), Archbishop Salvatore Baccarini (1881 - 1962), Bishop John Garufaloff (1888 - 1951) etc.

2. Servant of God Josepha Karska (1823 - 1860), religious name: Maria Josepha of Jesus Crucified, foundress of Polish Immaculate Conception Sisters as well as many sisters from this congregation.

3. Sisters from the Congregation of the Resurrection, e.g. Blessed Alicja Kotowska (1899 - 1939).

4. Priests educated in the Polish Pontifical College in Rome, e.g. Bishop Saint Józef Sebastian Pelczar (1842 - 1924), Blessed Fr. Jan Balicki (1869 - 1948), Fr. Józef Dąbrowski (1842 - 1903), Archbishop Saint Józef Bilczewski (1860 - 1923), Blessed Fr. Franciszek Rosłaniec (1889 - 1942), Blessed Bishop Władysław Goral (1898 - 1945), Blessed Fr. Zygmunt Sajna (1897 - 1940), Cardinal Adam Stefan Sapieha (1867 - 1951), Cardinal Edmund Dalbor (1869 - 1926), Cardinal Aleksander Kakowski (1862 - 1938).

6. Many other priests, e.g. Jan Koźmian (1814 - 1877), Cardinal Albin Dunajewski (1817 - 1894), Cardinal Włodzimierz Czacki (1834 - 1888), Archbishop Joseph Teodorowicz (1864 - 1938), Servant of God Fr. Franciszek Blachnicki (1921 - 1987).

7. Number of religious sisters, e.g. Blessed Émilie d'Oultremont (1818 - 1878, Marie of Jesus, foundress of the Sisters of Mary Reparatrix), Venerable Servant of God Maria Teresa Dudzik (1860 - 1918, foundress of the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago).

8. Numerous lay people, e.g. Valerian Wielogłowski (1805 - 1865), Ignatius Domeyko (1802 - 1889), Józef Ignacy Kraszewski

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2001, pp. 23-32. [www.jstor.org/stable/20148612](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20148612). Wojciech Mleczo, CR, "Parafia jako przestrzeń zmartwychwstania społeczeństwa (szkic o działalności ks. Wincentego Barzyńskiego w Chicago)," in Wojciech Mleczo, CR, ed. *Zmartwychwstańcy: ku duchowemu odrodzeniu społeczeństwa. Resurrectionists: towards the spiritual rebirth of society*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo św. Jana Pawła II, 2015, pp. 127-159.



(1812 - 1887), Antoni Patek (1811 - 1877), servant of God Jan Tyranowski (1901 - 1947, spiritual director of the young Karol Wojtyła).

## 6. Conclusion

Resurrectionist spirituality, initiated in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> Century, was both original and ahead of its time. Its doctrine was in total opposition to both laxism and Jansenism (e.g. it promoting frequent Communion). The deeply personalistic system of Resurrectionist spiritual formation was years ahead of doctrinal formulation of the theory of personalism, which became well known only in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Similarly, the idea of the primacy of love gained preference only in the teachings of Vatican II, when it was given biblical justification. Father Semenenko did this many years before.<sup>40</sup>

Resurrectionist spirituality should also not be associated exclusively with the Congregation of the Resurrection. The heritage of this school of spirituality has enriched many outside of the Congregation, and is able to enrich every member of the Church who feels called to work for the spiritual and moral resurrection of a society.

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<sup>40</sup> Stanisław Urbański, *Formacja życia duchowego w ujęciu głównych przedstawicieli szkoły zmartwychwstańskiej*, Warszawa 1988, pp. 242, 247. Edward. T. Janas, "Father Peter Semenenko, C.R. and His Message," in *Polish American Studies* vol. 13, No. 1/2 (Jan. - Jun., 1956), pp. 1-18.

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**Rev. Stanisław Urbański**

**The Resurrectionist School of Spirituality**

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The founders of the Resurrectionist school of spirituality in the end of the XIX and beginning of the XX century were Fr. Peter (Piotr) Semenenko (1814 - 1886), Fr. Paul (Paweł) Smolikowski (1849 - 1926) who were the first Resurrectionists, as well as mother Marceline (Marcelina) Darowska (1827 - 1911) - the co-founder of the Immaculates, all found themselves in their congregation-forming activities in a very specific mixture of religious, social and political conditions which were prevalent at that time in Poland. They knew very well that the situation of this complex inter-dependence had a significant influence on the development of spiritual life and as a result, had a key role in the living conditions, they were able to indicate where one should look for strength to overcome one's own imperfections and external threats.

Aware of the dangers mentioned above as well as of the need to deepen Catholicism in the Polish Nation, they founded new religious congregations (the Resurrectionists and the Immaculates) which they themselves deemed as the most effective "cure" for all the problems in religious and social life. Without mentioning the activity of these congregations we will concentrate on our authors' doctrine which was the essence of the authors' spiritual life as well as the essence of the above mentioned congregations, thus giving shape to their community life. Due to the external activities undertaken by certain members from these congregations, the spirituality of the authors' spread and had an impact on the formation of the spiritual lives of not only Poles.

The fundamental elements of doctrine of the school of Resurrectionists' are: introspection, optimism, personal idealism, the primacy of love, integrity as well as the Trinitarian aspect.

## 1. Introspection

Introspection leads to knowledge about the human interior. One can say that it means coming to know the truth about oneself;

that is, gaining a knowledge about one's own poverty and of one's own nothingness. At the same time it leads to the consciousness in a person of that, which is the "property" of God in him and of that, which is purely human. The truth about oneself makes a person realise their dependence on God and the need to co-operate with Him. The authors understand the term "wretchedness" as the lack of what man had before original sin and should have but lost after Adam was thrown out from God's Eden. The Thomistic conception of original sin allowed us to consider "wretchedness" on two levels: the supernatural and the natural. The former depends on the loss of sanctifying grace and of the supernatural gifts connected to it. From then on humankind was unable to effectively fight with concupiscence because she/he no longer had the ability to turn to God in a way fitting to His divine nature. Man is unable to avoid sin by his own strength or to carry out any supernatural action. Wretchedness analysed by the authors on the natural level consists in the loss of original order and harmony. Mental powers without supernatural powers guiding it to the ultimate goal, rebelled against the human being just as they did against God and with time took control of the person. Being under the pressure of matter, the senses and passions the person lost control of his body and the body lost touch with the soul because of suffering and death.

The authors put greater emphasis in their doctrine on the disorganisation in nature, the consequence of which is the lack of correct orientation toward the divine goal. From the moment that first man committed original sin, mental powers turn towards the created objects without being co-ordinated among themselves and without referring to the ultimate goal. Wretchedness causes the Christian to substitute God with his own "self" in his spiritual life. Natural activity can be changed into supernatural only through intensive work based on the "new creation" received through Baptism as well as with the vital help of actual



grace. Otherwise the evil arose after original sin is a substantial obstacle in receiving the correct spiritual formation.

Like St. Ignatius Loyola, the authors emphasise the continual need of having the awareness of one's own wretchedness. They maintain this point of view despite being convinced that a person will never come to know it sufficiently enough and will never destroy it completely. This awareness helps to be aware of one's dependence on God and ones need to continually turn to Him and seek help from Him.

The lack of awareness of one own wretchedness makes us give up the fight to eliminate it, which in turn leads to a naturalism in which a person cannot free themselves of by their own strength. Without having the courage to take another step forward, a person succumbs to fear and even despair, which leads to a nervous breakdown and to doubt in the ability to make the effort to work on oneself. The authors define "nothingness", as a full dependence on God – both ontological and moral. The first is connected with the credos about the act of creation. God is a subsistent absolute, completely independent, who has in Himself the reason for existence. "Nothingness" is not the being but a contradiction of it, therefore the statement besides God, before the creative act there had been only pure nothingness, means that apart from Him, no other beings existed. Nothingness in its moral sense is not an intellectual contradiction of the being in general but it signifies the threefold condition of a human. Mankind did not create itself because it received its existence independently of itself, nor was it created in its final form because it developed materially, mentally and spiritually; it cannot hold and maintain its own being because it is mortal. Everything – that is subject (human nature) and object (life) as well as the power uniting the subject with the object is given to him from the exterior. Although man received existence in the moment of creation, God has to incessantly support it. Also the faculties of man do

not have the ability in themselves to fully satisfy desires because that “something” that a person desires comes from the exterior.

The authors Semenenko, Darowska and Smolikowski did not treat the term “nothingness” in purely negative way. Despite the knowledge of pessimistic currents, which were particularly strong in Europe in the XVII and XVIII c., Polish authors were not adherent to them. In the second half of the XIX c. Father Lacordaire in France and Father Faber in England started to promote optimistic views, presenting “nothingness” in a positive way – as a complete dependence on God in existence and activity. The authors deduce the following conclusions for spiritual development from the fact of the “existence” of nothingness:

1. The human being is inclined towards nothingness and death without God and because one’s life is dependent on the Creator, one could say that she/he does not live but is receiving the gift of life in every moment of his existence. So nothingness is the foundation on which our participation in the divine life is realised by co-operating with the Creator.

2. “Nothingness” is the cause for distraction and dryness in prayer and of the resulting indifference to God.

3. “Nothingness” is the foundation of humility as it was also for the angels, for Adam before the fall and also even for Christ the Man.

Uniting the divine life with human nothingness in Christ is an example of the perfect human humility that human nature has towards God. Constant and comprehensive awareness of one’s “nothingness” and its acknowledgement is the requisite to achieve humility and love. Disregarding it leads to pride, in other words to falsehood about oneself, blindness and self-love.

In the arguments concerning one’s nothingness and wretchedness, Semenenko, Smolikowski and Darowska, despite having drawn the concepts from the French school, rejected the negative approach to the consequences of original sin. The authors introduce the dogma of original sin to the formation

of interior life so as to overthrow the trends exaggerating the affirmation of human autonomy in making decisions and in co-operating with God's grace. It is not the detailed analysis of the essence of original sin which is their aim, but its influence on thwarting spiritual transformation. Hence, the issue is very important and has a crucial role in their teaching. It is the starting point from the awareness of which the development of interior life should begin. That is why the authors made a detailed analyses of the action of human wretchedness in the human faculties, trying to invoke disgust, hate and contempt for evil present after the sin of Adam. They suggest, at the same time, means of purifying the faculties from the effects of original sin so as then to lead to a harmony in its activity.

The authors great merit is incorporating the psychological aspect into the analysis of wretchedness both in theory, as for the faculties of nature, and their principal rules of activity and in practice concerning the detailed observation and analyses of spiritual-mystical experiences. They found many arguments confirming their subtle reflections on wretchedness and nothingness as well as the futile attempts of man, if dependent solely on his own effort. The psychological realism based on the framework of their personal psychological observation skills as well as introspection into the secrets of the human nature appear throughout their works.

Upon reading it one can have the impression that they often turn their attention to the knowledge of the tarnished human nature from which, as a somewhat biased approach, there may arise a danger of deviation. These very objections were raised against the authors, but Semenenko does not fail to point out in his works the danger of solely analysing one's own wretchedness. This misunderstanding of Semenenko's teachings was the result of a lack of differentiation by the one's raising these objections, of one's nature from a person and wretchedness from sin. Wretchedness exists in the tarnished nature but it cannot be attri-

buted to the person until they accept it as his or her own. And as nature acts through reason, will and heart, the movements of concupiscence present in man are not a sin up to the point when a person begins to accept them as their own.

The authors, based on a realistic psychological analysis and on the teaching concerning the action of Divine grace, prove that a person reaches union with God through a deep distrust in one's own strength which is the foundation for a fuller entrustment of oneself to the Creator.

The problem of "nothingness" and wretchedness is an important element in the teaching of the authors'. It is not depressing although it retains a reasonable pessimism concerning the state of human nature after original sin. However, once a person acknowledges the natural values of the human being and building the whole edifice of interior life on grace and love of God, the doctrine of our authors' finally turns out to be optimistic.

A thorough knowledge of the defiled human nature and of our own helplessness allows a person to gain a much better understanding of the words of Christ: *Without me you can do nothing* (Jn 15:15). This truth force us to seek help from God and to co-operate with Him. It should also lead us to the virtue of humility which should be based on full knowledge of the human nature taking into account both the positive and the negative aspects.

## 2. Optimism

The optimism promoted by the authors is based on the fact of Redemption and Resurrection. The love of God for humankind is revealed in salvation history, which restored the correct relation between human being and the Creator, transforming it into a relation of bride to her Lord. This fact should give a person the courage and energy in action but above all should urge them on to work on their interior life.

The authors optimism is also visible in their views concerning leading harmony in the human faculties. They neither propose resignation from the human faculties nor uprooting the lower faculties (the aim of the Stoics) but a full purification from the effects of original sin thus leading a person to a fuller co-operation with grace.

This attitude of the authors serves to highlight the joyful character of Catholic spirituality. The authors do not hesitate to show believers the importance of caring to keep a joyful disposition of spirit, regarding it as a moral duty. They treat sorrow as a very dangerous state for spiritual life. They pay much attention to this vice analysing carefully the cause of it arising and appropriate methods of combat. Therefore, spiritual formation according to the concept of the authors does not stifle joy and does not lead to sorrow because a joyous spirit should always accompany a Christian on his way to God. Thus, it is clear that the authors stand in opposition to the rigorous theories of pessimism which treat God as only the "Lord" and "Judge".

### 3. Personalism

At the base of the authors' concept of spiritual life is a clear differentiation between a person and one's nature. In accordance with this rule, they first analyse the term: "ontical" and "ethical" person. Accepting the ontic existence of a person allowed them to assent to the trend in Christian theology, which acknowledged the substantiality of a person. This view, originating from Boethius, acknowledges the existence of a person's substantial core which is the underlying foundation for all changes and acts.

Accepting the ontic person as the substantial basis of human nature lead Semenenko to the definition of the ethical person. For the authors, the ontic person is the base for the ethical person because it is the same person considered as the subject of actions. The first assumes the existence of the second. The freedom of

choice in the system of values is the attribute of the ethical person. Semenenko does not connect this characteristic with the human will but with the person as the subject. This freedom is the potential of determining or not the faculties of nature to act. This is most actively expressed in the process of striving to union with God in love through the free choice of co-operating with Him and abandoning oneself to Him. At the same time it contributes to one's own development, which becomes a personality due to persistently working on one's self, thus gaining permanent dispositions. Therefore, the personality is formed through creative work, understood as working on vices and gaining traits. This in fact is St. Paul's rule about the stripping of the old man (cf. Col 3:9) which is the echo of Christ's teaching about combating one's vices explained in a scientific way, which has been so stressed by the authors. He/she who surrenders his nature to the action of God and his/her own formation, he/she who brings into it the rulership of love, will achieve a personality. That is why the authors suggest the continual development of a person and their openness to God and to other people in the development of spiritual life.

Having made the distinction between the ontic person and the tarnished human nature, the authors, in accordance with the doctrine of personalism, begin to analyse the relation of the person to nature. They believe the person to be realistically separate from nature. According to the authors, the person has a role of utmost importance in relation to nature both from the side of the structural being and from the side of action. Semenenko believes that the person differentiates one being from another, while nature is the same in all people. The person takes place of existence, the nature, meanwhile, of the form. The existence determines the form and therefore Semenenko attributes to the person the role of forming nature. Nature is an instrument and means thanks to which a person can keep in contact with the purpose of life. The decision of a person in their actions causes a change in the type

of action from material to formal. The authors speak of the internal growth or stagnation of a person depending on the moral value of all of its faculties, and the freedom rooted in it gives it its primacy in carrying out all human acts. In this way, a person is the source of all their actions and at the same time is the cause, the promulgator of laws and executor of sanctions. Only due to nature can a person act and undergo development which in itself is limited by the wretchedness in a person resulting from original sin. The way a person uses their nature is explained by the authors through analogy to the mystery of the Trinity and the incarnation where the activity common for all the three Divine Persons is externally separated from the activity of every one of the Persons. Despite it being only Christ as the second Person of the Holy Trinity who assumed human nature as a result of the action of all three Persons of the Trinity, its acceptance, however, is the personal act of the Son of God who Himself does not undergo any change. All human action occurs in nature which is under the control of the person who can accept or reject this activity through the free act of will.

In the doctrine of this school of spirituality the personalistic concept of the human was enriched by the teaching of the Holy Bible about the human "image" and "likeness" of God in a person. The "image" according to P. Smolikowski is found in human nature, in its faculties and was given by God in the moment of creation. "Likeness" on the other hand, is based on virtue and righteousness of God, which occurs in us as a result of our co-operation with God. The authors teaching, which gives an in depth analysis of the human nature and person as well as all their aspects, suggests self-criticism, especially in the mystical progress. At the same time it shows Christ as the greatest ideal of a personality and teaches about the ennobling influence of His nature on the human person when He engrafts his nature into a person and unites with them like the graft in the grapevine.

The deeply personalistic system of the Resurrectionists school of spirituality was ahead of its time and preceded by far the doctrinal formulation of the theory which was formally accepted in the XX c. In the doctrine of the Polish authors it became the key to formulating the conception of interior life, as well as the relation between God and man and human relations.

#### 4. Voluntarism

In the school of the Resurrectionists the will has a decisive role in the spiritual formation of the Christian. Despite reason having priority among the faculties of a person, it is the faculty of acting that is of fundamental value in the field of spiritual life and in the relation of the soul to God. The act of free will based on choice is very complicated process because it is very difficult to separate it from the influence of emotions, instincts and the subconsciousness. That is why the conception of the formation of spiritual life suggested by the authors is aiming at liberating the will from various different bad influences to make it truly free yet not left without guidance.

In stressing the role of the will they did not want to be preferential towards it but they did however want to emphasise its authentic role while at the same time appreciating all the human faculties. They recommended avoiding the continual brandishing of evil in man and to pay particular attention to the possibility of doing good. Voluntarism understood in this light has a large amount of joy and optimism.

#### 5. The Primacy of Love

The authors in their concept of interior life have acknowledged the primacy of love and concentrate the whole of Christian life around it. Therefore, they often write that the aim of man is God and His love. This love is not an abstract term for them, but



the act of living person, understood as the participation in the love of God – towards Himself and towards creation. Therefore, it is both the foundation of holiness and as well as the motivating power behind a person's efforts to reach union with God. Human relations are a test of this love when people fulfil the will of others in everything apart from sin. The authors are conscious that here on earth a human will never overcome his own egoism, which inevitably will be giving signs of life from time to time. It does not however, relieve a person from the continual effort to overcome it. Through this doctrine, the authors wanted to show people that the way of perfection is long and difficult and it cannot be achieved by single effort. Therefore Christians should not be afraid when there comes a time of crisis after the period of initial fervour – the power of love mobilises the will enough to fight every obstacle.

The words of St. John: *God is love* (Jn 3:16) are the key to understanding the nature of love and in this light, to understanding the mystery of God and His interior life and to acknowledge that love is the ultimate reason for the work of creation and salvation. According to Semenenko these words express the identity of the nature of God with love and referring to St. Augustine, he sees this fact as a starting point to interpret the mystery of the Trinity. He considers this scheme to be the most perfect because it allows getting to know the way love exists in God and to discover its laws. The main results of God's identity with love in the interior life of God are the Three Persons. God is Triune because He is Love.

God-love wants to love Himself, which is why He has to come to know Himself earlier. To achieve this, He presents Himself, in other words His Divine nature, in front of Himself as the subject and at the same time He gives it (the nature) the "second position", the position of the Known One and Loved One, that is the Son. God as the subject of the love, thus also the Son, assume Divine nature, in other words, Love and with this same love

devotes Himself to the Father. Thus, He appears as love “giving back”, as the known and beloved God and consequently coming to know and loving in return. The Father and Son, coming to know one another as the One God, become a common subject in regards to their nature and love, so as to know it and love it together as their unity. In loving this unity of theirs – Semenenko states that “they make a separate pre-person”, in other words, they give out the Person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit therefore, as God has the “third position” what with being both come to be known jointly and loved jointly and consequently the one who comes to know conjointly and comes to love conjointly. In regards to perfection, He is a person equal to the Father and the Son, thus, He is the love of God’s love. This is why love exists between the Divine Persons. The Father and Son give themselves to one another in love, they love the Holy Spirit with a joint love and they unite with Him. The Holy Spirit in turn loves the Father and Son with their own love and in giving Himself to them, He binds them to one another. In this way, love is revealed in the Trinitarian truth. Divine life depends on this external and necessary interior imparting and giving back going on between the Divine Persons. And because giving oneself is love, the God’s life is love. This is the essence and content of His life. Despite the characteristic Tri-unity – the threefold base of existence but one being, has place Him – the Threefold way of life exists in Him, but there is one life and one love.

The authors see in this statement the relation between God and man, in whom supernatural love is revealed. Man comes into the world with the need of loving in general and with the need of abandoning oneself to Him. God has created and grafted this human need into the human person and nature. Being closed to God and neighbour leads to egoism and love of one’s own nothingness. The result of such action is a gradual self-annihilation. Thanks to the gift of supernatural love and actual grace (*gratia actualis*) one can use the other faculties in a supernatural

way and transform their acts into acts of love. Through this, supernatural love makes it possible to participate in God's, which is why a person can become open to the love with which God loves Himself and manage to make an internal effort to concentrate his own thoughts, feelings and actions on God. By accepting this grace a person is obliged to struggle to conform his thoughts, feelings, desires, to God's plan concerning him. Such love of God fashions a person's temporal life, giving it the fullness of supernatural value. Through this devotion to the Most High and in striving to union with Him, a human being most fully becomes "himself".

The authors show love to be a personal act, which is why all of the relations between man and God and between human beings become personal the more they are transformed into love. A person's relation to objects may also have a dimension of love when it becomes a sign and expression of love towards a person. The love of neighbour is also realised as supernatural love to the extent that it occurs in an atmosphere of complete openness towards another person.

Love, in the opinion of the authors is the most perfect means leading to union with God. It allows God to dwell in the very centre of the human personality and to take possession of it completely. On the other hand a person finds his fullness and his greatest happiness in God through love. The consequences of this communion are very important for a Christian because the loving God, who loves a person and is present in him/her, transforms his/her actions so as to conform them to His own. It is as if He divinizes the human person, thanks to which one can say: *it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me* (Gal 2:20).

It is clear to the authors that devoting oneself to God who is Holy, makes a person holy. Semenenko, in line with the teaching of St. Augustine, writes that holiness depends on union with God as the final goal and the limit of human knowledge and human love. The essence of holiness is the union of man with his Creator

in an act of love because it is through love that we can most fully adhere to anyone as well as to God Himself. Destroying this communion by a mortal sin causes the loss of one's sense in life.

Although God is the ultimate aim of man, it is Christ in whom it is realised. A Christian can reach union with God in the Holy Spirit through union with Christ in love and through being transformed to become more like Him. That is why the authors regard love as the cause and the basic act of communion with God, also in the aspect of the filial relation. By abandoning oneself to Christ and co-operating with Him, a Christian person is „filled” by Christ and his interior and exterior are transformed into His acts. This process stems from Jesus as its source and occurs through the love that brings with it union on common existence and activity.

The authors name the attributes that should characterise love of God. It should be total, which means one should encompass God with one's heart, will and reason – with all of one's faculties. To love God with one's whole heart means to turn to God with all of one's desires as the only good and the only law of effective life, to devote one's heart to love the goodness of God and searching for His will and happiness in us instead of our own pleasures. To love with an undivided will is to turn to God who is Holiness and law, thanks to which one can accept Him as the unique almighty law of all actions and life and as the one Lord. It also means to abandon oneself wilfully and freely to the will of God. To love with all of one's thoughts means to turn with all of one's reason towards God as the truth and beauty as well as the almighty law of intellectual life, to give up one's reason to love the Divine truth.

The union between man and God is the biggest mystery of a human being, thus being called the “sacrament” of love by the authors. They think that a human can subjectively feel the love that is the bond in this union, and objectively can see its effects. This union between man and God gives rise to peace and happiness in

the human soul. At the same time it entails a submittance to every event, humiliation, trial, which God of course sends purely for the sanctification of a person and for His own glory.

The authors, in accordance with the teachings of St. Thomas state that love, in its essence, is the love of friendship which a person should give God because of His infinite kindness. Real friendship can be characterised by three traits:

1. Good will expressed by the desire for good of one's beloved. It is the acknowledgment of God as good in Himself and striving towards Him as one's good so as then to share it with others.

2. Mutuality, whose need exists in the very nature of friendship. The one who loves, in giving himself, receives the gift of mutual abandonment to one another.

3. Abandonment of oneself to somebody, signifies the incessant giving of everything and above all of oneself. Its main trait is the abandonment of oneself with one's whole nature, with all of one's faculties supported by grace.

An obstacle in abandoning oneself to God is self-love flowing from nature tainted by original sin, which directs the human faculties towards another person arousing the desire of possessing, of taking and devoting everything to oneself. Generally, it can be said that everything that comes from self-love negates the abandonment of oneself to somebody. And so, vanity, falsehood, laziness, rashness; everything which goes against our union with God and everything that is directed at seeking one's own benefit is a negation of abandonment of oneself to somebody.

The authors quite rightly state that progress in perfection is dependent on the frequency of making acts of love by a person. On the one hand, people love God by mortifying themselves and fighting with their bad inclinations, on the other, by abandoning everything that is good in themselves to the Creator. Therefore, all the good deeds of a person are, at the same time, acts of love.

The idea of the primacy of love in spiritual life was also acknowledged by the teachings of Vatican Council II, giving it the biblical foundation, which our authors had put forward many years previously. The Council accepted love of God as the main element of Christian life. This love defines a person whose every faculty is directed towards it and should serve it. The virtues that a Christian acquires through spiritual formation are also the means of leading to it and expressing it.

## 6. Integrality

The conception of interior life resented by the authors emphasises the integrality of natural and divine element with the priority, in terms of action, being given to the later. The teaching about grace is of utmost importance in their doctrine.

Natural skills must however be continually supported and guided by supernatural virtues, whose aim is to create the perfect human with the help of grace. Human nature has been given the special ability to receive the supernatural, although this trait has a passive character because nature cannot do anything on its own in the supernatural domain as it is merely the basis for the supernatural. At the same time, nature does not exclude the supernatural factor although it can only accept it when God will want to gift it with participation in supernatural goods. Therefore, there is no proportion between the supernatural and the natural elements which is why the ability to accept supernatural gifts by human nature is defined as *potentia oboedientialis*.

The supernatural factors bring out all the creative values of the natural character, gifting it with power and developing it in an intensive way. They not only protect it from bad inclinations which could expose it to the danger of losing the state of grace but with time, they protect more and more efficiently both from smaller imperfections, which in fact do not break the border line of venial sin but always halter spiritual development. The

human personality does not die out nor give way to a psychic annihilation when entering the domain of supernatural life. On the contrary, the more a person is richer in the order of nature, the more perfectly he can fulfil the role of the subject in regards to supernatural intervention. This is why the Christian is able to bond all the deeper and all the stronger both factors of interior life – the natural and the supernatural – as one complete whole, establishing harmony between them. According to the authors, only the notion about a harmonious co-operation of both factors can correctly express the essence of the development of spiritual life. They believe that the perfect development of the interior life of a person cannot be limited only to the ascetic aspect, that is, to subjugate the tainted nature. In accordance with the conception that these two elements are in harmony in interior formation, a person's full spiritual upbringing is to lead to mystical union with God.

The authors on the basis of this, gave the formation of spiritual life a dynamic character. They presented this dynamism of the development of spiritual life in light of three traditional ways – the purifying, the enlightening and the unifying.

A very detailed and in depth analysis both from the positive and the negative aspect of every one of the three ways indicates how very much our authors wanted to show the conditions of growth, maturing and the bearing of fruit of the spiritual life of a person, in true light. The negative aspect is the struggle to combat the negative effects of original sin, vices and sins committed and the positive aspect is spiritual formation of nature and her faculties through the action of virtues infused by God and through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The aim of these paths is to lead a person to the summits of perfection. Interior growth is difficult and tedious which is why, in explaining about the states that a soul may experience, the authors, in accordance with the teachings of the masters of spirituality, suggest the means and necessary counsel to reach union with God.

The authors support those schools of spirituality, which acknowledge mystical life as a normal stage of development of interior life.

## 7. The Trinitarian Aspect

The main starting point for this theory is the doctrine about the relations between the persons of the Holy Trinity. Foregoing the scientific analyses of these relations, it is important to mark that the doctrine also contains the pneumatological dimension in respect to spiritual life.

The whole conception of formation of interior life put across by our authors consists in three fundamental problems:

1. The knowledge of and overcoming of tainted human nature.
2. The co-operation with God's grace.
3. The union with God.

This theory is implemented in practice in the following way: the whole reality has been formed by the Creator according to one basic model; that He Himself and His triune way of existence, is. That is why, in every created being, both material and spiritual, one should look for the resemblance to the unity and triplexes of God. One should look for this kind of existence in every creature. This existence causes its substance to appear once as absolute and three times as relative. The basis for unity and a certain triplex exists in every one of them, while each of three "elements" is a separate aspect or it fulfils a certain function of its own which is analogous to the function that the corresponding Person of the Trinity fulfils in the immanent Divine life.

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The doctrine of the Resurrectionist school of spirituality is still actual even today, particularly in regards to the question of prayer which indispensability is felt more and more by people lost in



contemporary times, in regards to living in grace, which is not appreciated by Christians who are presently all geared toward consumption as well as in regards to the struggle with the defects of our nature.

The problems presented in the article do not exhaust the whole conception of spiritual life. Only the more important elements and have been put forth here in a general outline.



**Abp. Joseph Teodorowicz**

**How to understand Father Semenenko**

*Text taken from: P. Semenenko, "The Interior Life. A Study in Ascetical Theology",  
translated by Francis J. Grzechowiak, CR, Rome 1969, pp. IX-XXVII.*

The ascetical and mystical writings of Father Peter Semenenko, C.R., were presented in three volumes and published posthumously by Father Paul Smolikowski, C.R.: *The Interior Life*, *Spiritual Exercises*, and *Spiritual Letters*.

In response to the request of the Resurrectionists, who asked me to comment on Father Semenenko's thoughts and reflections on the interior life, I decided to consider the totality of the author's ascetical doctrine as it unfolds itself in the volumes mentioned above.

Father Semenenko's ideas are characterized by a singular originality and a unique manner of presentation. He demonstrates a wide range of thought, a very close connection between asceticism, mysticism and theology, and an extraordinary subtlety and depth in the analysis of the human soul and divine activity.

The negative aspect of his writing embraces the philosophical form, according to which man's faculties are divided into three categories: intellect, heart and will. He applies this threefold division throughout and extends it to the minutest details. This is the format of his presentation. When it is used in the development of important or basic themes, it does not offend; and where it would obstruct or hamper the discussion by excessive analysis of details, it can be cast aside like a shell, and the kernel alone retained.

In order to present the specific character and spirit of Father Semenenko's ascetical and mystical teaching, I will preface my remarks with the exposition of a single idea borrowed from the Apostle Paul; it appears in the forward of his letter to the Ephesians.

As he enumerates the benefits of the Incarnation, the Apostle introduces to us the mystery of Christ. But he does not find the basis for this mystery, as it would seem, in the earthly life of Jesus; neither does he seek to tie it in with his idea of the glorious life of Christ after Golgotha. Paul's thought takes an entirely different turn.

Soaring aloft like an eagle, the Apostle bursts the boundaries of time and halts his flight only when he comes to rest in thought in the eternal womb of the everlasting Father. There he contemplates Christ and presents for our consideration an account of the life of the Savior in those pre-historic times which he labels, "before the foundation of the world." Half a century later, St. John the Evangelist begins his prologue with the words: "In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God; and the Word was God." These are magnificent and powerful words; but they no longer take us by surprise, nor are they unexpected after the words of St. Paul's letter. For these contain the whole essence of the (John's) prologue. The Apostle had already long ago elevated us to these lofty and dazzling heights. Where St. John's prologue serves as a point of departure for his account of the events of the life of Jesus on earth, St. Paul's prologue relates the Christ of pre-history with the events of our own life and does so in a unique way. He does not consider our fortunes and our history in relation to our life here on earth, nor even as they are related to life in eternity after death. *He sheds new light on them* – as through a prism – by considering them in Christ – Christ existing before the ages, "before the foundation of the world." But how does one even begin to consider a concept such as this? Christ reposes in the loving womb of the Father. His future role of Savior of the world has already been committed to him; and therefore he bears us – all, and individually – in his own womb. As a result, the loving glance which the Father casts upon the Son embraces also those whom the Son has loved, and we are born into that divine family of which the Son is the head.

Just as an artist or genius carries the masterpiece which he has lovingly conceived for a long time before he proceeds to produce the reality in bronze or marble, on canvas or in writing – so likewise is it with the eternal love of the Father and the Son for us. It is by virtue of this love that we, too, enjoy a history before the ages, and that our ancestry and family tree trace their

roots to the eternal. Let us consider the way in which the Apostle conceived the prehistoric activity of Christ in the womb of his loving Father, and how, into the bond which joins the Father and the Son, he intertwines our persons so as to weld the three into an indissoluble unity. "Even as he (the Father) chose us in him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, ...he predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ as his sons, according to the purpose of his will" (Eph 1:4-5). Once the Apostle had spoken these words, each of us can say that he is the chosen one of that everlasting love which has its beginning in the eternal love of the Father and the Son.

Conceived in this love, we should live for it - our life, virtue and holiness should be dedicated to it. The Apostle gives expression to this thought when he states the precise purpose of the great eternal plan put into operation by God through a free and independent act of the will. God chose us before the beginning of time "that we should be holy and without blemish in his sight." Not "in our sight"; even less "in the eyes of the world", but "in his sight."

He searched us out before time began, loved us with a completely disinterested love; for his love is not founded on any "*do ut des*" ("I give, so that you might give in return"). How, being nothing, could we ever merit this love?

Even though it was our nothingness which attracted this love, yet the summit of this love is "the glory of his grace", and "the praise of his glory."

This love is an everlasting and a most disinterested love; but at the same time it is a love which cannot be separated from us, and therefore it is a love by which God loves himself in us.

It might appear that the ideas of St. Paul in which the whole plan of salvation begins to dawn are, nevertheless, the result of abstract theological speculation, developed somewhere in inaccessible heights and, by that very fact, detached from life.

How erroneous such a judgment would be! For what more than love links and unites hearts? And it is precisely this love which emerges in Paul's thought with hitherto unknown and powerful brilliance. Therefore St. Paul, exposing to our view the eternal love of God for us, joins and couples it inseparably with our life. The goals and the practical purposes of this love are, according to the Apostle: "that we might be holy without blemish." The Apostle further requires that we should reciprocate this love with love. We should not even desire holiness itself for ourselves alone. It should be desired primarily for him who loved us, in order that, according to the expression of the Apostle, we might be holy "in his sight" - not in our own eyes, and therefore not for ourselves alone, not for the world, but for him. Love for Christ must take possession of our whole heart; it ought to arouse and impel us to the point where, counting everything outside of Christ as dung, we give ourselves to him completely and invest ourselves with his spirit. These ideas, so practical and yet so lofty, are the central theme of the letters of St. Paul. We see from this how the contemplative gaze upon the everlasting love, which encompasses us as well, is extended by St. Paul to include life, together with its noblest plans and assignments.

As we look up at these heights, however, we are tempted to ask: Is it possible that the Apostle has forgotten our misery and corruption, and the weakness of a will so strongly inclined to evil - since he establishes such lofty ideals as the goal of our lives? Not at all! Quite the contrary, he descends to the very depths of our misery and corruption. In his letter to the Romans, using his own heart as a model, he paints a picture of the eternal struggle between concupiscence and the law, and then goes on to point out the complete helplessness and hopeless weakness of fallen human nature. This causes him to cry out in the end: "Unhappy man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom 7:24). But St. Paul has a ready answer to this cry of anguish on the part of human weakness, corruption and nothingness.



Who will deliver him from this weakness? Who will snatch him up to the heights of goodness? "The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 7:25). That grace is always available, since the work of my sanctification involves not only my own personal spiritual interests, but the interests of Christ as well. Eternal love re-echoes in the motto: "with Christ!"

By the grace of Jesus weakness is changed into strength. In it we should seek the secret of great deeds. It is by grace that Paul became what he was. He would say of himself: "not I, but the grace of God with me" (1 Cor 5:10). It is in this way that human misery, corruption and weakness are changed into power and strength in Christ. St. Paul goes so far as to glory even in his infirmity, for the weaker he is, the more fully is the power of God made manifest in him.

Contemplation of the loving eternal plan, a consideration of the confusion wrought by our own misery and weakness, liberation from this abyss not by one's strength alone but with the help of God's grace, and finally, unceasing prayer for that grace – taken together, these would seem to constitute a denial of any personal activity, a seeming admission of a kind of passivity in the interior life.

And yet it is in and through just such passivity that the most difficult and sublime effort is expended – an effort which is required at that stage by the soul which must go out of itself and enter into Christ. This apparent passivity in the life of the soul is, in fact, the portion of Mary kneeling at the feet of Jesus and totally absorbed in his words. It is a portion which earned for her the highest praise, and the assurance that the finest portion shall not be taken from her. If, conversely, the active expression of love and cooperation with Christ, according to the spirit of St. Paul, does not receive due consideration or find a proper place for itself in the interior life, then the ascetical or mystical life takes on the character of Martha, who was anxious about many things. Efforts undertaken to acquire a knowledge of the interior

life and to achieve perfection can be the best and most honorable; but if the basis on which they rest is one's ego alone, then the end result of all these efforts is to create a ferment in the soul.

Martha is concerned about many things, when meanwhile one thing is necessary. The soul strains to perform many acts; but in pursuing enlightenment it is concerned with itself alone, and hence overlooks the one thing necessary. It overlooks and forgets the truth that it must go out of itself and, mindful of the love of Jesus, it must offer itself as a holocaust. It is only in this way that the one who believes in Christ's love for him by cooperating with grace permits Christ to act in him, to rule him according to his own mind and will, and to use him as an instrument in his action and reaction as it affects the world.

Only then can the soul repeat after St. Paul: "It is now no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

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After this preface, I find it easier to trace the principal actions involved in the ascetical and mystical teaching of Father Semenenko; for these notions are borrowed from Pauline asceticism. The guiding principle of Father Semenenko's spiritual works is the belief that we are loved by Christ, that to some extent he loves himself in us. It is in this spirit that he develops the meditation on the end of man in the *Spiritual Exercises* and in his *The Interior Life*; from this faith flows an absolute trust in the assistance of Christ and his cooperation with us. The words of St. Paul are the measure of this confidence: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). The very beautiful chapters which conclude the *Spiritual Exercises* extensively develop these ideas. Faith and hope stir us to activity in the cause of our sanctification. This activity is not made to depend on self, neither do we engage in it for ourselves; but the soul, regarding itself as the instrument of Christ, leaves room for him, in order that he might dwell in it

according to his own plan and his own designs. And since such a concept of the interior life, together with such interior activity, cannot be reconciled with any exalted estimate of self and dependence on one's own strength, Father Semenenko orders us to burrow deep down into the abyss of our nothingness and helplessness, not that we might doubt about ourselves, but that we might lean the more heavily on Christ. Here Father Semenenko is also a disciple of St. Paul, who, upon viewing the depths of his misery, cries out, "Unfortunate man that I am; who shall liberate me from the flesh of this death?" (Rom 7:24). Nevertheless, the Apostle lifts himself immediately from the abyss of his misery and, in answer to his own question, declares: "the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ."

The love of Christ so impels the Apostle that the consideration of his own misery and imperfection, which men usually find so repulsive and humiliating, becomes for him a sweet delight and an object of glory. He glories in his infirmities, because in contrast with these the activity and power of Christ stand out ever so much more clearly and manifestly.

These central ideas form a kind of key to the character of the spiritual doctrine of Father Peter Semenenko. All those practical conclusions which refer to our obligations gather about this focal point wherein his leading ideas are concentrated. The final expression of these ideas is the surrender of ourselves to God, together with our lot in life; but above all it is the surrender of our intellect, heart and soul – the complete surrender of our ego as a holocaust in the service of divine love. These ideas break through everywhere, throughout the ascetical writings of Father Peter. Nevertheless, he assigns them a special place in the outlines which he left to us in the second part of the *Spiritual Exercises* under the title "Transformation in Jesus."

But how is man, whose misery and weakness Father Semenenko examines and describes so well, to undertake the accomplishment of such an enormous task and such a large program?

Father Semenenko answers this question in his instruction on grace. What he says is nothing new theologically; yet in the manner in which it is applied to the doctrine of the interior life, it constitutes one of the outstanding characteristics of the ascetical writings of Father Peter Semenenko. The author bases himself, on the one hand, on a sound psychological analysis of human misery, which he pursues into the darkest and most obscure corners; he finds further support in the writings of St. Paul. With these he demonstrates that man achieves mystical union only when he acquires a profound distrust in his own strength, for this distrust is the foundation of an even greater confidence in the grace which assists and cooperates with him and in him. Beauty as well as profound psychological analysis will be found in the chapter dealing with the consideration of man's misery and nothingness, as well as the uselessness of his exertions in the supernatural life when he relies on his own efforts alone. He shows that, whereas in theory man believes in cooperation with grace, yet in the practice of the interior life he assigns it a secondary role.

It is impossible to go into any greater detail in a summary as short as this. Yet even this brief glance will enable the reader to appreciate how these leading ideas of Father Peter's ascetical and mystical teaching keep the soul from forgetting Paul's ideas or from failing to realize their import sufficiently.

It is a pity that the term "self-activity" figures in some of the chapters; for as it is currently understood, "self-activity" is indispensable, not only in the natural, but also in the supernatural life. Therefore one ought not to consider it as a spiritual disorder, or as something that hinders supernatural activity. Father Semenenko understood this perfectly well, and it was not in the current sense that he spoke of "self-activity". By this term he understands an activity in the supernatural life which proceeds only from natural and personal motives. But in doing so he did not take into account the psychology of the contemporary reader,

who is very much inclined to attach to that concept the ordinary, time-worn meaning. As a result such a one tends to judge falsely that in the interior life every effort and all initiative is dangerous.

Such an erroneous notion is very far removed from the principles of Father Semenenko. It could easily become the cause of a serious misunderstanding, since it would permit one to regard flight from effort, initiative and all activity in general, as the ideal of the interior life.

In the interior life it is well to exercise great caution lest one come to accept the awaiting of efficient grace and of the fulfillment of mystical love in a wholly improper sense. Thus it would be absolutely wrong for the soul to imagine that since it does not yet possess the grace of love, it may not elicit acts of love until such a time as it will have obtained that grace by its entreaties. For although a soul in the state of grace is still only tending to full union with Christ, yet its very desire of being united with him is evidence that it loves him. Its love can and should be perfected. The perfection of love is the work of grace; but the soul cooperates effectively with grace by acts of love. It was in this spirit that St. Francis de Sales spoke when, having been asked what one must do to attain the love of God, he answered: one achieves this goal "by loving". Therefore, it is my opinion that on this point one meets with too much subtlety and analysis in Father Semenenko.

In his new work, *The Love of God and the Cross of Jesus*, Father Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., devotes several chapters of the first volume to a theme identical with that developed by Father Semenenko, that is, "self-activity." However, Father Garrigou-Lagrange does not call it "self-activity," as does Father Semenenko. He has chosen the more appropriate title, "natural activity." "Authors of ascetical and mystical writings use the term 'natural activity' to mean whatever the soul does outside of and prejudicial to the influence of grace, unsanctified activity apt, when

developed, to lead men from divine union toward practical naturalism" (*Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 309).

Ultimately, however, this resolves itself to a question of terminology which does not detract in the least from the otherwise excellent content. This is especially true of the highly original and wonderful treatises on prayer and temptation.

It would also be wrong to conclude that Father Semenenko, in stressing the action of grace, attached little importance to man's own efforts, struggles and mortifications. A well-known ascetical and mystical writer of another country who understood Polish, after a careful reading of Father Semenenko's ascetical works, said to me: "I have not found a spiritual writer who demands so much effort on the part of a soul as does Father Semenenko." His analysis of the misery and corruption of man's intellect, heart and will is itself sufficient to indicate that this is true. The penetrating realism and psychological truth of this analysis stands unequalled by other works on asceticism or psychology. In his discussion of the activity of grace, Father Semenenko stresses repeatedly that the passive stages of supernatural activity, which demand from us patience and forbearance, refer only to mystical union with God. It does not refer to the struggle with evil; there grace is always available. It suffices to read in this book, *The Interior Life*, the sections that deal with man's purification. Actually, what Father Semenenko opposes is the work of a Martha in the interior life: that is, of one who, without fixing her gaze upon Christ and uniting herself sufficiently to him, is anxious and troubled about many things.

To a great extent a one-sided view and, therefore, a misunderstanding of what Father Semenenko has written about this question, results from the way in which his works were composed. For it was not the intention of the author that the mystical portions – and this constitutes the bulk of his writing – should be published. These portions consist of retreats which Father Semenenko preached to various religious congregations. Souls under

his direction, which were well known to him and which were already far advanced in the mystical way, did not need preliminary instructions. They were satisfied with the mystical teaching meted out to them according to individual needs and requirements. Fundamental introductory notions about the activity of God and man's active cooperation were explained elsewhere by Father Semenenko – in sections of this book, for example. Therefore, if the reader fails to consider Father Semenenko's ascetical writings as a whole, he may be deceived into thinking that the author places an excessive emphasis on human misery and on waiting for God to act in the soul – an emphasis that savors of passivity.

In clarification I will cite an example. If one were to read certain passages from the writings of Father Semenenko, he could get the impression that the author involves the soul excessively in incessant and harmful analysis of its misery and corruption. Harmful, because such a one-sided examination of self is prejudicial to healthy interior life which does, indeed, admit an examination – but such as is full of peace and self-confidence. The truth is that Father Semenenko himself, in various places throughout his writings, labels this one-sided consideration of one's own misery as harmful. For example, in his *Spiritual Letters* he writes: "My dear Sisters in the Lord: I write this to you in order to deliver you from one-sidedness. A sense of one's own weakness, meanness and powerlessness is good, both healthy and necessary. But by itself it is the one-sidedness which abolishes and destroys the harmony of the spiritual organism. If this is all you had, and if you were to remain with this alone, then realize that it is not enough. This alone is not and will never be what it ought to be; it is not now, and will never be, a truly divine and supernatural sentiment of our weakness and powerlessness. Do you know what it would be instead? It would be instead a sense of our own strength, modified into a sense of our weakness. Our own strength, together with its old habit of acting by itself,

when confronted with a task surpassing its powers, that is, a task pertaining to the supernatural life, would breathe a sigh, drop its hands, and cry: 'I can't!' And even if, after this, it were to add contritely: 'What can I do?' I am so small!' - this would not be enough to repair the sounds of discord. And what would happen if the soul were to cry out: 'This is not for me!'"

In the *Spiritual Exercises* the following subjects dealing with the interior life are considered: "Mystical Faith", "Mystical Hope", "Mystical Love", "Mystical Poverty", "Mystical Chastity" and "Mystical Obedience". One can safely say that these six chapters, together with the outlines concerning transformation into Christ, are the real essence of Father Semenenko's mystical doctrine.

If we seek an analogy in the present day with the doctrine presented in these chapters, the history of the interior life of St. Therese of the Child Jesus comes readily to mind. The whole of her doctrine on the interior life, as derived from personal experiences, is to be found in the chapters of *Story of a Soul*. It is possible to institute a comparison between the spiritual doctrine of St. Therese and the mystical doctrine of Father Semenenko as embodied in the chapters mentioned above. In both, the emphasis is on nothingness and personal weakness. Both agree that the sense of personal misery gives birth to a limitless confidence in the supernatural action of God in the soul. Both sources establish an ideal of love which does not seek itself, but solely the pleasure of the beloved, Jesus Christ. Love goes out of itself in order to enter completely into Christ. And although *Story of a Soul* is, in a sense, meant for all, yet the strict, exact imitation of the interior spirit of self-abasement and mortification which is prompted by motives of love will be ultimately the privilege of those souls who alone are especially called to the mystical way. In like manner, in order to understand fully the practice and mystical portions of Father Semenenko's writings, souls require special preparation. They must have passed through the interior novitiate of the ways of purification and be in the way of mystical union.



To souls either unprepared for or not called to this state, the reasonable demands of Father Semenenko will seem too difficult and too extravagant.

Once again the writings of Father Semenenko offer a suitable explanation for this fact. "God does not call all souls to this final, more profound, higher and purer way; just as he does not call all souls to the religious life. The religious life is compared to life in the world in the same way that in the life of perfection, or rather in the interior life, the pathway of which I spoke is compared with that which I call the path of self-activity. Ordinarily God gives neither the desire nor even the understanding of the religious or interior life to souls which he has not called. In such a case peace prevails. But in the event that God does call, he gives the soul both understanding and desire; and in this case it goes hard with the soul if it fails to respond to its vocation" (*Spiritual Letters*, p. 11).

After these words of Father Semenenko everyone will understand that a soul should not hastily undertake the practice of these mystical states which are described in the chapters of Father Semenenko's book *Spiritual Exercises*; it should first have completed the preparatory and purgative way, which is so admirably expounded by Father Semenenko in *The Interior Life*. Moreover, the special vocation of a soul to the mystical way must also be taken into account.

A second reason why many find it difficult to understand properly the character of the ascetical writings of Father Semenenko has to do with the time at which these writings first made their appearance. This may seem a strange thing to say, and yet there is a strong psychological foundation for this statement. The same ascetical writer whom I mentioned above told me that he was genuinely amazed to find anyone who, a half-century ago and despite contemporary currents in ascetical teaching, explained the interior life in a spirit which is generally accepted only today. After what has been written about St. Therese of the Child

Jesus or the Visitation Nun Benigna Consolata, mystical union with Jesus Christ is one of the leading questions dealing with the interior life. True, one could not say that this question was either completely omitted or even neglected in ascetical theology. But the way in which the life of mystical union with Christ has come to be the center of all other questions in the interior life, according to the spirit of St. Paul, is characteristic of ascetical currents in the present era. Today the expression "offering of one's self" has already been sanctioned by use. It is "*le don de soi-même*", which Blessed (Peter Julian) Eymard put into his rule as a basis of the ascetical training in his Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. In ascetical treatises today, one frequently encounters an analysis of the act of oblation of self to Christ, entirely in the spirit and almost of the order established by Father Semenenko. For example, in the beautiful life of Dom Columba Marmion, an ascetical writer well known, we meet with such passages:

By this faith we identify ourselves in some way with Jesus Christ: In our thoughts: "Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony of God in himself." We have the same thoughts as those of Jesus Christ: "Whoever is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him."

In our desires: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

In our words: "If any speak, let him speak as the words of God." Christ becomes the mainspring of all our projects: "That Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts."

In our actions: "All whatsoever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and to the Father by him."

Then comes to pass the: "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me... I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and delivered himself for me." To act in the name of Jesus Christ: this means to

act in him and for him, fulfilling the function of emissaries. "As the living Father has sent me, and I live by the Father."<sup>1</sup>

And in a letter to one of his penitents he writes:

I see that the great penance which surpasses every other is self-abandonment carried to its furthest limits, the abdication of our personality, in favor of the Word, who then often leads us by the way of Calvary.<sup>2</sup>

I have purposely cited this excerpt at length, with its divisions; for whoever has read the discussions, full of subtle analysis, in which Father Semenenko treats of a topic that is dear to him – the offering of self to Jesus – and has noted there how he lists in order the oblation of his mind, heart and will: such a one will be struck by the close analogy between Dom Marmion and Father Semenenko. It might even seem, though this is highly improbable, that Dom Marmion borrowed heavily from Father Semenenko.

Many similar citations might be found in the works of present-day ascetical writers, such as Schryvers, Garrigou-Lagrange and Father Zychlinski. But at the time when Father Semenenko wrote his conferences, special emphasis on questions of the interior life considered in this light was something new and was not without disbelief. It was as though Father Semenenko was presenting a new doctrine. Although the reasons for this disbelief were never specifically defined, they attached themselves to the ascetical works of Father Semenenko and to the direction taken by his mystical teaching. Moreover, Father Semenenko himself was well aware that in propounding ascetical principles, especially those which relate to cooperation with grace, he was, as he himself expressed, striking out on a new path. His writings, it is true, do

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<sup>1</sup> *Abbot Columba Marmion*, by Raymond Thibaut, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409

not possess a controversial character in relation to the system of asceticism then in vogue; on occasion, however, he does place an almost excessive emphasis on the truths for which he is blazing a trail. It is part of the psychological make-up of everyone who presses forward with a truth which has been forgotten or insufficiently explained, that he inclines in his words and in his writings to stress with particular emphasis the differences and similarities between his view and those of his contemporaries. For example, when Father Semenenko contrasts what he calls self-activity in the interior life as against cooperation with grace, he speaks about, among other things, the need for patience in a soul awaiting the time when the plan which God has in mind shall be realized in it. The truth in itself is completely sound and perfectly natural. We are certainly aware that supernatural life, in the gradual stages of its development, is compared with the life of nature. Likewise, the activity of God in the soul, from the aspect of its gradual development, is compared by Christ himself to the gradual growth of a seed which must pass through a process of organic development before it gives birth at last to the mature fruit. It is obvious that we have to wait until the fruit ripens, until the time needed for ripening is completed. However, in the manner of presentation of this instruction, wherein Father Semenenko again shows himself a master, excessive emphasis is placed on the soul's inability to achieve the ideal or mystical union before the designated time. It would seem at first glance, before one has had time to ponder the matter, that such a manner of proceeding would react unfavorably upon the reader. What Father Semenenko has in mind is excessive and exclusive personal activity in ascetical matters, where too little attention is paid to the activity of grace. The result of all this is that his manner of presentation is too conspicuous. This would not be true if, for example, he were to write the same things today.

About his striking out on a new path, Father Semenenko writes in his letters: "I will agree that a certain activity, which can

in a sense be called our own, is even necessary. It is just that I feel that it is necessary to state the principle once more: as long as one does not set about the business by himself, and begins to labor by himself where it is a question of acquiring some good, or of realizing Christ and his life in us. This principle, this very important agreement, is not even mentioned in the system of self-activity, or by those who direct souls according to its norms. They presume always that in accomplishing this work, grace comes only to assist; grace occupies second place, self-activity first place. They fail to understand that in this activity God takes the first place, and that we act only through him. Even though they repeat a hundred times, 'without grace you can do nothing', this axiom has another meaning for them, at least as they understand it, especially in practice. For I know from experience that it is the practical understanding of this axiom which creates considerable difficulty. On the other hand, too, the theory of self-activity seems so simple, so natural (precisely because it is natural), even obligatory, that it manages to deceive minds which had been awakened and turned in the direction of the true way. What can be done? On this earth truth must always blaze a new trail."

Admittedly, these words of Father Semenenko relate to the more advanced stages of perfection; for in the initial phases of the interior life, man's natural talents of mind and will stand out especially. And although even in this activity grace occupies the first place, yet in any practical activity in the acquisition of virtue, one recognizes in the soul the ardor and enthusiasm of personal effort. It is only in the second phase of the interior life – the mystical state – that supernatural activity assumes a stronger and more complete control. When this happens, the natural gifts of man drop to a secondary level, cooperating with the activity of grace.

Finally, one should not interpret Father Semenenko's teaching on self-activity to mean that one must forsake initiative and provident care for fear that some disorder might accidentally

creep into his action, or that one should abandon the effort which reason tells him is either commanded, required or necessary for the acquisition of virtue. To understand self-activity in this way would be ruinous to both the internal and external life of the soul. It would be all the more fatal in our days, which require great initiative and great outlays of energy. Therefore, we suggest that it is better for the soul not to examine and analyze its own interior to excess, or ask before every act whether or not its activity is defiled by any natural impetuosity or self-seeking. Rather, let the soul take heed to work insistently for greater purity of intention and to practice self-denial in its activity; in this way there will be room left in the soul for the supernatural activity of Christ.

Such activity does not diminish in souls the proper initiative and natural efforts on the part of the will. Quite the contrary, it will multiply great enterprises for good undertaken by the soul. It will not extinguish, it will set on fire; it will stir up the natural endowments of the soul. For a man who no longer acts from motives of self-love becomes a more docile instrument, allowing the Holy Spirit to operate in him and through him.

As I relied upon St. Paul to provide a commentary on the spirit of the writings of Father Semenenko in all that is falsely regarded at times as a kind of passivity, so now, to complete my sketch, I append the commentary of the Apostle dealing with what is sometimes referred to as self-activity: "Whatever things are true, whatever honorable, whatever just, whatever holy, whatever lovable, whatever of good repute, if there be any virtue, if anything worthy of praise, think upon these things" (Phil 4:8).

These words of the Apostle permit no doubt in this regard: without qualification, one should undertake a good work, even think beforehand about it, eagerly initiate good works – where and whenever the good work of virtue may demand it.

In general, in the explanation of the action of grace presented in the works of Father Semenenko, and in the relationship

between it and human activity, a distinction must be made between theory and practice. To illustrate, I will use an analogy. If a watchmaker reveals the inner workings of a clock to a student, the latter benefits insofar as he becomes acquainted with the mechanism. But if, in his daily life, the student wishes to discover what time it is at any particular moment, he will not review all the theory about cogs and wheels; he will simply consult a watch, and by this single glance will turn it to his use.

If Father Semenenko introduces us to the inner secrets of man's fallen nature, and leads us from there to an understanding of the mechanism of supernatural activity – if I may be permitted the expression – he acquaints us in this way with the theory of the interior life, which is based upon the awareness of our own inadequacy and weakness on the one hand, and upon the activity of God on the other. This theory is necessary, too, for the practice of the mystical life. In this it differs from the example I used above. Further, in the practical application of theory to life, it is important to beware of any excessive analysis of any individual act concerned with the work of the interior life.

Certainly it is necessary to examine our souls and detect our misery, and that for many reasons; but this examination must be as simple and uninvolved as possible. Simplicity is even more important, a single glance of the soul into the heart of God; from this heart his grace pours out upon us. Despite certain general principles, the activity of grace is very simple: it has no mechanism to encumber it, and in a certain sense it may be considered elemental. If one keeps this in mind, and uses the theories in this way, so that they join in him in a simple, uninvolved act, then he is on the right road. He will always know how to combine a profound sentiment of his own misery with a confident, loving gaze upon God. In this way we will combine obedience to the action of God with personal initiative and effort.

I will conclude my remarks with this general reflection: As I said, the central idea of St. Paul's mysticism, appropriated a half century

ago by Father Semenenko, figures very prominently in the currents of [thought concerning] the interior life today. It is for this precise reason that the ascetical writings of this master of the spiritual life have not grown stale. Instead, thanks to the freshness of thought, the synthetic grasp of the most difficult and subtle problems, and the combination of mysticism with dogmatic and moral teaching – thanks to so many other qualities, these works occupy and will continue to occupy a position of first rank in spiritual literature.

Lviv, 1931



**Servant of God**

**Father Peter Semenenko, CR**

**The Spiritual Life**

(edited by Paul Smolikowski, CR)

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# 1. GOD

## Love of God, Our Principle and End

“God would not be perfect,” says St. Thomas, “did he not understand and will actually.”<sup>1</sup> “Whenever we understand, by the very fact of understanding there proceeds something within us which is a conception of the thing understood, proceeding from our knowledge of that thing. This conception is signified by the word of the voice. As God is above all things, we should understand what is said of God, not according to the mode of the lowest creature, namely bodies, but from the likeness of the highest creatures, the intellectual substances; although even the likeness derived from these falls short in the representation of divine objects. Procession, therefore, is not to be understood from what it is in bodies, either according to local movement or by way of a cause proceeding forth to its exterior effect; as for example, like heat proceeding from the agent to the thong made hot. Rather it is to be understood by way of an intelligible emanation, for example, of the intelligible word which proceeds from the speaker yet remains in him.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, just as an immanent intellectual word, which is a “similitude of the thing understood and of the understanding intellect,” and immanent volition are produced in us, so too is there true immanent production in the infinite spirit.

Nevertheless, human reason can neither discover nor understand why in the Divinity both the intellectual word and volition are persons distinct from the understanding and willing God. St. Thomas gives a reason, saying: “To be and to understand are not the same in us. Hence, that which in us has intelligible being does not belong to our nature. But in God, to be and to understand

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<sup>1</sup> *De Potentia*, q. 10, a. 1, c.

<sup>2</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 27, a. 1, c.

are one and the same. Hence, Word of God is not an accident in him, or an effect of his, but belongs to his very nature. It must therefore be something subsistent, for whatever is in the nature of God subsists."<sup>3</sup> But there is a reason why whatever is in the nature of God subsists is not satisfactorily understood. Is it because the most perfect existence is personal? On this question reason remains undecided.

"God is love,"<sup>4</sup> says Sacred Scripture. Supposing this revealed truth, that God is love, we become more convinced both of the necessity of and the reason for the persons in God and of their processions.

Love cannot be thought of except as existing between persons. Therefore, there ought to exist, in addition to him who loves, another who is loved: the lover and the loved one. But since love pertains to the essence of God who is called love, it must necessarily be eternal. Consequently, the persons themselves must be eternal. Since indeed God is one, one divine nature and one divinity, the persons in God cannot be distinguished among themselves in any other way than by a reciprocal relation, namely by that which they, in fact, are: the lover and the loved one. This relation truly supposes another prior relation: understanding and being understood. "For nothing is able to be loved by the will, unless it is conceived in the intellect," as St. Thomas states. Thus the necessity of a third person.

It is true that the reason for a third person is not clearly perceived, for from the analogy of the intellect it would rather follow that the object itself be conceived through the intellect and be loved through the will. Indeed, the Catholic concept of the Most Holy Trinity declares that the Father generates the Son and loves him through the Holy Spirit. St. Thomas explains it thus: "The procession of the will is not by way of likeness, but rather by way

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<sup>3</sup> *S.T.*, I, q. 34, a. 2, ad 1.

<sup>4</sup> 1Jn 4:8.

of impulse and movement towards something. So what proceeds in God by way of love does not proceed as begotten, or as son, but proceeds rather as spirit; which name expresses a certain vital movement and impulse."<sup>5</sup>

"We can name God only from creatures. But because in creatures generation is the only principle of the communication of nature, procession in God has no proper or special name, except that of generation. Hence the procession which is not generation has remained without a special name; but it can be called spiration, since it is the procession of the Spirit."<sup>6</sup> And the Angelic Doctor gives the reason for this: "The intellect produces something in likeness to itself...since the word is the likeness of the thing understood and of the intellect understanding itself.... On the other hand, the will does not produce its likeness... since love, which is an intimate procession, is not some likeness of the will or the thing willed, but a kind of impression made on the will by the thing willed, or a kind of union between these two... Accordingly, we acknowledge in God a procession of the word and love; and this is the procession of the person of the Son from the Father (for the Son is the Father's word) and of the Holy Spirit who is his love and life-giving breath."<sup>7</sup>

We should not be surprised that some of these things are not clear to us, for we are dealing with the greatest mystery. But, supposing the revealed truth, that God is love, both the necessity for some kind of distinction of the persons becomes apparent, as we have already stated, and the reason for their processions immediately becomes clear to us. We are convinced, first, that in God the operations of intellection and volition proceed from one principle, for it is an intelligent being who loves; and, second, that there cannot be more than three persons in God since "the

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<sup>5</sup> *S.T.*, I, q. 27, a. 4, c.

<sup>6</sup> *S.T.*, q. 27, a. 4, ad 3.

<sup>7</sup> *De Potentia*, q. 10, a. 2, ad 11; a.1, c.

acts in a nature which is intellectual and divine are only two, namely, understanding and willing."<sup>8</sup> God understands and wills all things by one simple act. Therefore, there can be but one person proceeding after the manner of love, which person is the Holy Spirit."<sup>9</sup>

We also understand that the procession of the Son must precede the procession of the Holy Spirit. For "though will and intellect are not diverse in God, nevertheless the nature of the intellect and will requires that the processions belonging to each of them exist in a certain order. For the procession of love occurs in due order as regards the procession of the Word, since nothing can be loved by the will unless it is conceived in the intellect."<sup>10</sup>

The love of God was the cause of our creation. Otherwise, why should God have created us?

God, being infinitely happy, does not need us for his beatitude. Therefore, he did not create us for his own good, but for our good; not for his own sake, but for our sake. We were the end of creation – the "*finis cui*", as it is called. We are the reason why God created us; for he created us out of love for us. Undoubtedly, he created us also for his love and for his glory, since in this alone can our true happiness consist. As St. Thomas states, "he seeks his glory (the same may be said concerning his love) not for his own sake, but for our sake. For the knowledge of God (also the love of God) is our need, not his."<sup>11</sup>

This love of God for us is incomprehensible to us, because after original sin "the affections of man are perverted and mercenary insofar as they come from himself. Hence, whatever he does, he does for his own advantage."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, when we love

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<sup>8</sup> S.T., I, q. 27, a. 5, c.

<sup>9</sup> S.T., I, q. 41, a. 6, c.

<sup>10</sup> S.T., I, q. 27, a. 3, ad 3.

<sup>11</sup> S.T., II-II, q. 132, a. 1, ad 1.

<sup>12</sup> St. Bonaventure, II *Sent. Dist.* 26, a. 1, q. 1.



someone, we love because there is something in the loved one which attracts, amuses, pleases, and delights us – something which thus renders us felicitous or happy. Or else we love because we could not be happy unless we had someone with whom to share our happiness. Or we love someone for an ulterior motive, either for reward or because of our love for some other persons. As a result, we cannot understand a love which bestows no profit, pleasure, or sweetness upon the lover. Thus man, concerned about himself alone, is unable to admit that someone – and indeed God himself – loves him for his own sake, without needing him in any way.

Man was created in the image of God. Since God is truly love, the likeness of man to God is in love. Sacred Scripture states: “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”<sup>13</sup> “Let us love one another: for love is from God. And everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, in explaining our likeness to God, Christ our Lord said: “Be merciful, therefore, even as your Father is merciful.”<sup>15</sup> “Be ye perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect,”<sup>16</sup> which Cornelius a Lapide interprets as, “Be ye perfect especially in love.” “That all may be one,” as Christ says, “as Thou Father in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us.”<sup>17</sup> That they may be one, “namely one bond of charity.”<sup>18</sup>

In loving, therefore, we ought to be like unto God. Since we were created in the likeness of God, who is love, the love of God ought to be our ultimate end. Even the glory of God itself should

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<sup>13</sup> 1Jn 4:16.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Lk 6:36.

<sup>16</sup> Mt 5:48.

<sup>17</sup> Jn 17:21.

<sup>18</sup> Cornelius a Lapide.

be sought through love of him; and the motive and animating principle of our lives and actions must always and in all things be the love of God. Since the love of God ought to totally occupy us, once it has been constituted, as it were, the basis of our lives, fraternal charity founded in that same love ought to be considered as the supreme law of our lives. For he who does not love his neighbors, as we have seen, neither abides in God nor knows God, who is love and from whom love is. "The love of God urges us."<sup>19</sup>

We have already seen that our principle is the love of God. But it is not sufficient for us to admit that God loves us first. We must also accept the fact that God loves each of us individually with a special love. God loves me, not because he loves all men, the entire world; rather he loves all men because he loves each and every one of them individually. Hence the statement that God loves must not be understood to mean that God loves the human race in general and, as a consequence, us. God does not have universal ideas and affections as we have. "The divine intellect does not form universal concepts, as the apprehension of our mind does. For universal representations are exceedingly imperfect, because they do not represent the total reality of the thing. God, however, does not know universals universally or precisely and in the abstract. He knows the common causes of things as one would know the characteristics of singulars. He knows the universal form insofar as he perceives the individuals contained under it and the likeness between them."<sup>20</sup> We speak in general terms in order that we might make up and supply for our indigence.

Hence, God loves each one of us as if each of us were alone in the world. "O thou omnipotent good," cries St. Augustine, "who thus cares for each one of us as though you care for each alone; and so for all as individuals." "This is the feeling of the

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<sup>19</sup> 2Cor 5:14.

<sup>20</sup> Hontheim, S.J., *Instit. Theodiceae*. Fribourg, Brussels, 1903, p. 829.

faithful servant," says St. (John) Chrysostom, "that the benefits of his Lord, which are given to all in common, he esteems as if they were granted to him alone. For St. Paul writes as if of himself alone: 'He loved me and gave himself up for me'." We may say that he alone has a clear insight into this truth, namely that each of us is loved by God with a singular love, who comes to the strong conviction that no one is loved as much by God as himself. The love of God for us is so true and so great that even after examination, it admits of no comparison, at least not in our own minds. "Let us therefore love God, because he first loved us," as St. John the Apostle puts it.<sup>21</sup> The will to repay God and to please him shall be the perfect rule for our life and conduct. For this reason we should desire and labor to promote not only our own sanctification, but also that of our neighbor. Briefly, we may say that the love of God ought to be our ultimate end; not merely because it is thus that we can render to God love for his love.

And what is our proximate end? Surely, that which contributes to the ultimate end, the means by which the ultimate end can be obtained. This, however, can be nothing else than that same love of God: God's love for us and our love for God.

Christ said to St. Catherine of Siena: "Enlightened by this light of faith, you will understand further that I am better able to know and will your good than you yourself are; and that you are able neither to know nor to will it without my grace. This being the case, you must make the greatest effort to submit your will entirely to my divine will." God himself, therefore, leads us by the hand to our ultimate end. The most certain means by which to obtain the ultimate end is to do the will of God.

God has all good things ready for man. It suffices that man receive them, that he will them. Then God grants all things to the prayers of man; for prayer is both a sign that man desires these things and, at the same time, a proof of his acceptance of them.

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<sup>21</sup> 1Jn 4:19.

"Seek and it shall be given to you," says Christ. If at times our prayers seem to go unheeded, it may be either because it would not be good for us to obtain the favors we seek, or because it would not be good for us to obtain them immediately. Nevertheless, God, having taken our prayers into account, grants us those things which will be advantageous to us. If a son begs poison of his father, thinking it to be bread, will the father by assenting to the pleas of the son truly hear him? He would hear him, indeed, if he would give him true bread in the place of the poison. "Therefore, if you, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?"<sup>22</sup> He will give good things and only good things! "Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For all these things the gentiles seek. For your Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be given you besides."<sup>23</sup> What we need, therefore, God will certainly give; but we ought first of all to seek God, his kingdom and, by that very fact, his will. For where the will of God is done, there God reigns. Indeed, this will of God is most beneficial to us and hence will most certainly lead us to our ultimate end, the love of God.

Therefore, when we have convinced ourselves that God loves each one of us with a singular love and that he has a loving care over each of us, then indeed shall we subject our will completely to the divine will. However, we must not do this for our own benefit alone, but rather out of love of God. For how can we not love him, who pursues us with so great a love? And how can we love and not subject our will to the will of him whom we love? "To will the same and to not-will the same, this indeed is true friendship," are words already in use among the pagans.

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<sup>22</sup> Mt 7:11.

<sup>23</sup> Mt 6:31-33.

By uniting our will with the will of God we acquire the love of God. This is our greatest good, and, therefore, God holds it in readiness for us. In fact, already in this life we will begin to live by this love and advance in it. Our proximate end, therefore, must be: to promote the kingdom of God, the most loving Father – a kingdom of love, in ourselves and also in the world.

## 2. MAN

### Our Nothingness

#### *Considered in Itself*

That we are nothing is one of those vital truths which must be regarded as the cornerstones of the foundations of our spiritual life. "For if anyone thinks himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceives himself."<sup>24</sup> Wherefore, St. Augustine says, "This is a whole great science: to know that man is nothing." But a necessary corollary of our nothingness is that we can do no nothing. Hence Christ our Lord said, "Without me you can do nothing."<sup>25</sup> Nothing!

God said of himself: "I am, who am." He is, therefore, his own existence. Therefore we do not possess existence as something that is our own; and although God gave us existence when he created us, it did not, however, by that fact become our own to the extent that each of us could say of himself: I am, who am. If we are to be, God must continue to give us existence. Hence we are preserved in being because the act of creation is unceasing, according to the dictum of St. Thomas: "Conservation in being is continuous creation." This being the case, we can easily understand why it is said that man is nothingness. Both in his

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<sup>24</sup> Gal 6:3.

<sup>25</sup> Jn 15:5.

being and in his operation, which follows upon being, he depends entirely upon the free will of another. And this is indeed true. Life, the existence of a living being, embraces in man sensation, intellection, and volition. We possess three vital potencies, three faculties: the senses, the intellect, and the will. They are called potencies, faculties, because through them we are in potency, we have the ability to sense, to think, and to will. But to sense truly and actually, we need to sense *something*; likewise, in order to really think, we must think about *something*; and to actually will, we must will *something*. However, that *something* is neither in us nor from us, unless God fills the potencies with prior energy, whereby these potencies are moved to produce their acts in a manner that benefits them. To put it briefly, we do not have within ourselves the object of our life; nor can we give it to ourselves until God, not just objectively and morally, but also physically, moves and directs us to act, as was said above, in a manner that benefits us.

But it does not suffice that we exist or live in just any manner. The situation itself demands that our vital activity, indeed our very being, be true life; that our vital activity satisfy the demands of this life, lest they remain forever unfilled. Otherwise, vital activity would not be life but a continual alternation of life with death. However, it is not within our power to meet these demands of life, namely, the desire of the heart, the elevation of mind, the ardor of the will. Our heart needs to live by affection, but this affection must satisfy the whole heart, and forever. For it longs for the true good, and in this good alone does it rest. The mind needs to embrace something that will satisfy it. Hence, it requires beauty, which has its origin in truth. Its vital activity does not consist solely in admiring truth and delighting in it. It lives its life to the full only when truth shines forth in it; when by means of the truth it becomes something, a thing of beauty. Finally, the will rests in life and demands that what it wishes to be,

should be. How greatly does a man's will trouble him, unless what he wills be done!

However, man does not find all these things which he needs, in himself. We are not even sufficient "of ourselves to think anything as from ourselves,"<sup>26</sup> in the words of the Apostle. Where shall we find a remedy for our indigence? Behold, how to these words above the Apostle immediately adds the following: "but our sufficiency is from God." God created us for himself. To possess God would be our joy, our delight, our sweetness and consolation. To admire God would mean to be conformed to him and at the same time to cause his image to shine forth in us; our glory would be derived from the glory of God. "Man was created in the image of God," says Pope St. Leo, "in order that he would be an imitator of his author. This would be the natural dignity of our race: to have the form of the divine goodness reflected in us as in a mirror." To be united with God by love would be our happiness. Then and only then would our will no longer fluctuate between objects, because then it would will what God wills. For to will the same and to not-will the same (as the one loved) is proper to true friendship. We were created to love and to be ruled by love. Our will, having been united to the divine will, obtains everything that it shall have desired because, as St. Bernard says, "then man not only wills what God wills, but he is so disposed, so perfectly disposed, that - as long as the perfect disposition remains - he cannot will anything else except what God wills." Hence St. Paul the Apostle, exulting with joy, says: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me."<sup>27</sup> And St. Bernard is moved by these words of the Apostle to exclaim: "How great a confidence these words manifest! Nothing expresses the omnipotence of God more clearly than this: that God renders omnipotent all those who trust in him." In paradise not only did

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<sup>26</sup> 2Cor 3:5.

<sup>27</sup> Phil 4:13.

man rule over animals, but he also exercised domination over the passions within himself. In him the passions of the soul did not anticipate reason and will, but were consequent upon the judgment of reason. He used phantasms as instruments perfectly under his control. Further, his will was united to the will of God. Therefore, in man there were no desires possible only in imagination, and hence inefficacious. His affections were not moved to unsuitable objects. As a result, man was not tormented by vain desires; he was master of himself.

*Our Nothingness After Sin*

Man rejected God and so lost the true object of his life. Hence his heart, needing consolation and sweetness, and not finding these in himself, sought them from creatures. However, every creature is nothingness just as we are. Therefore it can neither fully satisfy nor please us. As a result, when we have seized upon some particular thing, we have scarcely given ourselves wholly to it when we begin to experience weariness, even aversion for it, and disgust takes hold of us. True, we do not all immediately perceive this emptiness and vanity of all things. For we live daily, rushing distractedly, thoughtlessly, and senselessly from one thing to another. But how many are there in this world who, at one time or another, have not cried out with St. Augustine: "You have created us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you!" It can find no rest, however, because in original sin it rejected God! We need the true good; but when it stands before us, we lack affection for it. Why? Because we have rejected it. On the contrary, we become true slaves of an affection which does not lead to God. We have experienced more than once how difficult it is to withstand this affection. Other troublesome affections also occupy our heart. These torment us, and we are not strong enough to free ourselves from them. Such are, for example, a certain innate hatred, prejudices, suppositions,



anger and envy. For where God does not enter, something else usually occupies the heart.

In the second place, we are now not only “not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as from ourselves,” but also when this something, a salutary object of our thought, occurs to the mind, we do not know how to think about it; it does not stir us, captivate us, or hold us. Why? Because we rejected it in original sin! On the contrary we are not able to liberate ourselves from or reject harmful objects – such as thoughts which are evil, impure, full of despair – thoughts which do not lead us to God but to death. These vex and torture us.

Meanwhile, needing love, we fail to love when we really should love. Why? Because we rejected the true object of our love in original sin. Hence, even if we did have in our possession the true object of our will, it would not be within our power to retain it. For it is love that strengthens the will. “To wish is within my power,” said the Apostle, “but I do not find the strength to accomplish what is good.”<sup>28</sup> “I see what is better and I approve; but I pursue what is worse,” Ovid frankly confessed. What is more, so often do we fail to find in ourselves the strength, the vigor, the energy to will what we will in a truly decisive manner, or not to will what we cannot have, or to allow a true act of the will to arise from a simple desire, or, where this is not possible, to prevent the desire from tormenting us. For our will is not fixed in God through love; and, not having in itself the strength required for stability, it fluctuates between different objects.

### Our Misery in General

After man abandoned God in original sin, he not only reverted to his own nothingness and impotence, but over and above this he fell into the greatest misery. That we might be better understand this misery, let us see in what that original sin consisted.

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<sup>28</sup> Rom 7:18.

Man wanted to be like God. But wasn't he created for this precisely – that he might be like God? Certainly! Man, however, “wanted a likeness to God, which is bestowed by grace; he sought to have it by the power of his own nature, and not from divine assistance according to God's ordering.”<sup>29</sup> It was very important to man “that by his own natural powers he might decide what was good and what was evil for him to do...; and secondly, that by his own natural power he might act so as to obtain happiness.”<sup>30</sup> In a word, “each wished to rely on himself, in contempt of the order of the divine rule.”<sup>31</sup> Hence, he wanted to provide for himself the likeness of God, not in the way in which God had determined, not by following the movement of grace, but by his own action. Accordingly, it was self-activity which separated man from God and played the leading role in original sin.

But this very self-activity has its own principle and source, and this is self-love. A very important question confronted the first man and awaited a response – which of the two, God or man? Shall it be the will of God, the law of God, or the will of man, the law of man? In a word – God or self? “God gave his command in order to test submission,” says St. Chrysostom, “he established a law to try man's will. And so it was that the tree stood in the middle of the garden: to test the will of man.” Man responded to the test and, alas, his answer was: Self! Not what God wills and not as God wills, but what I will and as I will! That response is the clear expression of self-activity; but self-activity itself arises from self-love and from a lack of the love of God. For the love of God impels us to say: God! Self-love always says: Self! Self! St. Thomas says, “The woman would not have believed the words of the serpent had she not already acquiesced in the love

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<sup>29</sup> S. T., I, q. 63, a. 3, c.

<sup>30</sup> S. T., II-II, q. 163, a. 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

of her own power, and in a presumption of self-conceit."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, self-love, or pride, was the origin of all evil. "Pride has the aspect of the first sin, and is the beginning of all sins."<sup>33</sup> For pride "properly regards lack of this subjection of man to God," hence "aversion from God... belongs to pride by its very nature."<sup>34</sup> Hence pride is a negation of the love of God and an affirmation of self-love. Christ said to St. Catherine of Siena, "Nothing else destroys, impedes, and loses the greatest good except self-will and self-love. If these were removed from you, hell would be removed as well."

We have all sinned in Adam. Therefore, after the sin of the first parent, man no longer refers to the love of God as to an end, because he no longer loves God more than himself and above all else.<sup>35</sup> Christ spoke to St. Catherine of Siena: "Do not love anything temporal except on my account; and what is of greater, even greatest, importance: do not love me for your own sake, or love yourself for yourself, or love your neighbor in your own interest; but love me for my sake, yourself for my sake, and your neighbor for my sake." After original sin this is impossible for us without the help of God's grace.

Man, "in the state of integral nature did not need the gift of grace added to his natural endowments in order to love God above all things naturally, although he needed God's help moving him to it. But in the state of corrupted nature, man needs, even for this, the help of grace healing his nature."<sup>36</sup> In baptism we receive, along with habitual grace, the habits of faith, hope, and charity – a true conversion to God. However, this is, as it were, only the seed of our conversion to God. Only by our cooperation

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<sup>32</sup> S. T., I, q. 94, a. 4.

<sup>33</sup> S. T., II-II, q. 162, a. 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 5.

<sup>35</sup> S. T., I-II, q. 109, a. 3, c.

<sup>36</sup> S. T., I-II, q. 109, a. 3, c.

with grace does it become actual. Therefore, before original sin, man had no need for the self-abnegation of which Christ speaks, for man had not yet taken his stand against God; but after the sin which man committed by asserting his Ego in the place of God, he needs to deny himself at every moment, in order that God might be affirmed: "Not I, but God!" "I live in you only to the extent that I die to myself," said St. Catherine of Siena to Christ. And Christ answered, "Therefore, if you wish to live, both in this world of uncertainty by means of grace and in that stable and eternal world to come by means of glory, cause yourself to die, by denying yourself and setting aside your own will."

Hence, after original sin, the necessary condition for arriving at a friendship with God in which we are most closely united with him in love must be lovingly fulfilled: we must empty ourselves and wholly deny ourselves that thereby we may truly and perfectly give place within ourselves to God, that he may dwell in us as our Lord and our God. Without this abnegation God will not be in us perfectly and fully as our Lord. The entire order of original justice, says St. Thomas, which original sin destroyed, "consists in man's will."<sup>37</sup> Man was seeking God, God's will, solely for God's sake; and in this will of God he found his own will as well, because a will which is subject to God does not will anything except what God wills. But after original sin man seeks only his own will and himself in it. Therefore, unless he denies himself, man will be his own master, not God!

It is the function of the will, "to move all the other parts to the end. Hence when the will has turned away from God, all the other powers of the soul become disordered."<sup>38</sup> These were the consequences.

First, the sensual appetite, which in the state of innocence had been completely subject to reason in such a way that there were

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<sup>37</sup> *S.T.*, I-II, q. 82, a. 3, c.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

no passions of the soul in it other than those which were consequent upon the judgment of reason<sup>39</sup> and which were perfectly restrained by a reason which, being subject to God, was perfected by God,<sup>40</sup> now precedes and impedes the judgment of reason and, contrary to reason, seeks pleasure, joy, sweetness, consolation and delights as its end. Man, now loving himself above all, no longer seeks God, his happiness and delights, his good, what delights him – which good and which delights would be man's also – but he seeks solely his own private good and delights, and himself in them.

A second consequence is that reason “is deprived of its order to the true”<sup>41</sup> and becomes a slave of the sensible appetite. Man, in the state of innocence, used phantasms as instruments which were perfectly subject to him; now indeed, he depends on the idols of his fantasy as the norms which guide his knowing process.<sup>42</sup> In matters which for us are not indifferent – when whether or not they happen is important to us, and even more so when we have been put in charge of something about which we are anxious and disturbed – if our heart is no longer void but captivated by the love of some person or thing or if, in a word, something is very dear to our heart, then our reason seeks what is false; at times it arrives at such a falsehood only after much effort and trouble, and in the end it takes what is false to be true. And it is in this sense that theologians say that after the fall there is in us a positive inclination to what is false.<sup>43</sup> Finally, since now man does not seek God and God's glory, which would be man's glory as well, he seeks rather his own glory and himself therein!

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<sup>39</sup> S.T., I, q. 95, a. 1, c.

<sup>40</sup> S.T., I-II, q. 85, a. 3, c.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Billot, *De Sacramentis*, 189, p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> Gazzaniga, *Praelect. Theol.* IV, 186.

From what was said above, it follows that man, who seeks himself in everything, is no longer able to see and know himself as he really is, in all truth; instead he sees himself to be what he would like to be. This is the origin of that incomprehensible human blindness of which Christ says: "But why dost thou see the speck in thy brother's eye, and yet dost not consider the beam in thy own eye?"<sup>44</sup> The evil we do, the evil which is in us, and which, as a consequence, we are able to know quite well – this we do not consider to be evil for the simple reason that it is in *us*. We easily recognize this same thing as evil in others and we call it such. This is the reason why it is so difficult to reconcile two people quarrelling with each other. For each one is fully convinced that the situation is just as he says it is and that the fault lies entirely with his opponent. If you permit someone to relate his deeds to you, you will be presented with pictures of a great man without any limitations. And you will not be able to deny that he was fully convinced of what he said. What is the reason for this? The words of the tempter, "You will be like gods, knowing good and evil," continually echo in the ears of the sons of Adam, urging them continually to believe themselves to be gods because they are of themselves good, impeccable, infallible people whom all things should serve; (they continue) to believe that what serves them is good and in order, while what does not serve them, what resists them, is certainly evil. A certain uncivilized and barbarous man was asked what did he consider good and what evil? He replied, "Good is when I attack my neighbor, conquer him, slaughter his people, carry off his possessions and wives; evil is when he does this same thing to me." Doesn't a similar law of nations still prevail today? Whatever is in the interest of the republic or of the people sanctions and justifies any means. Is there any injustice that is so obvious or any crime that is so

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<sup>44</sup> Mt 7:3.

monstrous that it is forbidden to be perpetrated if it is of great advantage to the republic or to the nation?

Justly, then, does St. Thomas prove the need for actual grace in those who have already attained habitual grace, in order that they may do good and avoid sin, from the fact that after original sin we are unable to know fully what is good for us, nor do we know what we should pray for as we ought,<sup>45</sup> and we are drawn toward pernicious things, as St. Paul says, "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner."<sup>46</sup> Hence, we must be guided and guarded by God, who knows and can do all things.<sup>47</sup>

Since, therefore, "it is clearly manifest that the soul's perversity and its proneness to every evil is very great, for:

1. in the memory: species and images of vile and most vain objects dwell in our memory as in their own proper dwelling, and furthermore passions and demons freely disturb it;
2. in the intellect: here we encounter blindness and shadows, many false judgments or assertions, and not infrequently crass, often even affected, ignorance;
3. in the will: malice exercises supreme dominion, as it were;
4. in the soul: over and above this there prevails in our soul a certain, incredible inclination to every sort of evil which draws the entire soul into the abyss of vice; to the extent that, were it not restrained by the benevolent hand of God, the soul would of its own impetus and at any moment plunge headlong into every conceivable crime - therefore - "it is impossible for anyone to recognize his own

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<sup>45</sup> Rom 8:26.

<sup>46</sup> Rom 7:23.

<sup>47</sup> S.T., I-II, q. 109, a. 9, c.

misery and malice accurately without learning to hate and despise himself."<sup>48</sup>

It is highly recommended that we meditate on our misery in order to acquire a true knowledge of ourselves, for this leads man to contempt for and abomination and annihilation of himself. St. Vincent Ferrer said: "You must put no faith in yourselves at all, nor in all your possessions, nor in your entire life... so that you may despise yourself with all your might as something most vile and abominable and even seek to be despised by others." And Father Bellecius advises anyone who makes the spiritual exercises to take care first to acknowledge his own baseness and meanness and to feel that in his soul. Further, in a letter to Pope Eugene, Saint Bernard said: "I fear for you, Eugene, lest the multitude of your labors, having caused you to neglect your prayer and meditation, lead you to a hard-heartedness which does not terrify a person because it is not felt."

God himself leads those whom he destines for higher things to a clearer knowledge of their misery. In his *Confessions* St. Augustine writes this concerning himself: "But you, O Lord, turned me around to face myself, snatching me from behind myself, where I had placed myself because I refused to correct myself; and you placed me face to face with myself that I might see how vile I was, how distorted and filthy, how stained and ulcerous. And I saw and I was horrified; and there was no place where I could flee from myself. And if I tried to turn away this sight from my eyes, again you confronted me with myself and thrust me before my own eye so that I might discover my iniquity and hate it. I should have known it, but I pretended not to, and closed my eyes and forgot."

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<sup>48</sup> P. Bellecius, *Exercises of St. Ignatius*, Augustae Taurinorum, 1835, pp. 152, 53; 146, 47.



Thus the saints used to speak of themselves as the greatest sinners of all. Not because they had one thing hidden in their heart and another ready upon the tongue: it would be disgraceful to admit something like this. Nor, certainly, because their sanctity had so clouded their minds that as a result they judged themselves less correctly when endowed with the light of grace than if they had made this judgment with the help of reason alone. On the contrary, the true reason is that they had the best knowledge of their own misery and nothingness. Saint Michael de Sanctis used to tell his own confessor that God had given him such a great and clear knowledge of himself and his misery, that he could not be led to believe that the very devils in hell were more perverse, base and loathsome than he himself. St. Philip Neri used to say, "Lord, keep your hands extended over Philip today, otherwise Philip will betray you." And walking the streets of Rome he exclaimed, "I despair." When he was admonished for this by a certain religious man he replied, "My father, I despair of myself; but I place my confidence in God."

Our misery is so great that when it is examined attentively it admits of no comparison, so that it appears to the examiner to be the greatest possible. It is an abyss which calls upon another abyss, namely, the mercy and love of God: a love which, as we have already seen, does not admit of any comparison because of its immensity. Commenting on these words from the Psalms: "You are my God because you have no need for my goods," (Vg. Ps. 15:2) St. Augustine appropriately exclaims, "But you do need my misery in order to be merciful." The greater the misery which we find in ourselves, so much greater and more apparent is the love with which God pursues us.

### **Our Misery in Particular**

Therefore, since we should pay such great attention to the recognition of our misery, let us view it more closely and treat each

of its manifestations. For the sake of clarity let us view it separately in the sensitive, intellectual, and volitional life of man.

*Our Misery in the Sensitive Life*

We are continually seeking pleasure, amusement and enjoyment in our sensitive life, in our corporal life, and even though we do so indeliberately and on the spur of the moment, this is certainly a disturbance of the right order. For pleasure and enjoyment in themselves can in no way be an end for a rational creature; at most, they can follow upon the attainment of the end or serve as a means to attain the end. Moreover, when we seek pleasure from creatures, we surrender ourselves entirely to them, with the result that we are bound to them as to a yoke, and thus we arrive at true slavery; for we no longer consider ourselves happy without them.

Our heart seeks its pleasure primarily in things which are entirely material, and indeed, first of all, in food and drink. We cannot eat and drink without experiencing some enjoyment, for God has decreed that this enjoyment should be connected with eating; but we ought to eat and drink in order to live and not for enjoyment. However there are some, and indeed their number is not small, who seem to live in order to eat and drink and who are so given over to eating and drinking that St. Paul justly issued this terrible statement concerning them: "Their god is the belly,"<sup>49</sup> and, "For such do not serve Christ our Lord but their own belly."<sup>50</sup>

As to ourselves, would that it be true that we do not seek those things, at least deliberately, as the goal of our life, and that we do not think only of food and are not entirely taken up with eating. Nevertheless, all of us possess a spirit inclined towards gluttony; we desire to eat elegantly; we apply our minds to these things and, although we do in fact take care to control ourselves in this

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<sup>49</sup> Phil 3:19.

<sup>50</sup> Rom 16:18.

matter – understanding very well the baseness of such a life given over to eating and to gluttony – and although we are ashamed of this animal-like existence, how many times in our minds do we not dream of food delightfully prepared, and how many times do we not eat and drink solely for the pleasure involved! Perhaps we do not know that of the propositions condemned by Innocent XI the eighth one declared: “It is not a sin to eat and drink to satiety solely for pleasure, as long as it is not injurious to one’s health, because the natural appetite can licitly enjoy its activities.”

And what are we to say concerning the far worse pleasures of which the Apostle says: “But immorality and every uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as becomes saints.”<sup>51</sup> To seek pleasure out of such sensuality – this is a frightful thing! It takes away our power for reasoning and willing, it extinguishes faith. And yet, is there a more frequent, indeed, a more common occurrence? So easily does man become mired in this filth, that the world even refuses to believe that it is impossible for anyone to contain himself and to repress this evil tendencies. Does God, therefore, require of man something that is impossible? After death our eyes shall be opened; we shall see all things and we shall have no excuse. For what could our excuse be? That we lacked the necessary grace of God? Then our eyes will be opened, and we shall see and understand that we had more than enough grace. Shall our excuse be perhaps that we were carried away by the excessive ardor of violent desire? We shall see that we could have contained it; indeed, we shall see that it was we ourselves who aroused it and who sought after it!

If we have been free thus far from such miseries, let us thank God for it. But concupiscence still exists in us. Perhaps it lies dormant; but it is there in its entirety. Let our temptations be the convincing argument. How horrible, how detestable!! There is

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<sup>51</sup> Eph 5:3.

no crime so base or so shameful that it would not enter into our minds and be impossible for us to commit. But, what is worse, the love and will for this sort of thing actually exist in us. This does not say that consent to the sin is also present, for the acts of the will can be indeliberate; but, although perhaps we act unconsciously and unadvisedly, nevertheless, we do seek these temptations, we arouse and provoke them. What pretext and subterfuges do we not use to excite the sensual appetites within ourselves while preserving, as it seems to us, a good conscience!

Indeed, is there anyone among us who, for example, resolutely and truly courageously and perseveringly keeps the custody of the eyes? When a sensual object is seen even at a distance and in a passing fashion, the soul immediately turns its attention to this sensual object. Immediately that, and nothing else, meets our eye. And why? For the simple reason that our heart yearns for such things.

Also, perhaps, do not we ourselves seek out temptations under the pretext of learning – visiting museums or reading certain books which are, as we say, useful? We think we have a legitimate excuse and we say, “To the pure all things are pure,” as though we were truly pure and as though we did not carry about in ourselves the consequences of original sin.

Even in the midst of the holiest things, unless we are very careful, we seek those things which are pleasing to our nature. Unless we are very careful, in the confessional itself, while hearing confessions, we search out without even adverting to it in the course of our questioning about sins, things to which we are attracted by sheer sensual curiosity and which would be better omitted. The perversity and cunning of our nature is such that, in the very act of searching for means to prevent impure movements, we desire them instead; and therefore, not infrequently, we struggle so strenuously against impurity solely in order that we might think of it continuously and thereby arouse it even more greatly. No matter how well-instructed we may be, there

is only one remedy in this situation – flight: i.e., insofar as it is possible, not even to think of impure things and to remain calm, trusting in God and his grace. Not infrequently, however, without considering, we excite ourselves with anxiety and maintain ourselves in a state of a continuous fear of being faced with temptation, which in our terrified state of mind we represent to ourselves as about to come upon us immediately; and we do this, even though unconsciously, for no other reason than to cause within ourselves a nervous agitation which arouses the passions.

We seek pleasure even from other things as, for example, from games, whether they are honorable and more serious enjoyments or childish and questionable ones such as playing cards, horse-racing, throwing dice and so forth. Whenever such a game serves to refresh the mind, there is nothing wrong with it; but quite frequently we give ourselves to it so completely that we are entirely taken up with it and are rendered powerless to keep the movements of the soul under our control. If, then, a game conflicts with one of our assigned duties, we give up the latter and follow the former. We must consider also that wholly incredible love of money, that thirst for riches which is never quenched; even though these riches are of no utility to one who is captive of an insatiable avarice, keeping his riches under lock and key. Certainly this sort of pleasure is incomprehensible to us, even as was that which the Romans found in gladiatorial contests. These are proofs of the extent of the stupidity and ferocity of which man is capable.

Passing on to another object, nobler but nonetheless also material, we must say something of objects which present themselves to us by way of light, sound and sweet odors. We seek pleasure in pictures, in art, in song and music, in lyric poetry – in a word, in the whole natural universe, which fills us with its beauty, charms us with a certain exceedingly agreeable delight, and captivates our soul in a most marvelous fashion. All these things are far from being wrong in themselves; indeed they can

be useful, and even greatly so. Further, they can be and ought to be referred to God, to have God as their end. This is, however, indeed a rare event; ordinarily the pleasure itself which we derive from them is our end. Any object so embellished and refined enraptures us; the whole world of nature captivates us. And we, as if inebriated, give ourselves totally, even though indeliberately, to that most pleasant delight of the senses. Then we are no longer able to command ourselves freely; we do not hold the movements of our soul in our power.

Further, we seek pleasure from picturing something to ourselves in our thoughts, forming a more vivid image of things in our minds, in a word, fashioning useless representations of them in our soul with the help of imagination. If our intellect were to use the imagination for some reasonable end, there would be no disorder. The imagination is given to us for the purpose of serving reason. But ordinarily the imagination enslaves reason because the imagination seeks its own kind of pleasure. To allow our imagination to become more vivid and to offer greater pleasure, we read fiction, frequent the theater and contrive other similar means directed to the same end. When we seek our pleasure in the imagination, not only do we pass our time uselessly and dull the mind, but we easily assume a false opinion of something, arouse dangerous affections in ourselves, and unjustly attribute and impute many things to our neighbors. In this way, false suppositions are formed which sometimes take up nine-tenths of the life of a person and which are usually seriously harmful not only to souls, but even to the social life of man.

Nor it is safe to seek pleasure even in spiritual matters. Spiritual consolations can often be useful; indeed at times they are necessary for us. God gives them to us to encourage us amid the difficulties of this life, to arouse us to the pursuit of virtue. Spiritual delights have, then, a good and legitimate purpose; and therefore we should be grateful to God when we receive them. We can desire them and ask for them from God by means of humble prayer. But to seek them in order to delight in them, that is, to

make them our end, is not lawful; for this would be a perversion of right order. In describing ecstasies, St. Teresa says that some ecstasies last only a very brief moment and one is unable to resist there. Other ecstasies can last for hours and for whole days, and these must be resisted; and woe to those who tarry voluntarily in ecstasy, reveling in and enjoying its delights.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, man seeks his happiness from other persons, a happiness which consists in love. We are not speaking here of true love. For true love properly resides in the will and seeks moral union. To will the same things and to not-will the same things – that is true love. Since, however, absolutely speaking, we are only permitted to will the same things that God wills, it follows that it is only lawful to love others for God; and, hence, it is in God that we ought to will things in common with others. Furthermore, true love does not seek consolations and pleasures, for it seeks not its own good but the good of the loved one, the loved one himself. It gives, and expects nothing; it demands nothing. In union with God, our love gives God to others, and if it seeks anything, it seeks the bond of love, that is, union: but union in God. “That they may be one in us,” said Christ. Being already united ourselves with God, we want to gain others for him as well. For we love God, and we love others for God’s sake. False love does not act in this way; it rather seeks its own good – it wants to derive pleasure from its love of others. It is a characteristic of false love not to give, but to receive. If, therefore, you are over-desirous of seeing some person or of writing to him or her, or if you think about that person continuously, or if you rejoice because you see that someone nourishes an affection for you or, on the contrary, if you are sad because you notice a certain indifference towards you – then you are already seeking to receive and not to give. Therefore your love is not a true love. How often a mother herself seeks her own good and her own pleasure in her

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<sup>52</sup> *Fundationes*, Chap. VI.

love; and, therefore, for example, she is afraid to admonish her children, to punish them or to deny them something, even though she sees that it must be done for the good of the children. She takes pleasure in seeing her children content, happy and loving their mother.

To be bound by an affection for some person is not something sensual because of the object, since that object is a person. Neither is it something ideal or spiritual, as are imaginations and consolations. This is something entirely different; it is something personal. However, since we are bound by affections of the heart, and the heart is sentient, and since we seek for pleasure, it happens that such a personal affection, which – as often is the case – in the beginning curbs all impure emotions, ultimately degenerates into sensual affection. However, this is not the only reason why such an affection is fraught with danger. Indeed, the pleasures derived from such an affection are not sensual of themselves. It is sufficient for the lover to fix his eyes upon his beloved and so contemplate him or her; happy is this vision, he will not move his eyes from the loved one's countenance. But these delights are so strong that the man who yields to such an affection and does not resist it in the beginning will not, as it were, find in himself the power to resist this affection later. He is prepared for everything, even for hell; he is ready to commit any crime for these delights. He will cheerfully undertake the most difficult and serious things for the person to whom he is bound in this way: he is ready to ascribe everything for him, to accept failure, to undergo punishment, even to lay down his life; he is ready to perform things from which he would otherwise shrink and turn away, which he would dread and detest intensely. Indeed, he delights in these things, solely because he thinks he is doing or suffering them for the sake of the person he loves.

Surely that is the greatest misery which causes us to take our heart, which was made for God, and give it entirely to a creature. Such a heart shall not rest in God, neither shall it see God. "Bles-



sed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God," said Christ, our Lord.<sup>53</sup> These alone shall see: the clean of heart shall see, the chaste shall see. Chastity saves us from our misery because it is the virtue by which we renounce all sensations and affections which do not proceed from God nor lead to him. Those who seek for perfect chastity deny themselves any affection by which they might cling to any person or thing (even if they cling to this good for its own sake) to the extent that their hearts would neither tarry nor seek pleasure in their duties or in prayer itself and its delights. But since renunciation itself is not the end, but only a necessary condition of the spiritual life (for we renounce creatures in order to adhere to God), the heart of those who seek perfect chastity must rest purely and wholly in God alone and in what pleases him.

*Our Misery in the Life of the Intellect*

In our intellectual life, we seek fame together with praise. Hence we aspire to praise, and we eagerly seek even the semblance of false glory. But since of ourselves we have nothing that would be worthy of praise, and since we are full of misery as a consequence of original sin, in order to provide praise for ourselves, we "glory in things which do not exist, or in that which is not worthy of glory, or in that which finds praise only in the judgment of men; or we do not refer the desire for glory to a proper end, namely, the honor of God, that is, that God might be glorified by men according to the Gospel dictum: "in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."<sup>54</sup> Even though unconsciously and indeliberately, we constantly pretend to be something other than what we are and to disguise what we really are, in order that we might make the best possible impression upon others, or that we might project the image of a great,

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<sup>53</sup> Mt 5:8.

<sup>54</sup> S.T., II-II, q. 132, a. 1, 2.

learned, wise or prudent man, or that we might act the part of a kind, honest, just man. Then, while identifying ourselves with the person whose image we have assumed, we accommodate our gestures, our words, our voice and even our facial expression to this imagined person. Sometimes, caught up in the lie, we do not even advert to the fact that we are deceiving the world by a lie; acting out the comedy, we become absorbed in maintaining the roles which we have so brilliantly assumed. Can any one of us deny that he seeks his own praise at every moment – admittedly not in words, but surely in act? Who can say, if the truth be known, that he is not concerned with what others think or say about him? Or that he always acts according to his convictions, and not that he might be seen by men, or that he might win them over to his side, assuring himself of praise and admiration? Yet each one of us is extremely careful not to seem to praise oneself, even going so far as always to speak humbly of oneself.

Every man, therefore, unless he resists the inclination within him, seeks praise; and he seeks that praise first of all in material things, especially from his own body: from his stature, health, strength, etc. Puffed up by such considerations, he prefers himself to others. He talks constantly of these qualities, seeking in this way to exalt himself. Whenever such a man judges himself to excel in any way, he immediately turns the conversation in that direction, to make sure that others notice this. He makes every effort to fix the eyes and minds of others upon himself, to see that he is handsome, charming, graceful or skillful, agile, polished or courteous, or sedate and full of dignity, or able to sing, play the organ or the clavichord, etc.

Often enough men will seek to be praised because of their good, honest or noble heart. They desire to be honored and esteemed either because they actually do possess such a heart, or because they think they do, or because they hope to give others that impression. However, we know what their heart really is. It is impure, sordid and mean, and the dissimulation is cheap and

miserable. What man, looking into his own heart, will not detect there some base inclination? The most sacred Heart of Jesus alone is noble and holy. Man of himself in his heart is, as we say, corrupt; unworthy of any praise, he deserves only insult.

Further, man often seeks praise from his moral qualities – from his honesty, prudence, virtue, even holiness. Such a man considers himself upright at the very least. How often, unwilling and unaware, do the very students of Christian perfection fall into this misery! Why is it that we so often speak ill of others? It is not always malice or envy or garrulity that prompts us to do so, but rather, we do so more often in order to extol ourselves at the expense of others. We certainly do not commit the faults for which we blame others! Therefore by reproving others we raise ourselves above them.

Further, man seeks praise from qualities that are entirely spiritual – from his sharpness of mind (which, for example, he uses to show himself the master over others by wit and humor), or from his knowledge or eloquence, or from his ability to write or paint. He willingly passes as infallible, omniscient. When it happens that he doesn't know something, or should he happen to make a mistake, he is ashamed; either he lies openly or he attempts to excuse himself, as if it were his nature to know everything and never err.

Why, normally, do those who are appointed to administer some affair or accomplish some work begin with a great show of zeal, discovering disorders everywhere in what was left to them by their predecessors, and making this the constant topic of their conversations; but later, they themselves neglect their work and make the same mistakes as their predecessors? They are not concerned about God, and they are not concerned about fulfilling an office assigned to them; if they were, they would always be animated by equal zeal. They want to show what they can do. When they have shown this, they already have what they sought, and they lack the principal motive which should induce them to act.

Others seek perfection for perfection's sake and sanctity for sanctity's sake, not because "this is the will of God, your sanctification."<sup>55</sup> Hence they vie with others for virtue, in order to excel them. They would become saints, but they do not desire to imitate the saints, fulfilling God's will in their regard as faithfully as the saints fulfilled whatever God demanded of them. Instead they emulate the external mortification or the vigils, as well as the other qualities which must certainly be admired in the saints, but not always imitated, nor by all. What great evils follow upon such activity! The greatest of these evils is that there remains within the individual a hidden desire to prefer himself to others, to cause himself to be honored.

A man who does not resist these miseries, who throughout his entire lifetime deceives others – even though it be not wholly deliberately – ultimately convinces himself, by pretending to be what he is not and by hiding what he actually is, that he is the kind of man he strives to pass for in the eyes of men. "Iniquity hath lied to itself."<sup>56</sup>

It is evident that unless this misery of soul is resisted, it can turn man away from God and God from man. Our relations with God and with our neighbors become impossible; neither can there be any progress in the spiritual life. Since in our relationship to God we must strive during our whole life to attain by means of love to a most intimate union with him, it follows that prayer is the principal aid in achieving this goal. But what kind of prayer does a person offer if he considers himself completely good and sees no evil in himself? He ought at least to thank God that no evil, but only good, is found in him. Such, however, was the prayer of the Pharisee whom Christ condemned. For what things do we pray to God? If someone asks God for help in temptation, he prays because he feels that he is weak, inclined to evil. If he

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<sup>55</sup> 1Thess 4:3.

<sup>56</sup> Ps 26:19.

prays for love, it is because he feels that he is lacking in love. In proportion as he recognizes more of evil in himself, so does his prayer grow more fervent. But if one sees no evil in himself, he will not pray sincerely. In his relations with his neighbors, one who considers himself better than others will show them no indulgence or tolerance; instead he will show them contempt, imitating the behavior of the Pharisee toward the Publican.

Justly then do we maintain that no virtue has any value without humility: humility is the foundation of all virtues. Whether we will it or not, we are truly poor, miserable in spirit; but we must come before God as such and actually recognize that we are such. Hence Christ said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."<sup>57</sup> Therefore they who strive after Christian perfection cannot cultivate external poverty alone; they must aim at interior poverty, for this is the poverty which the Savior recommended so highly. Therefore, everyone shall take diligent care to despoil himself completely in spirit: first, of all created things and their vanity, so that one can truly say in spirit: I have nothing; then also of all self-esteem and pride, so that one can likewise say: I am nothing. It is absolutely necessary that we come to the recognition of this profound truth: that of ourselves we are nothing and can do nothing and that, further, we carry with ourselves the corruption and the misery of original sin. When we understand this properly, and when we assent with profound conviction to the truth of our lowliness and to the truth that in ourselves we are nothing, then we are the humble and the poor in spirit whom Christ called blessed. And such must we be if we wish to be truly poor. Poverty, as a virtue, preserves us from the misery of vain glory.

Yet is it true to say that no good can be found in us, and that there is only evil in us? And, if there is any good in us, are we allowed to view it more closely?

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<sup>57</sup> Mt 5:3.

Our knowledge of self should be complete and not one-sided. St. Thomas proposed the virtue of magnanimity as a complement to the virtue of humility, and teaches: "Magnanimity makes a man deem himself worthy of great things in consideration of the gifts he holds from God... and makes him tend to perfect works of virtue. On the other hand, humility makes a man think little of himself in consideration of his own deficiency. It is therefore evident that magnanimity and humility are not contrary to one another, although they seem to tend in contrary directions, because they proceed according to different considerations."<sup>58</sup>

There are some who think that it is very dangerous to take notice of the good that is in us because such attention very easily exposes us to pride. However, just the contrary is true. The consideration of what is good in us should not only not lead to pride, but it should rather be a very strong motive to preserve us in humility. And in fact we read in the lives of the saints that they abased themselves most profoundly; when they reflected upon the gifts and graces of God present within them, they claimed to be the greatest sinners. Take, for example, St. Michael de Sanctis. We have already heard him declare himself unable to believe that the devils are more perverse than he. As his reason he alleged the conviction he had about himself: no man in the entire world could be so wretched as not to reach sanctity were he to receive from God favors and graces as great in kind and degree as he himself had received. St. Francis of Assisi answered in like manner when he was asked how he could honestly call himself the greatest of sinners: "If", he replied, "God had granted graces like those which he bestowed upon me to even the greatest of sinners, I think that this sinner would have shown himself more faithful to God than I."

We possess talents, natural endowments, the ability to speak and other similar gifts. We possess, for example, the gift of elo-

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<sup>58</sup> *S.T.*, II-II, q. 129, a. 3, ad 4.

quence. Our name is outstanding in the rank of the most famous pulpit orators. What of it? Must we deny this and proclaim loudly that we do not know how to preach at all? Would such a proclamation immediately convince us that this is true? Or shall we at once be protected against pride and shall we acquire humility simply because we have said this? Surely everyone understands that this gift has been given to us freely by God and that we shall one day have to render an account for it. Hence, we cannot disregard it; instead, we are obliged to use it for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. However, let us consider the way in which we use this gift. Do we seek not to benefit ourselves by it? Are we perhaps more concerned with winning renown and applause than with the good of souls? The same may be said, for example, of the gift of prayer. It is possible for one who has this gift to delight willfully in its use because it affords him a certain pleasure; not infrequently such a one is ready to abandon his duty rather than interrupt his prayers. How many reasons shall we have, therefore, for abasing ourselves, if we take notice of our talents and gifts!

Certainly there are many other good things to be found in us. How much heroism we discover among men! How many there are, prepared for any sacrifice and any labor for God's sake and for the good of others! And in our own selves, how many good affections, noble impulses, beautiful thoughts and pure desires! All these, of course, are the work of God's grace. But was there no cooperation on our part? He who knows himself well, who knows how much evil there is in us, how strongly inclined we are to every form of vice and how tainted our own will is within us, and yet sees himself withstanding the assault of temptations, persevering in the way of virtue, never deliberately forsaking God or the Church and constant in striving to achieve what is good, even best: such a one must conclude that this could not have happened without continual struggles and victories. Therefore, besides our

natural endowments which were freely given to us, we must also most certainly consider our merits.

But, shall we be proud of this or take glory in it? Certainly not! He who knows himself well also knows that, as he is in himself, he is always on the brink of a fall or, if he has fallen, he is always about to sink even deeper. Therefore, if he has resisted temptations, if he has overcome them, this was due not to himself but to the grace of God. "By the grace of God I am what I am."<sup>59</sup> If we know ourselves well, we are aware that this is true. But our cooperation was there, too. This is very true. Otherwise nothing could have been done. God's grace would cease to operate; it would be void in us, according to the words of the Apostle, if cooperation is due to grace. And more often than not, how feeble is that cooperation! Often we are not conscious of our victory because it depresses us, rather than elates us. We have fought, it is true, but how sluggishly! In fact, when we examine our victories more closely, we shall find a new reason for abasing ourselves. God attracted us by his grace to what was good, and we allowed ourselves to be attracted by cooperating with grace and by giving our assent; but on our part how much hesitation was mingled with this cooperation of ours! How much ill-humor, tardiness, indolence, inertia, wavering, vacillation, uncertain intention and even bad will! God withdrew us from evil by his grace, and we permitted ourselves to be withdrawn by cooperating with grace and by giving our consent. But even here, how strong was the desire for evil in us, obstructing our consent and cooperation! How difficult it often was for us to give up what was evil!

As a rule, we give so little to God! But how highly God values even the little that we give him! For God unites each one of our actions to his own; it is sufficient that the act be good. He unites his action to the grace with which we cooperate; he regards the union of his action and our cooperation as one action. Truly his

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<sup>59</sup> 1Cor 15:10.



activity is sublime and is in every respect most holy, perfect and powerful. Hence, to those who can neither see nor recognize our interior impulses and movement, to those who do not (because they cannot) distinguish God's action in us from our own action, what we do appears lofty, holy, noble and perfect in every respect. They consider only the final result; and it is actually what it appears to be, because the activity of God sanctifies our action. Therefore, when the Apostle said: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace in me has not been fruitless," he also added, with good reason, "in fact I have labored more than any of them, yet not I, but the grace of God in me."<sup>60</sup>

And what shall we say about certain natural, good qualities which are seen in those who do not appear to be in the state of grace? Past history records some magnificent deeds performed naturally by pagans; we note among them men of lofty stature from every standpoint. We are sure of the following points concerning these men:

1. After original sin man cannot by his natural power, without the grace of God, love God above all things. Therefore, they who are deprived of this grace seek themselves in everything. If at times they sacrifice themselves for others, without a doubt such an action is directed ultimately to their profit.

2. There are men in whom sense life plays the prevalent role; these men search especially for pleasures. In others the life of the intellect is better developed; these men willingly sacrifice pleasures for renown. Finally, there are others whose greatest concern is to have power over others; these men care nothing for pleasures and approval of men; it is enough for them that their will be done.

3. We find the summit of man's natural perfection among the Stoics. But what did their famous "abstain and endure" entail? Abstain from all pleasures, they said, because they are beneath

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<sup>60</sup> 1Cor 15:10.

man's dignity and make him a slave. Endure every adversity with greatness of soul, for even if you struggle against adversity for a long time, your struggle shall be in vain – they believed in fate – neither shall you thereby prove yourself a man. Hence there prevailed among the Stoics a strong passion for their own honor and a kind of proud estimate of themselves.

4. We have to admit that the gentiles were not entirely deprived of the grace of God.

*Misery in Our Volitional Life*

The heart feels, the mind deliberates, but the will ordains. The body seeks pleasure; the intellect seeks praise; the will seeks to have its own wishes executed, that is, it wants to rule and govern (for a man rules or governs when his wishes are carried out). Thus in this final phase of our life, our life of volition, we seek absolute rule.

However, since our will is not united to the divine will we do not seek what God wills; nor do we even seek to know what his wishes are. Rather, we are occupied entirely with devising plans for ourselves, with taking numerous resolutions. Ordinarily, we turn to God and ask him to help us only after we have already arranged things for ourselves and made the final decision. Thus it is not we who must do God's will, but God who must do ours. It is not we who must serve God, but God who must serve us! Our will has been severed from the will of God. As a result it is fickle; and it repeatedly longs for what it does not possess. Hence, if our will is at length to be done, we are obliged to take care and to weary ourselves in a thousand ways: by fraud, cunning, deceit, flattery, fawning and, if need be, even by force. As a subject, we act in such a way that the Superior commands and has us do what we ourselves wish to do; then, and only then, we become most obedient subjects. Those who are not exactly what we want them to be, who do not think and act to suit our taste, we slay. If we slay them only morally, the wound is nevertheless mortal.

We annihilate them in our own minds by disdain and despising them, by pursuing them with hatred and being angry with them. We annihilate them in the minds of others by ridiculing and calumniating them. We consider them as our enemies, and we will never pardon them because they do not act and think as we would like them to do, because they do not march in step with us, or because they do not have an outward appearance, a manner or bearing that is agreeable to us. If someone should oppose or hinder us in any matter, we immediately become estranged from that person. In fact, we already have an aversion for him. This estrangement, this aversion deep within us, expresses itself in the formula: Would that he did not exist! We say in our heart: Would that he did not exist! We would be most unwilling to have these words escape our lips; but this desire, impressed on us unawares, remains fixed in our heart. Religion, a good education and the fear of God and man do not permit us to see to it that this person's non-existence should become a fact. But unless these factors had intervened, we would have been prepared to commit homicide.

Some individuals are satisfied only by having their own way at all times and having no one oppose them in this - to possess such ruling power that they are masters over themselves and lords in their own households.

Others have higher ambitions and seek greater things. They determine to have authority and to rule over others; indeed, they use any and every means to achieve this goal.

First, they want to rule others materially, if I may put it this way, because they make use of material means. An individual of this type may for example possess a fortune or be at liberty to spend money as he likes; and because of this, others depend on him for their food, clothing and other necessities. Immediately he puts this power to use to keep others in subjection. If they fail to do his bidding, let them beware! Another person of this type, however, wishes to wield authority by way of the heart. He may

be, for example, the superior who wants to win for himself the hearts of his subjects in order that they may obey him more readily; whereas he ought rather to lift their hearts to God. To gain his end he grants them every kind of permission and tolerates everything in them. In this same category are also those who strive to bring others under their power by catering to their desires and passions, winning their favor by means of flattery.

Secondly, they try to rule over others by more spiritual means. They devise a scientific system and impose it upon others. They try to persuade others in order to obtain power among men. Heretics have done this very thing.

Finally, they seek to exercise dominion over others using no other means, imposing upon others nothing except their own will. Famous is the dictum of a certain heretic, who when asked to prove a particular point of his teaching, answered: "Such is my will, such is my command. My will is reason enough." Can they be said to act otherwise who, caring nothing for the law and will of God, make the laws themselves and impose them on others in the name of the nation and therefore in the name of man? Or those who consider the will of the people as the highest law, to which God himself must bow?

But heretics, rulers of nations and those with authority over others are not the only ones who are subject to this misery; even men who labor in the Lord's vineyard are subjected to it. In the direction of souls, God's will and his way are to be sought before all else; souls are to be directed in God's way. But often men impose their own judgments, their own will, upon these souls. To do so is to inflict a great injury upon them. Sometimes superiors, in dealing with subjects, make no effort to discover the proper conduct and approach to be observed with different individuals. Such superiors show no patience in listening to their subjects and attach little importance to their views. They do not incline their heart to those beneath them in such a way that their subjects may be encouraged to reciprocate by opening their hearts to them and placing full confidence in them. Instead they

(such superiors) jump to conclusions or issue hasty commands without considering all the details carefully before God. Their only concern is to be obeyed by their subjects; they care very little about whether or not the obedience is willing and cheerful. In fact, they sometimes seem to prefer a reluctant obedience, because subjects who obey in such a manner indicate that they are doing the will of the superior and nothing more.

Such, to be sure, is the misery of our will. But the full extent of this misery has not yet become apparent to us. In the one nature of man two substances are united: one corporal and one spiritual – matter and spirit. Hence there is in man a sensual and a spiritual life. The first relates to the body, the second to the intellect. But with which one of these, the body or the intellect, is volitional life more closely connected? The will is a faculty distinct from the sensual appetite and from the intellect. Its operation is more properly concerned with the person. The volitional act of the person is an act of the *principium quod* willing, of which the will is the *principium quo*. “Although the act of willing belongs to the concept of a person,” writes St. Thomas, “it proceeds from the natural potency which is the principle of this act.”<sup>61</sup> We have already seen from St. Thomas how “the aversion of the will from God was followed by disorder in every other faculty” and that, as a result, original sin “was centered primarily in the will.” “But,” in the words of St. Anselm, “nature demanded that Adam eat, because it was created in such a way as to require it. However, his eating from the forbidden tree was an act not of the will as a natural faculty, but of his own personal will. Yet nothing a person does is done without his nature. Thus he was a person, and so he was called Adam; his nature made him a man. Therefore it is the person that renders nature sinful: because when Adam sinned, a man sinned.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> III *Sent. Disp.* 18, q. 1, a. 1, q. a. III, ad 1.

<sup>62</sup> Mazella, *De Deo Creante*, p. 736.

Hence this misery does not remain in the will alone, but extends even to the person. Here it appears as self-activity, self-love and egotism, which are nothing else than pride. There is in our innermost person an inclination, a propensity to love ourselves above all things and to put ourselves in the first place.

“In his heart,” says Bossuet, “every man wants to be adored.” From this follows what we have already seen above in speaking of the miseries of the will. “You will be like God,” said the tempter. God is the good, the truth, the law; and we want to be the good, the truth, the law. In the first place, we wish to be *the good* for ourselves and for others; that is, we want to do everything for ourselves as for the highest good. We want everyone else to act always for our welfare; we want them to love us and to be mindful of us. Secondly, we wish to be *the truth* for ourselves and for others; that is, we wish to determine for ourselves and others what is good or evil, so that what pleases us becomes true. Further, we want others to think about everything as we do, and to have exactly the same convictions as we do. Lastly, we want to be a *law* unto ourselves and for others; that is, we want to do as we please, while others do our bidding.

From this greatest of all our miseries, that we extol ourselves above all others and that we look upon ourselves as the center of all activity, many consequences flow. Perhaps we pay too little attention to these.

We often wrangle over trifles, matters that are not worth our while. Yet for us these matters are not trifles, because bound up with them is the question of our *ego*; and when our ego is concerned, we do not judge the issue trivial. We are denied something. Immediately it seems to us that nothing is permitted to us. Why? Not because there is a question of this or that which is forbidden to us and which under other circumstances would perhaps make no difference to us, but rather because it is a question of something being denied to *us*.

A particular individual, for example, must play the leading role in everything. This person talks incessantly and does not know how to listen. Others are obliged to listen to him. But when on occasion it is his turn to listen to others, his mind wanders and he pays no attention to the conversation, because only what he says has any value. Such a man is the first to give an opinion in a discussion; he takes the floor unasked and makes himself a part of things without being invited to do so. He rearranges things already arranged, redoes what has been done. Whatever he himself has not done or arranged he considers either not done right or not well arranged. "Overlooking himself, he keeps a close watch on others" (St. Bernard).

There is nothing more difficult, there is no mortification more burdensome for men than to regulate their lives in accordance with the truth which they themselves preach to others. Their self-love so blinds them that they do not see in themselves the evil which they see in others; or rather, for reasons mentioned above in treating of our misery in general, they do not regard it as evil. They act as if what obliges others does not oblige them: "And they bind together heavy and oppressive burdens, and lay them on men's shoulders; but not with one finger of their own do they choose to move them."<sup>63</sup>

How often it happens that a person will show no regard for others, will conduct himself uncivilly and will make no effort to be pleasant to his neighbor! Let others wait on him, defer to him; let them bear the inconvenience! It never enters his mind to make things easier for others, to lighten a portion of their burden, to eliminate some obstacle or to remove what is a cause of embarrassment, humiliation or shame to them. He never thinks to alleviate the cares of his neighbor, to lift up his spirit when he is sad or cover up his embarrassment. He would never consider

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<sup>63</sup> Mt 23:4.

conforming himself to others. Such a person has no care at all for others.

He interrupts others when they speak and attaches little importance to their opinions; his own voice drowns out those who are speaking. The noise he makes disturbs everyone present. And he does all this not from a dislike for others, not from hatred, not from malice. No, not in the least. He acts thus because he esteems only himself and is concerned and thinks only about himself; he cares for no one else. He regards them as "nobodies" and belittles them. But should he fall sick or be afflicted by sorrow, then everyone must know about it, everyone must be concerned with his plight.

It happens not infrequently that a person nourishes within himself a kind of deep and abiding torment; he feels himself demeaned and wronged. Sometimes not even he himself is able to account for his depressed disposition. Perhaps not enough consideration was shown to him; he may have been overlooked, unheeded or slighted. Others may not have grasped something dear to him, something he wanted, and he did not wish to declare himself openly in the matter. Such a person always remembers the wrongs he has suffered; and, given the occasion, he reminds others of this and makes them take notice. For he wishes that they too should feel distress on his account. How he suffers! How chagrined he is if they go on without adverting to or making much of his suffering!

And what shall we say of hatred? Hating those who oppose us - people who neither are what we want them to be nor act as we want them to act - this we have seen already; and it is not hard to understand this. But what shall we say about the hatred we bear toward those against whom we have sinned, toward those whom we have injured, or even toward those who have heaped benefits upon us? Tacitus said, "It is human nature to hate him whom we have wronged." "Why do you hate me?" asks an Arabian proverb. The answer: "Because I have wronged



you." And in fact, a certain man used to say: "When I see that someone hates me, I ask myself, 'What favor could I have done for him that he should hate me?'" These sayings would be altogether unintelligible to us if we did not realize to what perversity our self-love is likely to lead us. Have we injured someone? Have we covered him with disgrace and abuse? We cannot admit that we have acted shamefully; and what is more, we think that for us everything is licit. Therefore, we had sufficient reason to act as we did. Yet there before our eyes stands the one injured; and our conscience accuses and reproaches us for our word or deed. This experience pains and torments us. Consequently, we begin to find the one whom we injured annoying and intolerable. And so we go on hating him more and more.

Has someone done us a favor? He did nothing more than what he should have done. He was obliged to do this, and therefore we owe him nothing. This is our conviction, for everyman must serve us. However, the benefit we receive from him humbles and depresses us, and as a result, his very person becomes odious to us.

Self-love not only disrupts our relations with our neighbors, it also upsets our relations with God. This disruption shows itself, too, in the scruples which often so severely trouble souls dedicated to God. Sometimes scruples arise from the fact that such souls regard their misery and all its manifestations as sins. They experience a strong temptation; they perceive and feel that their nature draws pleasure from this temptation and is fascinated by it. They are aware that what is evil pleases them, that their will chooses evil. Of course, this choice is not deliberate, but the will feels itself inclined towards the object of the temptation, even towards the temptation itself. If this inclination were lacking, temptation would disturb us only exteriorly; but "everyone is tempted by his own passion," says Sacred Scripture. These souls realize and sense this. Further, they experience a complete inability to resist the inclination. In fact, they cannot see how they

could have resisted; and consequently, it seems to them that they did actually consent to the temptation. This is not a rare occurrence. But, if this is the origin of scruples, better instructed individuals are easily freed from them.

Sometimes there is another cause of scruples. St. Philip Neri used to say that humility is the only remedy for scruples; in which case, the cause of scruples would be pride. We want to rely on ourselves, on our own sufficiency. But "our sufficiency is from God";<sup>64</sup> and we should seek our safety in God and in his mercy. If we know that we are scrupulous, then, when any doubt arises, we may boldly place full confidence in God's mercy and trust that we have not sinned, at least, not gravely. We should, likewise, pray to God to deliver us from error if the opposite is true. St. Alphonsus has this to say: "And, to tell the truth, I never feel more consoled spiritually, nor more assured of being saved, than when I find myself praying and commending myself to God. And I think that the same experience comes to all the other faithful. Then too, the other signs of our salvation are all uncertain and fallible; but that God will hear those who pray to him is a truth certain and infallible, as it is an infallible truth that God does not fail to keep his promises."<sup>65</sup> We should fear one thing, therefore, reliance upon ourselves while lacking confidence in God. "The Lord desires, on the one hand, that we always have a fear of ourselves, so that we do not fall into presumption by placing our confidence in our own strength; on the other hand, then, he requires us to be fully certain of his good will and help and to direct our requests to him, so that we have an unshakable confidence in his goodness."<sup>66</sup>

But we, on the contrary, place our confidence in ourselves, relying on our own uprightness. So feverish a pursuit of repose

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<sup>64</sup> 2Cor 3:5.

<sup>65</sup> *Gran mezzo della preghiera*, p. 1, c. 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. II, c. 4.

and security, of itself, brings to light our self-love. The egoist seeks tranquility; but even in advance he is tormented, foreseeing the mental confusion that is a consequence of sin. Thus, the very thought of sin which he imagines he has committed, agitates him, not because it is an offense against God, but because it deprives him of peace and causes him annoyance. Always solicitous for himself, looking out for his own interests in everything, loving himself above everything else, he is forever occupied with himself; and it is thence that scruples arise.

The same thing happens to a man who is too much concerned about himself and unreasonably anxious about his health; he begins to observe himself, to wait on himself, and to diagnose himself. In this way he manages ultimately to find some imaginary, non-existent disease in himself. He remains alarmed and tormented until he becomes so absorbed in a particular, steady, daily work that he finally stops thinking only of his health.

We have seen how great is the misery which infects both our will and our person. In what, then, does our resistance to this misery consist? In loving and obeying God. "He who has my commandments," says Christ, "and keeps them, he it is who loves me."<sup>67</sup> Therefore, obedience must proceed from love, and it may be regarded as the sole remedy for self-love and self-activity. However, there should be some visible sign of this obedience. For a man manifests in some way what he feels, what he thinks, and what he intends. He must give evidence of this by some act or some conventional sign.

As it has been said: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar. For how can he who does not love his brother, whom he sees, love God, whom he does not see?"<sup>68</sup> The reason for this is that God requires love from us, and some outward sign of this love must be given. It must be proved. For

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<sup>67</sup> Jn 14:21.

<sup>68</sup> 1Jn 4:20.

we do not see God; accordingly we can neither know for certain whether we love God, nor can we easily prove this love because God has no need for us. "Thou art my God, for thou hast no need of my goods," says the Psalmist (Ps. 15:2, Douay-Rheims Version). Therefore Christ said that he would regard as done to himself whatever we did for our neighbor. The love of our neighbor thereby becomes the visible sign of our love for God. Similarly, God requires that we prove our obedience by some visible sign. In paradise such a sign was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "so called by God," says St. Chrysostom, "in virtue of the divine plan. For God had chosen to test man's obedience by forbidding him the fruit of this tree. If man obeyed by avoiding this tree, he would preserve and increase his justice and happiness. If he destroyed these by eating of this tree, he would be punished by death. Through this tree man learned to know by experience what he formerly knew only by speculation, namely, the difference between obedience and disobedience, between good and evil." For us, after original sin, such a sign is the Church, which Christ left on earth in his place and which he has commanded all to obey. We do not see God. Therefore we can neither know for certain that we are obedient to God, nor can we easily prove this obedience. But we have the Church to which Christ said: "He who hears you, hears me" (Lk 10:16). Hence, we can apply here the reasoning of St. John the Apostle, cited above. If anyone says, "I obey God," and does not obey the Church, he is a liar. For how can one who does not obey the Church, which he sees, obey God whom he does not see? It is for this reason that we attach so much importance to obedience to the Church and to its visible Head. Indeed, this is why the faithful wish to show special reverence and love for the Holy Father, whose voice they are determined to follow with great readiness and love, ready to fulfill each and every command and wish of his. For by conducting themselves in this way, they prove their obedience towards God himself.

They who strive to reach a higher degree of perfection even bind themselves by religious obedience, so that, unless the matter is clearly sinful, they regard as the will of God whatever the superior may command or forbid. This obedience, even in the smallest things, limits self-will, self-activity; it puts self-love to death and is the ultimate in self-abnegation. Christ says: "So, therefore, everyone of you who does not renounce all that he possesses, cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:33); and also, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself" (Mt. 16:24). "In the first quote we are asked to renounce what we possess," observes St. Gregory the Great; "in the second, we are told to renounce ourselves". Now perhaps it may not be difficult for a man to give up his possessions; but it certainly is difficult to give up one's own self. To be sure, it is less of a problem to forsake what one has; but to forsake what one is, is a great act indeed.

In order that we might understand more fully that religious obedience actually includes in itself complete self-denial and complete surrender of oneself, let us examine what such obedience entails.

First, all of our actions (except the ordinary or daily ones prescribed by the Constitutions or house rules) must be brought to the attention of the superior and submitted to his judgments. "The will of the superior," says St. Thomas, "however it becomes known, is a tacit precept: and a man's obedience seems to be all the more prompt, for by obeying he forestalls the express command as soon as he understands his superior's will."<sup>69</sup>

Secondly, perfect obedience should be not only external, but also internal; that is, it should prompt not only the external act of the will, but it should also internally move and engage the intellect, the heart, and the will itself. "Obedience," says St. Alphonsus, "in order to be perfect must walk with two feet, that is, with the intellect and the will. When one obeys only with the will and not with the intellect, judging otherwise than the superior judges,

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<sup>69</sup> S.T., II-II, q. 104, a. 2.

such an obedience is lame."<sup>70</sup> "He is not obedient," according to St. Joseph Calasanz, "who obeys without submitting his own judgment." Obedience, therefore, is perfect when the subject submits not only his will, but also his intellect, when he admits that the commands given are not only holy because of the authority of God, in virtue of which the superior commands, but also reasonable, good, and just in themselves, for the reason which motivated the superior. If one obeys in this way, not taking time to understand whether such really is the case, not investigating these commands minutely, not dwelling on the reasons which motivate the superior or on the difficulties which might arise, then such an obedience is called blind obedience; it is a most perfect obedience. But there is also another obedience, no less perfect, by which the subject tries to understand that the given commands are not only holy because of the authority of God in virtue of which the superior commands, but also reasonable, good, and just in themselves, for reasons which move the superior.

Concerning this kind of obedience, Pope Pius X writes, in a letter to his Eminence, the Cardinal Vicar, on the eighth day of December 1903, on the occasion of the *Motu Proprio on Sacred Music*: "We foster the hope that you will support Us in this desired restoration; yet, not solely with that blind submission, however praiseworthy it may be; rather, may we give our assent, in the spirit of upright obedience, to commands which are burdensome and contrary to our own way of thinking and feeling and make our acceptance with that readiness of will which is born of the intimate conviction that we are obliged to act in a certain way for reasons which have not been rightly understood, which are clear, compelling, without repugnance."

This obedience, no less than blind obedience, does not permit us to refuse obedience if the commands of the superior do not seem reasonable, good or just to the subject, for then it would

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<sup>70</sup> *Vera Sposa*, p. 188.

not be obedience. If a subject makes an effort to see the reasons for commands given, he should always do so with a readiness to obey promptly; just as one who tries to understand what he believes by faith approaches his investigation with the disposition that he is ready to believe these articles of faith, even though he should not be convinced of their truth by the light of reason alone. Similarly, obedience tries to understand the meaning of the command more fully and carry it out more reasonably.

But is it possible, perhaps, that by inspecting the motives for obedience, reasons may diminish the merit for the act of obedience? When human reason investigates what pertains to obedience, it can influence the will in two ways. First, antecedently: for example, where the subject is either not willing to obey or not willing to obey promptly, unless human reason persuades it to do so. And this use of our reason diminishes the merit of obedience. Yet, reason can influence the will of the one obeying in another way: when the will is ready to obey, when man cherishes the command received and still turns it over in his mind, considering whether he can find further reasons for it. In this case the activity of human reason does not exclude the merit of obedience; rather, it is an indication of greater merit. These are the words of St. Thomas concerning faith; we have accommodated them to obedience.<sup>71</sup>

Such an examination of the reasons which motivated the superior can, it is true, weaken obedience; but it ought not do so. The reason which is advanced *against obedience* increases the difficulty of the act itself. Hence, provided the will to obey remains the same, he who obeys in spite of the many reasons he sees to the contrary merits more than one who does not see these reasons. Moreover, a reason which is advanced *in favor of obedience* renders the will more prompt to obey, and in this respect it can increase the merit of obedience.

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<sup>71</sup> S.T., II-II, q. 2, a. 10.

But someone might object: A work done for God alone is more meritorious than one in which this intention is mingled with some other, worldly objective; therefore, it is likewise true that human reason mingled with obedience diminishes the merit of obedience. We answer that the activity of reason does not hinder a man from obeying solely for the sake of God because even if this influence were removed he would nevertheless still obey. Therefore, this activity, considered in itself, does not diminish merit except through the fault of the one who obeys. (St. Thomas, as above, is speaking of faith.)<sup>72</sup>

It is easier for subjects to obey when they do so by way of blind obedience, because it is easier to submit our reason when no questions are asked and no arguments are raised. This does not require such great self-denial. To be sure, our greatest concern is to judge, to decide for ourselves what is good and what is evil. Hence, we resolutely maintain our own opinion and firmly adhere to it. We want everything to be exactly what we judge it to be. But obedience crushes us and deprives us of our own will when it is not only external, but also (and more important) when we submit judgment and reason, as we do in internal obedience, either blind or non-blind. The more fully we subject our reason, the more perfectly do we crush our self-will, and the greater is our self-denial. We submit our will most completely not when we accept without inquiry the commands given us, but when we make an effort to realize that they are reasonable, good and just. Thus it often happens that when we submit our reason blindly and without any inquiry, reason, given the opportunity, reasserts to itself and prevents the fulfillment of the command in the way in which we would have fulfilled it if we had crushed our self-will completely. Moreover, the better we realize that the commands of the superior are good and just in themselves, the more resolutely does the will embrace them. By trying to enter

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<sup>72</sup> III *Sent. Disp.*, 24, q. ad 3.



into the mind of the superior, we achieve closer harmony with him. We thus train ourselves like soldiers who try to appreciate the orders of their commander, so that when there is no opportunity to refer a matter to the superior and obtain his permission and the matter is urgent, we then do what we, before God, presume the superior would want us to do.

But of all the motives, let the one based on the love of God be the most important to us. God desires us to obey the superior and to obey in such a way that we submit our own judgment and will, that we carry out his commands in a most perfect manner, that we crush ourselves in every respect. His grace urges us to do this. The will of one who loves accepts and accomplishes the will of God most freely and willingly. Obedience, therefore, is most interior and most perfect in all its parts when the one who obeys progresses to the point where he not only lovingly accepts and willingly executes the external commands given either by the Constitutions or by the superiors, as imposed on him by God, but when, over and above this, he has advanced so far that he intends neither to do nor to will anything except in virtue of obedience – that innermost obedience in virtue of which, prompted by love and by conscience, he feels a constant obligation to the most lovable will of God and to his grace.

### 3. THE GOD-MAN

#### **The Life of Christ in Us**

“God became man, that man might become God,” said St. Augustine. Hence, on the one hand “It is necessary that God alone should deify, by bestowing a partaking of divine nature through a participated likeness, as it is impossible that anything save fire should enkindle.”<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, the condition of human nature appears to require that this participation in the divine nature, which is itself a likeness of God, be expressed in a way that is in keeping with human nature. Therefore, since God has decided to make man a participant in his divine nature, he willed to accomplish this through a man and in accordance with human conditions. In himself, this man would express the likeness to God in a human way, yet most perfectly. And, being at the same time God, he would have the power to share this Divine likeness with us. This man was Christ: God and man, one who is rightly called our Mediator. Wherefore, when God created man in his own image and likeness, “he has also predestined [them] to become conformed to the image of his son”<sup>74</sup> in such a way that, according to the words of the Apostle, “Christ is formed” in them.<sup>75</sup> Further, Christ, through this intimate union with men, deifies them. “I am the true vine,” he says of himself. “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remain on the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing.”<sup>76</sup> This Christ said of himself as a man; for he would not be the vine unless he were

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<sup>73</sup> *S.T.*, I-II, q. 112, a. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Rom 8:29.

<sup>75</sup> Gal 4:19.

<sup>76</sup> Jn 15:1-6.

a man, as St. Augustine teaches. For this reason, explains St. Hilary, did Christ become man: that men might be grafted upon him, as branches on a vine. In fact, both saints add that Christ would not have been able to give life to the branches unless he were also God, for "Christ's humility is, so to speak, an organ of his divinity. Now an instrument does not bring forth the action of the principal agent by its own power, but in virtue of the principal agent. Hence, Christ's humanity does not cause grace by its own power, but by the power of the divine nature joined to it whereby the actions of Christ's humanity are saving actions."<sup>77</sup> Thus, "the interior influx of grace is from no one save Christ, whose manhood, through its union with the Godhead, has the power of justifying."<sup>78</sup> Accordingly, Pope Pius X, who solemnly declared that he proposed to restore all things in Christ, in order that Christ might be all in all, justly says in the first of his encyclical letters to the Pastors of the Church: "Let your first care be to form Christ in those who, in the duty imposed by their vocation, are destined to form Christ in others. We wish to speak of priests, Venerable Brethren. Because all those who are honored with the dignity of the priesthood should know that they have, among the people with whom they live, the same mission that Paul bears witness to having received, when he uttered these tender words: 'my dear children, with whom I am in labor again, until Christ is formed in you!' (Gal 4:19). Now, how will they be able to accomplish such a duty, unless they themselves are first clothed with Christ and so put on Christ that they are able to say with the Apostle: 'It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me' (Gal 2:20)? 'For me to live is Christ' (Phil 1:21)."

Christ, therefore, lives in us! Let us see what this means.

The apostle has said: "That they who are alive may live no longer for themselves, but for him who died for them."<sup>79</sup> Let

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<sup>77</sup> S.T., I-II, q. 112, a. 1.

<sup>78</sup> S.T., III, q. 8, a. 6.

<sup>79</sup> 2Cor 5:15.

them therefore live for Christ, not for themselves, not for their own interest. "For me to live is Christ";<sup>80</sup> thus they think only of Christ, they desire him alone. But "Paul said not only: I live for Christ, but also something far greater: Christ truly lives in me" (St. Chrysostom). Thus, "I live," that is, I have life, desires, thoughts, plans, a will on my own; but "yet no longer I," that is, I am not the first principle of all these things, the "I" who acts of himself and independently. Rather, I do all in Christ, with Christ and through Christ. Furthermore, these desires, thoughts, plans and the very act of the will - I do not have these of myself. Not only do I not live for myself, I do not live with myself, by my own life; neither do I have my delight in myself. I live because of Christ and for Christ; I do not draw my life from myself. I am not the principle of my life; I am not the Alpha. "**Christ lives in me.**" My life does not proceed from myself; neither could there be, in such a case, a fullness of this life in me, for I am nothing. But "of his fullness we have all received"<sup>81</sup>, because Christ is the source of life. And when Christ lives in me, he lives there that he may transform me into himself. For as often as two are united in such a way that one is inevitably changed into the other, observes Albert the Great, speaking of the Eucharistic Bread, the stronger changes the weaker into itself. For this reason also St. Augustine presents Christ as saying of himself: "Nor will you change me into yourself as you change food into your own flesh; rather will you be changed into me." Moreover, not only is Christ united to us as our food, but also "as the head into the members and the vine into the branches he continually infuses strength into the justified; a strength which always precedes, accompanies and follows their good works, and without which these could not in any manner be pleasing and meritorious before God."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Phil 1:21.

<sup>81</sup> Jn 1:16.

<sup>82</sup> *Synod. Trid.*, Session 6, chap. 16.

Thus Christ lives in us as God, but acts as man through his humanity, which, as we have seen, is like an organ of his divinity, and which has the power to justify us because it is joined to the divinity. But how it is possible for Christ, who already enjoys the beatific vision, to live on earth the life of a wayfarer? Strictly speaking, Christ does not live the life of a wayfarer, but the actions which he performed long ago while on earth “by the power of the Godhead... were beneficial – that is, by causing grace in us, both meritoriously and efficiently.”<sup>83</sup> The efficacy of his works endures and is applied to us. In us Christ himself continues his former earthly life as a wayfarer, perfecting in us a reproduction of his own life, and perpetuates his life in us and through us, as by a kind of living instrument.<sup>84</sup> Thus St. Augustine explains these words of the Apostle: “and what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ, I fill up in my flesh”<sup>85</sup>, saying: “All the sufferings of Christ were complete, but only in the head; the sufferings of Christ, in his body, were yet incomplete. Now you are the body of Christ and his members.” That is to say, the actions of Christ were in themselves perfect and complete, but cooperation on our part was yet lacking in them, for Christ did everything for us. Even when he “intercedes for us,”<sup>86</sup> “always living to make intercession for us,”<sup>87</sup> he does this only “through the merits of the Sacrifice consummated on the cross.”<sup>88</sup> And this Sacrifice is continued in the Mass, wherein, in a way, we are all united with Christ by reason both of him who offers, as also of what is offered. The Church can be considered as the oblation, insofar

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<sup>83</sup> S.T., III, q. 8, a. 1.

<sup>84</sup> Louis Laneau, *On the Deification of the Just Through Jesus Christ*, p. 219.

<sup>85</sup> Col 1:24.

<sup>86</sup> Rom 8:34.

<sup>87</sup> Heb 7:25.

<sup>88</sup> Franzelin, *Verb. Incarn. Thes.*, 51.

as it is united with its head.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, when Christ “continued all night prayer to God,”<sup>90</sup> when he permitted himself to be tempted, when he grew in wisdom and grace before God,<sup>91</sup> he, who did not need to pray nor to be tested by temptation and who possessed all wisdom and grace from the beginning, prayed in order that we might be able to pray. Therefore, we say daily, in reciting the Breviary: “O Lord, in union with that divine intention, with which thou didst praise God on earth, I recite these hours for thee.” He was tempted “so that the Christian might not be overcome by temptation” (St. Augustine) and “advanced in wisdom and grace, not in himself, but in his members, that is, in Christians” (St. John Damascene). In a word everything he did while on earth, he did in order that all our prayers and works might begin from him and end in him.

Since this is so, it is not enough to ask ourselves before every action: “What would Jesus have done?” in order to conform our life to the life of Christ, in order that “the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodily frame.”<sup>92</sup> We should rather ask: “What did Jesus do?” “For it is not enough,” says Louis Laneau, “that we perform good works as Christ did. We should also do them with the same dependence and in the same manner as Christ, conforming ourselves interiorly and exteriorly to him so that we may be fully possessed by him and moved by his Spirit; so that we may continue in ourselves his life as a wayfarer, or rather, merit that Christ, who is in us, perfect his likeness in us and as through a living instrument perpetuate his life in us and through us.”<sup>93</sup> “If, therefore, you wish to acquire some virtue – humility, for example – do not consider only the kind and

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<sup>89</sup> Billot, *De Eucharistia*.

<sup>90</sup> Lk 6:12.

<sup>91</sup> Lk 2:52.

<sup>92</sup> 2Cor 4:11.

<sup>93</sup> Louis Laneau, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

degree of humility found in Christ while he lived on earth; but consider also what kind and degree of humility it is that Christ, dwelling within you, desires to practice in you and through you, or for what special reason he wishes to continue his humility through your humility. For the humility which Christ possessed in himself and which Christ continues to possess in his members is truly one and the same, except that it does not produce in each exactly the same acts or the same exterior effects."<sup>94</sup>

By his grace Christ is continually acting within us and urging us to act. Thus they who, full of their own activity, always act by themselves, as if everything depended on themselves, are as much in error as those who, on the other hand, do nothing, forever waiting for God to act. "Do you not know yourselves," the Apostle asks the Corinthians, "that Christ Jesus is in you? unless perhaps you are reprobate."<sup>95</sup> Those are reprobates in whom grace no longer acts, in whom Christ does not dwell. For when Christ dwells in us he lives in us, and lives as a cause of grace. However, since Christ possesses greater power and dignity than we, he is the *first* to act in us. Although he acts together with us, he is always *first* and, as we have seen, transforms us into himself. It is the teaching of St. Thomas that God moves men to will some specific objects through the influence of his grace.<sup>96</sup> For we cannot have a full knowledge of what is good for us; we are also powerless to accomplish any good work,<sup>97</sup> so that we need to be directed and protected by God, who knows and can do all things.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, since Christ lives in us, our "primary and general duty," writes Louis Laneau, "consists in this: that just as the motion of the bodily members depends on the head, so we

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 420.

<sup>95</sup> 2Cor 13:5.

<sup>96</sup> S.T. I-II, q. 9, a. 6, ad 3.

<sup>97</sup> Rom 7:18.

<sup>98</sup> S.T., I-II, q. 109, a. 9, c.

also depend entirely on Christ, or on the influence of the Spirit of Christ." And he demonstrates this as follows:

Creatures by their very nature necessarily depend on their Creator in order to exist and to act. The faithful, too, in their condition as Christians, depend on Christ in order to be and to act as good Christians, for it is written: 'Without me you can do nothing.' We know this, all of us who have been trained in the schools, but we do not all observe this rule of Christian piety. For, wishing to live by our own will, we do not fear to withdraw ourselves from Christ and his sweet dominion. We choose only what pleases us and freely avoid what displeases us: we show no concern for Christ. We act as if it was not Christ, but we who were a head to ourselves... Thus, even as our bodily members depend on the head for motion and for rest, so also should we depend on Christ either to act or not to act. We note this important difference: without the influence of the head, the bodily members cannot will to move; neither is it even possible for them to love. In our case, however, we can act without the special impulse of the Spirit of Christ; but we ought not to do so. We can act: for assuming the presence of the divine assent, we have received from the Creator all that is required for acting. We have a free will and other faculties ready to deliberate upon and do what pleases me. But we should not act in this manner for, having been implanted in Christ, we have surrendered to his will the use of our own will and its freedom of choice. Therefore, we may no longer use them except by the will and command of him who is now our head. Thus, we should now be left without any faculty with which to deliberate and act. In all of us who are in Christ there should now be not many wills, but the one will of Christ, which alone moves us to will and act. For, what a monstrosity would result if in one body there were as many wills as members! Consequently, unless Christ infuses his Spirit into us and urges us on



to action, it is not for us to make any decision upon our own authority or to aspire to anything. When we act otherwise, we seem insolently to arrogate to ourselves the office and authority of the head. Nor does it help to plead as an excuse that what we wish to do is not evil, but good. Neither does it suffice that the members be moved to action in any way whatever; they must be moved by that strength and energy which arises from their union with the head. This must be true if their operations are to be regarded as vital actions and not mere convulsive and unnatural movements. Hence, it often happens that works which seem good and praiseworthy in other respects, because they are not performed in dependence upon the Spirit of Christ, proceed only from some natural inclination. Lacking the vital force and energy of the Holy Spirit, they are malodorous before God and pass away into nothingness.<sup>99</sup>

In baptism we renounce sin because “all who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death. For we were buried with him by means of baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ has arisen from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life.”<sup>100</sup> And in what does this newness of life consist? This newness of life consists in a life with Christ: “put on the Lord Jesus Christ”, exhorts the Apostle.<sup>101</sup> “For all you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”<sup>102</sup> Thus we are sons of the resurrection. As Christ by dying has destroyed death and by rising has restored life, so also we, fighting under this banner and dead to ourselves by his power, confidently hope to participate, by rising with him, in that new, real and eternal life which flows from Christ.

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<sup>99</sup> Louis Laneau, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-196.

<sup>100</sup> Rom 6:3-4.

<sup>101</sup> Rom 13:14.

<sup>102</sup> Gal 3:27.

In regard to this new life let us make our assimilation to Christ consist in rising with him as true sons of God, so that we may at the same time live and do all things together with him. Then God will begin to reign in us through Jesus Christ; he will abide in us as our God, our Lord and our all, and will do this the more effectively from day to day until we can finally say with the Apostle: "It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me."

This life of Christ in us begins in baptism. It is perfected in the Holy Eucharist, the sacramental effect of which consists principally in the nourishment of the soul by a certain conversion or transformation into Christ of the one communicating. St. Thomas teaches that in Holy Communion the body of Christ is united with ours. "For a shoot from a good tree has the power, if it be grafted onto the stem of even a wild tree, to overcome its bitterness, to turn the other's bitterness into its own sweetness, and to make the wild stem produce its own good fruit. Similarly, the body of Christ, which is implanted in us, cancels our defects and draws us to its own goodness, so that as Christ brings forth leaves, blossoms and fruits of justice, so also do we through him."<sup>103</sup>

Now let us consider our relations with our neighbors. When we have once established the love of God as the foundation of our life, we should also consider fraternal charity, rooted in the same love of God, as the supreme law of our lives; we should regard the following words of Christ as especially directed to us: "A new commandment I give you... that as I have loved you, you also love one another."<sup>104</sup> We ourselves are not able to love others as Christ has loved us. However, since God does not command us to do what is impossible, this precept of our Lord assumes that Christ dwells in us, and that in us and with us Christ loves our neighbor.<sup>105</sup> Thus this love of ours is a pledge of our

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<sup>103</sup> *Opusc.*, 57, c. 20.

<sup>104</sup> Jn 13:34.

<sup>105</sup> Argument of Sister Therese of the Infant Jesus. Cf. autobiography.

resurrection with Christ; it is our second resurrection and our life together with Christ. "We have passed from death to life because we love the brethren,"<sup>106</sup> states St. John the Apostle. Hence, Christ has also declared: "By this will all men know that you are my disciples: if you have love for one another."<sup>107</sup> In our apostolic life, therefore, following the example of Christ our Lord and intimately united with him, animated by the same love of God and the same charity for man, we shall consider the end of our apostolic labors to enkindle that same divine fire which he himself came to cast upon the earth, and to animate the souls of men with this fire of Christ. This, their new life from God, will indeed be a new resurrection; it will be the kingdom of God and of Christ in the world.

That we may truly live this new life and help others to live it, that is, that Christ may live in us and in others, we should place the fullest trust in the special protection and help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, conceived without sin. For since Mary is the Mother of the Savior, she is the true mother of the living; through her we possess life, this new life that is Christ. She is our mother, the mother of each and every one of us, not only because she once brought forth the Savior, but also because she brings him forth in each one of us. For since she is the mother of divine grace, all graces are in the hands of Mary; and Christ is formed in us by divine grace. Most fittingly, therefore, may she say to us: "My dear children, with whom I am in labor again, until Christ is formed in you."<sup>108</sup> Origen very clearly expresses this motherhood of Mary in regard to each of us: "Jesus said to his mother: Behold your son; and not: Behold, this also is your son. It is just as if he had said: Behold, this is the Jesus to whom you have given birth; for he who is perfect no longer lives himself,

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<sup>106</sup> 1Jn 3:14.

<sup>107</sup> Jn 13:35.

<sup>108</sup> Gal 4:19.

but Christ lives in him. And since Christ lives in him, Mary hears these words: Behold, your son Christ."<sup>109</sup> Wherefore, as in our whole life we rely on Christ, follow Christ and tend to Christ, so also let us rely on Mary, follow Mary and tend to Christ through Mary; so that through Mary, the New Eve and the true mother of the living, a new life according to God may be developed and the Kingdom of Christ on earth extended. Let us have most fervent recourse to this Blessed Mother, so that she may cherish us with her motherly care and fill us to overflowing with the graces of Christ.

### **Christ's Dwelling in Us: When Christ Does and When Christ Does not Live in Us**

Let us view this life of Jesus Christ in us more closely and examine its individual stages.

#### *The Sensitive Life*

How does the life of Christ in us and with us appear in our sensitive, in our bodily life; and how does it not appear there?

Whatever is inordinate in this bodily life, even though it is not sinful, cannot proceed from Christ. Christ then no longer lives in us; but it is we who live our own life, a natural life – and nature seeks what pleases it. And what is inordinate in this bodily life of ours? We have already seen the answer to this. It is inordinate for us to seek pleasure, enjoyment and delight, for these should not be the end of our actions; they can only be a means to the end or they can result from its possession. If, therefore, we follow in an individual act the inordinate inclinations of our bodily life, Christ can neither work together with us nor can he live in us. As a matter of fact, even then he still lives in us (unless we have entirely driven him out by mortal sin); he lives by urging us through the grace of the Holy Spirit to resist the inordinate inclination,

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<sup>109</sup> In John.

to mortify all the inordinate movements of our nature, and to be sorry if we have already given in to this inclination. Through his Spirit Christ awakens our conscience in us, causes us to reflect; that is, he directs our attention to our actions and moves us to choose what is right and best. If he is to do this, however, our consent is necessary. "You, however," says the Apostle, "are not carnal but spiritual, if indeed the *Spirit of God* dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the *Spirit of Christ*, he does not belong to Christ. But if *Christ is in you*, the body, it is true, is dead by reason of sin... for if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if *by the spirit* you *put to death* the deeds of the flesh, you will live. For whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."<sup>110</sup> Therefore, if we wish Christ to live in us in every one of our actions, we must labor untiringly and continually to acquire that mortification which holds the body in subjection.

But is it fitting that Christ should have a share in our common and ordinary daily actions?

We are not speaking here about indeliberate acts of men (*actus hominis*), which are indifferent with respect to merit, and are neither morally good nor morally evil. Rather, we are speaking of deliberate human acts (*actus humani*). These are not indifferent in concrete cases. Therefore, they are either good or bad, and if good, are performed with the aid of divine grace. Hence, the Apostle said: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink or do anything else, do all for the glory of God."<sup>111</sup> Moreover, actions that are performed for the glory of God are not worthless or contemptible. It is certain that to be meritorious our actions must be human acts, hence they must be performed with some deliberation. Otherwise they would not be free acts, and in that case they could not be meritorious. These actions must be ordered, that is, tending to a proper end. Finally, they must be performed for the glory of

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<sup>110</sup> Rom 8:9; 10; 13; 14.

<sup>111</sup> 1Cor 10:31.

God; that is, man ought to refer his action to God, since he is obliged to practice charity with a certain degree of perfection. For there is a perfection of charity, says St. Thomas, which all are bound to practice. It is not enough to direct all things to God habitually; to do so actually is impossible, just as it is impossible to be always thinking of God. But we are all bound to direct all things to God by means of a *virtual intention*: and this is nothing more than to have God as our ultimate end. St. Thomas explains this:

As in a series of efficient causes the influence of the first cause perdures in all the following causes, an intention directed to the principal end endures through all the secondary ends; for this reason whoever actually intends some secondary end, virtually intends the principal end. For example, while a physician is in the act of collecting herbs he intends to prepare a potion, without a thought of health. Yet he has a virtual intention to restore someone's health and it is for this reason that he prescribes the medicine. So also, when anyone directs his whole being to God as his final end, this intention of the final end, which is God, remains virtually present in everything that he does for himself. Hence, it is possible to gain merit from every act as long as one has charity. It is in this sense, then, that the Apostle urges us to direct everything to the glory of God.<sup>112</sup>

On the other hand, it is not so easy to perform such a meritorious act, even in the most common and ordinary matters such as eating and drinking! To observe moderation in food, to take care not to exceed due measure, to eat not for pleasure but to sustain life and, in addition, to retain God as our ultimate end, at least virtually, is indeed a great and arduous task. Therefore,

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<sup>112</sup> *De Caritate*, a. 11, ad 2.

why should it be unbecoming for Christ to act together with us in these matters?

During his life on earth, Christ ate and drank. "For John came neither eating nor drinking," that is, he led an extraordinary life, not within the reach of all and not easily to be imitated; and "The Son of Man came eating and drinking,"<sup>113</sup> that is, leading an ordinary life. Certainly, Christ ate and drank as he performed other actions, in a most perfect manner. He did not seek delight, but regulated all things according to necessity. He did all things for the glory of God, so that we, united with him in all things, might be united with him in this manner of acting as well.

However, that Christ led a most perfectly regulated human life is not all. The characteristic, the principal part of his life was the suffering he endured on our account and for us. He was a man of sorrows. If, therefore, he continues his life by living in us, we must suffer likewise.

Accordingly, the spirit of Christian mortification consists principally in this, that as Christ our Lord suffered for love of us, died and was buried, so we also should desire to suffer for love of him and, in the words of the Apostle; "rejoice in sufferings, filling up in our flesh what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ" (cf. Col, 1:24). In this way we shall be better and more perfectly able to die and be buried together with him. Therefore, we should make great efforts to acquire mortification of the spirit, by which we conquer ourselves in all that is repugnant to nature, overcome every difficulty, tread under foot all that turns us away from God. By this mortification of the spirit we quickly overcome every disinclination to the apostolic life, surmount what is arduous and difficult, bear all things and if need be, lay down our life to gain the souls of our neighbors for God.

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<sup>113</sup> Mt 11:18-19.

God, desiring that “the life of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodily frame”<sup>114</sup>, has himself provided that each of us has something to bear and endure in this life. Therefore, we should accept all adversities as coming to us from God. We usually attribute any evil we encounter to the malice of men. If we have had to suffer something from others, the guilt of the evil is theirs, of course, but it was God who arranged that we should fall in with such people. When in order to condemn Jesus, Caiphas said: “It is expedient for us that one man die for the people, instead of the whole nation perishing,” the Gospel adds, “This, however, he said not of himself; but being high priest that year, he prophesied.”<sup>115</sup>

Certainly, Caiphas committed a very grave sin and was a malicious man; for he himself confessed that “this man performs many wonders”; and nonetheless he sacrificed an innocent man for the sake of human prudence: “If we let him alone as he is, all will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away sy and by condemning Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies. This conclusion is clear: even those who do us harm do so by a divine purpose and, consequently, we should accept everything as coming from God. Hence, whatever comes to us from other causes, whatever seems to happen to us by chance is from God, in order that we may have an opportunity to suffer. Accordingly, those who are sick (and who is not sick at one time or another?) will look upon their ill health as a means of sanctification given to them by God. Hence, they will submit themselves with resignation and thanksgiving, accept humbly and thankfully the services offered them, and diligently avoid being exacting and oversensitive. Acting in this way, they will edify others and they themselves will not lose the fruit of their sufferings.

But, then, are we not permitted to enjoy any consolation in our life of union with Christ? Is it ruled out that we should receive any

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<sup>114</sup> 2Cor 4:11.

<sup>115</sup> Jn 11:47f.



pleasure or any delight? Indeed, we can experience such and even the greatest! For only what is inordinate obstructs our union with Christ. Now it is not inordinate to experience all these pleasures and delights, but only to strive for them as our end. For just as it is impossible to eat and not experience any taste or feel a certain pleasure, so likewise it is impossible not to experience any consolations in a life together with Christ. On the contrary, in the greatest torments of body and soul which a man endures for Christ and with Christ, he finds true peace – that peace which the world cannot give – and consolation. To Christ himself in his agony “there appeared an angel from heaven to strengthen him.”<sup>116</sup>

There are times when we, too, may seek some solace or consolation – never, of course, for its own sake, but in order that we may more easily attain our end. Thus, for a sick man who finds it difficult to eat, and who has no relish for food, we should procure food prepared in such a way that he may eat with a better appetite; for he has to eat in order to regain his health and preserve his life. To the weak in spirit God usually gives certain spiritual delights and consolations to enable them to endure hardships more easily, to draw them to the spiritual life, and to encourage them in time of temptation. We should accept these gifts from God with thanksgiving and with humility as well. And if we become aware of their necessity, we should even actively seek them. In the Garden of Olives Christ himself twice came to his disciples, so that they might comfort him, as we see clearly in his reproach to them: “Could you not, then, watch one hour with me?”<sup>117</sup>

It is certainly more perfect not to seek consolation (unless this is done with a kind of presumption); the way of love is more perfect than the way of fear. It is more perfect to accept the cross than to avoid it. It may happen that one has so perfect a fear of God that, penetrated by the realization of his misery and humbly distrustful

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<sup>116</sup> Lk 22:43.

<sup>117</sup> Mt 26:40.

of himself, he does not receive Holy Communion more frequently; yet, on the other hand, this distrust of himself may strengthen his trust in God and prompt him to more frequent Communion. Clearly this latter is the more perfect. It may be perfect to refuse a cross when one fears that he could not carry it well: of course, leaving everything finally to the will of God. Christ wanted to take upon himself even the less perfect when he prayed in the Garden of Olives saying: "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; yet not as I will, but as thou wilt."<sup>118</sup> His will, his human will, shrank from the cross. He did not will what God willed! "Yet not as I will" he said. Thus he experienced in his will an opposition to the divine will, an opposition which he at length overcame! And, hanging on the cross, he cried out in a loud voice, as though he wanted to bewail his suffering and entreat relief for himself: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"<sup>119</sup>. Although it is clear from so many and such convincing proofs that Christ did what he did for us, yet we can also adduce this further proof: he wished to permit in himself even what is certainly less perfect. And he did this for no other reason than that we might be able to unite ourselves with him even in our less perfect actions and so gain merit from them. It is also true, by this fact, that what appears to us the less perfect in Christ, emerges in him as the most perfect, because he permitted this out of love for us.

#### *The Life of the Intellect*

In our intellectual life, the life of our spirit, what can we say pertains to the life of Christ in us and with us, and what does not? Everything in this intellectual life which is inordinate, even though it is not sinful, cannot proceed from Christ. Christ, then, no longer lives in us in this instance or in this action. And what is inordinate in our intellectual life? We have already dwelt on this.

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<sup>118</sup> Mt 26:39.

<sup>119</sup> Mk 15:34.

It is inordinate to seek fame, the shadow of false renown. Christ has said of himself: "Yet I do not seek my own glory"<sup>120</sup>; and when he was praised by others and called good: "Why dost thou call me good?" he replied. "No one is good but only God."<sup>121</sup> And he commanded us to act in such a way as not to boast even of the good that is in us, realizing that it does not come from us: "So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."<sup>122</sup> Hence the Apostle also says: "But he that glories, let him glory in the Lord."<sup>123</sup>

Christ did more than live a human life that was most perfectly ordered; he also wished to suffer humiliations, ignominy, and insults. Therefore, if his life is to be manifested and continued in us, we too must walk the path of humiliation and rejection. God will see to it that every one of us has some humiliations to endure in the course of his life; it is for us to accept them from the hand of God, and bear them in union with Christ. Therefore, as often as we become the object of calumny or detraction, we should remain silent and not defend ourselves, unless there is danger that God's glory would suffer because of our silence.

### *The Life of the Will*

In the life of the will, what can be the life of Christ in us and with us, and what cannot? In this life, anything inordinate, even though not sinful, cannot come from Christ.

And what is inordinate in this life? First, self-love is inordinate; the love of God and of neighbor is ordinate. Christ loved men for God's sake, and not because of any of their qualities, or because he found any solace in them; for he loved those who were sinners, and therefore his enemies. St. Paul said: "Be you,

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<sup>120</sup> Jn 8:50.

<sup>121</sup> Lk 18:19.

<sup>122</sup> Mt 5:16.

<sup>123</sup> 2Cor 10:17.

therefore, imitators of God, as very dear children and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and delivered himself up for us an offering and a sacrifice."<sup>124</sup> Christ demands from us a love like his own: "that as I have loved you, you also love one another."<sup>125</sup> It is by means of this love that we must be united to Christ. His was an active love: "He went about doing good."<sup>126</sup> Whenever there was any question of the love of God or of a duty to be performed, he showed no regard for persons, even those who were dearest to him, because his own love was well-ordered. When his mother said to him, "Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold, in sorrow thy father and I have been seeking thee," he answered: "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"<sup>127</sup> On another occasion he said: "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother."<sup>128</sup> When love in us is ordered in this way, then Christ acts in us and with us: He lives in us.

Therefore self-activity is inordinate, because it is no longer the activity of Christ. Then it is we ourselves who live, and not he in us. And so we must avoid self-activity as much as possible. This still is not enough. Not only has it been said: "I live, now not I," but also, "I live," and, "Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Consequently, it is we who must live; but we must live the life of Christ. It is we who must work; but we must work in cooperation with the grace of Christ. It is not we but the grace of Christ, Christ himself, who must work with us.

We have already seen what principally constituted original sin. Whatever God had destined for him, man desired to obtain by himself, by his own activity and "not with divine assistance,

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<sup>124</sup> Eph 5:1-2.

<sup>125</sup> Jn 13:34.

<sup>126</sup> Acts 10:38.

<sup>127</sup> Lk 2:49-50.

<sup>128</sup> Mt 12:50.

according to the divine design." Relying upon himself, man determined to do his own will, not God's. In order to destroy this sin, Christ took special pains to fulfill the will of His Father in all things. "For just as by the disobedience of the one man the many were constituted sinners, so also by the obedience of the one the many will be constituted just."<sup>129</sup> Christ himself said: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me"<sup>130</sup>; "I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me"<sup>131</sup>; and "of myself I can do nothing!" Nothing! Consequently, if the life of Jesus Christ is to be manifested in us, if Christ living in us is to continue his life in us, we also must obey the will of God in all things. We should be totally indifferent to "what" God wills for us, for the "what" adds nothing to the merit of our actions. We should be satisfied if we accomplish the will of God which relates to us and to which Christ impels us by his grace as perfectly as Christ fulfilled his Father's will as it pertained to him. Louis Laneau writes:

Many people believe that they render sufficient homage to Christ when they abstain from drunkenness, theft, murder and other such heinous crimes; they worry little or not at all about other sins. Others again, endowed with deeper understanding, also avoid venial sins and certain coarser imperfections, fully aware that such things cannot be reconciled with submission to Christ. But lacking more abundant light, they go no further. Such men can rightly be said to serve God in part, and themselves in part. But they who strive for what is more perfect are careful to preserve not just a partial and limited dependence on Christ, but a universal dependence embracing everything. Would anyone believe an individual to be totally dependent upon Christ if he avoids what are manifestly sins and imperfections, but

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<sup>129</sup> Rom 5:19.

<sup>130</sup> Jn 4:34.

<sup>131</sup> Jn 5:30; 8:28.

lives as suits himself the rest of the time? Christ as our head acts with us through the inner influence of his own Spirit, by means of interior inspirations and by secret impulses and movements of the heart which can hardly be detected externally. For Christ desires to govern his own body, and by means of his life-giving Spirit to move each of the members of that body, a living instrument, to continue to perform the functions which he fulfilled during his sojourn on this earth. Further, he desires to use them as he sees fit. Christ is not satisfied that we should perform good works for him or for his intentions; he wants us to do them as we are moved by him and in dependence on him. He does not just wish that we should be holy in him; he wishes us to be holy only in dependence on his Spirit. In this way he will more gently and more fully perpetuate his life through us and in us. When individuals come to know and perceive that they can no longer be independent, they will not venture to form any resolutions by themselves alone, nor will they determine purely on their own to undertake a work, even one that may be good in every other respect. Otherwise, were they boldly to presume to claim for themselves what belongs to Christ they would, in their opinion, offend Christ their Lord and Head. Therefore they stand by, waiting patiently until they judge, and probably in good faith, that they are being moved, almost guided, by the Lord to act. Of such men It can be said that they have died and are buried together with Christ; for they are genuinely of the opinion that they are nothing and can do nothing without Christ. Hence they carefully avoid undertaking anything hastily, without waiting for the Spirit of Christ to move them; for they fear reverting to their former way of life and manner of activity - it makes no difference how dormant these may seem - lest they withdraw themselves from submission to Christ and seem to wish to rise without him. While this manner of action is, indeed, very noble, it is likewise difficult and arduous. Consequently, I foresee that it will not be acceptable to all. For who

wants to die to himself completely? Does anyone want to abandon his former diligence and way of acting? Is anyone willing to annihilate totally his own life, his own thought and his own activity in order to be assimilated to Christ in all things? It is human to wish to manage our own affairs, to be our own counsellor and to do everything as if we were the absolute masters of our soul and faculties. Who does not realize that, if these desires are rooted in nature, a great deal of labor will be required to subdue them? Although this task cannot be accomplished without difficulty, yet it is not impossible for those who love God. When someone resolves to take up arms against himself and his nature for Christ, he experiences the divine assistance which comforts him and by which he daily grows stronger. Christ has accepted us as his disciples on the condition that we renounce not just what we possess, but also our own souls. For when Christ recommended that we deny even our own souls, what else did he intend except that we should renounce all the affections of our heart, depend upon him in everything, carry his yoke without rebelling and follow him gladly and willingly, wherever he may lead us?<sup>132</sup>

But in what way are we to know how and to what the grace of God is moving us? How are we to know where Christ is leading us, in order that we might follow him willingly? Temptations manifest God's will to us internally; for there can be no doubt that God wills us to resist them. Externally, our duties indicate the will of God for us. Therefore, when we encounter temptation, when we have a duty to fulfill, God's grace intervenes, Christ himself is there. But God requires our cooperation. Now we cooperate most efficaciously by praying. Therefore Christ has said: "Pray, lest you enter into temptation,"<sup>133</sup> and, "we ought always

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<sup>132</sup> Louis Laneau, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-212.

<sup>133</sup> Lk 22:40.

to pray and not to faint."<sup>134</sup> But is not the prayer itself due to grace? Yes, but this grace of prayer is given to all. God is constantly moving us to prayer by means of his grace. "The Spirit helps our weakness. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself pleads for us with unutterable groanings."<sup>135</sup> And because you are sons," the Apostle tells the Galatians, "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts crying, 'Abba Father.'"<sup>136</sup> The Council of Trent states: "For God does not command impossibilities, but by commanding admonishes you both to do what you can do and to pray for what you cannot do, and assists you that you may be able" (Dent. 804). If, then, upon being obliged to act, you find it easy either to fulfill your duty or to resist temptation, thank Christ – for you surely possess his grace – and proceed to do what you can. If you encounter difficulties, pray; for God urges you to ask him for what you need, and he himself will help you to be able to overcome these difficulties. Since this is so, since we must throughout our life tend to a most intimate union with God by love, and since the necessary means to this end is prayer – upon which depends God's grace, without which, as we know, we are nothing, have nothing and can do nothing – we must consequently remain steadfast in prayer, draw all our strength from it, so that by cooperating faithfully with grace at all times we may be able to attain the end to which we are called. Just as intimate intercourse with God is the most important goal of our entire life, so must prayer, which leads to it, be our principal occupation. Therefore, we shall regard as especially addressed to us the words of Christ the Lord: "We ought always to pray and not to faint."<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Lk 18:1.

<sup>135</sup> Rom 8:26.

<sup>136</sup> Gal 4:6.

<sup>137</sup> Lk 18:1.



Our duties, our labor, our external works – all contribute most efficaciously toward our interior formation and therefore pertain also to prayer. “Everything,” says St. Margaret de Pazzi, “that we do from obedience is prayer.” It is said that he prays little who only prays when he is on his knees. Prayer is an elevation of the mind to God. Therefore, in order to pray, we have only to turn our eyes to God in supplication. We can always pray in this way. A diligent student in the presence of his teacher does not forget that he is being watched by the teacher; yet, instead of hindering him from doing his work, the presence of the teacher helps; because it reminds him to do his work well and keeps him from distractions. Similarly no labors, either spiritual or manual, should distract us from prayer and from the presence of God. For every work, even the most insignificant, belongs to the great work which God is accomplishing in us. Hence we should not make light of them. Instead we ought to apply ourselves in such a way as to accomplish our works in the most diligent and suitable manner possible. Let us make every act a prayer: our studies, the care of souls, our ministry; let all our dealings with men be a prayer; above all, let us make a prayer of solitude, seeking it whenever charity towards our neighbor and our duties permit.

However, our life with Christ – or better, Christ’s life in us – is not confined to the limits of prescribed duties or to the conquest of temptations. Various circumstances, the necessity or usefulness of a certain act and finally interior inspiration are frequent means whereby God’s will is made known to us. “Why would God plant the desire in us,” asks St. Bernard, “unless he also willed to satisfy it?” Louis Laneau writes:

Let us make this our rule: never undertake a work that is not prescribed or necessary, even though it may be otherwise licit and not forbidden by any law, as long as you are not prompted to it by an inspiration of grace. On the other hand, never under any pretext neglect works that are of precept, whether or not

the inspiration of grace is present. But in such a case you must humbly ask the Holy Spirit for permission to act, in order to supply for the lack of an internal impulse. This rule for matters of precept can with equal merit be applied to other matters which, although they are not of precept, are still very useful, sometimes even necessary and, in any case, in harmony with right reason. It is well known that the Holy Spirit by means of special illuminations and impulses moves us to more perfect and more excellent works. Works that are of precept are sufficiently clear and manifest. One does not need extraordinary movements of grace to discover them; as a rule, ordinary grace suffices for this purpose. But that which is more perfect lies hidden, and no one can even think of such a thing without the special help of the Holy Spirit; much less can he rise to it. When we speak of what is more perfect, we do not mean only that which is of greater importance, such as selecting a state of life or the undertaking of some great work for the glory of God; we mean to include also a great number of other things which, although they are not so important, are very frequent and, if done properly, contain immense treasures of grace and holiness. Because these latter are considered small and insignificant, they are generally neglected. But the Holy Spirit who watched over our progress urges us in almost every moment to numberless acts of mortification and humility which, though they might be regarded as insignificant, restrain us from various sensual delights, gently reprimand and rebuke us for lesser faults and prompt us to do penance for our sins without delay. He keeps us from uttering idle words or from glancing about us in a spirit of levity, from reading a few lines of a particular book out of curiosity or from tasting morsels of food through sensuality. Constantly and lovingly he continues to impel or deter us from any number of such things. It is truly marvelous to note the solicitude with which the Holy Spirit watches over us, to draw us away from external things and to draw us to the interior. No novice

master promotes the spiritual welfare of his subjects with such great zeal. He says: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock'<sup>138</sup> to teach, to admonish, to forbid and to command. When he loves someone more and destines him for higher things, he also tests and chastises him more severely. That is why those men who are dearer to God than others and who are, as it were, bound by the Spirit, are scarcely free to move a foot or say a word without receiving an immediate rebuke from the Holy Spirit who accuses them of their faults and strikes their heart with a kind of interior hammer.<sup>139</sup>

But if we continue to look about us and wait for God's grace in this way, will we not be impeded in our activity? By no means! As St. Gregory the Great has said: "The grace of the Holy Spirit knows no tardy efforts." The saints of God are witnesses to this truth; it is sufficient to contemplate what they accomplished. St. Gregory himself is a witness. Of him Pope St. Pius X wrote:

He, who in the highest position of pontifical dignity first wished to be called the servant of the servants of God, did not strive for success in the way of the princes of this world, by force and power; he did not prepare the way for himself with profane knowledge and the persuasive words of human wisdom, with the foresight of civil prudence or with plans for the restoration of society prepared through long study and then applied. Finally - what is astonishing - he did not think in terms of planning and proposing some vast scheme whereby he might make steady progress in the apostolic ministry; for as it is well known, he firmly believed that the end of the world was imminent and therefore that there remained only a short time to accomplish any great deeds.

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<sup>138</sup> Rev 3:20.

<sup>139</sup> Louis Laneau, *op. cit.*, pp. 386, 388, 389.

And yet he accomplished so much that “the entire Middle Ages lived on the fruits of his labors.” How did he do all this? “We can safely say, and Gregory himself was so persuaded, that it was the hand of God that produced such results. The words which he spoke to the holy monk Augustine concerning the conversion of Britain can certainly be applied to all the other activities of his apostolic ministry: “Whose work is this except of the one who said: ‘My Father has worked till now and I work?’”<sup>140</sup>

Since this is so, we can conclude with the words of Louis Laneau: “Let us beware of hardening our hearts and becoming like the Jews of old who ‘heard the sound of the words, but entreated that the word should not be spoken to them.’ They cried: ‘Let not God speak to us, or we shall die.’<sup>141</sup> Instead we should say: Let God speak to us, so that we may soon die the death of the just; and that dying in Christ to all, even the slightest, affections of our nature and being buried together with him, we may attain to a new life in the Risen Christ.”<sup>142</sup>

## Jesus Living in Us in the Communion of His Mysteries

### *Our Spiritual Birth*

“For we are buried with him by means of baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ has arisen from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be so in the likeness of his resurrection also.”<sup>143</sup> “Here the Apostle proves that we have died to sin and that we must not

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<sup>140</sup> Encyclical Letter of St. Gregory the Great.

<sup>141</sup> Heb 12:19; Ex 20:19.

<sup>142</sup> Laneau, *op. cit.*, p. 392.

<sup>143</sup> Rom 6:4–5.

live for it again, because through baptism we have been incorporated into Christ in order that we may live the life of Christ."<sup>144</sup>

The entire life of Jesus Christ must be renewed in us in order that we may live his life from beginning to end. Each moment of this life follows gradually one after another; in like manner, each and every moment must gradually be continued in us.

The first of these moments is that of the nativity of Jesus Christ. Our spiritual birth must be adapted to and regulated by the birth of Christ. Or, to put it better, the birth of Christ must be continued in us; Christ must be born in us.

The general characteristic of Christ's birth is spoliation. From the very beginning Christ as man possessed all knowledge, all power, and consciousness of his person. Consequently, he freely and willingly agreed to this state of spoliation and submitted to it deliberately and advisedly. And so he began his life by despoiling and renouncing himself. As man he accepted and chose what man finds most difficult: cold, inconvenience, the stable, the manger. From the very beginning of his life he chose what man regards as most miserable: nakedness, poverty, a dwelling not for men but for animals, the condition of infancy, insignificant and weak, a cave instead of a palace, a manger for a throne and cattle for courtiers. Upon entering into life he chose what man considers as offering least freedom: the helplessness of an infant, the surrender of himself into the hands of his mother to be bound and carried wherever she pleased. We too, in our common life with Christ, should begin with spoliation: "stripping off the old self with his deeds, and putting on the new."<sup>145</sup> Jesus Christ is the new man. "For all you who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ," says the Apostle.<sup>146</sup> Hence, "put on the Lord

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<sup>144</sup> Cornelius a Lapide.

<sup>145</sup> Col 3:9-10.

<sup>146</sup> Gal 3:27.

Jesus Christ."<sup>147</sup> Spoliation therefore signifies that "as regards your former manner of life you are to put off the old man, which is being corrupted through its deceptive lusts."<sup>148</sup> We must do this in order that we may put on Christ, particularly; by resisting rather than gratifying the flesh, that is, by not seeking delights and pleasures but rather patiently bearing inconveniences and annoyances; by denying the spirit every ambition, that is, by not seeking glory and honors and by bearing affliction and humiliations; by saying farewell to our own will and by not seeking independence, but rather giving ourselves entirely to Christ and fulfilling his will.

Christ also manifests this state of spoliation in his Mystical Body, that is, in the Church.

Christ was both God and man; but men did not perceive his divinity. From the moment of his birth he was full of wisdom, power, and virtue; yet men regarded him an ordinary infant. God permitted this! The wise men of the day did not believe in him, although they proved from the Sacred Books that the Messiah had already come. Herod had no personal experience of the Messiah and his Mission although he was aware of them, and he ordered Jesus to be killed. Jerusalem, hearing that the Messiah was born, was troubled; Jewish patriotism was aroused by the benefits that might come to them, but they were not concerned about Jesus. They would have been concerned about Jesus if they could have used him for their own ends. So likewise the Church in the eyes of man is a simple infant with whom one can do whatever he likes. Therefore they plunder, bind, hinder and persecute her. And God permits this. The faithful see the divine in the Church, but because they are one with the Church as its living members, men rob, imprison and persecute them also.

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<sup>147</sup> Rom 13:14.

<sup>148</sup> Eph 4:22.

Thus it happens that what grieves the Church grieves them also; when the Church suffers, they suffer too.

It is necessary, therefore, that we bear all these sufferings together with Christ. Let us suffer and grieve together with him; but at the same time let us perceive the divinity of the Church, even when she appears weak and frail. Jesus Christ permitted himself to be treated as a child, and now he permits the same thing to happen to the Church for the good of souls. They who persecute the Church without knowing or willing it, fulfill the will of God. It appears that the enemies of the Church are successful in all that they do; it would seem that they deceive and overthrow the Church itself. Let us not fear! When Caiaphas condemned Jesus to death, he fulfilled the prophecies; he carried out the divine will. Let us therefore wait patiently. While it is true that we often find it hard to endure the triumphs of the enemies of the Church, was it not more painful for Christ to tolerate rebellious man's unheard-of triumphs over God himself? Let us unite with Christ in bearing these sorrows, and calmly await the future.

#### *Our Spiritual Progress*

“And Jesus advanced in wisdom and grace before God and man.”<sup>149</sup> He advanced in wisdom and grace, manifesting his progress to the eyes of men gradually and externally, as was fitting. He also advanced in wisdom and grace before God, gradually and externally fulfilling those acts which, according to the divine command, had to be accomplished for our redemption. We say that such progress was external because from the first moment of his conception, Christ possessed the fullness of perfection which became him as the God-man, the Head of the Church.

After this explanation, let us not delay! Having the progress of Christ before our eyes, let us not postpone striving to attain the spiritual progress indicated and assigned to us by Christ

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<sup>149</sup> Lk 2:52.

himself. However, no one should be anxious to hasten his spiritual progress contrary to the will of Christ.

Christ did not need to perfect himself internally, and yet he devoted the greater part of his life to this interior labor. He did this for us, so that we might apply ourselves diligently to making progress in the spiritual life and come to maturity therein, without being troubled because all our time seems to be spent on spiritual exercises alone. Our esteem for these exercises should grow and not decrease. For surely our inner progress is worth more than our studies and our occupations.

Until he was twelve years old Christ was silent. Concerning this part of his life the Gospels offer no details. Why? Because he wished to remain a man and to observe the conditions in which man had been constituted. He did not try to anticipate the events of his later life, nor did he anticipate the will of God. He did not leap forward before it was time because he was impatient of delay. Neither did he desire to possess immediately that which comes only gradually.

When he was twelve years old the boy appeared in public in the midst of the Jews as a disciple of the Law of God. How did Christ go about this? He listens and he asks questions. The Gospel says: "They found him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions."<sup>150</sup> Why? So that he might learn? He had no need to learn. You yourself teach then! You will draw all men to yourself and you will save them! No, the hour has not yet come. Such impatience and such haste would be very human. "And he was subject to them," adds the Gospel.<sup>151</sup> He, God, wished to obey; he wished to be subject to men. Let us therefore unite ourselves with him, not impatiently anticipating God's will by our own action, but waiting for and

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<sup>150</sup> Lk 2:46.

<sup>151</sup> Lk 2:51.



following his will, submitting to legitimate authority even if it should be less worthy than we ourselves.

Interior progress for us consists in this: that we grow in the love of God and in the love of our neighbor.

How can we love God and act only for God? It is easy to err in this matter, for the fact that one says he loves God and does everything for God does not guarantee that such is actually the case. The Jews honored God, and yet God said of them that they honored him only with their lips, but that their heart was far from him. We truly love someone if we do his will. To fulfill the will of another is a certain sign of love for that person. Even the pagans used to say: to have the same likes and dislikes, this is true friendship. Indeed, Christ said that the world could recognize that he loves the Father, because he does the will of his Father. "That the world may know that I love the Father, and that I do as the Father has commanded me."<sup>152</sup> As a sign of love, he required that the Apostles do his will: "If you love me, keep my commandments."<sup>153</sup> Another sign of our love for God is to fulfill our duties toward our neighbors, to show them love for the love of God. In the words of Christ: "As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me."<sup>154</sup>

While speaking about the love of neighbor, what should be said about the love of one's country?

Just as every man has definite duties and obligations towards his neighbor, and by that fact has a vocation – because one is called by God to something, and God "gives each of them precepts about his fellow men"; so also every nation has obligations with respect to other nations. If God established the nations, he must also certainly have given each of them precepts about its

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<sup>152</sup> Jn 14:31.

<sup>153</sup> Jn 14:15.

<sup>154</sup> Mt 25:40.

neighbor. Since every man is a neighbor to us, we are bound to love him.

Christ esteemed and cherished the vocation which God had given to the Jews. He wished the Jews to precede the institution of Christianity. They were to introduce the Gospel into the world; this was their vocation as a nation. Christ wished the Jews to be happy and prosperous, but they were to find this happiness and prosperity in the service of others. Therefore, he reproached them for the hostility which they harbored toward other nations; he taught them that the Samaritans whom they hated most were their neighbors. Nevertheless Christ preached the Gospel only to the Jews: "I am not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel";<sup>155</sup> and he commanded the Apostles: "Do not go in the direction of the Gentiles nor enter the towns of Samaritans; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."<sup>156</sup> Hence Paul and Barnabas said to the Jews: "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we now turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us."<sup>157</sup> Christ was grieved by the misfortune of his nation: "he wept over it"; he grieved "because they had not known the time of their visitation."<sup>158</sup> When he prophesied to the Jews: "Behold, your house is left to you desolate,"<sup>159</sup> he indicated the causes of that ruin, reproaching them namely with their vices and their sins. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Thou who killest the prophets and stonest those who are sent to thee! How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathers her young under her wings, but thou wouldst not!" He then uttered a long series

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<sup>155</sup> Sir 17:12.

<sup>156</sup> Mt 15:24.

<sup>157</sup> Mt 10:5-6.

<sup>158</sup> Acts 13:46-47.

<sup>159</sup> Lk 19:41, 44.

of “woes” in which he vehemently denounced the Scribes and Pharisees as “blind guides” of the Jews.<sup>160</sup>

We can be united with Christ in a love for our country – if that love is not mixed with hatred for others; if it does not justify the vices and mistakes of one’s own country but rather, where possible, uncovers and avoids them; if we use all possible care, effort, labor and diligence to root out such vices and errors (and especially in each individual himself), in order that our country may be willing and able to fulfill the vocation assigned to it by God. Moreover, love of country is already included in love of neighbor. For among our neighbors, those closest to us are our fellow countrymen with whom God himself has joined us in a special way.

#### *Our Temptations*

Christ, says St. Paul, “in that he himself has suffered and has been tempted, is able to help those who are tempted.”<sup>161</sup> Wonderful words! It is almost as if Christ could not help us if he himself had not been tempted. The words of St. Paul become clear if we once admit that we draw all our strength from the union of our actions with the human actions of Christ. But in order that we might be united with him in this way, it was necessary for Christ to perform such acts; this is the reason why Christ permitted himself to be tempted by the devil.

Christ’s temptation, as it is described in the Gospel, was threefold. The body seeks satisfaction; but woe if, seeking satisfaction, it forgets about God. The devil proposed such a food: the apple to the first parents of the human race, and bread to Christ. The apple was beautiful to see, good to eat, and one had only to reach out his hand to take it. Christ, however, was in the desert, not in paradise; he was weakened by hunger after forty days of fasting. For man had been cast out of paradise after the sin. The devil did

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<sup>160</sup> Mt 23:33.

<sup>161</sup> Mt 23:37, 24.

not offer him (Christ) an apple but a stone, that bread might be made out of it. For after original sin man did not have bread; he was forced as it were to dig it out of stone for himself, that is, to provide it for himself with much sweat.

Satan said to Christ: "If thou art the Son of God, command that this stone become a loaf of bread."<sup>162</sup> If thou art the Son of God! Therefore the matter of greatest importance, the principal concern, is to satisfy the body! In this way, by providing bread, you will show yourself to be God, the Savior of the human race, the promised Messiah, the Expected of the nations!

Man is hungry. He is hungry for God. You give him bread. 'Before all else, be concerned about material things, not about striving after higher things. Use all of your diligence for achieving the temporal good. If you are going to do anything for the welfare of the people, furnish bread.' Such are the words of the tempter.

And Christ? "Jesus answered him, 'It is written, not by bread alone shall man live, but by every word of God.'"<sup>163</sup> In these words he warns us of the truth that we are created for higher things and that everything does not end for us at death; therefore, we must first be solicitous for the kingdom of heaven, and all these other things shall be given to us besides. He points out to us that it is not material desires alone that prompt us; we are moved by desires for higher things, and if these are not satisfied, we cannot be happy here on earth. Only when supported by the word of God can we bear with inequality of state, hardships, misfortune and finally life itself.

This was the first temptation of Christ and his first reply. A similar temptation awaits us; we will conquer it by uniting ourselves with Christ. For nothing else gives us the strength to overcome and master our passions and all worldly allurements, except the word of Christ who assures us that man lives "by every word that

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<sup>162</sup> Heb 2:18.

<sup>163</sup> Lk 4:1.

comes forth from the mouth of God."<sup>164</sup> These words once uttered by Christ continue to resound in us, arousing in us a love for higher things, and especially for God himself.

Secondly, Christ was tempted on the spiritual level, Man thinks that he is worth a lot; he desires to be raised to the highest dignity and to go on forever, at least in the memory of others. The spirit craves immortality: Satan offered our first parents this greatness, this immortality; "Eat," he tells them, "and you shall not die; but your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil, that is, you will be omniscient." To Christ, however, he says: "Throw yourself down, and you will not die, because angels will hold you in their hands."<sup>165</sup> To both, therefore, he promises immortality. But had God not said to Adam: "On whatever day you eat from it you will die?" To cast oneself down (from the pinnacle of the Temple) is certainly to deliver oneself over to death. The tempter denies this. In fact, he claims that the very thing that would bring death will rather exalt men and prove their high dignity. Adam was to find this greatness within himself: "Your eyes will be opened," the devil said to him. But as for Christ, he promised to lend him greatness: "the angels upon their hands shall bear thee up." For after original sin, man cannot even dream of true greatness. Therefore, the tempter offers Christ a false greatness, without any usefulness at all. He wants him to show himself great, to fly through the air, for no other reason than simply to show off. "The devil wished to move Christ to a vain display of his majesty," says Cornelius a Lapide.

And Christ? He replies that this would be to tempt God. "Jesus said to him, 'it is written further: Thou shall not tempt the Lord thy God.'"<sup>166</sup>

To place one's confidence in God is quite another thing. For then man in his humility relies solely on the goodness and mercy

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<sup>164</sup> Lk 4:4.

<sup>165</sup> Mt 4:6.

<sup>166</sup> Mt 4:7.

of God, rather than on his own excellence or rights; neither does he appropriate anything to himself. If he does not succeed, he does not blame God or deny God for that reason. He trusts God and therefore does what he ought to do. He does not expect a miracle; but he does look to divine providence for everything. God promised his help and his grace; but not to those who busy themselves with many things through vainglory, and not because they believe that God wills it. "What command has God given to the angels concerning you?" asks St. Bernard. "That they guard you in all your ways. Does this include guarding you from precipices? What kind of way is this: to cast yourself down from the pinnacle of the Temple? This, certainly, is not a path but a precipice." God did not promise man his angels in order that he might fly through the air, amuse himself, waste his time, excite admiration, focus the eyes and minds of all upon himself; for in so doing he would not be following the path which will lead him to true greatness and eternal glory. "Therefore do not be anxious," says Christ, "saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or, 'What are we to put on?' for after all these things the Gentiles seek; for your Father knows that you need all these things."<sup>167</sup> Hence it is right that we place our confidence in God only for those things which we need.

Here also let us unite ourselves to Christ: conquering our vanity, not seeking false esteem and glory, not boasting on all sides in order that we might gain it for ourselves. Let us not tempt God by asking him for things we do not need, and which may only satisfy our vanity.

We come finally to the last temptation. The desire to act is human. But woe to us if we will to do only that which suits us, taking no account of the will of God; or if we will that others do only that which we desire; in a word, if we desire to dominate. Domination belongs to God alone. The devil offered our first

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<sup>167</sup> Mt 6:31-32.

parents such domination, since he offered them divinity itself. "You will be like gods," he says to them. To Christ "he showed all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them"<sup>168</sup> and promised: "To thee will I give all this power and their glory."<sup>169</sup> But to Adam he proposed independent domination, divinity itself. If Christ is to reign he must humble himself before the devil. "All these things I will give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."<sup>170</sup> For, after original sin, man cannot even dream of independence from creatures.

And Christ? "Then Jesus said to him, 'Begone, Satan! for it is written: The Lord thy God shalt thou worship and him only shalt thou serve.'"<sup>171</sup>

The dominion of the devil is as great as the number of people in this world who follow him and turn against God. These individuals serve the devil. In the first rank of those who are the enemies of God is that world of which Scripture says: "Do you not know that the friendship of this world becomes an enemy of God?"<sup>172</sup> It is the world for which Christ refused to pray: "Not for the world do I pray; but for those whom thou hast given me, because they are thine... the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."<sup>173</sup> That world is an enemy of God of which Christ spoke to his disciples: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you."<sup>174</sup> "You shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice."<sup>175</sup> Therefore, let the friendship of the world be far from

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<sup>168</sup> Mt 4:8.

<sup>169</sup> Lk 4:6.

<sup>170</sup> Mt 4:9.

<sup>171</sup> Mt 4:10.

<sup>172</sup> Jas 4:4.

<sup>173</sup> Jn 17:9, 14.

<sup>174</sup> Jn 15:18.

<sup>175</sup> Jn 16:20.

us! For what does it do? It is governed by the maxims of this world which are contrary to the divine maxims. It judges the precepts of God according to the principles of this world. It puts the world before the Church which speaks in the name of God.

This last temptation is nothing trifling. The world does attract us. If we comply with its principles, we fall under its domination, no matter if it may appear to be otherwise. The majority of men agree with the principles of the world, and we are honored for doing so. We place ourselves above the Church because we judge it; and this flatters our self-love. We are using our liberty, because we are doing what we please. In any case, we do not serve God; and yet we are honored, free, happy – at least we think we are. Here, once again, we must be united with God, if we wish to conquer this last terrible temptation.

There are other temptations which do not attract to evil, but which restrain us from good. Christ experienced these also, on the Mount of Olives. We do not have a very detailed description of them in the Gospels, but we do know that they also are of three kinds. Christ prayed three times “saying the same words,”<sup>176</sup> repeating each time: “Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee. Remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou willest.”<sup>177</sup> He was confronted with the difficulty of fulfilling the divine will; it was by means of this threefold prayer that Christ repelled the threefold temptation holding him back from doing the will of the Father. The Gospel makes it sufficiently clear that these were terrible temptations. Christ, in going to the place of prayer, “began to be saddened and exceedingly troubled,”<sup>178</sup> “to feel dread and to be exceedingly troubled.”<sup>179</sup> And praying,

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<sup>176</sup> Mt 26:44.

<sup>177</sup> Mk 14:36.

<sup>178</sup> Mt 26:37.

<sup>179</sup> Mk 14:33.



“he fell prostrate.”<sup>180</sup> “And falling into an agony he prayed the more earnestly. And his sweat became as drops of blood running down upon the ground.”<sup>181</sup> It is apparent that the Gospels are here referring to a sacrifice that Christ must accept freely, a sacrifice imposed upon Christ by the will of the Father. Since Christ had to take upon himself the sins of the whole world, offering himself in death for all sinners, he also had to see all these sins and the magnitude of the sacrifice, so that the sacrifice might be complete, full and perfectly free. Therefore on the Mount of Olives Christ was shown all that his body was to suffer. All the humiliations, disgraces, and blasphemies that awaited him passed before his eyes. He saw them all. But he shrank most of all from appearing before his eternal Father as a sinner, an enemy of God. Christ loved all men; he wished all to be saved. How deeply did he grieve then, when he saw the inefficacy of his sacrifice as regards so many men who would reject his grace, condemn it, despise it and consider it of little value; who would care little for his sacrifice, even going so far as to commit injustices and crimes in his name. This last was certainly the most difficult to bear. And “there appeared to him an angel from heaven to strengthen him.”<sup>182</sup> He strengthened him, as the commentators on the Sacred Scripture explain, by causing to pass before his eyes all of the immeasurable good which would be brought about by his death.

Temptations that keep us from doing good are rarely regarded as temptations; therefore little attention is paid to them and, as a result, it is more difficult to overcome them. And so Christ willed to be subjected to these temptations also, lest they should gain mastery over us. We find it difficult to do the will of God, because he requires a certain amount of sacrifice from us also. And since it is hard for us to do the will of God, it becomes for

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<sup>180</sup> Mt 26:39.

<sup>181</sup> Lk 22:43–44.

<sup>182</sup> Lk 22:43.

us a true cross. It would not be hard if it were not a cross. Hence the difficulty which keeps us from doing the will of God, that is, from doing good, constitutes a temptation which we must conquer by uniting ourselves with Christ, using his words to tell God: "Not as I will, but as thou willest! Not I, but you!"

*Our Suffering and Death*

Who among us does not suffer? Christ suffered, and "did not the Christ have to suffer?"<sup>183</sup> Every one of us suffers, and even has to suffer, in order that we may say with St. Paul: "what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ I fill up in my flesh"<sup>184</sup> or, in other words, to be united with Christ by suffering with him. We must suffer not just that we might become like Christ, but also because Christ suffered for every one of us individually: "He himself bore our sins in his body upon the tree"<sup>185</sup>; and because those who sin are "crucifying again for themselves the Son of God and make him a mockery."<sup>186</sup>

The Church in her prayers presents Christ as saying to us: "Come and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!" for no man can suffer as Christ suffered. "In others who suffer," says St. Thomas, "the interior sadness and even the exterior pain is mitigated by some consideration of reason, through a kind of derivation or overflow from the superior into the inferior powers."<sup>187</sup> Persons whose mind is completely absorbed in some project, who wholeheartedly embrace a great and noble idea, who undertake great and difficult tasks, who are eager for glory, who burn with love for another person or for their country, may repeatedly endure the greatest pains without seeming to feel them.

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<sup>183</sup> Lk 24:26.

<sup>184</sup> Col 1:24.

<sup>185</sup> 1Pet 2:24.

<sup>186</sup> Heb 6:6.

<sup>187</sup> S.T., III, q. 46, a. 6.

In fact, in the midst of extreme torments they experience ineffable delights if, by means of these torments, they can give proof of their magnanimity, their fidelity to the principles which they profess, their love for a person or a cause. And Christ? Did he not suffer for the love of his heavenly Father? Therefore, if we take into consideration the tremendous work that he accomplished and the persons for whom he did this, would not his interior sadness and even his exterior pain be diminished? St. Thomas says no. Why? We shall soon see. But even if that which in man is sufficient to mitigate pain did not suffice in the case of Christ, yet surely the Beatific Vision must have sufficed? For during his lifetime Christ enjoyed the Beatific Vision which prevents all sadness and pain. The saints become impassible to suffering and pain in time of ecstasy, although this is only a mere shadow of the Beatific Vision.

These things are all true enough as far as we are concerned. When we are strongly moved by excitement or passion, when our mind is moved by the strong impulse of love, ambition or concupiscence, we find in ourselves no superior force on which to base ourselves in offering resistance; and so, aroused to excess in one part of our humanity, we become insensitive in another. But Christ was at the same time God and man. His person was divine and he could command all the forces of his human nature; therefore he could control his human emotions and the delights resulting from the vision of God and direct his soul to the passion. Therefore, as St. Thomas says, in Christ the sadness and pain were not alleviated by any consideration of reason or by any overflow from his superior to his inferior powers, "because he permitted each of his powers to exercise its proper function."<sup>188</sup> Moreover, "not only did the Beatific Vision in Christ not impede or lessen the pain and sadness of a person still living on this earth, but rather greatly increased and intensified them, because

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<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

the knowledge and the love of one possessing the Beatific Vision contribute to the perfection of the intellect and will do so even while the person is still in the state of a wayfarer.<sup>189</sup> Certainly in the Beatific Vision he understood the nature of sin most perfectly – sin, which prevents man from achieving such great beatitude. He understood the malice of sin which rises up against such a God. He also saw how unhappy sinners are and experienced more strongly the horror which restrained him from taking upon himself the consequences of sin. We get some inkling, however imperfect, of what Christ endured, from what we observe in the saints. Since they had a better knowledge of God, and since they loved him with their whole heart, loving also their neighbor as Christ loved them, every sin committed by men caused them intense sorrow. St. John Vianney heard confessions every day and, as he reflected within himself upon the misery of sinners and the offence given to God, he would suffer very much and begin to weep.

From what has been said we can understand why Christ says to us by the prophet: “Come and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!” How, then, can we suffer in union with Christ?

In order that we might supply what is lacking to the sufferings of Christ in us, in order that we might suffer his sorrows to the extent that we are able to do so: first, we must not avoid the sorrows by which God tests us, but we must accept them freely; in this way we will be united with Christ, who could have sought refuge for his human nature in an ecstasy deriving from the Beatific Vision in order to alleviate his sorrow and suffering, and yet did not do so, permitting each of his faculties to operate in the way that is proper to it. Secondly, as we meet with suffering and sorrows, let us take care as far as possible to stay calm and to be attentive to our duties without ever neglecting them. Certainly this is very difficult; in union with Christ, however, it is not

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<sup>189</sup> Franzelin, *Incarnation*.

impossible. Finally, since Christ suffered everything out of love to show us how much he loved us, we, too, if we wish to act in union with him, must bear our sufferings in order to give him this proof of our love.

Before he suffered, Christ gathered together his disciples in order that the sight of those he loved might refresh and strengthen him and give him courage. "I have greatly desired to eat this Pasover with you before I suffer."<sup>190</sup> He had been troubled, and this was to be a solace to him! His disciples did not understand him! When he spoke to them of his approaching passion and death, "there was a dispute among them which of them was reputed to be the greatest"<sup>191</sup> in the future kingdom of Christ - a kingdom which, as with the rest of the Jews, they understood in a completely material sense. At the time of his agony on the Mount of Olives, when he was in the greatest need of their solace and therefore had recourse to them, he found them sleeping! "Could you not watch one hour with me?"<sup>192</sup> he reproached them bitterly. Finally, at the most important moment, "all his disciples left him and fled;"<sup>193</sup> and the very person whom he had chosen as his successor denied him three times. Christ, who had worked so hard to form his disciples, who had done so much for them and had treated them with so much love, at the end of his life was not understood by them; in fact, he was forsaken by them. Certainly we, too, in our lives experience frequently forgetfulness, desertion, ingratitude and distrust on the part of others. Let us at such times unite ourselves with Christ and suffer with him.

In original sin, man offended God most grievously by refusing to accept him as his truth, his good, his master. Adam believed the tempter, who said: "By no means shall you die"; the things that

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<sup>190</sup> Lk 22:15.

<sup>191</sup> Lk 22:24.

<sup>192</sup> Mt 26:40.

<sup>193</sup> Mk 14:50.

God had predicted will not come to pass. He had said: "For the day you eat of it you must die."<sup>194</sup> He believed the tempter, who insinuated by his words, "For God knows,"<sup>195</sup> that God knew very well that this would not happen, and that therefore he had lied to man. Therefore God is not the truth. Moreover, man admitted that God had lied to keep him from becoming like God. "For on whatever day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God."<sup>196</sup> Consequently, God's action was prompted by jealousy; and therefore God is not good. Finally, he also agreed with the devil when the latter affirmed: "you will be like gods, knowing good and evil." He agreed that God had no reason to rule over man, because man himself was capable of knowing what was good and what was evil; therefore, as far as man was concerned, God was a tyrant. Since the injury done to God by man was of such a nature and extent, man, in order to make amends to God, had to accept freely a similar injury unjustly inflicted upon him and offer it to God. But for the satisfaction to be worthy of God, the person who offered it had to be of the same dignity as God. The only such person was Christ, who was God and man at one and the same time.

Christ gave satisfaction to God. And inasmuch as man had committed a threefold injury against God, Christ suffered a threefold ignominy inflicted upon him. During his passion, first they blindfolded him<sup>197</sup> and said to him: "Prophecy to us, O Christ! Who is it that struck you?"<sup>198</sup> In this way did man wickedly challenge God: "Do you see me?" They blindfolded Christ to signify that he was darkness, not light, ignorance not omniscience, falsehood not

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<sup>194</sup> Gen 2:17.

<sup>195</sup> Gen 3:5.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> Mk 14:65.

<sup>198</sup> Mt 26:68.

truth. Then “they spat in his face.”<sup>199</sup> On what does one spit? On something detestable, loathsome, ignoble, intolerable; briefly, on that which is in no way good. Finally, “they buffeted him, while others struck his face with the palms of their hands.”<sup>200</sup> “And they clothed him in purple, and plaiting a crown of thorns, they put it upon him and began to greet him, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ and they kept striking him on the head with a reed and spitting upon him; and bending their knees, they did homage to him.”<sup>201</sup> Therefore, they laughed at him as at a king! And when he was being tried, “Herod with his soldiery treated him with contempt and mocked him, arraying him in a bright robe”<sup>202</sup> – the robe of fools. They treated him, therefore, as one who was insane. The people unanimously preferred Barabbas, a very wicked man, to Christ. To them Barabbas was good; Christ was not good. Lastly, he was condemned because he claimed falsely that he was the Son of God and a king. And when he already hung on the cross, suffering the maximum penalty inflicted upon slaves, both Jews and pagans came to mock him and to reject with scorn his kingdom and his power. The Jews came and, passing by, “were jeering at him, shaking their heads and saying, ‘Thou who destroyest the temple and in three days buildest it up again, save thyself! If thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross!’”<sup>203</sup> They reject him, therefore, as their High Priest. “He saved others,” they said, “himself he cannot save! If he is the king of Israel, let him come down from the cross, and we will believe in him.”<sup>204</sup> Therefore, they reject him as their king. And finally they reject him as their teacher, saying; “He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he wants him; for he said,

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<sup>199</sup> Mt 26:67.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> Mk 15:17-19.

<sup>202</sup> Lk 23:11.

<sup>203</sup> Mt 27:39-40.

<sup>204</sup> Mt 27:42.

'I am the son of God'."<sup>205</sup> The pagans did the same. "One of those robbers who were hanged was abusing him."<sup>206</sup> The soldiers also scoffed at him, dividing his garments and casting lots over them. Pilate also, in mockery, wrote the title: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. Therefore, rightly does Christ complain by the mouth of David in Psalm 21: "I am a worm, not a man; the scorn of men, despised by the people. All who see me scoff at me; they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads; 'He relied on the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, if he loves him.' They have pierced my hands and feet; I can count all my bones. They look on and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them and for my vesture, they cast lots." And Isaiah the Prophet, astonished at the ignominious passion and death of Christ, exclaimed: "Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows; and we have thought him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted... and he was reputed with the wicked."<sup>207</sup>

If Christ wished to suffer much humiliation and degradation and to endure so many insults and so much disgrace, this life of his must be manifested in us as well; if Christ living in us is to continue his life, we must also follow him along the path of humiliation and rejection. We unite ourselves with Christ in this way not only as he satisfies for the sin of our first parents, but also as he satisfies for our sins. For we also in the course of our lives frequently renew the infamy and the injury inflicted upon God by our first parents. When we sin, we determine in our hearts how much Christ means to us; for we prefer our own pleasures, interests and will to the law and the wishes of Christ. We live as if what God has revealed were not true; as if we were not faced with death at every moment; as if the things of this world or glory possessed some real value; as if we would never have

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<sup>205</sup> Mt 27:43.

<sup>206</sup> Lk 23:39.

<sup>207</sup> Is 53:4, 12.



to leave these things – in practice, therefore, we deny that God is truth. We live as if God did not love us and care for us; as if he had not provided all that we need for body and for soul; therefore, as if God were not good. We live as if God were not our absolute king and master, and as if he had no right to command us as he wishes; as if we could do anything of ourselves, and as if we were at liberty to act in this way; as if it were enough to call upon God to help us in what we, of ourselves, have already proposed and decided to do. True, we do not act in this way consciously and deliberately; but since we have all sinned in Adam, since self-love is deeply rooted in us and self-activity impels us, our affections also grow cold, our mind is darkened and our will is weakened. If we were to believe with a lively faith, always accompanied by good works, that which we already admit as certain, then our lives would be entirely different: we would be saints. “Therefore, we must enter more deeply into ourselves,” says Louis Laneau, “as St. Paul has so eloquently recommended: ‘Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus.’”<sup>208</sup> It is as if he had said that what Christ experienced in himself we should experience in ourselves; but in Christ Jesus, that is, as his members, receiving the power of sensation from the head. Therefore, just as Christ humbled and emptied himself, so let us also, in like manner humbled and emptied of self, enter into Christ in order that, endowed with his interior sentiments, we may not think, will, love or do anything other than what we recognize that Christ in us or we in Christ knows and loves. For it is no longer we in ourselves, but we in Christ, who is all in us.”<sup>209</sup>

Christ invites us to take up our cross and follow him in his passion. “Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow

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<sup>208</sup> Phil 2:5.

<sup>209</sup> Laneau, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

me";<sup>210</sup> and, "he who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."<sup>211</sup> In St. Luke we read: "He said to all: 'If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'"<sup>212</sup>

What is the meaning of the cross, and what does it mean to follow Christ? Let us see.

Christ foretold the cross to Peter in these words: "When thou wast young thou didst gird thyself and walk where thou wouldst. But when thou art old thou wilt stretch forth thy hands, and another will gird thee, and lead thee where thou wouldst not." To this St. John adds: "Now this he said to signify by what manner of death he should glorify God."<sup>213</sup> The cross, therefore, signifies bondage, complete dependence. This is understood even better from the words which Christ added: "and follow me." For what does it mean to follow another? It means to go where the person whom we are following goes; not to go either faster or slower than he, and not to swerve either to the right or to the left; it means to remain wholly dependent upon him. We never leave his side: when he takes a step, we take a step; when he stops, so do we.

How hard the cross is, then, and how contrary to our "self-activity," which wishes to rush forth, and that independently! Unless we are united to Christ, who carried his cross and died upon it for us, we will find it impossible to fulfill the commandment of the Lord: "Let him take up his cross and follow me."

Hanging on the cross, "Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'"<sup>214</sup> At the very end, Christ wished to endure the great sorrow: in his humanity

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<sup>210</sup> Mt 23:34.

<sup>211</sup> Mt 10:38.

<sup>212</sup> Lk 9:23.

<sup>213</sup> Jn 21:18-19.

<sup>214</sup> Mt 27:46.

to experience himself abandoned by God. He does not cry out: "My Father, my father!" because he had taken upon himself the anger of God, of the Father who had been repudiated by man.

Of all his torments, this was certainly the greatest. It was as if the whole of Nature feared this moment. "And there was darkness over the whole land... and the sun was darkened."<sup>215</sup> For when the sun is darkened in our soul, everything around us becomes shrouded in darkness as well.

Christ wished to endure even this because of us and on our behalf. On our behalf because God, to try his children, sometimes permits that they should no longer experience his presence. Since they had always walked in the sight of God and kept God always before their eyes, they had already experienced how sweet and how good the Lord is. Therefore, when they are deprived of his presence, they suffer intensely. They suffer all the more because they seem abandoned by God their judge, who is justly wrathful. Oh, how greatly comforted they are then by the fact that Christ himself endured similar torments!

Therefore, let every one of us who has to pass through the same dark night and who experiences periods of spiritual dryness and scruples, unite himself with Christ hanging upon the cross and crying out: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But since Christ had at the same time acquired the divine Fatherhood for us, let us give ourselves to God, our Father, and with Christ call upon God, now also our Father: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."<sup>216</sup>

Ultimately, the pains of death await us. Christ also wished to die. In Psalm 21 he describes his death in prophetic terms: "I am like water poured out; all my bones are racked. My heart has become like wax melting away within my bosom. My throat is dried up like baked clay, my tongue cleaves to my jaws; to the

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<sup>215</sup> Lk 23:44-45.

<sup>216</sup> Lk 23:46.

dust of death you have brought me down.” As he hung on the cross Christ described the fever that was consuming his life in the simple word: “He said, ‘I thirst.’”<sup>217</sup> And the Evangelist adds: “Now there was standing there a vessel full of common wine; and having put a sponge soaked with the wine on as talk of hys-sop, they put it to his mouth. Therefore, when Jesus had taken the wine, he said ‘It is consummated!’ and bowing his head he gave up his spirit.”

The loss of bodily life is, by nature, something terrible to man. There is in us a desire to live; but the object of that life is not present in us. We seem to catch hold of it for ourselves, but it eludes us, leaving behind only discontent, weariness and disgust. Temporal goods can only provide us with passing satisfaction, because we are created for that which is eternal. While we live in this world we take delight in flitting from one object to another, in taking pains to continue to find something new in everything, striving to distract our minds. In order that time might not drag for us, we make an effort to spend it in some way, even to waste it. We seek false objects in life so that we might not feel need within us, the void and the emptiness that torment us. Thus moved and thus affected by various objects and events that change constantly, we do not yet feel the full force of that inner need. But if we should suddenly find ourselves in eternity, where change will no longer be possible, where all the objects of our life will disappear, what then? And that moment is certain to come. This is what happens in the hour of death. Man then experiences the desire to live, while at the same time he feels himself annihilated. He sees that the whole world which until now had surrounded him, now deserts him. He now no longer beholds this world nor admires it; he no longer enjoys it or thinks about it. He feels that life, the only life he knows how to live, the only life he understands or loves, slowly being extinguished.

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<sup>217</sup> Jn 19:28–30.

Faith renders this terrible transition from life to eternity easy; it can even make that moment sweet. United with Christ, we draw from his death the strength to leave this life peacefully, even joyfully; not despairing as men without faith, or as dumb and stupid men submitting to fate like beasts. But we must die to the world already in this life, ceasing to seek life in those things which cannot provide us with immortality. "Do not labor," says our Lord, "for the food which perishes, but for that which endures unto life everlasting."<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Jn 6:27.



**Servant of God**

**Father Paul Smolikowski, CR**

**Father Semenenko's System of Ascetism**

*A foreword to: Fr. Peter Semenenko, CR, "Spiritual Exercises" (Kraków 1903, pp. 5–82).*

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In a memorial eulogizing Fr. Semenenko after his death, Father Kalinka<sup>1</sup> stated:

Father Semenenko, a penetrating judge of souls, was an excellent confessor and a superb conference master; once an individual sampled his spiritual direction, he could not easily settle for any other. After one had completed a retreat under his direction, he could be satisfied by no other. His conferences made an enormous impression – a lasting impression; no mere passing fancy. This effect was not the result of eloquence; Father Semenenko was not at all eloquent. It was the ideas themselves that struck home, held one enraptured, and found favorable reception in the soul. One felt that his words contained no exaggeration, or flights of poetry, but truth pure and simple.<sup>2</sup>

What then – was Father Semenenko presenting something new? In the teaching of the spiritual life, as in the teaching of faith, there can be nothing new; for the spiritual life is based on revelation, and revelation was completed and concluded by Christ. However, in the course of centuries, that revelation, that revelation has been developed and clarified. St. Vincent of Lerins, in speaking of the progress possible within the Church, sounds this warning:

...may that which was formerly believed with difficulty be made, through your interpretation, more understandable in the light. May posterity, through your aid, rejoice in the understanding of things which, in old times, were venerated without understanding. Yet, teach precisely what you have learned; do not say new things even if you say them in a new manner. At this point,

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<sup>1</sup> Father Walerian Kalinka CR (1826 – 1886) was a Polish historian, political writer and journalist, later priest and member of the Congregation of the Resurrection, founder of the religious house in Lviv.

<sup>2</sup> Walerian Kalinka, *Ś. p. ks. Piotr Semenenko*, [in:] Walerian Kalinka, *Dziela*, vol. XII, Kraków 1902, p. 19.

the question may be asked: If this is right, then is no progress of religion possible within the Church of Christ? To be sure, there has to be progress, even exceedingly great progress. For who is so grudging toward his fellow men, and so full of hatred toward God, as to try to prohibit it? But it must be progress in the proper sense of the word and not a change in faith. Progress means that each thing grows within itself, whereas change implies that one thing is transformed into another. Hence, it must be that understanding, knowledge, and wisdom grow and advance mightily and strongly in individuals as well as in the community, in a single person as well as in the Church as a whole, and this gradually according to age and history. But, they must progress within their own limits, that is, in accordance with the same kind of dogma, frame of mind, and intellectual approach. The growth of religion in the soul should be like the growth of the holy, which in the course of years develops and unfolds, yet remains the same as it was. Much happens between the prime of childhood and the maturity of old age. But the old men of today who were the adolescents of yesterday, although the figure and appearance of one and the same person have changed, are identical. There remains one and the same nature, and one and the same person.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, in the teaching of the spiritual life, as in all other things, there must be progress – progress not by the addition of something new, but by the development and explanation of the old. Today, when men are acquiring such vast sums of knowledge in all spheres of learning, a deeper penetration into the science of the spiritual life is also called for. The mind which is accustomed to investigation cannot restrain itself. Questions of religion, questions dealing with the interior life, since they are most vital, must inevitably confront the soul. The soul cannot

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<sup>3</sup> Vincent of Lerins, *The Commonitories*, trans. Rudolph E. Morris (“The Fathers of the Church”; New York: Fathers of the Church, 1949, VII, 308–309).

leave these without an answer; it feels obliged to form clearer concepts about such things. Let us take, for example, an explanation of the passion of the Lord. There are souls for whom its simple presentation suffices to awaken within them love for and gratitude to Christ, because he has suffered so much for us. But there are others, who in the course of their meditations on the passion, will be disturbed by the doubt: did Jesus really suffer? For, they tell themselves, people who suffer for some idea, or for love of another, bear such suffering with ease – either without feeling the suffering at all, or even finding a certain relish in it. Now the Savior undoubtedly loved his Father infinitely; he suffered for the salvation of the world – such was the exalted work that he was to accomplish! In such circumstances, could he possibly feel the severity of his sufferings? Souls that are somewhat advanced in their knowledge of the catechism will ask themselves: how could Christ suffer if, during his lifetime, he was endowed with the beatific vision, such as is enjoyed by the blessed in heaven? The happiness which one experiences in the sight of God blots out all suffering. Hence, such souls need to enter more deeply into the reasons for Christ's passion in order to understand that it was precisely the vision of God, and the love of God, which increased Christ's suffering beyond measure and made it impossible for any mortal to suffer as much as he suffered. Father Semenenko, in like manner, presents nothing new; but he does enter more deeply into certain truths of the spiritual life.

There are certain truths, universally promulgated and accepted by all, which nowhere receive a solid basic explanation. As a result, these truths are regarded by many merely as methods of expression, as figures of speech, devoid of any real meaning. Among the first of such expressions we might cite our "misery," and the "corruption" in which we are born. All of us are convinced that this misery is in us; and, what is more, theology teaches us that this is so. Anyone who does not consider that he is full of misery and evil inclinations is ill thought of and considered

conceited. In the world, it is even a part of good etiquette to speak of oneself in very humble tones, and never to ascribe any good to oneself. The saints cannot find words adequate to express their condemnation of self; they consider themselves to be the greatest of sinners. How do they arrive at such a conclusion? Must we say, perhaps, that their mind was not in agreement with the words they spoke? Or, that sanctity so clouded their reason, that they were unable to view themselves as accurately in the light of grace as in the light of natural reason? Humility is regarded as the basis of all virtue; without it no virtue is pleasing to God. But what is humility except the voluntary acknowledgement that one is miserable and corrupt? Yet despite this fact, does the acknowledgement of our misery usually find an adequate place in the teaching about the spiritual life? Is it the basis of our teaching on the spiritual life, as it is undoubtedly the basis of that life itself? Much is said about sin and sinners. We find frequent descriptions, e.g., of the proud man, or the one who is given to impurity, etc. But it is not usually said of every man – even of him who cannot be accused of pride or of leading a dissolute life, etc. – that he has within himself the inclination to all these evils, and that these inclinations continually make themselves felt within man. About this we hear little or nothing. Father Semenenko gives this knowledge of self first place. He shows that we are not dealing with a mere figure of speech, a method of expression: “that we are miserable, corrupt, full of evil inclinations,” but that this is the strictest truth.

Coupled with our misery is our nothingness. St. Paul says: “For if anyone thinks himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceives himself” (Gal 6:3). To know that man is nothing, says St. Augustine, is the height of wisdom. “Hoc est tota magna scientia, scire quia homo nihil est.” “O unknown nothingness!” cried Blessed Angela of Foligno, “I tell you that no knowledge that the soul can acquire is more valuable than the knowledge of its own nothingness.” How do we understand this nothingness? Again for us, it is just a way of speaking; for we usually speak of ourselves

as something. As a rule, we do not go deeper than that. And it is here that Fr. Semenenko steps in – not with something new, but with a truth recognized by all, repeated by all – he applies this truth to life. On it he bases his whole ascetical teaching.

Closely associated with our nothingness is our weakness. We can do nothing of ourselves. Jesus himself told us so: “Without me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). St. Paul also states: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God” (2 Cor 3:5). And yet, only infrequently is this weakness of ours taken into account. In our meditations we are told we should make our resolutions as far reaching as possible, without inquiring whether or not these are within our power to fulfill. Fr. Semenenko considers this self-activity, that is, doing everything by ourselves, as though we could do anything of ourselves, as the greatest enemy of the interior life. He interprets self-activity as the source of all the difficulties and confusion which we experience. He claims that self-activity is the result of a lack of love of God, and urges us to fight it as our principal foe.

Is there, then, nothing but evil in us? And if there is some good in us, are we not permitted to look upon it at all, or take any delight in it? Indeed, many writers regard such activity as a very dangerous thing, and warn us to close our eyes to these good qualities. Fr. Semenenko was not of this opinion. According to him, self-knowledge should never be one-sided; to shut our eyes to what is good in us can, as a matter of fact, throw us into the clutches of pride.

The life of Christ in us has never before been explained adequately with such frequency and perseverance. Sacred Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, and books dealing with asceticism speak of this life; but in the minds of many, this is only a figure of speech, sheer poetry. Fr. Semenenko regarded it as an absolute reality. What can be said of the relation of our acts to the acts which Christ performed in the course of his lifetime? We read in meditation manuals: “See how much you have contributed

to the sufferings of Jesus by your whole life;" or, "My sins scourged him, crowned him with thorns, struck him and spat upon him, nailed him to the cross, and put him to death! Hence, there have been times in my life when I have cried with the deicidal Jewish mob: Sentence Jesus to the cross; let Barabbas live!" Again, "I should say to myself: Look, this is your work! It was you who, by means of the hands of the executioners, scourged the flesh of Jesus; it was you who covered it with blood and wounds."<sup>4</sup> They say to the dying: "Join your agony with the agony of Christ, and it will be easy for you to die!" Is all of this nothing more than poetry, figures of speech? Fr. Semenenko regarded this relationship of the life of Jesus to our life as something most real.

From what we have said, it can be seen that the ascetical system of Fr. Semenenko what was new in it as regards the presentation of the spiritual life, what he especially highlighted in it and that in which he synopsized his whole teaching embraces three points: 1. a deeper knowledge of self; 2. a condemnation of self-activity; 3. the life of Christ in us, and our life in him.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Father Bruno Vercauysse SI (1797 – 1880), *Manual of Solid Piety or New practical meditations for every day in the year on the life of our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. I.



## 1. SELF-KNOWLEDGE

### Our Misery

It is a dogma of faith that, after original sin, misery and concupiscence remained in us. The Council of Trent, in condemning the doctrine of Luther, who regarded concupiscence as sin, stated that while concupiscence is not to be identified with sin, it derives from sin and leads to sin. Saint James ascribes all temptations to concupiscence: "But, everyone is tempted by being drawn away and enticed by his own passion. Then when passion has conceived, it brings forth sin; but when sin has matured it begets death" (Jas 1:14-15).

Concupiscence is considered here in its broadest sense: as the inclination to all of the evil that has remained in us after original sin. Since sins fall into three categories according to the three faculties in man, intellect, heart and will (Cf. S.T. 1, 2, q.78, a.1, c), the inclination to evil in us will also be threefold. St. Thomas calls these inclinations "wounds inflicted by the sin of Adam." And so, we have the wound of ignorance in the intellect, the wound of concupiscence in the heart (the appetite), and the wound of wickedness in the will (Cf. S.T., 1, 2, q.85, a.3, c).

Fr. Semenenko likewise distinguished our misery according to these three spheres of life. As to the extent of evil which remains in us after original sin, there is a variety of opinions among theologians. There are principally two schools of thought: one holds that man was deprived of the supernatural gifts, but that nature remained intact; the other holds that man was affected in his nature as well in the sense that the heart conceives desires, now no longer at the command of reason as before, but contrary to reason (S.T., 1, q.95, a.1, C); and the intellect was deprived not only of supernatural light, but now shows an inclination to falsehood (Cf. S.T., 1, 2, q.8S, a.3).

Fr. Semenenko interprets this, stating that in things to which we are indifferent, i.e., about which we are not concerned that they should be this way and no other, things which do not involve the heart, as e.g., mathematics, astronomy, etc. – here the intellect sees clearly. But, where our emotions enter in, our interest, there usually we seek falsehood. We work hard to arrive at the goal of falsehood, and in the end we come to regard falsehood as the truth.

Fr. Semenenko, in offering a deeper explanation of our misery and corruption – this was the principal topic of the retreats he gave – did not touch upon theological controversies; he did not even cite Scripture or the Fathers of the Church. He analyzed the whole matter from a psychological standpoint. He demonstrated what goes on in man, in his soul, the internal process through which man passes. He described all this so clearly, so accurately, those who made retreats under him testify, that throughout the whole time of the conferences (and he had ten full-hour conferences) they sat as it were on pins and needles. It seemed to them that Father was reading their souls, and relating their deeds. He presented man's misery in all its horror; he penetrated right to the heart of the matter. "We must despise ourselves," he would say, "for our nature is no better than that of a public sinner, at whom men point their finger. The proof of this is to be found in the temptations we experience. At times the intellect is plunged in darkness and the heart wavers. God permits this to show us what we really are. Let us profit from these experiences, and let them serve as the basis for our self-detestation."

"What is the heart," he asks, "in which man searches after glory? Abomination, deserving of aversion. And that pretense? It is contemptible and vile. Man of himself, in the depths of his consciousness, is all that we call vile. He deserves no honor, but rather all dishonor. And what is our integrity, our honor? Outside of God there is in us only our own misery. At the bottom of this misery is shamelessness and baseness. Who, after he has examined

himself more carefully, will not discover in himself some such base instinct?"

He asks: "Can anyone say that in him there is no trickery or scheming?" And he answers: "We would not be men if there were not in us at least the roots of such evil. Even murder is not beyond us; its seed is present within us." He goes on to say: "Have we never felt (at least in the form of a temptation) hatred for someone, and experienced either the wish that he did not exist, or displeasure and anger because he does exist? For he gets in our way; we find him distasteful. Several considerations: human respect, our better, polite, training, but especially the grace of God, keeps us from actually taking steps to get rid of such a person."

"Such is the basic human wickedness," cries Fr. Semenenko. "We must know it well, and despise ourselves as a result of such knowledge." Self-detestation, hatred of self – such was the end of the retreats given by Fr. Semenenko. He wished to excite his hearers to despise themselves, and therefore he unmasked the comedy which man continues to act out; he demonstrated how everyone clings to some image, some figure, which he dresses up, adorns with flowers, feathers, and radiance that accord with his desires. He would like to be such an individual; but especially he wishes to be regarded as such in the eyes of men. He sees himself thus adorned; he recognizes, honors, and admires himself. It is immediately evidently that he is occupied with himself; he thinks about himself and, simultaneously, about the impression he is making on you. You feel that he is posing, that he is comparing himself with that ideal image, that he has in his mind. Father was merciless in disclosing human weaknesses, and when he got down to specific manifestations of human vanity, he proceeded in such a masterly fashion that one was forced to laugh at the foolishness and ridiculousness of man, even while he wished to hide himself in shame, since he recognized himself in these descriptions.

The reproach was sometimes made to Fr. Semenenko that by such disclosure of the misery of man he could easily discourage some, depriving them of the courage to work. Such critics said that it was better to leave man with the good opinion he had of himself. But, is it possible to achieve holiness without a knowledge of self? We know that, on our part, prayer is the principal active ingredient of holiness. But what will be the prayer of one who does not know his own misery? At most his would have to be a prayer of thanksgiving that there is no evil in him. This would be the prayer of the Pharisee whom our Lord condemned. For what would he pray? For what would he ask? If one asks for help in time of temptation, it is because he feels that he is weak, inclined to evil. If one asks for love, it is because he sees that he is lacking in love. The more acutely one feels this lack in himself, the more fervent his prayer becomes. But if he sees no evil in himself, he will not pray sincerely; and without prayer, how will he resist in time of temptation? How will he acquire virtue? Besides, without a knowledge of self, he will manifest a lack of understanding in relations with his neighbors – he will show a certain contempt, like that of the Pharisee for the publican.

### **Bogdan Jański**

How did Fr. Semenenko achieve such a profound comprehension of human misery? Where did he acquire that vivid conviction of the reality of this misery, of the need to understand it, as well as of the need to make it known? He had to observe it in someone; someone had to be his master in this study. True, he could have studied it in himself; for he knew himself well, and he was severe in his judgments of himself. In his spiritual notes for the year 1836 he says of himself: "After examining my conscience well, I doubt whether I have ever performed any work in which pride did not take a hand."

A few years later he writes again: "Having reached the conclusion that pride continually draws me away from you, O Lord,

I sought refuge in humility; but I could discover no humility in myself. I discovered my vileness, and was convinced of it. I was convinced also that I was proud, for this was all so manifest that I could almost reach out my hand and touch it. But I found no humility. Indeed, in my soul I found bitterness because I was so vile and so proud; but you see, my Lord, that even this bitterness stemmed from pride." Such an understanding of self was the result of work upon himself, to which it would seem someone else had aroused him and pointed out the way. This "someone else" could only have been Bogdan Jański.

Jański kept a diary in order to keep a check on himself. This diary was known to his disciples, or at least it became known to them after his death, for Fr. Kajsiewicz<sup>5</sup> writes in his Memoirs: "Jański's notes dealing with the future of the Congregation and the needs of individual souls bear witness to the depth of his foresight and understanding." But even during his lifetime, those who were close to him must have known that he kept a strict watch on himself, for they lived in close intimacy with him, especially Semenenko, whom Jański had converted, and whom, as Fr. Kajsiewicz writes: "he tamed with his gentleness, while making a deep impression on the proud young man with his learned and interesting conversation." Semenenko lived with Jański for several months after his conversion: "He rarely left the house, except to go to church. He spent his time in fasting, in prayer, and in the reading of Catholic books provided for him by Jański to correct his false concepts."

It would be true to say that in this time Semenenko was making a retreat under the guidance of Jański. Getting back to our original line of thought, Jański, in his diary, was checking on himself continually, finding an abundance of misery in his every

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<sup>5</sup> Hieronim (Jerome) Kajsiewicz (1812 – 1873) was a disciple of Bogdan Jański, co-founder and superior general of the Congregation of the Resurrection; famous for his preaching.

deed, thought and intention. In reading the diary, one senses a kind of weariness and discouragement. In this person before whom men bow their heads, whom they regard as a saint and call an apostle, against whom no reproach can be brought unless it be that he is too kind, that he takes too little thought of himself – in him one looks for some perfection, some pre-eminence, something extraordinary. But no, he is a man like other men: full of vanity, seeking himself in everything, seeking his own pleasure and glory – a man without character.

And we need not think that humility causes him to exaggerate, or that he is speaking only in generalities. No, he is continually catching himself in the act, narrating facts. Only when you consider that it is he himself who reveals all this evil, when you appreciate the depth of sorrow and humility with which he turns to God in every instance, when you realize that while we are wearied and discouraged by reading this journal, he was not discouraged, nor did he grow weary of such a life, or tired of continually checking on himself – only then can you appreciate his excellence. At the same time you get an inside view of how Jański understood the spiritual life: he regarded self-knowledge as the principal condition and basis of perfection. Jański saw the evil in himself, and continually acknowledged it. In fact, he was so imbued with the sense of his own misery and wickedness that he asks himself: “Do I despise myself enough?” And he answers that he needs, even finds indispensable, a continual sense “of contempt for, and fear of myself.”

Fr. Semenenko was a disciple of Jański. It is inconceivable that Jański should not have provided him with an explanation of the need for this self-knowledge, about which he himself was so strongly convinced. At the same time, he made him aware of his weaknesses. We saw how severe Semenenko was in accusing himself of pride. Jański accused him of the same fault, warning

him that "a head that is too big will lose its balance." Duński<sup>6</sup> wrote that during his studies in Rome, Semenenko "surpassed all others in intellectual pride;" that he was "a stubborn disputant, challenging others with difficulties." In this same time Jański was warning him "to guard against manifesting his intellectual superiority; to seek rather to be superior in love." When he came to Rome, he grieved over him: "What has happened to this Peter? I cannot recognize him!" He administered fraternal correction, which Semenenko received with great humility and gratitude, praise and love for Jański.

In a letter from Rome, in 1838, Semenenko confides to Jański: "I continue to be full of myself, complaining about the uncircumcision of my mind and heart. It is extremely difficult for me to enter upon the practice of humility, simplicity and self-abnegation, especially where it concerns the intellect. Dear Bogdan, pray for me. I have great confidence in your prayer because, as compared with me, you enjoy a special place and significance in the sight of God. Forgive me for all of my past foolishness." In another letter to Jański he says: "Do not forget about the brethren who are separated from you, and who sorely need fervent intercession for them with God. Bogdan, you are especially aware of the need of him who writes this; therefore, do not forget him."

In that same year, when the brethren in Rome chose Semenenko as their Superior, he wrote to Jański: "They have already written to tell you about their decision concerning me. It was up to them to justify their choice, for as regards me, you know your Peter." "If I seemed to be teaching you," he writes in 1839, "forgive me, my dearest and always senior brother; for I wish to listen to you as a child, respect you as father, love you as a brother given by God." He loved and respected him in this way always. When he published his "Philosophical Discussions"

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Duński (1810 - 1857) was a disciple of B. Jański, later a priest and member of the Congregation of the Resurrection.

[Biesiady Filozoficzne] in 1859, he introduced Jański as the principal character, as the leader, as the Socrates. For his was “truly a superior intellect,” he wrote in the foreword, “a man eminent in every respect. Although he passed through the darkness, he was, nevertheless, the first to greet the dawning light. And then he himself began to shine with the light of a star. It is true he did not carry the torch long in his hand; yet he did hold it long enough to show the way. How many men were found to rally about him immediately! How many men were able, in him and through him to catch a glimpse of the heavenly light! Upon how many did the peace of God descend by way of him! They hailed him as a messenger from on high. They followed him as an angel sent to guide them.” Among these followers of Jański was Fr. Semenenko. Since he had such words of praise for him, it is natural that he should have followed in his footsteps. And it was undoubtedly from him that he learned to be aware of his own misery. Jański could be an example to him in this, and he did actually help him to do so, as we have seen. It is possible that the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* edited by Fr. Bellecius, and published right at that time, may also have been a factor in his determination to put self-knowledge in the first place.

### The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius

St. Ignatius Loyola, in the Directory for his *Spiritual Exercises*, states: “He who make a retreat must first of all endeavor to acquire a most exhaustive knowledge of self by investigating the causes, sources, and roots of his bad habits. He must also seek to acquire a recognition of his own wickedness and baseness, and to remain keenly aware of it.” Father Bellecius, one of the outstanding editors of the *Spiritual Exercises*, i.e., the retreat of St. Ignatius, describes Man’s misery and corruption as follows: “It is manifest that there exists in the soul: 1. perversity; 2. inclination to all manner of evil; 3. impotence as regards any good



work... Pictures and images of evil and vain things stick in the memory as in a place proper to them; Satan and concupiscence also disturb it without limit. In the mind there are blindness and darkness, plus many false judgments and principles which are the result of deliberate ignorance, often purposely cultivated. Malice reigns supreme in the will... Besides this, there prevails in the soul an incredible inclination to every form of evil, a disposition which draws the whole soul into the abyss, so that, if it were not held back by the merciful hand of God, it would be led by its own momentum to fall into a variety of crimes in each moment... And not only does there exist in the soul this incredible inclination to every evil, but also a complete impotence with regard to every good."

Father Bellecius urges meditation on this misery, and he explains why St. Ignatius demands that so much time be assigned to its consideration: "So much time and labor is set aside for the attainment of self-knowledge because an accurate knowledge of our own misery leads most certainly to humility and to hatred of self. At the same time, it removes the greatest obstacle preventing us from achieving the fundamental indifference which will permit us to serve God as he wishes to be served. For it is impossible that one should come to a full recognition of his misery and malice without coming simultaneously to hate and despise himself."

Fr. Roothan, the Superior General of the Jesuits, an eminent interpreter of the text of St. Ignatius' *Exercises*, was Fr. Semenenko's spiritual director after he came to Rome with Fr. Kajsiewicz to pursue their studies there. There can be little doubt that Fr. Roothan would have strongly recommended the *Exercises* of St. Ignatius to them, for it was just at this time that the edition compiled by Fr. Bellecius was published in Turin. That the *Exercises* appealed to them very much is evident from the intention of Fr. Semenenko to translate them into Polish after 1845. It is true that

he could not complete this work; but Fr. Alexander Jelowicki<sup>7</sup> made good for him, publishing the Polish version of Fr. Bellecius' edition of the *Exercises* in 1851.

Fr. Semenenko, intellectual genius that he was, must have observed immediately upon reading the *Exercises* that very little, almost nothing, is ever said about that misery, the knowledge of which St. Ignatius considered so important. We have said already that much is written in ascetical books about sin and sinners. Authors go into minute detail to describe the slaves of concupiscence, i.e., sinners. They do this in order that the very ugliness of the sins and the consequences of surrender to them might frighten people away from imitation of the sinner. If there is ever any mention of misery, it is usually spoken of as something which we must avoid, something which we should not allow to touch us, rather than as something which is in us. Nothing, or very little, is said about this: that every man, even one who cannot be accused of sin, has within himself the inclination to every form of sin; every man feels this inclination within himself.

Fr. Semenenko regarded this as a serious lack. From his experience, both personal and that acquired in the confessional, he must have become constantly more convinced of the great harm suffered by souls because there is no one to help them to acquire this basic knowledge of their misery. Therefore, he tried to fill this need. Hence, his constant insistence on the need for recognizing one's own misery. Such is the reason for his solid and thorough presentation of the subject.

### Qualities and Merits

Is there nothing but evil in us? And if there is any good in us, are we not permitted to look upon this good and take delight in it? Some say that to do so is to court grave danger. Man is so

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<sup>7</sup> Alekander Jelowicki (1804 - 1877) - a famous Polish catholic priest and member of the Congregation of the Resurrection.

prone to conceit and pride that it is hard to say how far he will go in idealizing himself on the basis of the least good which he espies in himself.

Fr. Semenenko was not of this opinion. Knowledge of self can never be one-sided, according to him. In making this statement he appeals to St. Thomas, who pairs the virtue of humility with the virtue of magnanimity; the function of this latter virtue is to see what good there is in us, consent to it, and tend to it (S.T. 2, 2, q.129, a.3, ad 4).

How much heroism, self-sacrifice, and nobility there is among men! In our own selves, how many fine sentiments, noble impulses, beautiful thoughts, pure desires! True, these are divine graces; but did we not at least sometimes, cooperate with such graces? Have we not achieved the good, which in that case was the fruit of mutual activity, ours and God's? Seeing the evil which is in us, the very strong inclination to evil, and recognizing that somehow, in spite of it, we have stood up, we come to the conviction that this could not have developed without struggles and victories. It is certain, therefore, that undeniable merit goes hand in hand with inherent qualities which were freely give to us.

The viewing of this good in us, the recognition of it, not only does not lead us to pride, says Fr. Semenenko, but quite the contrary, closing our eyes to what is good in us may be a sign that we attribute this good to ourselves, and it can thus lead us to pride. We retain a kind of general conviction that there is something very good in us, and that this is of our own doing, since the fear that we might pride ourselves because of it prompts us to hide it from ourselves. On the other hand, if we inspect this good more closely, it will become evident: first, that what good there is in it does not come from us, and then that, for our part, we spoil the good which God gives us by seeking in it only our own benefit. We seek to exalt ourselves in our own eyes, if not in the eyes of others; we seek pleasure and satisfaction.

Whence it follows that the recognition of the good that is in us can actually be for us a motive of humility, and can confirm us in humility. St. Francis of Assisi humbled himself most, saying that he was the greatest sinner, when he considered the gifts and graces which he had received from God. When he was asked how he could in all sincerity call himself the greatest sinner, he replied: "As I see it, if God had given the graces with which he endowed me to the greatest criminal, that person would be more faithful to him than I am."

We possess gifts, qualities, e.g., the gift of eloquence in preaching. Are we to deny this, and proclaim everywhere that we do not know how to speak? And as we make our denial, will we ourselves believe what we are saying? And will such statements shield us from pride, and win humility for us? Everyone knows that this gift is purely a divine grace; it is a talent for which we must one day give an accounting. Therefore, we must know of it, and we must use it for the glory of God and the salvation of souls; it was given to us for that purpose. Let us consider how we use this gift. Do we not seek our own pleasure in it? Do we not use it to display ourselves, for our own glory? Are we not more concerned about the impression we make, the applause we receive, than about the good of souls? The same holds true, e.g., for the gift of prayer (if we have it) which, because it gives us pleasure, we use for our own enjoyment; and we are ready to sacrifice works of obligation rather than miss prayer.

Concerning merit... How many battles, how many victories - as we have already stated - were necessary to achieve the state in which we now find ourselves? Knowing this, can we boast of our achievement, or be proud of it? A man who knows himself well, knows that if he depends on nature alone, he will always fall; and that when he falls, he will tumble all the way down. Therefore, if we have resisted temptations and conquered them, this was not due to our own strength, but to the grace of God. "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor 15:10). If we know ourselves,

we know this well. True, we must also take into account the fact that we did not cooperate. This was necessary; for grace would cease to operate if there were no cooperation on our part. But how weak this cooperation of ours usually is!

At times we are not even aware of our victories, for they humble us rather than flatter us. We did fight; it is true – but how weakly! Here again, when we inspect our victories, we find only new reasons for humbling ourselves; for our part of the good which has taken root in us is only misery. God attracted us to good by means of his grace, and we allowed ourselves to be drawn. But how many delays, how much disinclination, laziness, lack of decisiveness, obscure motives, even ill-will! God, by his grace, was drawing us away from evil. We permitted him to draw us, true. But even then, how often did we desire the evil; how unpleasant and difficult it was for us to forsake it, and how we longed for it!

How little we usually we give to God! But God treasures even the little that we give him; he treasures it infinitely. In his eyes this little has great value. Why? Because to every effort of ours God joins his own activity. He regards as one: our activity, and the grace by which we cooperate. And his activity is great, holy, and powerful. To others, to those who cannot see or recognize our interior motives, who do not distinguish God's activity from our own because they are unable to do so – to these men our activity must seem great, holy, noble. They look at the result, and the result is really such, since God's activity sanctifies our cooperation.

### **Application to Life in Society**

It would seem that there is nothing simpler than to know oneself, and nothing more difficult than to know others. For we actually witness – we see what goes on in ourselves. Our thoughts, feelings and desires are not hidden from us. On the other hand, we cannot see the thoughts, feelings, and desires of others. We know something of them only insofar as such persons make them known to us (and we know how diligently and skillfully

men hide what is not to their advantage; we know how constantly they dissimulate). Nevertheless, the fact is that we do not usually know ourselves at all; and we know others very well. We are quick to detect the slightest weakness in others. Jesus confirmed this fact when he said: "You see the mote in your brother's eye, but you do not see the beam in your own" (Mt 7:3).

How is it that we do not know ourselves? Why is it that we fail to see what is so clearly visible, and, on the other hand, see what is so difficult for us to perceive? The cause which produces this astonishing result must be very powerful. It must reside deep within the soul, since it exerts such a definite influence on man, blinding him so incredibly. Should we not seek the solution to this psychological puzzle in the fact that we do not regard the evil that is in us as evil, and the evil we do as evil? We do not regard it as evil because it is in us, because we do it. We justify everything on the basis that it is ours. It is good because I did it. It is right and just because I did it. In others, the same action can be wrong, bad, unjust - especially if I am involved, or if the action is harmful to me.

Can we admit anything like that? This would simply be a repetition of the words the Tempter spoke to our first parents: "You will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad" (Gen 3:5). These words continue to ring in the ears of the children of Adam, continually urging them to regard themselves as gods because they are basically good, infallible. Everything must serve them; and whatever serves them is in order, it is good. Whatever does not serve them, whatever opposes them, is evil. A savage was once asked what he regarded as good, and what as evil. Our answer to that question would be reasoned, learned; the reply of the savage was perfectly sincere and natural. He said: "It is good if I attack my neighbor, conquer him, slaughter his household, carry off his cattle and his wives. It is evil if he does the same thing to me."

Isn't this exactly the law that governs international relations? The interest of the State, the interest of the nation, sanctions every means. There is no injustice, no crime, which is not permitted if the interest of the State or of the nation requires it. Everything that can be regarded as national – even vices and bad habits – must be esteemed, honored and loved because it is “ours.” The fact that it is “ours” justifies everything. It should not be necessary to prove that such blindness cannot, in the final analysis, result in anything good for society. Therefore, even society must know itself.

Someone put it beautifully when he said: “Nations are curable, says Sacred Scripture. But if one is to work effectively for the cure of his nation, he must know its weaknesses, and the sources of these weaknesses. On the other hand, we must also recognize our national virtues, and count up our vital forces, in order to derive from them the greatest possible benefit for the country.” It is necessary, then, that society to know its vices if it is to be cured of them. These vices must be known, not only that we might rid ourselves of them, but also that we might retain a certain humility, a humble estimate of ourselves, without seeking the cause of our misfortune in others. We need to be patient with others, for patience enables us to survey our situation calmly. It protects us from the hatred which blinds us, disrupts our equilibrium, and ultimately destroys us.

Fr. Semenenko applied the need for self-knowledge to the whole of society. The principal social contribution made by him and his associates concerned itself with ridding the society which they served of its vices. In working toward this goal, they showed courage, continually reproaching society with its faults. Fr. Semenenko himself was not an eloquent preacher, but often, in his conferences, he would call attention to these national failings. Thus, for example, speaking of distractions, he says: “Each of us Poles has more or less the same sickness: daydreaming. This is

due to a faulty training among us in Poland, which permits the imagination to develop without relating these imaginings to reality. Each of us, then, ought to work at this, and seek to correct this failing. In fact we should establish this as one of the principles whereby we guide our lives. It will devolve upon us to correct this fault in others as well, for it is a basic fault of our society, in which a lively imagination combines with an emotional heart. The life our society lives is guided by the heart - with which the imagination is closely associated - more than by reason. This is the root of many of the public calamities from which our society suffers."

In the pulpit Fr. Semenenko was redeemed by Fr. Kajsiewicz, his faithful friend; the words of Fr. Kajsiewicz reflected the thought of Fr. Semenenko, for they agreed in everything. Count Tarnowski<sup>8</sup> said of them: "Kajsiewicz manned the oars while Semenenko sat at the rudder, fixed his eyes on the heavens and the stars, and from time to time pointed out the way." In 1838, Kajsiewicz wrote to Jański that he agrees with Semenenko in everything: "I wish to be subject to him in Christ as I am to you. He is my companion, my master. He is my hands, my eyes, and everything, wherever needed. May God reward him!"

It was that way always. They rendered this service to their country as a duo, and for a time they alone performed this service. Theirs was an ungrateful task, for no one is eager to listen to those who reproach him with his faults. They had to suffer much as a result. Fr. Kajsiewicz presented his warning for the first time at a moment when, in the words of Count Tarnowski: "our adoration of self was reaching its loftiest expression; when Krasiński<sup>9</sup> was in the midst of preparing the most exalted

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<sup>8</sup> Stanisław Tarnowski (1837 - 1917) - count, professor and rector of the Jagiellonian University.

<sup>9</sup> Zygmunt Krasiński (1812 - 1859) - one of Poland's Three National Bards (together with A. Mickiewicz and J. Słowacki), the trio of great Romantic poets.



apotheosis of Poland. At that time Fr. Kajsiewicz was alone in urging that same Poland to penance and amendment."

It was even worse when he spoke out once more in 1863. At that time, again, he was the only one who dared to point out the evils in existing society. His action aroused a great storm against him; but it did not terrify him. As Fr. Semenenko then wrote in defense of his friend: "Certainly somebody has to tell the truth." Fr. Valerian Kalinka also, in his history and from the pulpit, bravely took the stage to confront society with its faults. Were these voices crying out in the desert? Fr. Kalinka stated that when he was writing the *Sejm Czteroletni*,<sup>10</sup> he thought they might stone him for his work. The opposite actually happened: he gained in popularity. "This is evidence," he said, "that society has matured and is ready to improve; for the first sign of improvement is this: that one permits another to tell him the truth without being enraged by it."

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<sup>10</sup> *Four Years Diet*, Fr. Kalinka's his monumental work on the last years (1888 - 1892) of Poland before partitions; also published in German (*Der Vier-jährige Polnische Reichstag 1788 bis 1791*, Berlin 1898).

## 2. SELF-ACTIVITY

### Our Nothingness

“Our nothingness,” Fr. Semenenko used to say, “is one of those vital truths which we must establish as the cornerstone, the foundation of our interior life.” He often spoke about this nothingness in his conferences, for from it flows our absolute impotence. We need to recognize, know, and admit this impotence, in order that we might accommodate ourselves to it. Jesus says: “Without me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). Nothing! To rush into action depending upon ourselves alone (self-activity), instead of acting together with Christ, is to commit what Fr. Semenenko regards as the greatest error. He devotes a separate chapter of the *Mistyka*<sup>11</sup> to this “self-activity,” and in that chapter he demonstrates that on the supernatural level, in our relationship with God, the one great evil is self-activity.

Our misery is one thing, our nothingness quite another. Misery is the inclination to evil which is to be found in us, and which is in us as a consequence of original sin. Nothingness existed even before sin; it is a condition of creation that is unavoidable.

God described himself as “I am who am” (Ex 3:14); therefore, he is Subsistent Being. We answer the question “What is God?” by saying: “He is his own essence; his essence is to be.” Therefore, we are not “Being;” otherwise we also would be gods. We should know this. God told St. Catherine: “My daughter, do you know what I am, and do you know what you are? You would possess eternal blessedness if you understood that I am that which is, and you are that which is not.”

It is true that, in creating us, God gave us being. But, he could not give us being in such a way as to make it our very own, so

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<sup>11</sup> Published in English as: *The Interior Life. A Study in Ascetical Theology* (Rome 1969, translated by F. J. Grzechowiak, CR).

that we could say of ourselves: I am who am. While conserving in us the being which he placed in us originally at creation, he must continue to give it to us: in every moment he must, as it were, continue to create us. St. Thomas explains this in almost identical words: "Conservation in being is continuous creation." Hence, we say that we are nothing; but our nothingness is not to be considered only in the abstract. Let us examine it in detail, in its manifestations, or rather where it is wanting.

Life is the manifestation of our existence. Life, in turn, manifests itself by means of sensation, thought, and desire. There are three vital potencies in us, three faculties: heart, intellect, and will. They are called potencies because they enable us to feel, think, and desire. But actually, to feel (to be in the act of feeling), we must feel something. To be actually thinking, we must think about something. To be actually willing, we must will something. Now this "something" is neither in us, nor from us. It comes to us from outside ourselves. In a word, the object of our life is not something that we have in ourselves.

It is not enough to exist, and to live a kind of life. Our life, and hence our existence, must be true life. The requirements of this life must be met and satisfied. They cannot be denied; there cannot be constant cleavage, for this is death. However, not even the potency to such true life exists in us. Our heart must live by feeling – by such feeling as would satisfy it completely and forever. We clarify this when we say that our heart desires love; for love, attachment to another person, is what fills it most. We need to love, and to be loved. But, is this in our power? Moreover, our feeling is not aroused only when it is needed. Even though its object is present, we may remain cold. On the other hand, we fall into a true slavery to the feeling, and sometimes find it difficult to struggle against it. Or, feelings which torment us may take root in us, violently tearing at our hearts. We find ourselves unable to banish these feelings: antipathies, prejudices, grudges, jealousies.

The intellect needs thoughts; but they must be the kind that satisfy it: noble ideas, beautiful thoughts, of which truth is the source. The fullness of its life is not complete when it admires truth, is enraptured by it. It also requires that the intellect become the image of that truth, that the truth be reflected brightly in it, that it take on the beauty of the truth, that it has meaning. Is this in our power? And, even though the object of thought may be within our grasp, we still may not know how to occupy our mind with it, or it may not interest us. Further, as often happens, our thoughts may be vicious or impure, thoughts of despair and even suicide, which trouble us, and which we are unable to banish from our minds.

Finally, the will requires that the object of its desire should exist, and that it should be able to attain this object. What horrible suffering we endure if what we desire is not realized! Our will, our desire, has an object; but does it depend on us alone to possess it? There are times when of ourselves we have neither the energy nor the strength to decide what it is we want; or, on the contrary, not to want what we cannot have. A certain writer once said that whether a man is happy or not depends on him. All he needs to do is: not desire what is impossible, and accept willingly what he cannot avoid. If only a man could bring himself to do this!

“Therefore,” says Fr. Semenenko, “nothingness is the expression of our existence – it is what we are. We must acknowledge this nothingness, see it clearly, resign ourselves to it, and enter into this truth with our whole being. It must become the cornerstone of our spiritual life.”

### **Bogdan Jański**

The question we asked when speaking of the knowledge of self is repeated here: How did Fr. Semenenko reach this understanding of our nothingness? How did he become so profoundly and totally imbued with the sense of our impotence? And how

did he reach the conclusion, which follows logically from the preceding, that we need to avoid self-activity?

First, he experienced this impotence within himself. In 1837, while still attending Collège Stanislas,<sup>12</sup> he included the following in his retreat notes: "My God, how have I spent this school year? How did I behave with the children committed to my care during this time? What happened to all the principles of dealing with them purposefully and lovingly – principles that existed in mind, but not in deed when it came to their daily application? As I recall, when I assumed this duty I began it with you, my Beginning and End – and for some time everything went well. But in the case of the first difficulty, which you permitted to test me, I stupidly confided in my own strength instead of having recourse to you, my refuge. As a result, the punishment for my stupidity fell upon me, and I was forced to bear its burden in dryness and distress of soul."

Another day he wrote: "Upon the advice of the retreat master I reviewed last year's resolutions. Spun out of my mind, they looked fine on paper; but I doubt whether I fulfilled a single one of these resolutions even once." Nonetheless, once again he sets down many resolutions in writing; and three years later realizes how impotent he was to fulfill them. He cries out: "Only you can cause results to follow from this invitation, this impulse. My dear Jesus, I assured you in the beginning that I was ready for anything, even to crushing myself; but it is myself that I fear, my softness and imbecility. You alone, O Lord, can provide the remedy. I fear. I am filled with fear. I have so much reason to fear!" Therefore, he was well aware of his impotence; but undoubtedly it was Bogdan Jański who helped him to acquire this knowledge. The latter was also undergoing great trials, in the course of which he wrestled with his nothingness. The conviction that we

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<sup>12</sup> The Collège Stanislas de Paris was founded in 1804 by Father Claude Lioutard.

can do nothing of ourselves is expressed by Jański at every step in his diary<sup>13</sup>. Once again, he does not speak of his impotence in generalities, using conventional expressions of humility. No, he catches himself in the act; he cites facts.

Jański could detect his weakness even at that early date when he lost his faith while still in his native land. On the one hand, he writes of himself, he had “fanciful notions of the strength of my own will, and of my influence over others, a sense of an extraordinary mission and of greatness;” while on the other hand, “despite my pride and a sense of personal power, even the slightest adversity would stagger me completely.”

Having become a follower of Saint-Simon,<sup>14</sup> Jański fell under the spell of a kind of religious pantheism. At this time he exclaims: “I wish to live in the temple of the great God; to that temple I must call all mankind. I wish to live in the temple of God, that is, the universe (everything)... The opinion of unbelievers does not concern me. They will judge me, and I will judge them. I must accomplish my mission. And I will accomplish it... This conviction, the guiding principle of my whole life, shall govern all its manifestations as well. My life shall be nothing more than a true expression of it.” He is constantly making resolutions: “What I need to do immediately is to establish a definite program for myself to cover the activity of a single day, or perhaps two days. When these days have passed, I must render an account to myself of how they were spent, and then once more arrange a program beforehand to govern my thoughts and actions.”

He makes an effort to fulfill his resolutions. He draws up a program for himself; but he has to check himself continually for lack of will and lack of perseverance. “Lord, how shall I ever accomplish

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Bogdan Jański, *Diary 1830 – 1839*, edited and arranged by Andrzej Jastrzębski, English translation by Fr. Francis Grzechowiak, C.R., Rome 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Claude Henri de Rouvroy, comte de Saint-Simon, often referred to as Henri de Saint-Simon (1760 – 1825), a French political and economic theorist.

my mission? Eight days ago I judged myself to be strong. I thought that I had reached the stage where my religious charity would manifest itself in my life always and everywhere. But what have I accomplished in this week? Nothing! I find myself at a lower level than I was before. I have fallen back."

In another place he says: "What a change for the worse from what I was! When I wrote the above, I was sure that I was finished forever with unsettled emotions, weakness of will, imprudence in my behavior. Must I always be unsettled, weak, imprudent? Is my future to be, like the past, a loss to me, to mankind, and to the glory of God?... How often did it happen that I would find myself inspired momentarily by the noblest emotions! How frequently did the most sublime thoughts pass through my mind! How often was I animated by the most practical and generous intentions! Yet, as I look back over the past, how many such experiences have I had, and how lacking I still am in improvement!" He continues to accuse himself in this way: "Once more a week has passed without completing the project upon which I embarked with such strong decision!" He is disappointed with himself: "Not so long ago I thought and felt: No more anxiety or weakness of will! From now on there will always be hope, quick decisions – always something to keep me occupied!" But this was no for long! A month later he writes: "Last month I told myself the same thing, and did not keep my resolution for even a single day!"

Even after his conversion, Jański continues to accuse himself of acting contrary to his resolutions, acknowledging that he has neither the strength nor the will to fulfill them. Therefore, when he was already a Christian, he makes such resolutions, and hastens to add: "Lord, receive them; and give me the strength and the will to fulfill them." "I depended upon myself and not upon God" he writes, "for, being aware of my weakness, I did not pray with faith to rid myself of it. I am quick to throw myself into whatever promises an increase in personal power, without

stopping to consult God. Beforehand I do not seek assistance through prayer; instead, I have recourse to my own combinations, and my apparently inexhaustible cleverness."

He teaches himself this lesson – as undoubtedly he also taught his disciple Semenenko: "When a good thought comes to mind, some project, even the holiest, before you reach a decision relative to its execution, be filled with fear that your motive may be tinged with personal interest, pride, or selfishness. Next, remind yourself of your sins. This thought should humble you, and remove every motive for self-love. Finally, humble yourself before God. Ask him whether it is his will that you should undertake this project. If it is, beg God most fervently to guard you from pride and selfishness in its execution."

It was not by words alone that Jański could teach Semenenko about his impotence, the need to avoid self-activity and how harmful it is to us. He could also point to himself as the clearest proof of the result of purely human activity. Jański was extremely active, a prolific thinker, and had a flair for organization. As a result, he initiated many projects. However, nothing succeeded for him; everything crumbled and fell apart. Jański himself saw this. Toward the end of his life he wrote: "Thank God! For some time now I have enjoyed peace of soul, undisturbed by the upheaval of individualistic projects, and particular feelings or ideas... Whatever has resulted from my life and labors up to this time seems to me to be obviously unsatisfactory, vain, and practically useless... Consequently, I experience a feeling of general discontent with myself."

At another time he writes: "I experience a sense of immense weariness and discontent with myself. I consider myself incapable of any activity, and all of my activity as vain. I even feel a disinclination to speak... My recent experiences should convince me that I am incapable of directing others... I took persons under my direction and care, but later abandoned them... Ultimately, while they wished to be occupied, I did not know how to



occupy them. They wished to follow orders, and I issued none." It is a fact that, of the works undertaken by Jański, none remains except the religious Congregation in Rome – and this one was not planned beforehand or conceived in the way it later developed. It is impossible that Semenenko should not have noted this, for in all these projects he took an active part.

The merit certainly belongs to Jański that, in time, God did direct events in such a way that Semenenko and Kajsiewicz went to Rome and stayed there. By every means available to him he assisted the work which was beginning to take form in them and through them. He himself lived amid difficulties, in great poverty; yet he thought only of his companions in Rome. "Only Rome. Always Rome. On bended knees I commend these to your remembrance and your mercy," he wrote to Zaleski.<sup>15</sup> "Whatever you give there will cheer and comfort us spiritually, almost as though we needed nothing ourselves."

The original idea with which he sent them out had more of the political about it; but once he understood that God wished to fashion from them a formal religious Community, he forbade them to become entangled in any other affairs, and ordered them to concern themselves only with their studies and the work of sanctification. He acted in this way, for he had convinced himself that of himself he could accomplish nothing; only a work begun by God could endure. His main concern, therefore, was to keep from spoiling the work by self-activity. Semenenko apparently inherited this fear of self-activity from Jański, since he writes these words from Rome to set the latter at rest:

Thank God, we are of the conviction that we can do nothing of ourselves – that it is even impossible for us to do anything of ourselves. We leaven all activity to God! He will arrange events. He will indicate the individuals. He will dispose hearts. We will do whatever work

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<sup>15</sup> Józef Bohdan Zaleski (1802 – 1886) was a Polish poet.

presents itself to be done. To run around, knocking on doors, seems to us wholly improper. We have left everything in the hands of God. In this way everything will be done more quickly and better. Join with us, therefore, in setting your heart at rest. You can count on us, with the reservation that we are sinners who, even before this day is over, are capable of committing all kinds of evil.

### **The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius**

As was true in the question of knowledge of self, so also in dealing with self-activity, we are of the opinion that the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius might have exerted a profound influence upon Fr. Semenenko in forming his views on this subject. St. Ignatius begins his *Exercises* with the meditation on the end of man. In the third point of that meditation he says:

We must serve God in the manner in which he wishes to be served. Why do you hesitate? What doubts do you entertain on the subject? The farmer does not permit his servants to work in a manner different from that which he has marked out for them. Why, then, should God alone be compelled to tolerate similar conduct? No one rewards a service which has been performed contrary to orders. Why, then, should God reward such services? Even acts of kindness cease to please when they are not done in conformity with our desires. How much more displeasing, then, services which are our due? The very holiest works become empty and valueless when not performed agreeably to the divine wishes. "I have no pleasure in you" (Mal 1:10), said the Lord to the Israelites. And why? Because "in the days of your fast your own will is found" (Is 58:3). Their actions were the result of caprice, and not of a desire to do God's will, and the Lord, in consequence, abominated their sacrifices. From this we perceive, even with the unaided light of natural reason, that it is our duty to serve our Creator, not in whatever manner we

ourselves choose to do so, but in that manner which is pleasing to him. Let us ponder well on this fundamental truth, and let it be deeply graven in our hearts (op. cit., p. 30).<sup>16</sup>

From this need, this necessity of serving God in the manner in which he wishes to be served, follows also the need for that famous "holy indifference" of St. Ignatius. For, since we must serve God in the manner in which he wishes to be served, it is not up to us to choose the kind of service, nor even to desire to serve by our own free choice. Therefore, what God calls or destines us to do should make no difference to us: e.g., how long he permits us to live, whether he asks us to work or to suffer, to do this work or something else. At the same time, we should not hasten to begin a work by ourselves, before we have ascertained whether or not God wants this of us. Neither should we initiate some project all by ourselves. We should make an effort to discover what it is that God asks of us, as well as the manner in which he wants us to do it. It was because of this third point that St. Ignatius considered this first meditation so important that he called it the foundation of the whole spiritual life, the principal meditation in the whole of the *Directory*.

St. Ignatius very properly places before the other meditations this one which he calls "The Foundation," since, as the *Directory* says: "It is the basis the Spiritual Edifice. And as the foundation supports the entire building, so the influence of this truth is felt throughout the *Exercises*, and more particularly in what concerns the choice of a state (or of a more perfect life), as this election almost entirely depends on it" (*Directory*, Ch. 12, 1 & 7). For, since a true emendation of life

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<sup>16</sup> The text used throughout this section is that with commentary by Fr. Bellecio: *Spiritual Exercises*, According to the method of St. Ignatius Loyola, by Fr., Aloysius Bellecio, S.J., translated by William Hutch, D.D., London, Burns & Oates Limited, 1883.

consists in electing to serve God in whatever manner is most pleasing to him... (*Ibid.*, p. 35ff).

Therefore says Fr. Belleccio, St. Ignatius “does not assign any fixed time for this meditation, nor does he limit its duration as in the case of the others, to one hour, thus giving us to understand that we should occupy ourselves with it so long as is necessary to imprint deeply in our souls the truth which it conveys” (*Ibid.*, p. 37). He tells us further:

Without this indifference, we shall never arrive at the perfection of charity, which consists in the conformity of our will with the will of God, by virtue of which we always wish that which God wishes, and in the manner in which he wishes it. For the manner in which the Lord of all wishes us to serve him, and to which we ought to be indifferent, consists in this, that we do what he wants and as he wants it. Thus he who is not indifferent will never do what the Divine Majesty desires, and as he wants it. Therefore, he will never be perfect.

The same thought is found frequently repeated in the *Exercises* of St. Ignatius:

It must be borne in mind, nevertheless, that we are to labor for the attainment of this end, namely our own and our neighbor's salvation, not according to the individual wish of each one of us, but after the manner in which God shall appoint; that is, by those means, and in that manner, by which, and in which, His Divine Majesty may wish us to attain it... The will of God ought to be the only goal of our actions and the limit of our desires. Outside of it there exists nothing save error and ruin (*Ibid.*, p. 49ff.).

It is not at all easy to reach this state of equilibrium or indifference. Therefore, Fr. Belleccio strives to support the assertion of its necessity with many arguments:

Since the necessity of this indifference is so great, that without it the entire spiritual edifice of the *Exercises* would go to ruin, in the same manner as a house would fall if its foundation were undermined; and since, on the other hand, it is a virtue extremely difficult to acquire as being diametrically opposed to our self-love I have resolved on putting forward a few arguments to persuade you to it (*Ibid.*, p. 58).

The indifference demanded by St. Ignatius as regards what we are to do, and the manner in which we are to do it, is what Fr. Semenenko calls renunciation of self-activity. Why doesn't he use the word "indifference"? Perhaps because it might seem to some that we must be indifferent to what God wants even after we have recognized his will. I must be indifferent, and ready to do this, that, or any other thing which God requires me to do. But since I already know what God wants me to do, I can no longer be indifferent to this. Perhaps, too, someone might think that in my feelings I must achieve absolute indifference to all things, which is impossible; for our nature will always draw us to what agrees with it. Such indifference is also unnecessary, for our merit is precisely in going against the demands of nature in this struggle with nature.

This foundation: that we must serve God in the manner in which he desires and the consequent principle of indifference to the kind of service, St. Ignatius considered as so important that he saw the lack of this indifference as the reason for the fall of the angels, and of the first man (Cf. *Exercises*, pp. 78. 82-83), and in this he is in complete agreement with St. Thomas Aquinas. For St. Thomas asks: "Did the angels and our first parents desire to be equal to God?" His answer is: "No." They could not desire

this. They only desired to be like God. They desired the likeness to which God had destined them, and therefore, they wanted what God wanted for them. In what, then, did their sin consist? Their sin consisted in this, that they desired to achieve this likeness not in the way God desired that they should achieve it, that is, not by corresponding to the movement of grace, but rather by means of self-activity (Cf. S.T. I, q.63, a.3; 2,2, q.163, a.2).

Therefore self-activity was the reason for the fall of the angels and of the first man. Fr. Semenenko regards it as the chief obstacle to – and as almost the sole evil – in the spiritual life which shows how well he understood and how deeply he had penetrated into the *Exercises* of St. Ignatius.

### On the Love of God

The fall of Adam, we saw, was the result of self-activity. Fr. Semenenko is right, then, in considering self-activity the root of all evil in our relationship with God. But he adds immediately that Adam fell through lack of love for God. “In the garden, and now, in this vale of tears,” he says, “the crux of the problem was and always remains, how will man respond to the question: God, or man? That is, is it to be God or myself?” (*The Passion and Death of Jesus Christ*, p. 17). In the first and second temptations (i.e., in what draws us away from good, as well as in what attracts us to evil), at the very bottom we encounter one and the same reason, which is the ultimate reason for both. It can be expressed in this one simple question: Which of the two? Is it to be God, or man? Is it to be the will of God, the law of God; or the will of man, the law of man? In a word, is it to be God or self?

Whether the temptation acts upon our nature by way of attraction or by way of aversion, the conquest of the temptation does not depend upon either the attraction or the aversion. Even in the case of the strongest attraction Adam could have conquered, just as in a similar temptation Christ actually did conquer. In the face of the strongest aversion, it was not Adam but Christ

who scored a decisive victory. And after him, countless numbers of people have conquered temptation together with him. In the struggle with temptation, our fate does not depend upon how it will act on our nature. It depends on what happens deep within the person, when temptation penetrates there, and confronts our person with the same basic question which the Tempter asked of Adam: "Why has God forbidden you to eat?"

This question is repeated successively to each of us: "Why has God commanded? Why has he forbidden?" We are challenged to respond to that terrifying: Is it to be I, or God? Hence, the outcome of the struggle between us and temptation depends upon the individual, that is, upon his answer to this question: Will it be not God, but I? Or, will it be not I, but God? What can save the person and give him strength to conquer, in spite of the almost overpowering pull of nature, with all of its laziness, unwillingness, and weakness, and even in the face of all its fears and alarms, its dread of suffering and death? What? Something miraculous: love! But grace as well: Love together with grace, and grace together with love. Only love can say: Not I, but God! It depends on a person's love. On that love depends whether a person will venture to speak the final word: Not I, but God!

Therefore, according to Fr. Semenenko, on the one hand it is self-activity, and on the other hand, it is a lack of love for God which is the chief source of all evil in our relationship with God. How are these two related to one another? Not God, but self! This is self-activity – the assertion of our own will and our own activity. What is important is not what God wants, or how he wants it, but what I want, and how I want it; for what matters is not God, but self. This is, at one and the same time, a denial of love for God, and an assertion of self-love. Self-love is the love of self above all-things. It involves becoming enamored of self, and so, the desire of preferring self always and everywhere, instead of loving God and preferring him above all things. Self-activity, therefore, finds its explanation in a lack of love for God. Adam

sinned through self-activity, precisely because he did not give preference to love for God.

St. Thomas teaches that Adam sinned by self-activity; but he immediately gives the reason, the ultimate explanation for this self-activity in the first man. He asks whether man was deceived by Satan into accepting the forbidden fruit. St. Augustine says that to regard what is true as false is not natural to man as created, but is a punishment of man as he is condemned (Cf. 1, q.94, a.4). If this is so, how could man have been deceived before he committed original sin? And yet man believed the words of the Serpent! Yes, he believed. But he did so, says St. Thomas, insofar as he sinfully raised himself above what he was. Falling in love with his own power he confided in himself. In a word, he sinned by pride. Pride is the motive for all sin; it is at the bottom of all sin (Cf. 2, 2, q.162, 1, 5, a.7). Pride is a denial of love, because it turns us away from God.

Before the fall, the first man was not yet confirmed in the love of God, and hence he could be tempted in this manner and so fall. But there was nothing in his nature contrary to the love of God. In fact, in essence his nature was turned to God. Naturally he loved God above all things, i.e., more than himself or anything else. However, already in our nature there is opposition to the love of God (non-love), a consequence of original sin. We now experience within ourselves the inclination to love ourselves, not God, above all things. This means that, as a result, we experience the inclination to self-activity. Therefore, before he sinned, man did not need grace in order to love God above all things naturally; but he did need God's help to move him to love. After sin, not only does he need that movement from God which in the present economy we call "actual grace," but he also needs sanctifying grace to heal his fallen nature (Cf. 1, 2, q. 109, a.3).

After original sin, man is an egotist, seeking himself in everything, and loving himself above everything. It is only under the influence of grace that he does anything disinterestedly (Cf. St.



Bonaventure, II Sent. Dist. 26, a.1, q.1). It is for this same reason that Fr. Semenenko considers self-activity to be the greatest evil in the spiritual life; for it is a consequence of this opposition to the love of God (non-love). As a further and necessary consequence, it follows that, after original sin, there is an absolute necessity for doing battle with our nature and putting it to death by way of self-denial.

“Before the fall, natural life was only the lower level of human life, a kind of reflection of that higher, supernatural life which was, in its turn, an elevation of natural life. After the fall, natural life became the enemy of supernatural life. The struggle between the two became a matter of life and death. One or the other exists only at the expense of its adversary. Therefore, after original sin, there can be no question of entering into any kind of treaty with the depraved nature which is our inheritance. There is no room for constructive reform or elevation of this nature to a higher level. What we need now is not an elevation, but a transformation of our life, i.e., the extermination of the natural, and the beginning of a supernatural life” (*Mistyka*, p. 20).

Before original sin, there was no need for that renunciation of self of which the Gospel speaks (Cf. Lk 9:23); but after sin, once man had uttered the words: “Not God, but I,” these same words continue to re-echo within us. In order to eliminate this disorder, we must deny ourselves every moment, that is, we must deny ourselves in order to confirm God: “Not I, but God!”

### Merits

Actions which we perform without grace – here by “grace” we understand actual grace – possess no worth in relation to eternal life, i.e. they are not meritorious for eternal life. For, as we have already seen, according to St. Ignatius “our holiest actions have no value unless they are performed according to the will of God.” However, acts performed according to the will of God are, at one and the same time, acts performed with divine grace;

for there can be no doubt that God gives his grace, offers his assistance, to do whatever he wants done. This grace accompanies man to do what God wants done, and in the way he wants it done. God does not give his grace to man, nor does he help him, when it comes to actions which he does not will man to do, or which he does not will man to do in such a way. We have already cited the words of St. Thomas who maintained that the likeness of God, and hence what God wills for man, is attained by the grace of God and according to the order established by God: by divine assistance and according to the disposition of God.

However, not all theologians agree that only actions performed in virtue of actual grace merit eternal life. There are some who hold that it is sufficient for man to be in the state of grace, i.e., that he possess sanctifying grace. St. Thomas discusses this question in a separate article of the *Summa Theologica*: "Whether one who has already obtained grace can, of himself, and without further help of grace, do good and avoid sin?" (S.T., 1, 2, q.109, a.9). Let us see what answer he gives to this question.

As usual, St. Thomas begins by stating the difficulties, to which he gives the answers only after he has explained and proved his position.

It would seem that whoever has already obtained grace can, by himself, and without further help of grace, do good and avoid sin. For, grace would be either useless or imperfect if it could not fulfill what it was given for, i.e., that we may do good and keep from sin. Further, by grace the Holy Spirit dwells in us... Now since the Spirit of God is omnipotent, he is sufficient to ensure our doing good and to keep us from sin. Finally, if a man who has obtained grace needs yet another grace to live righteously and to keep from sin, with equal reason he will need yet another grace, and so on to infinity, which is impossible.

Having stated the difficulties, he turns to a consideration of the question, and offers this explanation:

On the contrary, Augustine says that as the eye of the body, though most healthy, cannot see unless it is helped by the brightness of light, so neither can a man, even if he is most perfectly justified, live righteously unless he is helped by the eternal light of justice. But justification is by grace, according to Rom 3:24: "All men are now undeservedly justified by the gift of God." Hence, even a man who already possesses grace needs a further assistance of grace in order to live righteously.

And now he proceeds to offer a solution to the question placed at the head of the article:

In order to live righteously, a man needs a twofold help of God: first, a habitual gift, whereby corrupted nature is healed, and after being healed is lifted up so as to work deeds meritorious of eternal life, which exceed the capability of nature. Secondly, man needs the help of grace in order to be moved by God to act. Now, with regard to the first kind of help, man does not need a further help of grace, that is, a further infused habit. Yet, he needs the help of grace in another way, i.e., in order to be moved by God to act righteously; and this for two reasons: first, for the general reason that no created thing can put forth any act unless by virtue of the divine motion; secondly, for this special reason: the condition of the state of human nature. For although healed by grace as to the mind, yet it remains corrupted and poisoned in the flesh, whereby it serves "the law of sin" (Rom 7:25). In the intellect, too, there remains the darkness of ignorance whereby, as is written (Rom 8:26): "We do not know how to pray as we ought"; since because we do not know ourselves perfectly, we cannot fully know what is for our good, according to Wis 9:14: "For the deliberations of mortals are timid, and unsure are our plans." Hence, we must be guided and

guarded by God, who knows and can do all things. For this reason also it is becoming in those who have been born again as sons of God to say: "Lead us not into temptation," and "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and whatever else is contained in the Lord's prayer pertaining to this.

Finally, St. Thomas answers the objections which head the article:

Reply to the first objection: The gift of habitual grace is not, therefore, given to us that we may no longer need the divine help; for every creature needs to be preserved in the good received from him. Hence, if after having received grace, man still needs the divine help, it cannot be concluded that grace is given to no purpose, or that it is imperfect, since man will need the divine help even in the state of glory, when grace shall be fully perfected. But here grace is to some extent imperfect, inasmuch as it does not completely heal man, as was stated above. Reply to the second objection: The operation of the Holy Spirit, which moves and protects, is not circumscribed by the effect of habitual grace which it causes in us; but beyond this effect he, together with the Father and the Son, moves and protects us. Reply to the third objection: This argument merely proves that man needs no further habitual grace.

St. Thomas, therefore, very clearly requires actual grace, a movement from God, for every action meritorious of eternal life. However, some theologians ask: Isn't it possible that the movement from God of which St. Thomas speaks is nothing more than what philosophy calls "concurus divinus," the usual movement required for every human act in order that it be possible? Careful reading of the entire article will surely reveal that St. Thomas is speaking of a movement from God by means of grace; he intends to prove the need for the help of grace, which means, undoubtedly, actual grace. Besides, he says elsewhere:

God, as the Universal Mover, moves man's will to the universal object of the will which is the good. And, without this universal motion man cannot will anything. But man determines himself by his reason to will this or that, which is a true or apparent good. Nevertheless, sometimes God moves some specially to the willing of something determinate, which is good; as in the case of those whom he moves by grace, as we shall see later on (S.T., 2, q.9, a.6, ad 3).

Therefore, the divine concursus does not move man to a specific, determinate supernatural act; the grace of God does this. Further, that no creature proceeds to act without first being moved by God is not the only reason adduced by St. Thomas to prove the need for actual grace. He offers a second reason also: After original sin our human nature is corrupted; hence, man does not do what is good for him, and is attracted to what is contrary to his good, according to the words of St. Paul: "I see in my body's members another law at war with the law of my mind; this makes me the prisoner of the law of sin in my members" (Rom 7:23). Therefore, man needs divine guidance to show him what he ought to desire, and help from God to actually desire it. By this argument St. Thomas manifests that the movement from God of which he speaks is not the divine concursus, but the movement to a specified, determinate good – actual grace.

The point which we are making here is a very important one. For, especially when we consider the consequences, it is of no small concern for us to know that, if our acts are to be meritorious of eternal life, they must be performed with the help of actual grace, i.e., that the grace of God must move us to perform these acts. Then God is first to act in us; for he moves us to act, to a determinate act, and we only cooperate. Hence, the initiative, the beginning of the action – of what we are to do, and how we are to do it – does not come from us, but from God. It does not depend on us, but on God.

To admit this as a certain principle requires a complete change in our outlook on both the interior and exterior life. For, if actual grace is not necessary to render our action meritorious of eternal life, if sanctifying grace alone suffices, then, so long as our action is good in itself and performed for God, whatever we do in this state will be meritorious of eternal life. Then man will be able to give free rein to self-activity; he will be able to arrange his interior and exterior life according to this own will, choosing whatever mortifications and pious practices appeal to him. But, if actual grace is also required, then man depends on it entirely. He needs to ascertain, first of all, whether he has this grace. He must watch for it, ask for it, and rely on it. In that case, in what a new light the need for self-denial presents itself! It assumes much wider proportions. For we must renounce not only what is evil or imperfect in us, but also our own activity, our own initiative, our own projects.

### The Operation of Divine Grace

The operation of divine grace in us confronts us with no small difficulties. Opinions on this topic have varied. Among the heretics, Pelagius said: "It is not grace, but I who act." Luther said: "Not I, but grace." Among Catholic theologians, prominence is shared by two schools: Molinists, who say: "I act with grace;" and Thomists: "Grace acts through me." St. Paul's formula is: "The grace of God with me," (Cf. *Theologia Universalis*, P. Hilarius, Vol. I, p. 75).

The first difficulty we encounter stems from the fact that grace is, at one and the same time, divine activity and our own proper activity. If good thoughts and good desires exist in us, these thoughts and desires are not just the result of the operation of divine grace, they are grace itself; they are the divine activity (Cf. Mazzella, *De Gratia*, 1880, p. 102). However, this activity is ours as well; for, can anyone be aroused to think and desire unless he himself actually thinks and desires? (*Ibid.* p. 90). It is our activity,

even though it is indeliberate (*Ibid.* p. 87). This same difficulty is encountered not only in explaining the operation of grace, but also with reference to all indeliberate acts. There are thoughts, sensations, desires in us which exist at times even though we do not wish to have them, and in spite of our efforts to get rid of them. And so they are ours, and yet not ours.

The next difficulty is this: not only does grace move us and operate in us, it also cooperates, i.e., our cooperation with grace is also the operation of grace. For when we accept grace, our very acceptance is a grace. As St. Paul says: "It is God who, in his good will toward you, begets in you any measure of desire or achievement" (Phil 2:13). St. Thomas says: "God does not justify us without ourselves, because while we are being justified, we consent to God's justice by a movement of our free choice. Nevertheless, this movement is not the cause of grace, but the effect; and hence the whole operation pertains to grace" (S.T., 1, 2, g.111, a.2, ad 2). How are we to understand that free will is preserved despite the fact that, when the will consents to grace, it is also moved by grace? Let us see what the theologians have to say about this.

The Thomists explain: The will is, of itself, indifferent, i.e., not determined, not committed to a single line of action. Such determination, such set determination, is impossible, for in that case the will would cease to be free. Neither can it determine or direct itself, for it is only a potency, and not an act. Therefore, God must direct or determine it to something. Indeed, if God did not so determine or direct it, if the will determined or directed itself, then the act which was meritorious of eternal life, considered in itself, in its entirety, would not belong to God or to his grace, it would belong to the will, and man would thereby become the first cause of his own salvation. But this, say the Thomists, is impossible. However, then we ask: In such a case where is free will, if the will in all events is directed by God to a single line of action?

The Molinists explain the matter differently. They reject any determination of the will. As they say, free will depends upon

a free choice, and upon being able to act or not to act. If the will were committed antecedently to a single course of action, it would be left with no choice, and it would not have to act (Cf. Mazella, *op. cit.*, p. 501). This is very true. But here we ask: In such a case, how is it that an action performed by virtue of grace can be principally attributed to grace, and not to man, whereas it is the will which determines and directs itself? Ultimately, we will end by ascribing salvation to ourselves.

We are confronted by a mystery. That we cannot understand it is not strange: a mystery is "above reason." But the mystery, as explained either the one or the other school, seems to involve a contradiction, i.e., it seems to be "contrary to reason." It follows only that these explanations are inadequate.

Fr. Semenenko had developed his own explanation. He was of the opinion that the controversy between the Thomists and the Molinists would never be settled, because it has its roots in the philosophical theories held by the opponents. The antagonism, the dualism, cannot be removed except by the introduction of newer and more complete philosophical theories. He attempts to do this himself. Let us see, then, how Fr. Semenenko explains the problem.

We have seen that good thoughts, sentiments and desires are not simply evoked by grace, but are the very operation of grace, i.e., they are the grace itself. They are ours insofar as they are realized within our faculties (Cf. Mazella, *op. cit.*, p. 87). The very desire for such thoughts, sentiments and desires is itself also a grace. As we have already seen, this is not to be understood in any sense comparable to what happens in natural activity, where God gives man the desire for good in general; man in his turn directs himself to this or that good, to a true good or to a good that is only apparent, and therefore actually evil. Our understanding here is that it is God who directs man to desire a particular and determinate good (Cf. S.T., 1, 2, q.9, a.6, ad 3).



What is there that is proper to us, our own, in an act that is free? For, if the Holy Spirit moves the will to act freely, St. Thomas says the will must at one and the same time be the cause of the action (Cf. S.T., 2, 2, q.23, a.2, c). In what then, does freedom consist? In what way does the movement of God become truly our own? For, we need not act, i.e., we need not accept the divine movement. The Holy Spirit, continues St. Thomas, does not move the will to act in the way a man moves an instrument. For although that instrument is a principle of the action, it cannot act by itself; neither can it not act. Thus, e.g., although a pen writes, to write or not to write does not depend on the pen. If the will were only such an instrument, its freedom would be taken away, and merit excluded (Cf. *Ibid.*). The Council of Trent has declared that, when a man accepts divine grace, this is an act on his part, for he could reject the grace (Sess. 6, cap. 5). Ours, then, is the acceptance or non-acceptance of the divine movement, and in this way the freedom of the will is preserved.

But how is the will free to act or not to act, since it is already acting under the influence of divine grace? For we have seen that God communicates to man the very desire for a specified thing. Is it possible for the intellect not to be enlightened, or the will not to be inspired by God, when the mind has already been enlightened, and the will inspired?

To explain this difficulty, Fr. Semenenko has recourse to the scholastic distinction between person and nature. He writes (*Mistyka*, p. 13): "We need to distinguish man's nature from his person... In the Holy Scriptures it is written 'You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your Whole soul, and with all your mind' (Mt 22:37). We must distinguish therefore, between heart, soul, mind, will - and the person to whom these belong, whose they are. The Savior also orders us to hate our own soul; the soul, therefore, must be distinct from the one who should hate it."

Therefore, once the will is in operation, it cannot not act. If it desires something, it cannot at the same time not desire that thing. Once the intellect is enlightened, it cannot not be enlightened. If it is already thinking about something, it cannot not be thinking about that something. However, the person can reject this operation, this desire. He need not accept this enlightenment, these thoughts; and, as long as the person does not accept the desire or the thought, they are not free, and the person does not have to answer for them. The person accepts the desire which is in the will and makes it his own; in doing so, the person desires. How, since the desire was a movement of grace, the person desires in virtue of grace. Then, and only then, is the act of grace an act of our will, and this act is distinct from the acceptance of the grace by us. In our cooperation with divine grace, the person is the one who cooperates, while nature, or the will, is that by which man cooperates: the person is the principium quod, and the will is the principium quo. Because our nature has been elevated by sanctifying grace and is already subject to the operation of the Holy Spirit, we, together with grace, are co-causes of an act which is meritorious of eternal life; for we, acting together with the Holy Spirit, are two agents; but the effect of our action and the action itself is due to grace.

It follows from this that, since the grace of God operates first, and I only cooperate with it, there can be no question of "I with grace," or "grace through me," but rather "grace with me." Therefore, I should act only when the grace of God acts in me. As a result, Fr. Semenenko puts this principle in the first place, establishing it as the fundamental principle of his *Mistyka*: "In the supernatural life we ought not to undertake anything at all on our own" (p. 27). In this way, once again, the need for condemning self-activity becomes apparent.

### Application to Life in Society

Does such a presentation of self-activity as our greatest enemy in the spiritual life – does the principle stated above: “In all things go only where the grace of God leads you,” logically lead to the complete abandonment of all work upon ourselves and for others? We will reply to this shortly; but first, let us investigate another question: Can we possibly know when it is the grace of God which works in us, and when it is our nature, i.e., self-activity rushing out ahead?

The answer to this question covers the whole teaching and practice of the interior life. It studies the discernment of spirits in order to discover whether it is the grace of God or nature which is operating in us. Fr. Semenenko in his *Mistyka* (p. 127ff) explains at length the signs of self-activity, and adds to that instructions concerning when we are to act. Whenever God demands something of us, he also gives us the grace necessary to accomplish the task. He demands that we fulfill our obligations, and avoid sin. If he makes any special demands of us, he also makes this known to us in some way. “God does not command what is impossible,” says the Council of Trent, “but, when he commands something, he requires that we do what we can, that we ask for help to do what surpasses our capacities, and he himself helps us to accomplish it.”

If, then, you are able, set to work, for you have his grace. For example, you feel the inclination to forgive an enemy. You are moved by love for God. You find it easy to obey, and to humble yourself. Recognize, then, that God is granting you a grace. Thank him for it and, influenced by it, proceed to perform the corresponding acts. If you see that you are experiencing difficulties, and cannot bring yourself to forgive; if you feel no love in yourself, and find it difficult to humble yourself and obey ask for grace, and believe, trust, that God will give it to you immediately if the matter brooks no delay.

If God does not grant the grace immediately, continue to ask until you receive it; when you have received it, proceed to act. Prayer is one of the principal elements in our cooperation with divine grace. In fact, our entire activity can be synthesized in prayer, that is, prayer in the general sense of the elevation of our mind to God, as an entreating glance that is turned to God. Fr. Semenenko resolves all of our interior activity into prayer. This is one of the characteristics of his ascetical system; and if we do not devote a separate chapter to this subject, it is because neither the principle itself nor its application, can be regarded as anything exclusively his own. He borrowed it from St. Alphonsus Liguori.

St. Alphonsus based our cooperation with grace on prayer. Graces, according to him, are conditioned by prayer: in the usual order of things, God gives his grace to those who ask for it. He does not permit anyone to be tempted beyond his strength. If he permits us to be tempted, he also gives us corresponding graces; but he orders us to ask for them. He gives to those who ask him. "Pray that you may not be put to the test" (Lk 22:40). Therefore, we "must pray always and not lose heart" (Lk 18:1). According to Pope St. Gelasius, the angels fell because they did not pray. St. Thomas held that the same was true of Adam, and St. Augustine made a similar statement of St. Peter.

But don't we need God's grace in order to pray? Yes, answers St. Alphonsus; but God gives this grace of prayer always, and to everyone. The Holy Spirit constantly urges us to pray: "The Spirit too helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be expressed in speech" (Rom 8:26). "The proof that you are sons of God is the fact that God has sent forth the spirit of his Son which cries out 'Abba!', 'Father!'" (Gal 4:6). That is, the Holy Spirit arouses us to prayer. He prays in us, and draws us after himself to prayer - naturally on the condition that we consent.

But does the practice of which we are speaking have any application to our exterior activity? Doesn't such anxious expectation, such watching for grace, or, what is the same, for the will of God, rather impede progress in spiritual development? Isn't it an obstacle in our work? Such difficulties result from misunderstanding: interpreting cooperation with God's grace as something entirely passive, a kind of waiting in complete inactivity. Quite the contrary, it is an intensely active cooperation, presupposing only the acknowledgement that it has its beginning and strength from God.

Those who misunderstand usually judge that such a surrender to God robs us of all strength and energy. The opposite is true. First, because there is no time and energy wasted on projects which do not trace their beginning to the will of God, and which ultimately accomplish nothing of good. Secondly, because divine activity knows neither neglect nor delay. It moves forward constantly, step by step, according to the saying of St. Gregory: "the grace of the Holy Spirit does not admit tardy and negligent efforts." (Cf. *Mistyka*, p. 128). We see how much the saints accomplished. St. Vincent de Paul never undertook a project until he was sure that it was what God wanted. And yet, did anyone ever undertake and accomplish more works than he did? Was there ever another whose works bore greater fruit or lasted longer? And, since we are speaking here of Fr. Semenenko, let it be said that he was unswervingly faithful to his principle of avoiding self-activity, even in his exterior activity, without any detrimental results.

This was demonstrated most clearly at the time of the founding of the house and boarding school at Lviv. Fr. Valerian Kalinka, an unusually active and practical man, was in charge of the foundation. Fr. Kajsiewicz jokingly described him as a man who first calculated, planned, and decided every move before he asked God to help him. And so, two men had to work together on the foundation: Fr. Semenenko as Superior General and Fr.

Kalinka who, as a subject, had to be obedient to him. Fr. Kalinka, whose outlook on things differed radically from that of Fr. Semenenko, charged that the latter was not doing enough for the Lviv foundation: he was not giving it enough thought. He wrote in despair: "This is, perhaps, the last chance to save the house; and it will not be saved by edifying words!"

At another time in presenting various plans whereby the Lviv House could be placed on a sounder footing, he wrote: "I pray to God that these words of mine may find their way into Father's heart, so that Father will be impressed with the need for strengthening our house; for, having survived many trials, it has now begun to meet with favor and assistance on all sides, except from our own."

Fr. Kalinka himself ultimately acknowledged that this was true. In the history of the Lviv foundation he wrote the following words: "The restless and over-solicitous mind of Fr. Kalinka was constantly darting ahead of the moment at hand. He was constantly tormented by the thought that personnel and funds would be lacking. He was constantly seeking, plotting, bustling about, almost always in vain. Should this Lviv house survive and develop in the future, then in all truth it may be said that no one else but God was its founder." Fr. Semenenko's "inactivity" had more results to show for itself than Fr. Kalinka's self-activity. In fact, without a doubt, if it has not been for Fr. Semenenko, the project would have been abandoned.

Is it possible to apply these principles further to an activity that is entirely social, to public life? The Church has always had to be a militant organization. In every country Catholics have to fight for their rights, for the freedom of the Church, and to preserve Christian life in society. Surely no one can doubt that God gives his grace to accomplish these goals in society, and that we ought to cooperate with that grace. But won't such solicitude for grace weaken activity? The contrary is true; it can only increase its strength.

God himself acts in souls; but it is his wish that even this activity should be subject to direction by the Church. The Church judges whether the activity in a soul is that of God or not; and each and every one of us is obliged to submit our judgment and will in obedience to the Church. If this is the case with reference to the direction of souls, then it must be the case even more so in matters which pertain to the visible rule of God on earth. Christ not only gives us his interior grace, he lives in the Church, directs the Church by means of the Bishops, and principally by the Pope, whom he has commanded to feed (that is, to lead) his sheep.

We must accept the leadership of the Pope. Because he is our head, he must think for us and direct us. In governing the Church, and in directing souls, Bishops, and even the Pope, can make a mistake; but we cannot make a mistake if we listen to them. When speaking to his apostles Jesus said: "He who hears you, hears me." He also said: "Seek first (the Father's) kingship over you, his way of holiness, and all these things will be given you besides" (Mt 6:33). Men will disappoint us; God will never disappoint us. Therefore, if we do what he wants us to do, i.e., if we obey those whom he has commanded us to obey, and seek first his kingship over us - his divine dominion, and therefore the will of God - God cannot refuse to keep his promise, and give us even that added portion: triumph for a just cause here on earth.

If it happens that Papal directives are not always productive of good results, it is usually due to poor acceptance on the part of Catholics, lack of complete submission, and a search for something else first, in place of the kingdom of God. What must our obedience to the Church and to the Pope be like? For us, no matter what kind of obedience we receive, it must be the will of God, for it is God's will that we obey the Church and the Pope. Consequently, he will always give us his grace to fulfill these

commands, even in situations where such commands might be neither opportune nor prudent, as long as no sin is commanded.

Mechanical obedience does not suffice. Obedience must involve both the intellect and the will. We should strive to execute commands in accord with the mind and intention of him who gave them. We should submit our reason, striving to understand the command as just, good, and reasonable, and make every effort to enter into the mind and reasons of the one who gave the command. We need to submit our will. This means we should want what the Church and the Pope want – and want it to be realized exactly as they want it. If everyone would truly unite themselves in this way with the Pope, as the Head of the Church, how strong the Church would be! Their actions would assure the triumph of the Church on earth. There can be no doubt that grace is active in us, and that it urges us to such obedience; for, in the eyes of the Church, this is the only true obedience.

If there is anything harmful to society, it is surely the injection of human activity, that is, self-activity, in religious affairs. Nothing brought greater harm to the Church and society than lack of obedience to the Head of the Church. The Holy Father's counsels and warnings go unheeded. There is an attitude of: "We need not listen to him. He should listen to us. We want to direct him rather than have him direct us." We hear constant complaints against the pope. Discontent, ill-will and suspicion are the order of the day. There have always been such people in the Church. Today they are called Liberal Catholics. Currents of independence bear the name of Americanism. What is Liberal Catholicism, or Americanism? It is nothing more than self-activity interjected into the life of the Church. But, to repeat: Is there anything more harmful to the Church and society than precisely this kind of self-activity?



### 3. CHRIST'S LIFE IN US

#### Can Jesus as Man Abide in us?

Jesus said: "I am the vine, you are the branches. No more than a branch can bear fruit of itself apart from the vine, can you bear fruit apart from me. He who lives in me and I in him, will produce abundantly, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:4-5).

Does this text refer to Jesus dwelling in us as God? A consideration of the entire text makes it clear that such is not the case. In the words of St. Augustine, "Christ could not refer to himself as the vine unless he were a man." St. Hilary adds: "It was precisely for this reason that he assumed a body, that we might be joined to him as branches." Therefore, Jesus is in us as man. But how are we to understand this?

We meet here with a difficult problem. Jesus, as man, can be present in only one place *localiter*, that is, as occupying a definite place. He is present in this way only in heaven. Even in the Eucharist he is not present *localiter*, locally, but in an entirely different way (Cf. Billot, *De Ecclesiae Sacramentis*, 1900, p. 320). We cannot imagine this presence, for our imagination cannot represent for itself something without dimension of form. Therefore, it knows only one mode of existence: local. Therefore, Christ does not "descend" upon the altar at the consecration; nor does he "reproduce" himself, for in that case he would be in many places at the same time, and this is impossible. Further, in the Eucharist he would be deprived of his natural dimensions, and in the division of the host into small pieces he would fit into a single piece. Thus, he would have one mode of existence in heaven, and another in the Sacrament and between the two there would be an abyss, separating him from himself (Cf. Billot, *Ibid.*, pp. 322, 455). Briefly, the presence in the Eucharist would not be that of Christ, but of something else (*Ibid.*, p. 321).

Jesus is in the Eucharist in such a way that the substance of the bread is transubstantiated into the substance of the body of Christ, which is present in heaven, which does not cease to be in heaven, and which is neither diminished nor increased. Jesus begins to exist upon the altar insofar as the accidents of bread, after transubstantiation, contain the substance of the body of Christ (*Ibid.*, p. 322). Because the substance of the body of Christ under the species of bread is not separated locally from its place in heaven, where Christ was, and continues to be, and because we cannot separate Christ's substance from Christ, therefore the whole Christ is present in the Eucharist concomitantly, i.e., mediately.

As God, Jesus is everywhere; as man, he exists locally only in heaven, but sacramentally under the Eucharistic species. Theology recognizes no other mode of existence for Christ. Therefore, if we say that Christ as man abides in us, we become suspect of accepting the ancient heresy which claimed that Christ, as man, was omnipresent, since he is joined to the divinity and his person is divine (Cf. Franzelin, *De Deo Trino*, note to thesis III).

Yet, we cannot deny that in ecclesiastical tradition we meet constantly with the assertion that Christ as man abides in us. What we need, therefore, is an orthodox interpretation of this assertion. St. Thomas teaches that only God himself can deify us, i.e., make us partakers of the divine nature; but he does this through the humanity of Christ which is, as it were, an instrument of the divinity (Cf. S.T. 1-2, q.112, a.1). The Council of Trent, for its part, adds that Jesus, as the head to the members, or as the vine to the branches, continues to pour out his life-giving power upon his faithful followers (Sess. VI, Cap. XVI). This teaching clearly identifies the manner of Christ's existence in us: He is there by his influence, by his activity. Fr. Semenenko explain this.

### How Does Jesus Abide in us?

In his *Credo*, when he speaks of the Eucharist, Fr. Semenenko cites the words of Cardinal Cienfuegos on the presence of Christ in us. He praises the Cardinal's view as "probable, even certain" (Cf. *Credo*, Lwów, 1885, p. 324). According to this theory, once we have received Jesus in Holy Communion, he remains in us "by his soul" even after the Eucharistic accidents have disappeared.

This theory cannot be justified theologically. The soul of Christ is in the Eucharist mediately because the substance of his flesh is there; and the flesh is vivified by the soul, because the body of Christ is alive. When the Eucharistic species cease to exist, the substance of his body is no longer present under the species, and therefore the soul also is no longer present there. The same reason which excludes the possibility of the local presence of the body in many places at one time also rules out the presence of the soul. It is true that the soul, being a spiritual substance, does not occupy space; the soul is where it acts. But a created spirit cannot be everywhere. It does not occupy space, but it must be in a place *definitive*, i.e., in a definite place according to the language of theology. An angel cannot by his operation be in two places at the same time. Further, we have seen that, besides local presence, we know of only one other presence, made known to us by revelation, that which comes about by the change of one substance into another. However, this presence is connected with the Eucharistic species. When the species disappear, presence also ceases.

Although Fr. Semenenko praises and exalts the theory of Cienfuegos, he had his own theory about the matter, a theory which he did not consider developed with sufficient clarity for a secure presentation. The theory of Cienfuegos appealed to him insofar as it asserted the presence of Jesus in us even after the disappearance of the Eucharistic species. This theory's position on the soul was understood by Fr. Semenenko according to his own ideas, i.e., Jesus

remains in us by his influence, by his activity. What, then, was Fr. Semenenko's theory?

Asked once to define "supernatural," he replied: "It is Christ living in us. His heart is grafted into our own as a knot in a piece of wood. His mind is in ours; his will is in ours. He is in us dynamically." The Council of Trent, as we have seen, uses the phrase "virtutem influit," i.e., infuses power. The result is similar to that produced by one who influences another by magnetism – the term hypnotism was still used only infrequently in his time. The subject will feel, think, or will, only what the operator thinks or wills. In the course of a retreat which he conducted in 1870, Father Semenenko explained Christ's dwelling in us as follows: "Christ always dwells in us as a person, but the influence of his humanity is explained as follows. He is present really and sacramentally in the Blessed Eucharist; however an effect of his presence always remains. Therefore, he is in us *effective*, i.e., effectively; for Jesus performed all acts for us, eminently and virtually, in his human body. Thus, each of these acts is in us effectively, i.e., actually, really, vitally. We complete this act, for it lacks the counterpart of our cooperation. A distance of eighteen centuries makes no difference. The influence emanating from the activity of Christ after five years, or after two thousand years, is the same. Time alters nothing. The radiation emanating from the action of Christ is united with our act to constitute a common action. This should not amaze us. We know, for example, that, on the spiritual or psychological level, we can imagine a past activity so vividly that we experience the effects of that action as if they had taken place just now. This is all the more true on the supernatural level."

The above words of Fr. Semenenko were written down at the time of their utterance. Perhaps they are not absolutely exact, but they render his thought sufficiently well, as a comparison with a passage from the *Mistyka* will illustrate. "Everything supernatural ought to be rooted in Christ, and rely on him. If grace is the force

which operates in us, then Christ is a co-cause of our activity, a common source, but always occupying first place: 'Without me you can do nothing' (Jn 15:5). Christ assumed a human nature in order to accomplish all those acts in it which we ought to have accomplished but could not, and cannot, but also to engraft all these acts in us. Christ is the head of us all, the source of divine life in us. From him emanate all supernatural influences. He is the source, the author, of faith, as well as its consummator. Whatever we ought to offer or do for God, Christ did in the name of mankind. St. Paul represents Christ as vivifying the whole body of the Church. This body is one with the body of Christ. We are all members of this body, and Christ is the head and source from which flows the life that is diffused in us. As the head of the body, Christ performed acts for the whole body. It could not be otherwise, for the head has to know what the other members are doing, and control these actions. Christ foresaw each one of us, felt each of us within himself, and even then began whatever he was to accomplish in each of us. This relationship of Christ to us is not some conjecture, theory, or stretch of the imagination; it is a reality. We must be vitally united with Christ – share the same thoughts, the same emotions, the same life: 'In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ' (Col 1:24). We complete his actions with our own; not because his actions are imperfect, but because, since he did them for us, they lack this other side, our cooperation. They lack what belongs to us and what depends on us. There are two sides to this cooperative activity: what Christ did for us, and what we are called upon to do. St. Paul declares that Christ's mystical body, of which he is the head and we are the members, grows (Col 2:19). We must apply ourselves so that it would grow in us 'to form that perfect man who is Christ come to full stature' (Eph 4:13)" (Cf. *Mistyka*, Kraków, 1896, pp. 71-72).

The metaphor of the ingrafted tree used by Fr. Semenenko is also used by St. Thomas. He says that in Holy Communion, which unites us with Jesus, real contact is established with him,

and his humanity becomes as it were rooted in us: "Like a good branch grafted onto a wild tree removes the tartness of the fruit and causes the tree to bear good fruits like its own, so the body of Christ, being grafted onto our own, roots out our vices and shares its own goodness with us, giving us the power to produce fruits of holiness similar to the fruits which it produces" (*Opusc.* 51, c.20).

The example of magnetism, or rather hypnotism in the terminology of today, which Fr. Semenenko used to illustrate the activity and presence of Christ in us, illustrates how he understood that presence. With the help of hypnotism, people so dominate other people, if they consent to be hypnotized, that they think the same thoughts, want the same things, do what they are told to do. In a sense it can be said that the hypnotist, by his activity and his influence, is present and lives in the hypnotized person. In like manner, Christ begins to live in us to such a degree that St. Paul can say: "The life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me" (Gal 2:20).

But, there always remains the difficulty that Christ as man is present only in heaven and in the Eucharist, and that he cannot act as man in many places at one and the same time. As God, he is present everywhere. Thus, he can act in us only as the divine person, but not as man. This demands further development.

### **The Life of Christ in us**

We have said that Jesus is in us by his influence and by his activity. But, Christ no longer lives on this earth as man. Therefore, we must suppose that he acts in us by virtue of such acts as he performed previously, and that he applies this activity to us. He is in us by way of those acts which performed previously. This was Fr. Semenenko's understanding of the question. St. Augustine interprets the words of St. Paul: "In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ" (Col 1:24) as follows: "All the sufferings had been completed, but in the Head. There

remained the sufferings of Christ in his body. But, you are the body of Christ and his members." There was nothing lacking in the sufferings of Christ or in any of his actions, for they were all complete and perfect in themselves. However, our cooperation was lacking. Christ did everything for us and in our name, so that later we could do the same things. Even when Christ "intercedes for us at the right hand of God" (Rom 8:34), "since he lives always to make intercession for us" (Heb 7:25) to the Father; yet he does not do this otherwise than by applying the sacrifice which he offered up for us on Calvary.

Fr. Semenenko says that the life of Christ was not just a lesson, example, illustration for us. Neither was it just an encouragement, motive or attraction. Rather, it was power, strength, an effective force. "Why did Jesus pray, continuing all night in prayer to God (Cf. Lk 6:12), and why does the Holy Spirit in the Gospels constantly point to this prayer? Christ prayed purposefully, to exemplify not just external prayer, but internal prayer as well" (*Mistyka*, p. 72). Preaching spiritual exercises in 1864, after reviewing the various mysteries of the life of Christ, and applying them to the inner needs of the soul, Fr. Semenenko adds: "From beginning to end, the whole life of Jesus must be repeated in us. The moments of the life of Christ follow one another successively, and each and every one of them must be repeated successively in us." When the Gospel states that, "Jesus, for his part, progressed steadily in wisdom and age and grace before God and men" (Lk 2:52), even though it is certain that he possessed all knowledge and grace from the beginning, the Fathers of the Church explain that these words mean he advanced and grew in wisdom and grace inasmuch as he performed acts of wisdom and grace for us (Cf. John Damascene, *Fid. Orth.*, I.3, c. 22)

All agree that Christ did not have to pray, but that he prayed for us. St. Augustine says he did not have to be tempted, but he was tempted in order that we might have the strength to overcome temptation. For, would Christ do all this only to leave us

an example? This would be unworthy of Christ, for this would mean that he performed all his actions for show.

Theology teaches us that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is one with the sacrifice offered on the cross. Not only is the same Christ present on the altar as man sacramentally, but he is likewise the same victim, together with the effect produced and the power that was radiated. However, there is a difference. In the Mass, the victim and the offerer is not just Jesus, but all of us in union with him (Cf. Billot, *De Eucharistia*). There is cooperation on our part. "I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ." The actions of Christ were salutary for us, not just by meriting grace for us, but also as distributing those graces (Cf. *S.T.*, 3, q.8, a.1).

Therefore, we need to unite our actions with those of Christ. The Church recommends that we pray: "Lord, in union with the intention by which you praised God while on earth, I bring you these praises." On the other hand, we inflict suffering upon Christ by our sins. Today, Christ can no longer suffer. Therefore, we must have afflicted him together with the Jews. "They are crucifying the son of God for themselves and holding him up to contempt" (Heb 6:6). "In his own body he brought our sins to the cross" says St. Peter (1 Pt 2:24). Thus, our good works, as well as our sins are intimately related to the life of Christ upon earth. How can we explain the relationship that exists between the Christ's life on earth, and our life in the present day? Is it possible that words, thoughts and actions accomplished many centuries ago can have an influence upon us today? Something similar has been discovered in nature, and it has been put to practical use. Words spoken at some time in the past are repeated at any moment in the present by means of a phonograph. The words are not spoken again, but they are heard again; and any number of phonographs can capture the same words.

But, why go so far afield? We have an example on the psychic level. We heard Fr. Semenenko say that "in the realm of the spiritual, the psychological, it is possible to imagine a past event so



vividly that we feel the impact of this action as though it had just occurred." The thoughts, words, or actions – even the whole life of an individual – can exert such an influence upon us that they remain as a constant echo within us, making themselves heard at any particular moment. When they do so, they console, encourage, fortify, and strengthen us. So deeply can they implant or grant themselves upon our soul, that they can change us into a completely different person.

You have heard it said: "He lives on in his students." Or, "A mother or father lives on in his\her children." But, adds Fr. Semenenko, this is even more true on the supernatural level, for there is a vast difference between the life of one such individual in the life of another, and the life of Christ in us. The words, thoughts, or actions of another individual exist and operate in us insofar as at one time they produced a profound impression upon us, as we gazed on them, and as the image of them remained fixed in our memory. But Christ is God. His person is divine; therefore he is present everywhere. And so, he who once taught, worked and lived on this earth as God, lives now in us, even after the Eucharistic species by which he is humanly present in us have disappeared; and he continues to act in us, sharing with us the life he once lived. It is in this sense, by his human activity, that he is in us as man.

Let us now examine how Fr. Semenenko applies this theory to practical life. "Only Christ knew the nature of God, and understood his majesty. Of ourselves we cannot honor God properly; but, in union with Christ, we are able to make our prayer worthy of him. Only Christ could adequately appreciate our nothingness, understand its whole abyss. At the same time, he was aware of the majesty of God, thus causing the contrast of our nothingness to stand out even more glaringly. Hence, only he could duly humble himself for us and only he can cause such humility to take root in us. Christ saw our misery in all its ugliness, and he accepted the sight, sensation, and consequences

of it. He who was without sin took our sins upon himself, and chose to experience the horror, opprobrium, and detestation of them. Therefore, if we wish to appreciate our own misery, we can do so only when, united with him, we penetrate its complete loathsomeness and go down into its abyss. Finally, only Christ expressed sorrow for sin. He was not, and could not be, guilty of sin; but he took upon himself the form of a sinner and felt sorrow for the sins of the entire human race. He shares that sorrow with all. Alone, a person can arrive at remorse, detestation, but none of us can achieve genuine sorrow by ourselves. Thus, it is only by way of uniting ourselves with Christ that we are able to achieve true sorrow for our sins" (*Mistyka*, p. 73).

We must ask Christ "to realize, and repeat, in us the thoughts which he had on this subject. For, what he thought about things is what we should think about them. His human knowledge and his human thoughts must gradually penetrate our minds. This should be the object of our prayer: to possess not other knowledge or thoughts except those of Christ. Our goal is to attain to the judgment and convictions of Christ, for in him these are identified with the truth. Unfortunately, we have our own thoughts and our own knowledge of things, purely natural thoughts. We have our own judgments of things, and this is very fallible. Therefore, we must pray that this judgment will no longer be ours, but rather Christ's. In this matter we encounter a constant need to catch and humble ourselves, and to beg God to work this transformation in us" (*Mistyka*, p. 74).

"We abound in sentiment. Here too, we must constantly catch and humble ourselves, even while we beg Christ to replace our sentiments with his own. How often we experience inordinate affections, antipathies, prejudices, grudges, ill-will, envy! Our own strength is not sufficient to overcome these sentiments. And even if we were to succeed in ridding ourselves of them, it would profit us but little to experience absolutely no feeling in our hearts for our neighbor. We need to replace such negative feelings with

something positive. We need divine sentiments. Therefore we must ask Christ for the sentiments toward our neighbor which he himself felt. There is in us a constant turning in upon ourselves. We are forever seeking our own will. During his lifetime, Christ sought only the will of God... Christ has already done everything for us. It remains for us to unite with his actions. Only in this way can we transfuse his will into our own" (*Mistyka*, p. 74).

### Our Transformation into Christ

As we said, Jesus acts in us through grace, in virtue of what he accomplished once long ago. Consequently Christ's activity is both human and divine: human, since he re-creates his own thoughts, feelings, and desires in us; divine, since he who acts is one of the divine persons. He is God. Because in Jesus humanity is united with divinity, his activity is salvific. We made this point before. When we cooperate with him, we unite with him in a single action, and at the same time we are transformed into him. According to St. Thomas, grace unites us with God, since it makes us similar to him. (Cf. *De Caritate*, a.2, ad 7).

God has "predestined us to share the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29), and we suffer St. Paul tells the Corinthians, "so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor 4:11). To the Galatians he writes: "You are my children, and you put me back in labor pains until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19). This transformation is our final goal. It is the principal effect of receiving the Eucharist, which is the soul's nourishment – not in the sense that, like ordinary food it is changed into us; rather that it changes us into itself.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Billot, *De Eucharistia*, p. 504: *The sacramental effect must also consist, proportionately, in the refreshment of the soul through a kind of spiritual change or transformation, not, however, a transformation of the one who receives it into Christ who is our spiritual nourishment. Man's spiritual life cannot be perfected by the heavenly bread being changed into his substance; the exact opposite is true. Moreover, as St. Albert the Great observes, whenever two beings unite in such a way that one must be*

In his mystical spiritual exercises (1869), Fr. Semenenko describes our transformation into Christ as follows:

Our life must now be lived in and by the supernatural, in Jesus our Lord. We have a life in common with him: He in us, and we in him, with the help of this super-nature. What are the conditions of this life? We know what this super-nature is. It is given to us to our person, for our use. Yet, we need to recognize, *first of all*, that of itself it is nothing. It is only a capacity, and a capacity does not possess either object or means in itself. Thus, the eye has the capacity to see; but unless there is an object to be seen, it sees nothing. If there is not light, the means of the medium, even if an object is present and the eye is capable of sight, the eye will see nothing. In like manner, we also need an object. For us, this object is Jesus. Next, we need a medium, a means, or better, a power. The Holy Spirit supplies this. Yet, even though in Baptism the Spirit provides the capacity for faith, hope and love, it is still necessary that he move this faculty to act. Thus, although the power, the source, already exists in us, its use still always depends on the Holy Spirit – and therefore, once again, on Jesus Christ. *The second point* to note is this: We should not grant to ourselves what we do not possess, nor, of ourselves, use what does not depend on us. This includes both the object and the power. The object is Jesus: his truth, his good, his will. Our first great blunder consists in trying to fashion these in our own way. The power is the Holy Spirit and his grace. Jesus confers this on us. This power challenges and draws us. However, to wish to respond to it in our own way, by ourselves, proceeding to act even when it is not there – this is a second great blunder. *A third point* that requires our attention is this: The first cause and principal agent, of the supernatural life in us

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*changed into the other, it is the stronger which always succeeds in changing the weaker into himself. Hence, since this bread is much more powerful than they who eat it, it spiritually transforms them into itself. It is for this reason that St. Augustine puts these words on the lips of Christ: "Neither shall you change me into yourself, as you might the food of your body, put you shall be changed into me."*

is Jesus Christ. "Without me you can do nothing." We ourselves are only co-causes, cooperators. Externally, Jesus provides us with the object of the supernatural life through the Church (its teaching, and the sacraments). But the Lord must do this internally as well, granting us true understanding, as well as correct concepts and feelings. The person who is not thus moved internally, and yet goes ahead on his own, exposes himself to grave danger. The object he pursues will always prove false in some way. Our Lord, for his part, confers grace upon us, and acts in us, through the Holy Spirit. This is how union with Jesus is accomplished.

An essential condition for union with Jesus requires that we rid ourselves entirely of self-activity, and also of any claim to independent existence. Self-activity forever rashly anticipates divine activity; it disturbs and hinders the possibility of life and activity in union with Jesus. Therefore, we need to deny ourselves. The "Ego" must cease to be the principle, the source, of our own independent activity. This self-denial does away with individualism on two counts: externally, it puts an end to egotistic activity; internally, it eliminates selfish and independent existence, without, however, destroying the person. Individuality and person need to be distinguished: The person is the "I" who exists; individuality makes me what I am.

We achieve transformation into Jesus by means of our union with him. Each of us corresponds to the divine idea. Each of us, in his own way and under a different aspect, expresses the image and likeness of Jesus. Jesus, the Word of God, wishes to realize his idea – one in essence, but different in the manner of its expression in each of us. In certain respects, this divine idea is the reflection and repetition of his own life of his mind, heart and will. Jesus takes the initiative. He presents himself to us, to our minds, in the way

in which he desires to be loved. We might also say according to the expression of his idea in us, or according to what we are in his mind.

St. John says: "When he appears, we shall be like him." And so, he too shall be like us. When we look upon Jesus in heaven, we see that he is like what we ourselves shall be. We see ourselves mirrored in his countenance. Therefore, it is necessary that we cooperate with Jesus beforehand, in order to change our thoughts into his thoughts, his understanding, his view of things, his judgments, his conviction – so that, of himself, he might lovingly suggest thoughts to our mind which, as it were, have already been changed into his own. In this way, beginning with the mind, we hope to accomplish the transformation of our being into his being. Such is the goal of love: union and transformation. "He abides in me, and I in him."

We all belong to God we are his possession. In a special way, we are the object of God's, of Jesus' delight – naturally only in principle, in potency, in the plan of God; for love demands that we become his possession willingly and freely. We must offer ourselves to Jesus with our whole heart as his possession, for his delight and pleasure. We must surrender our affections to Jesus. He, in turn, must change these into his own, and further implant his own in us, until, finally, we possess no other affections but those of Jesus – his own heart. Everyone of our affections must become a repetition, as it were, of his own.

Finally, we are all children of God, the object of his love. As a consequence, we must live as children of God, awaiting final and complete transformation into Jesus, when we shall become, like him, sons of God. "When he appears, we shall be like him." This life,

like that of the Son of God, is accomplished by way of complete union of our person with that of Jesus, by means of love. Love makes us one. Our being is nothingness, constantly in need of loving: with a holy intensity when it loves well, and with a frenzied intensity when love goes astray.

The love of God, or more immediately the love of Jesus, for us, summon us to love. When his love touches our person, it fans the fire glowing beneath the embers into a great flame. Our love is prompted by his. "We, for our part, love because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). Hence, it is necessary to offer ourselves to Jesus now: 1) in order that we might find in Jesus the complete fulfillment of our being: its source and outlet, the beginning and the end, as well as all that lies in between. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last;" 2) in order that all of our interior acts may become those of Jesus, "so that all of our prayers and works may always begin with You, and through you be likewise ended."

We hope in this way to achieve a union, and a common existence, a common life and activity, until we reach a complete transformation, a common life of two persons who have but one individuality. One individuality because: 1) what is in each is the same - they are constituted in like manner; 2) the two persons correspond to one another - our person mirrors that of Jesus; 3) as such they enjoy a common existence - they are related to, and bound up with, one another, indissolubly and eternally one. Then, I no longer exist; there is only Jesus in me. "The life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me" (Gal 2:20).

### Father Louis Laneau

After we had investigated the first two points of Fr. Semenenko's ascetical system, we asked the question: Does this knowledge of self, this teaching concerning self-activity, have any practical application for the generality of people, or is it simply a deeper insight into the spiritual life reserved for those who are especially called to it? Even more so now, when we are discussing the life of Jesus in us, we must ask the question again: Is it possible for all people to participate consciously in this life of Jesus in us, or is it reserved for mystics, who might understand it and make it the object of their mental prayer? For, in itself, this truth seems to be too subtle, too profound, and too mystical to be shared by all.

Each person can answer this question for himself after reading what has been explained above. Realizing that this matter can be somewhat difficult, since it is out of the ordinary, and we hear or read little about it, we shall try to facilitate its understanding by quoting from another author whose teaching is the same as that of Fr. Semenenko. However, he will present it in his own way, and the language in which he expresses it will be different. One point needs to be noted: His precise concern is to apply this doctrine to all people.

In 1887, shortly after the death of Fr. Semenenko, a book entitled *On the Deification of the Just Through Jesus Christ*, was published in Hong Kong. The author, Rev. Louis Laneau, was the first Vicar Apostolic of Siam. Fr. Laneau died in 1696, and up to this time his work had existed only in manuscript form. The doctrine contained in it is the same as that of Fr. Semenenko. We will cite a few excerpts in order to illustrate.

Writes Fr. Laneau:

Surely there is no one, even one with a very elementary knowledge of the Scriptures and of faith, who has not heard often that the faithful are members of Christ. This is preached from the pulpit; doctors of theology teach it in the schools. There is no other doctrine that is



heard or spoken of so often. But it is possible that there are people who do not fully realize the importance or sublimity of the words they speak. For they think that these words should be understood only in a moral or metaphorical sense. Others, with keener insight, feel that such an explanation, or rather such a distinction, does not adequately render the sense of the words of Scripture; yet they accept it, lest they be forced into difficult and troublesome investigations. And finally there are some who know the true meaning of these words, but put off explaining to the faithful what they themselves see and feel, because they regard the common person as too immersed in matter, and as incapable of understanding a matter so profound. Despite all this, I cannot convince myself that any more suitable or more effective means exists to arouse people, learned and unlearned alike, to the love of Jesus Christ than the practice of setting before our eyes, reflecting upon, and entering deeply into this ineffable doctrine of our incorporation into Christ: union, and as some doctors did not hesitate to say, identification, with him.<sup>18</sup>

It is not my intention to establish principles and precepts to be followed by pastors of souls and ministers of the word of God. However, I earnestly beg and entreat them not to be niggardly and sluggish in preaching Jesus Christ, and in explaining the mystery of Christ. For, while they do instruct children and simple souls in the mysteries of our faith, the knowledge of which is necessary for salvation, they keep silent about Christ. They preach sermons about virtue and vice; and they should do so. In order to imbue their listeners with a love for virtue and a hatred for vice, they gather a whole mass of arguments, they stir up and encourage, without neglecting a single opportunity, and this is to their credit. Yet their efforts often fail to produce results. To use the words of St. Augustine: "They conquer!

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<sup>18</sup> *De deificatione justorum per Jesum Christum auctore L. Laneau, Hong-Kong, 1887, p. 61-62.*

But they do not convince." Why? It may be precisely because they do not include Christ in their teaching as they should. The apostles and their disciples acted otherwise. They too were intent on instructing the faithful in virtue; yet they always preached "Christ crucified," not coldly or indifferently, but in such a way as to make it understood that Christ alone is "the power and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24), and that all virtue is to be sought in him. For the purpose of the preacher can be none other than that Christ be "formed" in his hearers (Gal 4:19), and that they might "grow to the full maturity of Christ" (Eph 4:15).

Therefore, when the apostles wrote about virtue and vice, they did not have recourse to select sayings of the Stoics, or search for reasons and wisdom in Plato. Instead, they cited reasons and motives drawn from the mysteries of Christ, namely: we are children of God, members of Christ, the Church, and the Holy Spirit. If we read their letters attentively, we see that they do not deal with virtue and vice as divorced from the mysteries of Christ, but rather, in Christ and through Christ. Thus, e.g., when St. Paul strove to withdraw the faithful from evil sensual habits and encourage them to chastity, he first discarded considerations to be gleaned from the books of the philosophers, or from human reason alone: "Do you not see that your bodies are members of Christ? Would you have me take Christ's members and make them members of a prostitute? God forbid! ... You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within the Spirit you have received from God. You are not your own. You have been purchased, and at a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:15, 19-20).

Where, I may ask, can we find stronger or more effective motivation to encourage people to chastity? When he sought to arouse married people to mutual love and peace, he said: "Husbands, love

your wives as Christ loved the Church ... This is a great foreshadowing. I mean that it refers to Christ and the Church" (Eph 5:25, 32). When he wished to encourage the faithful to charity among themselves, he said: "So too we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Rom 12:5). St. Peter urged patience, saying: "Christ suffered for you in just this way and left you an example, to have you follow in his footsteps" (1 Pt 2:21). Once again St. Paul counseled mortification: "After all, you have died! Your life is hidden now with Christ in God" (Col 3:3); and to humility: "Your attitude must be that of Christ" (Phil 2:5).<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, if you wish to acquire a particular virtue, e.g., humility, and to make it the subject of your meditation, do not consider the virtue of humility in the abstract; consider, instead, humility as it existed in Christ. Reflect upon the cause of Christ's humility, its consequences, circumstances, etc. Moreover, if these considerations are to be conducive to your greater perfection, do not be content to ponder only the humility of Christ during his life on earth, but seek rather that humility which Christ living in you desires to practice in you, and through you, i.e., seek the particular way in which Christ desires to continue his humility through your humility. For Christ's personal humility and the humility which he effects in his members are one and the same. However, it does not yield the same external acts and results in everyone.<sup>20</sup>

People who practice good works and abstain from evil works in an effort to imitate Christ, yet do so of themselves and by their own choice, are still far from what is most important for the imitation of Christ. It is not enough for us to perform good works as Christ did.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 356–359.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 420.

We must also perform them in dependence on Christ, and in the same way that he performed them. In this way we become conformed to him both internally and externally, so that, wholly possessed by him and animated by his Spirit, we might continue the life which he lived on earth; or rather that we may merit to have Christ living in us, complete his likeness in us, and continue to live his life in us and through us as his vital instruments.<sup>21</sup>

The members of a body depend upon the head, not just when they move, but even when they are in repose. In like manner, we must depend upon Christ whether we are active or inactive. Of course there is a difference: Members of a body have neither the capacity nor the will to move without the head. On the other hand, we have the capacity to act, even apart from a special movement by the Spirit of Christ; but we should not do so. We can act, for our Creator has given us whatever we need to act, and God himself concurs in our activity. We possess a free will and other faculties which are ready to reflect upon and execute whatever we desire. We can act, but we should not; for from the time when we were grafted onto Christ, we surrendered our will and our freedom to him, so that now we no longer exercise these except at the command, and according to the will, of Christ our head.

Consequently, we are left, as it were, without will, judgment, or the faculty to reason and act. In all of those who are in Christ, there should no longer be many wills, but only one will: that of Christ, which is responsible for both willing and acting in us. Would it not be a monstrosity to have as many wills as there are members of a single body? Therefore, as long as Christ does not infuse his Spirit into us, or move us to act, we must refrain from determining and

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 219.

initiating any activity purely on our own. Otherwise, impelled by pride, we would actually be usurping the office and the authority of Christ our head.

We cannot defend ourselves by insisting that what we want is good, and not evil. For the members of a body cannot act in just any way. They have to be moved by the power and force which derives from union with the head. This must be so if their acts are to be vital, rather than convulsive or unnatural. Thus it often happens that acts which might otherwise be good and praiseworthy, proceed, in fact, from some purely natural instinct, for they are not executed in dependence on the Holy Spirit. Such acts are dead in the sight of God, for they lack the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup>

Father Laneau asks himself: "What is the foundation of this dependence on Christ?" He answers:

There are many who think that they give themselves to Christ sufficiently when they refrain from drunkenness, theft, murder and other similar grievous sins. These people pay little or no attention to other faults. There are others who are more enlightened: They avoid venial sins, as well as the more obvious imperfections, for they realize that such things cannot be reconciled with genuine submission to Christ. Yet, because their light is not strong enough, they go no further; consequently, it can rightly be said of them that they serve partly Christ and partly themselves. However, one who aims at perfection cannot be satisfied with only partial dependence on Christ. Such a person's dependence must be complete and universal.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 192-196.

Can anyone who avoids actual sins and imperfections for the sake of Christ, but in other things does as he pleases, really believe that he is depending entirely on Christ? As the head, Christ acts with us by way of the interior influence of his Spirit, through internal inspiration and secret movements of the heart, without any visible sign, for he wishes to exercise control over his body. Thus, he wishes to move the members of his body as his vital instruments by means of his life-giving Spirit. He wishes to move these members according to his will, and he prompts them to act in order to continue the life which he once lived on earth. Therefore, he is not satisfied when we perform good works for him, or on account of him; He wants us to act as moved by him, and in dependence on him.

Christ wishes us to be holy, not just in him, but in dependence on his Spirit. It is in this way that he is able to continue his life in us and through us more easily and more fully. Since we know and realize that we no longer belong to, or depend on, ourselves alone, we should not think anything as of ourselves, or reach decisions by ourselves on any work, no matter how good it may be in itself. To act otherwise is to offer an affront to Christ who is our Lord and our Head. We do this when we dare to claim as our own what rightfully belongs to him. We must wait patiently until we are able to conclude, with all probability, and in good faith that God is arousing and moving us to action. It is such people that can justly be said to be "dead and buried" together with Christ, for in their own estimation they really are and can do nothing without him. As a result, they are careful to avoid haste in initiating any undertaking lest, by not waiting for the movement of the Spirit of Christ, they cause a former way of life and action, now dormant, to reawaken in them; and lest, having ceased to act with due dependence on "Christ, they seem to wish to rise without him."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 198–201.

The last mentioned way of proceeding is a noble one, but it is also difficult and burdensome. Consequently, it does not appeal to all. Does anyone really wish to die to self completely? Is there anyone who will agree to the cessation of his own life, feelings, and activity in order to conform to Christ in all things? It is human for a person to wish to control all the arrangements of his life: to plan, decide, and execute them as absolute master of his own soul and faculties. It must be clear to everyone that if such a tendency is a part of a person's nature, we can expect to encounter great difficulty in trying to curb it. Yet, however difficult the task, it is not impossible for loving souls. One who makes a firm decision for Christ, having determined to take up arms against one's self and one's nature, will discover that God has generously consented to offer his help. Comforted daily by this divine assistance, we grow stronger steadily.<sup>24</sup>

The author raises a question: "But what should one do if one lacks or does not experience being moved by Christ?"

Since not all are granted the experience of being so moved, we must explain the procedure to be followed in such circumstances. First, if an action is neither necessary nor useful, abandon it; otherwise we shall be reclaiming the freedom we once had when we surrendered to Christ. On the other hand, if the action is genuinely necessary or useful, the fact that we are not moved by Christ should not prevent us from acting. However, even then, instead of acting strictly on our own, we should appeal to Christ for guidance.<sup>25</sup> But what if Christ does not answer our appeal? Then we must do what we judge to be more pleasing to Jesus, at least what we judge is not unpleasing, and always with the desire to depend on Jesus in everything.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 211–212.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 202–203.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 205.

Fr. Laneau explains elsewhere how this is to be understood:

Our guiding principle should be: to refrain from a work that is not prescribed or necessary, even if it is licit, unless we are in some way moved to do it. On the other hand, duties must never be neglected, whether or not the inspiration is there. In any given case, lack of any interior movement is to be supplied by permission, which should be sought humbly from the Holy Spirit. This principle, which applies to matters of precept, can be extended safely to matters which, though not of precept, are either very useful or necessary, and in accord with reason. Everyone agrees that the Holy Spirit prompts us by special illuminations and inclinations to what is more noble and more perfect. For that which is commanded is clear and evident. We do not need any extraordinary inspirations of grace to recognize it; ordinary grace is sufficient. But perfect works are hidden from us. No one can conceive such things in his mind without very special help from the Holy Spirit; nor can anyone aspire to them without his help. I regard as perfect works not only such as are extraordinary or of great value, for example, the choice of a state of life, or the undertaking of some great work for the glory of God, but also a great number of other works which, although they are not so important, by reason of their frequency involve tremendous treasures of grace and holiness if they are well done.

Such works are often neglected simply because they are regarded as of little or no significance. But the Holy Spirit, who always provides for our needs, is constantly active. He arouses us to various acts of mortification and humility which may seem insignificant. He draws us away from diverse pleasures, warning and rebuking us for the slightest faults, and encouraging us to do penance for them. He keeps us from speaking even a single idle word, looking upon some object with vanity, reading even a few lines out of idle



curiosity, or eating a few choice morsels just for pleasure's sake. In any number of similar acts he never ceases to manifest his love, encouraging, or discouraging, us as the situation may require.

The care of the Holy Spirit is truly admirable. He watches over us with the intention of weaning us from the external, and converting us to the internal. No Master of Novices has ever shown such great care in providing for the spiritual welfare of his disciples. "Here I stand, knocking at the door" (Rev 3:20), to teach, reprove, command, forbid. The more love the Spirit has for someone, the greater tasks does he assign to such a person, and the more severely does he reprove or punish him or her. As a result, they whom God loves more than others are, as it were, chained to the Holy Spirit. They cannot take a single step or speak a single word at their own pleasure, for the Holy Spirit will immediately reprove them, and strike their hearts with a kind of inner hammer, accusing them of infidelity.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4. EPILOGUE: ON THE MOTHER OF GOD

Did Fr. Semenenko have any special thoughts to offer on our relationship to the Blessed Virgin? Such as he had follow from his theory about the life of Christ in us. According to the unanimous teaching of theologians, all divine graces pass through the hands of Mary. She is the Mother of Divine Grace. If, when speaking of the trials he bore in preaching and ministering the sacraments St. Paul could say to the Galatians: "You are my children, and you put me back in labor pains until Christ is formed in you," (Gal 4:19) how much more can this most Holy Virgin be said to give birth to us anew, and to form Christ in us! Therefore, she is a true

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<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 386, 388-389.

mother to us all – not only because she once bore our Savior, but also because, as the one through whose hands God’s graces pass and who forms Christ in us, she also gives birth to Christ in us. In the Rule of the Congregation, where Fr. Semenenko speaks of a new life by resurrection with Christ, he says: “In this life we must rely on Mary; and go to Mary, so that, through Mary, the true Mother of the living, this new life may be developed and extended upon earth.”

**Rev. Wojciech Misztal**

**The Female Actualization of Resurrectionist  
Spirituality in the Light  
of Mother Hedwig Borzęcka's CR  
Letters: to Know, to Speak and to Help**



Mother Hedwig (Jadwiga) Borzęcka CR (1861 – 1906) who belonged to the first generation of the Sisters of the Resurrection is the co-founder of the congregation together with her mother Celina. She is a perfect example of a creative, feminine way of fulfilling of Resurrectionist spirituality and has contributed to the fact that other women have lived according to this charism for decades. These facts remain strongly connected and draw upon the spirituality from, among others, Father Peter Semenenko CR (1814 – 1886). He, among others, prepared the thirteen year old Hedwig for her First Holy Communion and then became her confessor. Mother Hedwig Borzęcka's CR letters clearly show how she chose such a path for herself and others.

Letters, as a form of communication, have a long history and offer precious heritage that can be shared. This needs to be emphasized in the modern era of new and advanced technologies, which facilitate communication between people but also often make it more difficult. Letters tell us a great deal about the sender and the addressee, as well as about their context. They communicate interesting and important facts which even the most robust descriptions cannot provide. The latter, by their very nature as a mediator, create a sort of filter or explanation: this is not a defect by its very nature for without descriptions letters can become more difficult to read over time. A letter, however, gives a kind of immediate or 'direct contact'.<sup>1</sup> Over time a letter may, of course, require some explanatory commentary in order to be understood but even the most perfect analyses cannot replace the original document, which is indispensable. Characteristically letters can have a considerable influence not only on their direct addressees, but they can successfully overcome conditions of the passage of time, distance, changes in culture and technology etc.

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<sup>1</sup> T. Krymowska, *Introduction*, in J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz CR 1891 – 1906*, Edited, introduction and index by T. Krymowska CR, Rzym 1990, p. II. See also J. Guitton, *O Nowym Testamencie*, Kielce 1999, p. 37.

This is shown clearly in Christianity. To understand how important letters really are it is worth asking the following question – after a generation that does not send traditional letters but only emails and text messages, what information, instructions will be left for future generations? However, even emails and text messages sometimes contain important and interesting information that people in the future could use to their advantage for example to avoid mistakes or be able to cope with life better.

The ability to communicate is a great gift from God and it is difficult not to see it as a divine characteristic granted to human beings that resembles God himself (see Genesis 1:26–27). For this reason, we need to treat communication with respect. This applies also to letters. This can be approached by answering the following question: what can we expect from letters, what information can we get from them and what can we not expect from them? The following analysis will be based on Mother Hedwig Borzęcka's CR letters to Sister Maria Zubylewicz during the years 1891 – 1906 prepared by sister Tarsylia Krymowska CR and published in Rome in 1990. There are 120 letters making up 136 pages in total.<sup>2</sup> These are not all of the letters written by Mother Hedwig Borzęcka to Sister Zubylewicz during this time period. Moreover, sometimes only part of a letter is quoted.<sup>3</sup> "In publishing Mother Hedwig's letters, a greater selection was made than in those of Mother Celina's especially when she was writing about matters already known from the Founding Mother's letters or when answering some of Sister Maria's unknown questions."<sup>4</sup> For the reader's sake, the letters selected for publication in this way, contain the letters of only one of the

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<sup>2</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz CR 1891 – 1906*, Edited, introduction and index by T. Krymowska CR, Rzym 1990. (Henceforth the letters will be given by their date and page number).

<sup>3</sup> See J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 25.11.1896, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> T. Krymowska, *Introduction*, p. II.

protagonists in the exchange of communication. This approach means that the reader needs to read the letters with caution when interpreting them as some important information may be missing. One cannot expect the letters to be a collection of systematic knowledge. However, we can get to know or even learn: 1) how to behave in certain situations; 2) how to indicate justification for one's values; 3) how to cultivate one's identity and basis for dialogue and 4) how to view our neighbors and relate to them.

### 1. The Communication Mission: Getting Involved for the Good

"Thanking you for your letters, I would like to spend a few moments with you at my desk."<sup>5</sup> From the context above it is obvious that being together means reading and responding to the letters. "I don't have any free time yet I constantly I want to share with you what hurts, dismays or reveals rays of trust which prove that Providence watches over us lovingly and that the Lord Jesus – who is Love, will not allow us to go our own way, despite everything and everyone!"<sup>6</sup> "If the situation becomes desperate, please bring the patient to Cracow immediately – a consultation will be needed and the family will need to be notified. (...) If anything unexpected happens, please send a telegram. (...) Please tell Sister Michaela that Our Blessed Lady sees the pilgrims' intentions and before complying with the doctors' decision, the novena will protect us. Mother General sends her blessing and all the sisters greet you warmly. Jesus is with us".<sup>7</sup>

These sample fragments from Mother Hedwig Borzęcka's letters to Sister Maria Zubylewicz, help us to understand the characteristics

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<sup>5</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 15.05.1904, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 5.01.1904, p. 101.

<sup>7</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 2.05.1905, p. 123.

interpersonal communication as such, may or should have. This includes offering help, service and love towards others.

About one hundred years later, in a world with new possibilities of communication Pope Francis, in his message for the 48<sup>th</sup> World Day of Mass Communication, familiarizes us with the way interpersonal communication should look. He refers to an old, well-known text and one which can be seen as having had a very positive effect on people throughout the ages – The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37). In his message, Pope Francis writes about the challenges and possibilities of the modern media<sup>8</sup>. His teaching is inspiring because this is how human communication as such should be seen. “Effective Christian witness is not about bombarding people with religious messages, but about our willingness to be available to others ‘by patiently and respectfully engaging their questions and their doubts as they advance in their search for the truth and the meaning of human existence’”<sup>9</sup>. The pope then adds: May the image of the Good Samaritan who tended to the wounds of the injured man by pouring oil and wine over them be our inspiration. Let our communication be a balm which relieves pain and a fine wine which gladdens hearts. May the light we bring to others not be the result of cosmetics or special effects, but rather of our being loving and merciful “neighbors” to those wounded and left on the side of the road.”<sup>10</sup>

Mother Hedwig Borzęcka’s letters show that turning towards others is not something impersonal but it has significance. Here are some examples that illustrate this approach while also promoting this idea. A letter could sadden an addressee because

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<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, Message for the 48th World Communications Day: Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter (24.01.2014) available at <http://w2.vatican.va> [accessed 5.10.2014].

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem. Pope Francis cites here Pope Benedict XVI’s Message for the 47th World Communications Day.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.



of the sender's ill health or more precisely, as the context here shows, as the result of neglecting one's health. "I have thanked Our Blessed Lady for your improved health but am saddened by the fact, that in your letter, you do not admit that this is your own fault. (...) because as soon as you feel slightly better, you abuse your health."<sup>11</sup> She shows how one ought to be concerned for third parties: "How is our dear Mrs. Wrotnowska?"<sup>12</sup> Correspondence can help face particular problems associated with religious life. "Thank you for your kind little letter which I received today as it had some details in it. I feel that when Mother is absent, you get some relief from talking to me."<sup>13</sup>

Care, plans and getting advice apply not only to individuals or those in religious life. "I sometimes think that we slowly need to collect building material for the nursery which will be needed in the New Year"<sup>14</sup>. Mother's words here show the sender's concern and sadness as a result of the addressee's mistakes in her relationship with her neighbors. The letter aims at helping and healing these relationships: if necessary through others who also have behaved badly. 'When I wanted to write to Sister Stanisława, advising a gentle, kind, loving approach, I received a very resentful letter from her. I always thought she had been treated ruthlessly and without mercy. No one authorized her to return to the convent but since this is what she thought, she could have been given a guest room for a few days since we parted amicably. All this is very sad. I will send you her letter after I have written back. Please read all this to Sister Teresa."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 27.03.1897, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 27.03.1897, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 10.02.1892, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 27.03.1897, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 25.11.1896, p. 15 see also 27.03.1897, p. 23.

The following correspondence also takes a particular standpoint and more precisely, a condemnation and objection to physical violence but also to any form of violence. The information here is worth attention because one needs to take into consideration the differences between those then and now regarding e.g. mentality, understanding, upbringing, the law and its implementation<sup>16</sup>. "We have had the most terrible affairs and goings on since Sunday with Mrs. Comello who beat Maria and Ada in front of myself and Mrs. Haller. Maria is covered in bruises and is coughing up blood. She is throwing Ada out of the house. She is going to lock Maria up in the first convent she can find, for four years. She is a heartless woman. (...) Poor Maria, poor, poor child."<sup>17</sup>

Conveying a message is a lesson in gratitude and even has a supernatural meaning. "Dear Sister Maria, thank you for all your efforts and for all the details of your stay in Cracow and Bronowice."<sup>18</sup> "I have thanked Our Blessed Lady for you improved health".<sup>19</sup> Simply communicating with others is often seen as part of the mystery of grace: God granting His love to us. "On this happy note, I thank the Lord Jesus, for allowing me to tell you so much."<sup>20</sup> Corresponding with others and wider contact with them is active participation in this exchange. Greatness here does not mean getting rid of or stifling our joy or our sense of humor; they too are part of human involvement in communicating for good. "At last you have written back and that is so nice and so honest that I want to thank you as soon as I can for what is in your letter. In truth you tempt me, dear Child, but you do

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<sup>16</sup> See W. Mleczeko, "Zmartwychwstańczy system wychowawczy. Próba zarysu", in *Zeszyty Historyczno-Teologiczne. Rocznik Zmartwychwstańców*, 13-14(2007/2008), p. 215.

<sup>17</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 20.04.1897, p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 16.11.1902, p. 92.

<sup>19</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 27.03.1897, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 10.02.1892, p. 5.

it so earnestly that I must thank you for it.”<sup>21</sup> These letters show communication as a way of noticing the other, observing his or her good and bad sides; noticing them, helping to develop the former and correcting the latter. This is ‘involved communication’ which does not waste the time of its participants. It reveals that we are dealing with the constant union of love and responsibility.

## 2. Letters as a Form of Communication Not Only Between a Sender and Addressee

“Why does Sister Joseph not write to me? – Please send her my greetings and ask her about this. (...) We thank dear Sister Helen for her letter and for remembering our beautiful anniversary.”<sup>22</sup> Letters are sometimes seen as a collection of information reserved solely for the sender and a chosen addressee. They undoubtedly have a right to this. Mother Hedwig Borzęcka’s letters to Sister Maria Zubylewicz acquaint us with communication appropriate for this genre and widen interpersonal relations as such, by even greater openness. It is by no means limited theoretically to merely conveying information but we are dealing with active participation in doing good. Reading the selected correspondence shows that this idea, which is strongly present in the letters, is very important to Mother Hedwig. These examples have been taken from abundant documentation. Reading the correspondence above, we learn among other things that not only in present times in an era of a flood of information, the challenge is an insightful and deep reading of messages. These should not be hidden because signaling them, as long as this does not result from ill will, can teach us how to give and receive help, and show how to behave in such cases and take advantage of intermediaries

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<sup>21</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 8.08.1894, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 6.01.1905, p. 115.

to sensitize and interpret the answer.<sup>23</sup> We learn that religious life does not depend on a hostility to a feeling of joy and even where it does exist, there is room for a smile, a gentle interpretation of reality and in this way we create spirituality in ourselves and our environment. An exchange of information which helps to do this is seen as a positive thing. "Thank you very sincerely for your two kind letters. It is a pity you don't write to your mother every Sunday as this is a great form of entertainment for her and all the sisters and for recreation purposes, one can write something amusing about such things as little profits, albs and uncomfortable benches."<sup>24</sup> A sense of humor should not be alien to our search for spirituality and a deep spiritual life. Humor may create an opportunity in asking for effective spiritual help e.g. in relation to a negative trait which influences people such as a lack of patience. "Here is some information for the impatient on condition that they pray a great deal so that what I tell you, is not lost."<sup>25</sup>

Mediating in conveying information is linked to gratitude for both material and non-material gifts with justified care even for this aspect of life.<sup>26</sup> It becomes an instrument for important spiritual support, which prayer is. "Please thank Sister Laura for her kind letter and the sugar bowl, and send my greetings to her and all the other sisters. Please ask them to pray for me."<sup>27</sup> "We sincerely thank dear Sister Helen for her letter and the fact that she remembered our beautiful anniversary which we celebrated so solemnly, by the good will of Mons. Della Chiesa."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 31.05.1899, p. 51.

<sup>24</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 17.08.1891, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 6.05.1898, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> See J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 19.01.1906, p.128. See also M.T. Opryńska, *Matka Celina Borzęcka i Obrembszczyzna. Drogi wzajemnych powiązań*, MA Thesis, Lublin 2010, p. 83n.

<sup>27</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 8.03.1893, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 6.01.1905, p. 115.

This way of providing mutual aid and building up the community relates to all its members especially those at the start of their religious life and those who lead the community. The texts cited below show that not all requests can be granted. More precisely, sometimes there are technical reasons related to possibilities from one hundred and twenty five years ago. "The novices, postulants and little Ola (Oleńka) send their greetings. Mother Superior has asked me to send you her photograph to comfort you but unfortunately, I cannot do this as we only have this one photo."<sup>29</sup> Taking part in this exchange of information is a way of keeping the commandment of love and a lesson in how to link openness, hospitality and prudence. "Mrs. Haller gave two of our teachers from Mianocic, travelling to Gorka an address where they could find accommodation (...) Cousins, (Sisters of the Resurrection) please do not reveal yourselves but still receive them with hospitality."<sup>30</sup> The words cited above relate to the situation where it was necessary for the sisters not to reveal who they were, for the good of the religious life. We also learn how the spirit of poverty is associated with providing rest and regaining one's strength. "Mother Superior sleeps very well here [i.e. in Tyrnów, in difficult circumstances] because she has a hard, level bed. Would it be possible to make just a simple chest" [in Kęty]: this is followed by an interesting description of a project for a bed and inexpensive equipment (e.g. a mattress, the possibility of placing bed linen in a chest under the bed).<sup>31</sup> In these letters, we come across links to correspondence with the Resurrection Sisters in North America and Bulgaria. In light of what follows in the letters, the whole community faces the same challenges e.g. economic or personal problems: these must not only be faced but solutions need to be found by working together. "Today, I received a letter from America asking for four

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<sup>29</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 10.02.1892, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 2.09.1899, p. 53.

<sup>31</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 31.05.1899, p. 51.

sisters, <without them a new mission cannot be founded>. This is impossible, we will have to dig out Sister Barbara and Sister Julia...Please discuss this matter and reply to this letter as soon as possible."<sup>32</sup> In this context, words of praise strengthen not only those who find themselves in difficult circumstances. "The letters from America show us just one of the problems (...) However, the letters from Bulgaria are evidence of misery, living with the bare necessities, an immeasurable lack of money in spite of 300 and 500 francs being sent. (...) One needs unwavering, supernatural faith so as not to be discouraged in such circumstances."<sup>33</sup> The idea of spiritual leadership and help in providing it is also important. An example of this can be found in a letter from Mother Hedwig Borzęcka to Sister Maria Zubylewicz dated January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1905 with advice for Sister Clara,<sup>34</sup> or the letter dated December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1904 in which Mother Hedwig Borzęcka writes again about the aforementioned sister: "to get back to the subject of Kęty, [i.e. the Resurrection Sisters who live there] (...).I have spoken to Mother Superior about Sister Clara (...) - so please tell her the following (...)."<sup>35</sup>

We also have information about the general state of health of the sisters. "The state of health here [in Kęty] is good in the sense that no one is bed-ridden, but many of the sisters are complaining and Sister Helen is not at all well."<sup>36</sup> Even though the words above appear optimistic, a letter dated February 27<sup>th</sup> 1905, shows what effort is needed to take on a difficult challenge such as the illness of a member of the community. "I ask you most sincerely and advice you to talk about this matter with Sister Michaela but only in the most general terms, as this is a very delicate matter [WM: the decision to operate, how to operate, finding money for

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<sup>32</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 10.06.1901, p. 79.

<sup>33</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 23.05.1902, p. 93.

<sup>34</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 6.01.1905, p. 115.

<sup>35</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 8.12.1904, p. 111.

<sup>36</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 2.09.1899, p. 53.

the operation and convalescence] and since she herself is so noble, talking about avoiding an operation which was advised by Dr. Parenski himself. In addition, waiting and uncertainty may make the situation worse (...) It's good that she no longer has to work in the sewing room. The fewer stresses and responsibilities she has, the more relaxed she will be and this will be better for her health."<sup>37</sup> It may be worth mentioning that these communications by letter are not only with the addressee but that such relations, which are associated with an awareness sharing information, are intrinsically rooted in God and taken into His care. "Greetings in the Lord to our dear postulant Sisters of the Resurrection."<sup>38</sup>

### 3. Correspondence as Testimony to One's Own Vocation and an Aid in Fulfilling It

It is well known that the manner in which a person expresses him or herself, tells us a great deal about their priorities and their spirituality. Christ's words are expressed in St. Luke's Gospel "A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of" (Lk 6:45). The correspondence here is a collection of letters in which one member of a religious order writes to another in the same order and therefore, through them, to all the other members. Mother Hedwig Borzecka and Sister Maria Zubylewicz devote a great deal of effort to the question of vocation but more precisely how to bear witness to the actualization of one's religious vocation. We are dealing with an important issue here which helps the sender fulfill his vocation – it is also offered to the addressee and to others. What is important here is that it must be done in love,

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<sup>37</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 27.02.1905, p. 118.

<sup>38</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 10.02.1892, p. 5.

with a sense of belonging and intimacy. "At last, I have about fifteen minutes to myself to thank you for your two kind letters which gave me such great pleasure because all the little details in them, and which help to inform us about our lovely community in our convent in Kęty."<sup>39</sup> This could refer to a kind of spiritual direction or spiritual motherhood.<sup>40</sup> "I feel that when Mother Superior is absent, you get some relief by talking to me."<sup>41</sup>

The context shows that the 'talking' referred to by Mother Hedwig Borzęcka means letter-writing. After this, the author adds "(...) don't feel as if you are in the grave without Mother Superior. You have the Lord JESUS, don't forget, He is yours and you belong to Him. Remind Him of this not only in your prayers but often, nearly all day long especially when you are afraid that you may think or do something yourself- this is the greatest sorrow, when it is not done with Him because we then ruin His work in us and in others. When this happens, the confusion that results shows us that someone created disorder". The sender then advises that such a situation can be managed and is not hopeless. "Whereupon, call for light, humility, trust and once your soul has calmed down and after you have apologized to the Lord Jesus, repeat these words: <It's not surprising, because it was me>... and simply trust in humility and all will be well."<sup>42</sup> Help may be related to making some adjustments in convent life taking into consideration changing circumstances and which is important here because it shows trust and enables spiritual growth which shows justification. "Is it true that the sisters in Kęty

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<sup>39</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 17.08.1891, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Mother Jadwiga Borzęcka joins the well-known and successful Christian tradition of letter-writing, which allows for efficacious spiritual direction or spiritual fatherhood which overcomes the limits of physical distance or the passing of time. i.e. the spiritual fatherhood of St. Paul towards the Galatians can be seen in his letter to the Galatians and their following of his advice. See Ga 4:19.

<sup>41</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 10.02.1892, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 10.02.1892, p. 4.



are not allowed into the chapel unless they remove their sleeves and aprons? When the chapel is empty, this makes things more difficult. It is a waste of time and shows a lack of humility."<sup>43</sup> The fulfillment of one's vocation is a very personal matter, however, it also has a communal dimension which constitutes help to others, bringing them joy through the mystery of participating in the mystery of the Risen Christ and Holy Spirit. "You at least, be a comfort to our Mother, bear the name Child of Comfort honorably so that you truly become a Daughter of the Resurrection. I carry the warmest greetings and wishes for my darling Confirmation Daughter in my heart."<sup>44</sup> Help in spiritual development comes from prayer and the feeling of participation in the mystery of the communion of saints, with an awareness of need and the possibility of receiving important, supernatural aid. "I entrust my daughter to Our Blessed Lady so as to make her a true daughter of the her Risen Son."<sup>45</sup> Mother Hedwig looks upon spiritual life and on the fulfillment of one's spiritual vocation carefully and in depth. Therefore, for example, in a letter dated January 2, 1894 we find the following interesting words showing the importance of ingenuity and good will in promoting positive relations within the community. "It was such a good idea to sprinkle semolina on the sweets, you really fooled the Italians and gave

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<sup>43</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 9.01.1904, p. 104.

<sup>44</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 7.10.1893, p. 7. Somewhat later St. Ursula Ledóchowska shows that this kind of action, this kind of 'becoming human' in the best sense of the phrase, that is self-consciously a tool in the hands of God means becoming a ray of light for oneself and others. B. Stubenrauch (*Pneumatologia – traktat o Duchu Świętym*, trans. P. Lisak, Kraków 1999, p. 104) understands the Johannine term "paraklétos" as "The one who leads everything towards the Good". See W. Misztal, „Testament” św. Urszuli jako synteza duchowości. Lektura tylko dla urszulanek Serca Jezusa Konającego?, in *Św. Urszula Ledóchowska: kobieta w Kościele i społeczeństwie*, eds. s. M. Krupecka, ks. W. Misztal, Kraków 2015, p. 91.

<sup>45</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 2.01.1894, p. 11.

great pleasure to the community as we all eat the same sweets as the sisters in Kęty."<sup>46</sup>

Mother Hedwig sees changes in spirituality in one's personal life and views them through the prism of a relationship with God and on this basis, imitating Christ as well as further developing a hierarchy of values and the possibility of one's own actions. She is aware of the fact that difficulties may arise. She does not conceal this and empathizes with the other person's situation. "You now probably miss your children but Our Lord never looked for pleasure, so now we must imitate Him. His will is our amusement and pleasure and His will can be found everywhere! I am sorry you have to change so dramatically to become a *bone fide* sister."<sup>47</sup> The reader is also informed about her view on ascetic practices, understanding their meaning and how they should be approached in cases of illness, as well as her concerns about health and various conditions associated with them. "I am very unhappy with you – that you were ill at such a bad time! Was it not worth calculating on something that couldn't be done? But it comforts me to know that my daughter is doing penance by eating sour soup!!! It saddens me that our community in Rome does not do penance and I do not set a good example. Please discreetly pray for my health to be stronger so that I can be a good Mother, not only in theory but also by example- the community really needs this."<sup>48</sup> A letter dated September 25<sup>th</sup> 1899, gives an interesting insight into understanding the relationship between not looking after one's health and true zeal: "Your flexibility and compliance [WM is referring to the sister's irregular lifestyle, failing to adhere to the rules of community life because of her availability for other people] are not the signs of a good cousin/sister/or great talent (...) Then carelessness,

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<sup>46</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 2.01.1894, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 7.08.1891, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 20.12.1891, p. 2.

untidiness abound causing a physical fever and a spiritual fever! I ask and advice you to return to order and then God will bless your health."<sup>49</sup> Another example showing true zeal in religious life are comments relating to a second reflection. In a letter dated November 25<sup>th</sup> 1896, Mother Hedwig Borzęcka writes: "I now owe you a few explanations so please share the information in this letter with the other sisters."<sup>50</sup> The Sisters of the Resurrection need to familiarize themselves with the following idea: "I am against a second meditation for several reasons (...) These spiritual exercises, such as they are, must be done in an exact manner and internally, not just externally and that will be sufficient. Our rule states that there should be just one hour of meditation."<sup>51</sup>

A spiritual struggle is presented in a straightforward manner in relation to the kind of relationship we have with God and how it can be cleansed and deepened "(...) personal struggles can be hard and there are times which seem infinite but this is proof that we are not living with Jesus, not with Him, but with ourselves. The only escape from this is humility and to surrender once again."<sup>52</sup> Mother Hedwig Borzęcka shares the following dynamics with us. As far as human spiritual weakness is concerned, those we are conscious of and those that have been overlooked, she does not stop 'in' the restrictions associated with a sense of guilt or weakness but also writes about gratitude for grace received. An awareness of such shortcomings in such a context leads to ask for forgiveness as well as prayer for God's help. "Be as it may [earlier there was mention of human weaknesses both conscious and unconscious ones], let us sing the *Te Deum* for all the graces received this year and for the immeasurable grace of our total devotion to the Lord Jesus in our religious vows which have

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<sup>49</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 25.09.1899, p. 54.

<sup>50</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 25.11.1896, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 25.11.1896, p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 21.03.1895, p. 13.

also been bestowed on you, my child. I then apologized to the Lord for myself and others and for the many infidelities, and in the depth of my soul I cried out for myself <Lord Jesus, grant us the grace to faithfully watch over ourselves and willingly speak of Your Holy Will>.”<sup>53</sup>

In this kind of experienced and promoted spirituality there are no doubt that there might be a conflict between the love, grace and activity granted to us by God and man’s commitment. This is confirmed in the letter dated November 25<sup>th</sup> 1896. “We say in all honesty: where there is love, there is peace and unity; where there is humility, difficulties disappear. Always, everywhere and in all things we practice these two virtues and when difficulties arise, and we can do little, then we run to the Blessed Sacrament! (...) you do well to remember your vows and sacred promises to the Lord Jesus – this helps you to take up and carry your cross and follow Him. This confirms your fidelity and I hope that your internal storms will not only bring peace in eternity but also here and now in the house of the Risen Christ and I ask Him for this for you.”<sup>54</sup>

We find convergence here in the teachings of St. John Paul II and Pope Francis regarding hope in our earthly life. “Hope of heaven stirs genuine concern for the well being of men and women here and now.”<sup>55</sup> “(...) Human beings too are creatures of this world, enjoying a right to life and happiness.”<sup>56</sup> Mother Hedwig portrays the understanding of human effort, trust in God and hope in the

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<sup>53</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 31.12.1894, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 25.11.1896, p. 14.

<sup>55</sup> John Paul II, Message 32nd World Communications Day nr.2 available at: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/communications/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_26011998\\_world-communications-day.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_26011998_world-communications-day.html) [accessed 31.08.2011].

<sup>56</sup> Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si* (24.05.2015), section 43 available at: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html) [accessed 18.06.2015].

following words including trust gratitude, humility and joyful amazement: "My dear Martha asks what did the end of May bring, dear Helen in her letter also regrets she has no certainty in a certain matter. Yes, my dear cousins [WM: the letter is written in Warsaw then under Russian occupation, so < cousins> refers to the Sisters of the Resurrection] Jesus leads us along strange paths but our blessed Father /Semenenko/ always said that we need to work and do what is right regardless of the consequences. There is no doubt that God leads us along a narrow and thorny path (...). The seed has been sown and will undoubtedly sprout in the Autumn (....) So: semper Deo gratias!"<sup>57</sup>

#### 4. Correspondence as an Expression and Tool for the Exchange of Goodness and Love Between God and His People

Interpersonal contacts are necessary: this is also true of an authentic, well-developed spiritual life in a religious order. In her letter dated December 10<sup>th</sup> 1902, Mother Hedwig asks "How is Father Moszczyński?" to which she immediately replies: "Please send him my kind regards and tell him in secret, that we often remember him with Mother Superior, to which Mother quietly adds <he's obviously a good person, but he doesn't answer my letters>. Please tell Father (...) in confidence, that in addition to our stack of problems, a prickly, thorny mountain of problems has appeared."<sup>58</sup> These contacts are a part of a much larger, more important reality. Mother Hedwig Borzęcka's letters to Sister Maria are not part of some parallel reality isolated from the relation of these women to God but they are infused with the mystery of these relations and are part of them. "I never write to you but I carry you deep in my heart so that I can place you at the Lord's

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<sup>57</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 5.08.1898, p. 39.

<sup>58</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 10.12.1902, p. 95.

feet, put you in His hands or His Most Merciful Heart!"<sup>59</sup> The form of address is often not appreciated when trying to establish the meaning of the message but it also provides valuable information. The form of address of the first letter begins with: "My good daughter."<sup>60</sup> One may regard this as stereotypical, using the normal conventions in letter writing etc. However, occasionally the form of address is written to differently: "My dear daughter in the Lord,"<sup>61</sup> "Dear Sister Maria in the Lord, dear child in Him,"<sup>62</sup> "Dear daughter in the Lord,"<sup>63</sup> "My dear sisters in the Lord."<sup>64</sup> In this way, the letters become associated with the mystery of interpersonal love. The love that unites people expands boundlessly, so to speak, through our connection to God – which has been observed and underlined – in other words with infinite and perfect love on the part of God. The last example shows that this does not only apply to the sender and addressee.

The author of the letters sometimes shares her observations, draws conclusions from them, which also show her own personal relationship with God. A careful reader will also see that he/she is also a protagonist who has a choice to make. In a letter written in Rome on August 17<sup>th</sup> 1891, Mother Hedwig writes the following: "The fact that some women in our nation moan has never bothered me – this is the prayer of a depressed nation". She then adds: "However, when an Italian prays, he/she just curtsseys or kneels in such a way that looks comical!"<sup>65</sup> The letter provides an opportunity to show concern for our relationships

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<sup>59</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 5.11.1893, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 17.08.1892, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 20.12.1893, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 8.03.1893, p. 5.

<sup>63</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 9.01.1897, p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 1.02.1904, p. 104.

<sup>65</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 17.08.1891, p. 1. 125 years after these observations about the different styles of prayer were made, they still seem to be accurate.

with God and help develop them in a positive way. "Oleńka's participation in the retreat is exemplary, she is extremely concentrated and absorbed with the importance and approach of the Holy Hour. I have just advised her to pray for Sister Maria on her First Communion Day."<sup>66</sup> Mother Hedwig uses this opportunity to include some words of praise. She treats the goodness received from Christ Himself, as the key to the mystery of her own life as well as being there for others. "I have wanted to write to you for such a long time but it is difficult to find the time and as you probably know, it is not easy for me here. But the Lord Jesus is so good! Until yesterday, He gave me health and strength, which I have not had for a long time. It seems that there were other needs but now my head and stomach are troubling me in the Roman way."<sup>67</sup> In the same letter, she also suggests that the needs of her religious order should be understood. Widening our horizons has another dimension, not just a chronological one but in fact, an eternal one. "(...) The Fathers are giving us two houses in Tymów for our own. Who would have expected that our community would be living in their own house in Tymów? See how good the Lord Jesus is, always the best, is it not wonderful that He prepared all this for us centuries ago."<sup>68</sup>

The discussion about their relation centers on gratitude. Mother Hedwig expresses this towards Christ as the One who shapes man, allows difficulties but also supports him on this journey so as to better understand His presence, plans and love. "I thank the Lord Jesus for your improved health and that He has given you the goodwill to be so patient. I hope that this mortification which the Lord has given you, will end as Advent comes to a close and the Infant Jesus will help you to understand what a grace life's

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<sup>66</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 21.03.1895, p. 13.

<sup>67</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 25.11.1896, p. 13.

<sup>68</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 25.11.1896, p. 14.

adversities are."<sup>69</sup> In this way, God unites people to Himself and to each other. "Our prayers will meet at Midnight Mass."<sup>70</sup> This attitude of human involvement in difficulties connects us to the mystery of God given goodness but not on the basis self-sufficiency. "We thank our good Lord for graces which we have received from His Mercy through our trials and tribulations but we also have to plead for these graces to be included into their souls."<sup>71</sup> The challenge that difficulties bring (e.g. understanding what they mean) becomes a good opportunity to take full advantage of them. "Maria, this is truly a hard cross to carry but since it has been placed on our shoulders, it is better to carry it so that it benefits us and is for the glory of God, drawing us closer to Him."<sup>72</sup> The subject of gratitude can also be goodness, which we naturally associate with our earthly life: "I thank God for the fact that your health is improving."<sup>73</sup>

The question of decision-making has already been mentioned earlier, managing others in a religious community. Here also the person with this responsibility is not left alone but can count on God's help and that of others and he/she needs to be aware of this. "May the Lord Jesus help you and give you the best inspiration in choosing the right way."<sup>74</sup> In the same letter Mother Hedwig writes: "If you have the strength to manage this, the Lord be praised."<sup>75</sup> It is also worth noting how human mistakes should be addressed. When they occur, there is a need to reflect, after which, with some effort, one gets to know oneself better and trusts in God, to find light and strength in Him. "Should we not,

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<sup>69</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 15. 12.1896, p. 16.

<sup>70</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 15. 12.1896, p. 16.

<sup>71</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 11.10.1897, p. 33.

<sup>72</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 17.07.1898, p. 40.

<sup>73</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 14.04.1897, p. 25.

<sup>74</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 31.05.1899, p. 51.

<sup>75</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 31.05.1899, p. 51.



in humility and faith, accept that God allows mistakes, a lack of prudence, negligence in our behavior so that we can humble ourselves in spirit and in truth and rely less on our own thinking?"<sup>76</sup> Doing good, being kind to others, unites the people who do this, to God. It allows those who receive it, to look to the future with hope. "Let Elizabeth be calm, for neither God nor people will abandon her, let her not be dismayed but always trust."<sup>77</sup>

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Mother Hedwig Borzęcka's letters to Sister Maria Zubylewicz deserve to be fully researched. They should also be recommended as scholarly readings. In this case, a multifaceted approach is justified. They most certainly will be of benefit to spiritual growth. As historical testimonies, they tell us about the author, the addressee, their relationship with their surroundings and most especially with God Himself. In this way they can become a source of knowledge for the reader. This knowledge may be atypical, not from a textbook, unsystematic, but valuable and worthy of trust nevertheless. The letters have a surprising number of ideas including an astute approach, a perception of God, people and numerous other matters, accurate comments, diagnoses, advice, sincerity, honesty, interest, responding to need with engagement.<sup>78</sup> These are the faces and tools of love.<sup>79</sup> The letters can be seen as a school of communication, which could be useful in our times for people who use limited words in text messages or apparently very fleeting virtually fixed, maybe too numerous, imprecise and superficial, hastily written emails.

Text translated into English by Dr. Paula Olearnik Szydłowska

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<sup>76</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 22.01.1900, p. 63.

<sup>77</sup> J. Borzęcka, *Listy do Marii Zubylewicz*, Letter from 3.10.1899, p. 56.

<sup>78</sup> If active engagement is being propagated by Confucianism as positive and worthwhile then why should it not be so for Christianity?

<sup>79</sup> There is an analogous approach in the case of Celina Borzęcka, *Pamiętnik dla moich córek*, p. 1 (electronic text made available by the Resurrection Sisters).



Rev. Robert Nęcek

**Prayer as Communication with God.  
On the Basis of the Writings of Father Valerian  
Kalinka, CR: "To Golgota" (*Na Golgotę*)  
and "Meditations on the Constitutions"  
(*Rozmyślenia nad konstytucjami*)**



Pope Francis has noticed that “prayer is not a means for escaping, disguising or isolating oneself, but for building a friendship which, by growing, allows us to contact the Lord *the true friend and constant companion* on the road, with whom *one can withstand everything*, as He *supports the spirit and will never let us down*”.<sup>1</sup> Even though the Holy Father is not familiar with the writings of father Valerian (Walerian) Kalinka (1826 – 1886), one of the pillars of Resurrectionists, his words reflect the writings of the famous Resurrectionist. Father Kalinka claimed that prayer – which is a personal relation with God, communication with him – is only true when it becomes the basis of a man’s life.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, prayer also becomes a relief for a fading mind and a rock for a withering faith.<sup>3</sup> In this context we will discuss – the communicative dimension of prayer, the elements of authentic communication and the communicative obstacles in prayer.

## 1. The Communicative Dimension of Prayer

In the writings of Father Kalinka, prayer takes on a communicative character. Furthermore, it becomes a tactile, personal relation with God. Therefore in the writing “To Golgota (*Na Golgotę*)”, he tells us that “as much as prayer sanctifies our life, life rectifies our behaviour: it is a two-way street. Any turmoil borne in the course of the day, lets itself show during prayer and until I make it just by confessing before the Lord, it will torment me. We shall then keep our souls peaceful during the day.”<sup>4</sup> This means that the instinct of communicating with God and the yearning for being close to him is of great importance and significance. Therefore, the

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, *Święta wędrownica. Przesłanie z okazji 500. rocznicy urodzin św. Teresy z Avila* (15.10.2014). “L’Osservatore Romano” 11:2014, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Walerian Kalinka, *Rozmyślenia nad konstytucjami*, Kraków 1996, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Walerian Kalinka, *Na Golgotę*, Petersburg-Warszawa 1897, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 25.

communicative dimension of prayer is determined by: prayer as a channel of communication with God and the meaning of holy mass and mortification.

### 1.1. Prayer Connects us to God

In “Meditations on the Constitutions” (*Rozmyślenia nad konstytucjami*), Father Kalinka has stated that prayer becomes a channel of communication with God. This means that not only friars, but all Christians are obliged to consult their everyday affairs with merciful God. It is God who must be the object of any Christian activities. Only then does prayer become palpable. Therefore, one must have valid intentions before meeting Him. Not coincidentally did Father Kalinka ask his brothers: “do I always have an intention when praying? What are the fruits of my prayer? Can everything I do be considered prayer?”<sup>5</sup> Kalinka’s approach towards praying allows for effectively scheduling the whole day, as a specified prayer leaves us no illusions, incites us to fulfil our duties and protects from misunderstandings. Within this perspective Father Kalinka has beautifully described a well-defined prayer: “a morning prayer is sunrise which determines the whole day. A prayer that does not formulate the day by shining a light and providing warmth is not a sun but an artificial light, a ruse to toy with the soul, feeding our emotionality. It is not real prayer, a genuine relation between the soul and God. Is the morning prayer the focal point of each and every one of my days?”<sup>6</sup>

This question is significant. Neglecting it might lead to such prayer that more likely resembles moving the sand of piety than an honest conversation with our loving Father. Meanwhile, prayer is supposed to resemble authentic communication with God and a spiritual bond that becomes real communication. This understanding of prayer results in specified communication with

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<sup>5</sup> Walerian Kalinka, *Rozmyślenia nad konstytucjami*, Kraków 1996, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem.

others. That is why establishing personal relations with God by communication, means, in reference to our fellows, taking care in their present "in utmost marginalised and disturbing situations, and acknowledging their dignity."<sup>7</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI has perfectly described the essence of communication by praying in the understanding of Father Kalinka. The Holy Father said that "communication should be regarded as a reflection of our participation in God's communicative and unifying love, as God wishes to congregate the entire human-kind within a single family."<sup>8</sup> In such perspective, communication means being available for God in a specific dimension of prayer.

## 1.2. The Meaning of the Holy Mass and Mortification

Father Valerian Kalinka has noticed that holy mass is a man's path, strength and prosperity. This path can help us win anything we wish for, provided that a participant in the Eucharist comes to realise what he seeks to gain and achieve. Thus, to gain, we must "know what it is that we are to gain; one must know God's requirements towards us, our chores, God's will that we are to fulfil."<sup>9</sup> Kalinka's saying is of significance, as it is prayer and Eucharist that enable us to step beyond the circle of our private affairs, once again be able to be close to others, "especially in times of trial."<sup>10</sup> This means that Eucharist can be extremely therapeutic, helping us not only to withstand suffering and the hardship of

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<sup>7</sup> Francis, *Między godnością i transcendencją. Przemówienie w Parlamencie Europejskim* (25.11.2014), "L'Osservatore Romano" 12:2014, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Benedict XVI, *Nowe technologie, nowe relacje. Trzeba rozpowszechniać kulturę szacunku, dialogu i przyjaźni. Orędzie na XLIII Światowy Dzień Środków Społecznego Przekazu* (24.01.2009), "L'Osservatore Romano" 3:2009, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Walerian Kalinka, *Rozmyślania nad konstytucjami*, Kraków 1996, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> Benedict XVI, *Modlitwa umacnia naszą więź z Bogiem Ojcem i otwiera serca na potrzeby ludzi* (14.12.2011), "L'Osservatore Romano" 2:2012, p. 50.

life, but to mend our problematic relations with our friends and close ones as well<sup>11</sup>. In this perspective, the saying of Father Kalinka is noteworthy, because "if the faith dies out, prayer stops, and we descend into darkness, become lost on our path of life."<sup>12</sup> Are then the questions of a famous Resurrectionist, contained in "Meditations on the Constitutions" (*Rozmyślenia nad konstytucjami*) purely coincidental: "do I not act without thinking and am I indifferent during a holy mass? Am I like this anytime I ask God for anything, especially in matters concerning my own soul?"<sup>13</sup>

These questions are remarkable, and the answers to them are not at all infantile. Kalinka's answers focus on mortification which is necessary for acquiring a strong spirit. In the light of his writings "we must mortify the body, mind and soul. None of these mortifications may not be neglected, as our path will turn sideways, our soul will lose harmony."<sup>14</sup> Father Kalinka accuses today's clergy of: abundance in speech, too much stress put on freedom of expression, vanity, the will to rule and judge.<sup>15</sup>

Father Kalinka's observations are timeless, as the tragedy of the times we live in is not the proclamation of God's death, but God being removed from our vision of the world. God has ceased to be a part of our moral and life choices, making these people feel deprived of a meaning of life and creating a spiritual void lacking any values.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, it is only through mortification together with prayer that we are able to retain spiritual balance and a live contact

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Robert Nęcek, *Moralno-religijne aspekty opieki medycznej*, „Przegląd Lekarski” 6:2012, p. 274.

<sup>12</sup> Francis, *Modlitwa maryjna z papieżem. Kobiety, które walczą i się modlą*, „L'Osservatore Romano” 12:2013, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> Walerian Kalinka, *Rozmyślenia nad konstytucjami*, Kraków 1996, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. ibidem, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Por. Józef Życiński, *Pożegnanie z Nazaretem*, Lublin 2000, p. 284.



with God.<sup>17</sup> Only then, meeting God by praying – as pope Francis will say – “makes us want to *come down from the mountain* and return to the bottom, to the plain where we meet our many brothers and sisters who toil, suffer from diseases, injustice, ignorance, material and spiritual poverty.”<sup>18</sup>

## 2. Elements of Authentic Communication

In the “To Golgota” (*Na Golgotę*) writing, Father Kalinka poses the question: “Does not the soul crave for a smile and joy as a flower craves for the sun and without the sun it withers?”. In the context of this question – if prayer is understood as a spiritual connection with God which bases on communication, and embodies spiritual solace and joy, its authenticity is determined by: truth, humility and patience.

### 2.1. Truth

According to Father Kalinka, it takes good will, simplicity and humility to learn the truth. Therefore he has written that “there must be something inside us that in any way reflects this truth, some similarity to it, or at the very least, the wish to learn it. Otherwise listening becomes futile. And yet we need even more. As our body has its organs, i.e. senses responsible for receiving sensations from the outer world, without which would be utterly lifeless, our soul possesses an organ for receiving and accepting truth; this organ is the sense of truth. One shall know it and bear it in mind.”<sup>19</sup> This means that truth is the heart of comprehensive communication. There is no communication without truth.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Walerian Kalinka, *Rozmyślenia nad konstytucjami*, Kraków 1996, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Francis, *Z Ewangelią w kieszeni* (16.03.2014), “L’Osservatore Romano” 3–4:2014, p. 55.

<sup>19</sup> Walerian Kalinka, *Na Golgotę*, Petersburg-Warszawa 1897, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 65.

By analysing the demeanor of Pontius Pilate, Kalinka wants to tell us that Pilate became blind to the truth, as he didn't want to lose the office. His conscience was determined by Caesar's orders. In this context, the famous Resurrectionist wants to emphasise that supernatural truths must all the more be reflected in the heart "and then all the life becomes proof thereof. But he, who is driven by dishonesty and urge for lying, who is blinded and stupefied by pride or disgraced by lust including the inner sense, the pious sense cannot exist, he will never accept any proof, and will always be filled with doubt, despite being preached to."<sup>21</sup> The teaching of Father Kalinka beautifully correlates with the modern prophecy of pope Francis, who while still the Metropolitan of Buenos Aires emphasised that: "he is damned who does not gently stand by truth, who is not aware of what he believes in, presents ambiguous beliefs; who takes utmost care in creating his image, the micro-universe of his own ambitions. His fears shall eventually turn into aggression, a feeling of omnipotence or reckless improvisation."<sup>22</sup>

## 2.2. Humility and Patience

Humility and patience are another element of authentic prayer communication. In "Meditations on the Constitutions" (*Rozmyślenia nad konstytucjami*) Father Kalinka has noticed that perfection cannot exist without humility and "humility is silence, sweetness, patience."<sup>23</sup> That is why a humble person will quickly rise following a fall.

Father Kalinka's logic is exceptionally evangelic, as "every saint has a past and every sinner has a future."<sup>24</sup> In this context,

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<sup>21</sup> Francis. Jorge Mario Bergoglio, *Prawdziwa władza jest służbą*, Kraków 2013, p. 414.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> Walerian Kalinka, *Rozmyślenia nad konstytucjami*, Kraków 1996, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> Francis, *Przy stole z grzesznikami* (13.04.2016), "L'Osservatore Romano" 5:2016, p. 36.

claiming that the “Church is holy” does not mean it comprises people who are flawless, only that a sinner can become a saint in the Church. Thereby, the Christian life is an education in humility, opening people to the grace of God.<sup>25</sup>

Knowing this, humble demeanor does not consist in bringing our foes to their knees, but acquiring them for ourselves. Striking the enemy down is a success half-achieved. Complete success is acquiring him for the cause. This means – as pope Francis has said – that the love of a heart with recognition for own sins counts above others, as “all religious acts are ineffective when done without a humble heart.”<sup>26</sup> It is therefore a question of truth, and it is sought after by the humble, as they are the ones who know how difficult it is to find it.<sup>27</sup>

In this perspective, communication is regarded as a common ground for truth-seeking that gives birth to a prosperous community and counteracts aggression. This also means that patience is not only a virtue of the departed. Patience is the virtue of, above others, great men.

### 3. Communicative Obstacles in Prayer

In the “To Golgota” (*Na Golgotę*) writing, Father Valerian Kalinka reminds us that every man is subject to temptation. Without temptations “we would perhaps be without sin, like a tree, but we could never become saints. Temptation is great blessing, one must not only know, but also make use of it. It pushes us towards evil, and our reactions to it lead to sanctity.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, without a reaction, temptation leads us to evil and becomes a communica-

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Robert Nęcek, *Od kapłaństwa do społeczeństwa. Wybrane kwestie z nauki społecznej papieża Franciszka*, Kraków 2014, p. 48.

<sup>28</sup> Walerian Kalinka, *Na Golgotę*, Petersburg-Warszawa 1897, p. 13.

tion obstacle in prayer. These include: pride and anger, envy and antipathy, ignoring retreat.

### 3.1. Pride and Anger

Anger-related pride is one of the main obstacles in the process of comprehensible communication. It is the approach taken by the insecure and underappreciated. It was not coincidental when Father Kalinka wrote: "anyone who would wish to eclipse our vision, towards whom the human eyes are directed, is unkind to us; thus we must face him, we cut his head off. By this solemn dignity we become the judges of others, we summon everyone before us, for them we decide their fate."<sup>29</sup> Pride is the source of bad judgment and bad-mouthing.

This way, pride creates anger. The more we bad-mouth, the more we hate. Kalinka lists the stages of hatred:

- Spreading rumours about others, dictated by the heart
- Trying to incite others to become hostile towards a neighbour
- Instigating oneself and others
- Further bad-mouthing
- Hatred – "now when I have bad-mouthed him, I hate him, I could shred him into pieces; and when I cannot, the least I can do is slander his good name."<sup>30</sup>

Father Kalinka's analysis perfectly fits the modern message of Pope Francis, who was urging the people of the Church to beware of their service becoming abundant in pride "from being triumphant over an enemy, nor shall it humiliate those universally regarded as losers and rejects! Mercy can help us mitigate the adversities we face and bring warmth to those who had received nothing but the coldness of judgment."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>31</sup> Francis, *Komunikacja i miłosierdzie – owocne spotkanie. Orędzie na L Światowy Dzień Środków Społecznego Przekazu 2016 roku*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 2:2016, p. 9.

### 3.2. Envy and Antipathy

Envy is somewhat similar to pride. While pride causes exaltation, envy makes us humiliate others. It is such a vile and low feeling that any man, poisoned by its shadow, will conceal it and bite it in secret instead of taking an open approach.<sup>32</sup>

One can safely say that Father Kalinka was an excellent phenomenologist in this regard. He has accurately observed that an envious man is – “like a burglar who carefully assesses what he can steal and hide in his coffer, without being caught. And so, an envious man follows in silence, by which he can tarnish the fame of the one he envies, and returns into hiding after the deed. Envy is the strongest opposite of the love for a neighbour.”<sup>33</sup> Envy entails antipathy which only sees in people that, of which they can be easily accused.<sup>34</sup> This means that the heart of an envious man is diseased, corrupted and lamentable.

### 3.3. Ignoring Spiritual Retreat

Undoubtedly, ignoring or indifferently participating in spiritual retreat is a communicative obstacle in prayer. In “Meditations on the Constitutions” (*Rozmyślenia nad konstytucjami*), Father Kalinka openly said that retreats experienced indifferently or without inner commitment, are even “murder for the soul.”<sup>35</sup>

What did Father Kalinka understand by it? Casual participation in retreat, full of indifference and lacking in a deeper look into oneself, without actual commitment to battling one’s faults and traits, leads to an indifferent heart. Meanwhile, retreat is “the bravest of cures, the most active measure: and because it is such, it should be provided in proper quantities.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Walerian Kalinka, *Na Golgotę*, Petersburg-Warszawa 1897, p. 36.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>35</sup> Walerian Kalinka, *Rozmyślenia nad konstytucjami*, Kraków 1996, p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem.

#### 4. Conclusion

To sum up, one must realise that the service of proclaiming the Gospel is rooted in prayer. By nature, prayer is communication, as it leads to becoming open to God and to others. This means that prayer may not lead to isolation. Furthermore, through God's love, communication becomes a carrier of God's message. Father Kalinka's saying is of extreme importance, because God – as Pope Francis has said – “possesses a certain weakness: weakness towards the humble. God fully opens his heart before a humble man.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Francis, *Jak należy się modlić. Katecheza wygłoszona podczas audiencji generalnej* (1.06.2016), “L'Osservatore Romano” 7-8:2016, p. 47.

## APPENDIX





**Chapter I**  
**of the Rule of the Congregation of the Resurrection**  
**of Our Lord Jesus Christ, 1882**

**The Nature and End**  
**of the Congregation of the Resurrection**

*Text taken from: "The Rule and Constitutions of the Congregation of the Resurrection  
1842 - 1967", edited by John Iwicki, CR, Romae 1967, pp. 159-165  
(translated into English from Latin original by James Gibson, CR)*

1. The cause and origin of this Congregation is the love of God, *our Father, who is in heaven*, and who has called us in his Son and united us in this Congregation.

Its ultimate end is the glory of God by living the same love: *Hallowed be thy Name!*

Its proximate end will be the promotion of the Kingdom of this most loving Father and of Christ the Lord in ourselves and in the world, which will thus lead us to his eternal Kingdom: *Thy Kingdom come!*

The spirit which shall animate the Congregation and its life will be to love God with a perfect love, and so to love and always do his will in all truth, as we pray: *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!*

Neither will we act by our own counsel, working or virtue, but only by the grace and virtue of the God who gives us life, for which we plead earnestly each day: *Give us this day our daily bread!*

2. The guiding principle, therefore, and the goal and life of this Congregation, and finally the motive and force of its living and acting, will be always and in all things the love of God – the God who is Love.

3. Indeed, the necessary condition for fulfilling lovingly all of these things shall be to empty and deny ourselves in everything, that thereby we may truly and perfectly prepare in us a place for God, that He himself may dwell in us as our Lord and our God.

4. In this manner we will fulfill the will of the Lord, who desires that *we may be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect* (Matt 5:48).

5. This Congregation is in fact established under the invocation of the most holy mystery of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ: for, just as *by dying he destroyed our death and in rising he restored our life*, so also we, fighting under this banner (of the Resurrection) and dead to ourselves, confidently hope by his power to participate, by rising with Him, in that new, true and eternal life which flows from Christ.

6. Thus the Brothers will in the first place discern not what might be a good reason for establishing some apostolic work, whether it be in service or for remuneration; but rather that all things be done in filial devotion and love of God.

7. We will therefore always keep in mind that God is love (1 Jn 4:16); that it was out of love that he created us: *For you love all things that exist, ...for they are yours, O Lord, who love the living* (Wis 11:24, 26); that it was out of love that he redeemed us: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son* (John 3:16); that this love, creating and redeeming us, has also made us Sons of God: *See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are* (1Jn 3:1). And not only *are we now God's children* (ibid., 2) but this love has established as our ultimate end that we become truly like God: *we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is* (ibid., 2). Moreover, the love of God has done all of these things; indeed, God delights in nothing else except mutual love, and He considers the greatest joy to remain in this mutual love: *I found delight in the sons of men* (Prov 8:31).

8. *Let us therefore love God, for God has first loved us* (1 Jn 4:19), and even as He delights in our love, so may our delight be in loving Him. This determination – namely, to return His love and to please Him, to seek our delights in His – shall be the perfect rule of our life and conduct; and, for this reason, we must earnestly desire

and labor not only for the salvation of our neighbor, but also for our own salvation.

9. In order that this work of our salvation, as well as seeking the salvation of our neighbor, may be based on a perfect foundation and also accomplished in a perfect manner, the Brothers will keep their eyes truly fixed on the Master and Author of all holiness and perfection: on our Lord Jesus Christ, who emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, humbled, crucified, dead and later truly risen. The Brothers will surrender themselves totally to Him, will have all things in common with Him, and with Him will carry out everything, never being separated from Him.

10. The Brothers will then strive above all, through the grace of Christ, to empty themselves perfectly together with Him, which is the very condition which the Lord himself imposes on us: *If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself* (Mt 16:24, Mk 8:34, Lk 9:23). Now truly denying ourselves is not only stripping ourselves of everything we possess (*So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple* [Lk 14:33]); it is not only renouncing our own lives (*yes, and even his own life* [Lk 14:26]); it is denying our own desires, our own judgments and our own wills; but even more, it is to the highest degree to renounce our very selves: that is, our person, in such a way that one is not even the principle of his own actions. This is the most direct meaning of the Lord's words: *Let him deny himself*. For this reason He not only adds the duty to carry our cross (*Whoever does not bear his own cross...*), but he truly desires that we follow Him: *...and follow me*. The latter is finally the motive for the most successful emptying of oneself when, having left behind all that is our own, we decide to follow no other inspiration except that which we receive from the Lord. In this way we are buried together with Christ, and we will be a continuing, living victim in

Him, who out of love for us was made obedient unto death, and death on a cross; and, finally, we will be able to rise with Him and to lead a new life.

11. In regard to this new life, then, the Brothers, keeping in mind the name borne by the One who *is not here, but has risen and is seated at the right hand of God, the almighty Father*, shall make their likeness to Christ consist in rising with Him as true sons of God, so that they may at the same time live and do all things together with Him. As a result God will begin to reign in us through Jesus Christ: he will abide in us as our God, our Lord and our all. Living this way more effectively day by day, we will finally be able to say with the Apostle: *I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me* (Gal 2:20).

12. In this new life the Brothers will zealously strive to imitate in all things the Immaculate and most holy Mother of God, the Virgin Mary: by finding in her their example, rule and law of cooperation with the grace of God their Creator, and considering all these things in the light of the words of the most Blessed Virgin: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word.*

13. The life of the Congregation is twofold according to the twofold end – internal and external – which it proposes for itself: that is, in order to establish the Kingdom of God within itself, the Congregation shall lead a religious life according to these Constitutions; and in order to establish God's Kingdom in the world, it shall lead an apostolic life.

14. The sum of religious life consists, in one respect, in the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience which the Brothers will profess to God and seek to fulfill perfectly. For the Brothers these vows will imply, beyond their external meaning, something

even more intimate and perfect, in their interior relationship with God. For the vows must produce in their souls a spirit of self-emptying and of profound adoration of God; a spirit of continuous prayer, neither desiring nor seeking anything in addition to God himself; a spirit of self-oblation and sacrifice, which does not know how to deny anything to God. In this respect and living in this way, life according to the Rule will be a most favorable aid toward the establishment of the Kingdom of God and of Christ among us.

15. In another respect the sum of religious life consists in an assiduous progress to a perfect mutual love among the members, and fraternal charity, of which God is the source and end. This perfect fraternal charity, based on the love of God, constitutes our second Resurrection and our common life with Christ: *We have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren* (1 Jn 3:14); thus is the Kingdom of God and of Christ made perfect among the Brothers.

16. The Congregation, convinced of this and having established definitively the love of God as the foundation of its life, shall also consider fraternal charity, rooted in this same love, as the supreme norm of its life, and it shall regard as directed particularly to itself the Savior's words: *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another* (Jn 13:34-35).

17. Indeed, the other special end pertaining to the Congregation is the promotion of the Kingdom of God and of Christ in the world. Accordingly, in its apostolic life the Congregation, following the example of Christ our Lord and intimately united with Him, animated by the same love of God and charity for our neighbor, shall consider as the purpose of its apostolic labors to enkindle on

the earth the same divine fire which Jesus came to ignite (in his own words: *I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!* [Lk 12:49]), and to animate the souls of others with this same fire of Christ. This new life of theirs, from God, will indeed be a new Resurrection: it will be the Kingdom of God and of Christ in the world.

18. In order to achieve this particular goal, the Congregation, as far as it may be granted by the Lord, has decided upon the following endeavors:

I. The promotion of truly Christian living among people by every means, especially by the care of parishes, along with missions, teaching of doctrine, writings, preaching, and other apostolic ministries for which the Congregation humbly places itself at the disposal of the bishops.

II. A truly Christian formation and education of young people, both for priesthood and for the secular world.

III. Finally, the Congregation will take care to promote, in any way it is able to, a special devotion and veneration of the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary, our Mother: her origin, her life, her holiness and piety, her power and her glory. The Congregation hopes that as much as possible its members, by lovingly embracing this special devotion to Mary, may more easily and more fully attain their goals, and that through Mary, the new Eve and true Mother of the living, a new life according to God may abound in the world and the Kingdom of Christ may be successfully and effectively established on earth.



**Homily of Pope John Paul II  
Church of the Resurrection in Rome  
January 4, 1987**

**Homily pronounced on the occasion of the 150th  
Anniversary of the Congregation of the Resurrection  
of Our Lord Jesus Christ**

*Text taken from the official website of the Congregation  
of the Resurrection: [www.resurrectionist.eu](http://www.resurrectionist.eu)*

*Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who has blessed us  
with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ  
(Eph 1:3)*

Dear Resurrectionists!

I am very happy to be with you today to commemorate some historic dates that are very significant in the life of the Church and of your Congregation, and to thank God sincerely with you for so many favors bestowed on your Order. I greet you all most affectionately, and with great joy I offer the Sacrifice of the Eucharist for you.

On this second Sunday after Christmas, the Liturgy recalls once again and celebrates the blessing of God our Father, which has been revealed in the Word made flesh. The Word of God, that is, the “wisdom of the Most High” (to use the words of the text from Sirach, in the first reading of the Mass), came to dwell among us. Jesus, the Child born at Bethlehem, is the light of the divine wisdom that shines in the darkness of our world and enlightens every person. In him alone do we find the light for our path in time towards eternity; from him alone do we have the supernatural life which makes us children of God. Jesus has revealed the Father to us; from him truth and grace come to us: “From his fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (Jn 1:16).

Gathered here today in this Church of the Resurrection, we reflect with profound emotion on the great gift which God has given to the Church through the foundation of your Congregation one hundred and fifty years ago. How could one fail to see in this a blessing of the Father, who has worked so much good for the advantage of the Church and of society through the members of the Congregation? Your Congregation continues to do so much good today also, with its priests and brothers, its students

and novices, and its fifty-five religious houses spread wide among twelve nations.

In the atmosphere of Christmas, which we still breathe, it is good to turn our minds back to the events of your past and to meditate in particular on the example and message of your Founders, so that we may draw from this appropriate indications for the encounter with the present reality, and stimulating directives for the future.

### 1. International Dimension

During the one hundred and fifty years of its existence, the Congregation has developed both in the exercise of the apostolate and in the awareness of its identity as a religious community. In the apostolate, the Congregation has dedicated itself principally to the pastoral care of the faithful in parishes and to the education of the young. As a religious community, the Congregation, while always aware of its Polish roots, has developed more its own international dimension, feeling itself called to share its own charism with the universal Church. Thus, while the Congregation lived its role to the full in the great Polish emigration of the nineteenth century and dedicated itself to the Church in Poland and the communities of Polish émigrés in many places in the world, it had also the fruitful experience of entering other cultures through its service of the local churches of Italy, Bulgaria, the Federal Republic of Germany, Australia, Canada, the USA, Bermuda, Bolivia and Brazil. An important example of this inculturation occurred in 1863, when my predecessor Pius IX asked the Congregation to go to Bulgaria, where it became a bi-ritual community at the service of the Church in both the Latin and Byzantine rites. In drawing attention to this missionary endeavor, I wish to honor the three Resurrectionists who remain in Bulgaria, all of them elderly Bulgarians, who serve the Church in difficult circumstances.

In the church of the Generalate of the Congregation of the Resurrection, there is the tomb of the Founders: Bogdan Jański, Peter Semenenko and Jerome Kajsiewicz. We recall the words of the Letter to the Hebrews: "Remember your leaders, those who proclaimed to you the word of God; considering carefully the outcome of their life, imitate their faith" (13:7). The Church reminds all religious of the need to "remember their leaders", to know their founders and to give due value to their intentions concerning the nature, the aim and the character of the institute (cf. CIC 578). This commitment to "remembering" can be considered as a means to make one's own the charism of the founders and to share in the spiritual experience which they handed on to their disciples, so that this experience may be "... lived, safeguarded, deepened and continually developed in harmony with the Body of Christ which is in a process of continual growth" (*Mutuae relationes*, 11). The Founders of the Congregation are men worthy of being "remembered", men whose faith must always be imitated, and whose life must serve as a model for every genuine Resurrectionist.

In the church of the Generalate, in a prominent position, there is also the image of Our Lady of Mentorella, Mother of Graces. The position of this image reflects the importance of the sanctuary of Mentorella, as the first mission entrusted to the Congregation. It likewise reflects the importance of the Mother of God in the life and the spiritual tradition of the Resurrectionists. The Constitutions declare: "We believe that Mary is our model in all that we are called to be and to do as Resurrectionists."

## 2. Profound Conversion

Bogdan Jański (1805 - 1840), professor of political economy, public penitent and lay apostle of the Polish emigration at Paris, is known to the members of the Community as the "Elder Brother" and as the Father Founder of the Congregation. Disappointed in

the socio-political movements of his time, he became aware that the true "resurrection" of society could come about only through profound conversion to the Lord and a life of faith attested in the service of others. The process of his conversion lasted almost three years. Shortly after making the general confession of his life, he invited his disciples, among whom were Peter Semenenko and Jerome Kajsiewicz, to begin a religious life in common in Paris. Bogdan Jański wrote: "It has pleased God to use me as an instrument and means of our fraternal union... God leads us to his own ends through strange means" (CRR 8585, Letter to J. Hube). Although they stayed together for only a short time, Bogdan influenced Peter and Jerome profoundly through the vision of the renewal of society which he was able to communicate to them. Bogdan Jański was destined to live for only a few years more. The last five years of his life can be described as a commitment to profound conversion, and an utterly generous service to his fellow countrymen at Paris. When he died at Rome in 1840, he was considered a holy man, not only by the members of the Congregation but also by all those outside the Community who had had the benefit of his ministry.

### 3. Rich History

Recently the Congregation commemorated the centenary of the death of Father Peter Semenenko, C.R. (18 November 1886). A disciple of Bogdan Jański, Father Peter is considered a co-founder of the Congregation. He was directly assisted in his conversion to the Lord by Bogdan Jański, whom he always venerated as his spiritual master. Father Peter was a man of extraordinary intellectual versatility and a thinker of great creativity. He was the author of all the most important Rules of the Congregation. By means of his writings in the area of the spiritual life, Father Semenenko developed a kind of spiritual tradition in the Congregation, making a subtle analysis of the obstacles to grace and

to union with God that come from human nature and from our ego. Father Peter was the spiritual director of many sisters, including some founders of religious communities. For example, his direction of Celine Borzęcka and her daughter Hedwig Borzęcka led to the foundation of the Sisters of the Resurrection, who are considered to be the spiritual sisters of the Resurrectionists Fathers. Father Semenenko was a man truly dedicated to the Church, both as founder and first Rector of the Polish College in Rome and as a consultor of the Congregation of the Index. It is said that when Pope Leo XIII heard of the death of Father Semenenko, he remarked, "You have suffered a great loss. He was the soul of your Congregation."

Father Jerome Kajsiewicz, C.R. (1812 - 1873), one of the first disciples of Bogdan Jański, is also considered as a co-founder of the Congregation. As a soldier wounded during the uprising of November 1830, he, too, benefited from the personal example and the spiritual guidance of Bogdan Jański at Paris in the process of his conversion. Father Jerome, a lover of poetry, was a friend of the national poet, Adam Mickiewicz. With a practical sense that accompanied his poetic gifts, Father Jerome made a great impression as a famous preacher. As superior general of the Congregation from 1855 until his death in 1873, he served the Community as a guide in practical and spiritual matters. Father Kajsiewicz was also a fervent patriot. At the same time, he promoted the idea of the international development of the Community. As superior general, he was the first to accept non-Polish members into the Congregation, and he sent the Resurrectionists to serve the Church in Italy, Bulgaria, Canada and the United States. He travelled much to visit the brothers and encourage them. Father Jerome is a model for all Resurrectionists of how to seek the will of God in all things. He began every letter with the motto, "Wola Boża" - "the will of God".

The lives of the founders - Bogdan, Peter and Jerome - teach you, their spiritual children, to strive for continual conversion. In

the Constitutions of the Congregation, approved on July 2, 1982 after the chapters of renewal, this dynamic process of conversion, which is lifelong, is presented as a special form of sharing in the Paschal Mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ: "We must constantly die to ourselves (to our own will, to our independence of action, to our self-love) in order to rise again, through the Holy Spirit, to a new life of love in Christ" (Constitutions, 1).

#### 4. Fire of Truth and Love

My purpose in recalling these examples – with which in fact you are already familiar – to enable you to draw from your glorious past fresh light, comfort and directives in order to be always and truly "religious in the Church and for the Church" (Constitutions, 11).

The general chapter to be held next July will concern itself with the mission of the Community, and thus with the identity of the Congregation and with its charism, through a meditation on the subject: "The Mission and the Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection". It is a vast and important subject, and it is my profound hope that the reflections and the discussion that will take place during the Chapter will be guided and enlightened by Christ's words: "I have come to cast fire on the earth" (Lk 12:49) – the fire of truth and love, which is able to offer clear opposition to error while always loving the person who is in error, with perfect availability and sensitivity towards others and with trust in the supreme goodness of the Father.

As members of a congregation dedicated to the renewal of society by means of a life marked by the Paschal Mystery, grasp the opportunity offered by this Jubilee Year and the coming general chapter in order to respond to the needs of the Church and of the modern world. Proclaim with great fervor the presence of the Savior in the midst of the people of today and every age. The world needs your witness and apostolic zeal.



I encourage you in your commitment and I assure you of a remembrance in my prayers, so that, as St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him... that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:17-18).

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*After the superior general Fr. Robert Kurtz, C.R., thanked the Pope for accepting the invitation to visit the Generalate on the occasion of the Jubilee, the Holy Father responded warmly and informally in Polish, English and Italian:*

You have just given me a copy of the history of your Congregation to read in English<sup>1</sup>. I must admit that if I know the history of some congregations more or less, I surely know the history of the Resurrectionists, for your history is deeply inscribed in the history of Poland, in the history of Christian Poland. The very truth of Resurrection, which is the greatest truth of the Christian faith, was a great light for the entire nation after the destruction of our country in the 19th Century; and your founders drew from this truth as a truth of faith, but at the same time conserved its character of inspiration for their countrymen and for the society of that time.

Yet this truth does not belong solely to the Polish nation, even though it has played a very important role in our history as an inspiration during the period that followed our downfall, our Calvary, our death on the cross. It is, at the same time, a truth of the Christian faith which has universal significance. I would

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<sup>1</sup> The Pope speaks about: John Iwicki, CR, *Resurrectionist Charism. A History of the Congregation of the Resurrection*, vol. I (1836 – 1886), Rome 1986.

like to say that your founders were moved by a prophetic spirit, as though they had foreseen the Second Vatican Council with its focus on the Paschal Mystery – on the mystery of the Resurrection, but clearly on the entire Paschal Mystery: from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. This, and thanks to the Council, the central idea and the charism of your Congregation have been renewed and updated in this century. As your Father General stated: “Our mission today is to proclaim the Resurrection, to work for the resurrection of society and of the individual societies in the places where we are located.” For all of these various societies are threatened today, in various ways, by death – a spiritual death.

The only force that can conquer death in these various societies is always and everywhere the Paschal Mystery, the mystery of the Resurrection of Christ. Wherever you are, wherever you work – in Poland, in the United States, in Canada, and even in Bulgaria where Resurrectionists more than a century ago undertook a special mission – I wish that, strengthened by this paschal truth, the truth of the Resurrection of Christ, you may be able to raise up groups of people, and even whole societies, from the many varieties of spiritual decay and death. This is my wish for the 150th Anniversary of your Congregation.

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**Archbishop Joseph (Józef) Teodorowicz (1864 - 1938)** – the last Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Lviv

**Servant of God Father Peter (Piotr) Semenenko (1814 - 1886)** – the co-founder and superior general of the Congregation of the Resurrection, creator of the main spiritual ideas of the Congregation (Resurrectionist School of Spirituality)

**Servant of God Father Paul (Paweł) Smolikowski (1849 - 1926)** – superior general of the Congregation of the Resurrection; rector of the Polish Pontifical College in Rome; missionary in Bulgaria

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of the Polish Bishops Conference. Spokesman for the Krakow Archdiocese in the years 2005 – 2016. On a proposal from the Commission on Rector's Awards of the Pontifical University of Pope John Paul II, he has been awarded for special didactic and organisational achievements. He is the author of several dozen research papers in Poland, Germany, Austria, Slovakia, India, Spain, as well as several scientific books in Poland and Italy. He has been awarded the Mater Verbi medal. In 2016 he was presented with a II class golden badge of saint Florian Mazovia, for exceptional effectiveness and competence in the media.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION





**The Spirituality of the Media and Social Relations  
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The Department does research in the field of the history of Christian spirituality, the modern Christian spirituality, the influence of Christian spirituality on the life of individuals and societies, the transmission of Christian spirituality and reactions to it. In this way it tries to carry out the program set out by Pope John Paul II: „The world of mass media also has need of Christ’s redemption. To analyze with the eyes of faith the processes and value of communications, the deeper appreciation of Sacred Scripture can undoubtedly help as a *great code* of communication of a message which is not ephemeral, but fundamental for its saving value” (The Apostolic Letter to Those Responsible for Communications, 4).



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**CONGREGATION OF THE RESURRECTION**  
**OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST**



# CONGREGATION OF THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

The Congregation of the Resurrection is a religious community of priests, permanent deacons and brothers serving in parishes and institutes in the following countries of the world: Australia, Austria, Bermuda, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Israel, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Tanzania, the Ukraine and the United States. The Congregation is organized into three administrative provinces (Ontario-Kentucky, United States of America, and Polish) and one region (South American), with the General Headquarters located in the city of Rome, Italy.

## SHORT HISTORY

The Congregation of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ began in Paris, France, on February 17, 1836, under the leadership of Bogdan Jański. After the death of the founder on July 2, 1840, his disciples under the direction of Peter Semenenko and Jerome Kajsiewicz, the co-founders of the Congregation, continued to develop his ideas and to live in community. On Easter Sunday, March 27, 1842, along with five other clerics, they professed their first religious vows in the Catacombs of St. Sebastian in Rome. The first Rule was written during the Lenten season of 1842 and became the basis for community life and personal sanctification. They were inspired to dedicate themselves to the Risen Savior and to call themselves the “Brothers of the Resurrection”. They were now dead to sin and alive with the Risen Christ in a new life dedicated to truth and charity.

## CHARISM STATEMENT

We desire to be faithful to the grace received by our founders, a grace we now share by our call to the Congregation of the Resurrection. We recognize certain truths to be especially important for our life and work as Resurrectionists because they give expression to this grace and call.

We believe that God's love for us is merciful and unfailing. We have not earned his love. We are nothing, have nothing, and can do nothing without God. We are attracted to evil. We are sinners. Yet, God continues to draw us to himself.

We believe that in his love the Father calls us to conversion: to personal resurrection in union with Jesus, to a new life filled with the power of his Spirit. With Jesus, we die to ourselves when we surrender our lives to the Father, renouncing anything that separates us from him. The power of the Spirit forms Christ in us, and moves us to respond with love to the Father's great love for us.

We believe that God calls us to live together as brothers-sharing the gifts that we have received, supporting one another, praying and working together for his glory. He has called us to be a community, which is a living sign of the gospel values of justice, truth and love.

We believe that God calls us to work together for the resurrection of society, bringing his life and love to all: through our personal witness, through the witness of our life in community, and through our community apostolates, primarily through parish work and teaching. This also requires that we build, and teach others to build, a Christian community in which all can experience the hope, joy and peace of Christ's Resurrection.

We believe that Mary is our model for all that we are called to be and do as Resurrectionists.

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Congregation of the Resurrection announces and gives witness to the Paschal Mystery. Convinced of God's unconditional love for us we herald the liberation and salvation of each person and society as a passage from death to life in which every situation of evil and injustice will be overcome.

We call others, especially youth and families, to communities of the Risen Christ in which faith, hope and love radiate as a sign of union with Christ and his mother, Mary, in the Church. We are convinced that to do this our Congregation must be a model of Christian community in which people are one in heart and mind.

We reach out to all people through our pastoral-educational ministry but especially join in solidarity with people diminished by unjust structures.

We assist the laity in their own efforts to become prophets to the world and to transform it by providing them with a deeper experience of the Paschal dynamic in their lives.

As an international community we assist each other in various parts of the world by sharing our ministries, experiences and resources.

We share Christ's own desire to enkindle the fire of divine love in the heart of every person on this earth.

## RESURRECTION PRAYER

O Risen Lord,  
the way, the truth and the life,  
make us faithful followers  
of the spirit of your resurrection.  
Grant that we may be inwardly  
renewed; dying to ourselves  
in order that you may live in us.  
May our lives serve as signs  
of the transforming power of your love.  
Use us as your instruments  
for the renewal of society,  
bringing your life and love to all people  
and leading them to your Church.  
This we ask of you, Lord Jesus,  
living and reigning with the Father,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God forever.  
Amen.

## BEATIFICATION PRAYER

O Risen Jesus, you called Bogdan Janski, Peter Semenenko and Jerome Kajsiewicz to proclaim your unconditional love for all people and witness to the Resurrection by dying to self in order to live a new life by the power of your Spirit. Glorify your servants by the way of beatification so that the example of their lives after conversion may bring the hope of Resurrection to all who continue to struggle with sin, error and their own human weakness. Amen





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