

Contemplative Prayer

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PREFACE.

THE object of the present paper is merely to indicate briefly the nature of the general solution which traditional theology appears to offer to certain questions touching passive contemplation: the method of its process, the means of access to it, its trials, its place in the economy of the supernatural, the kind of direction which it demands. We assume as known the descriptions of the fact of mysticism which have been left us by such masters as Denys, Saint Gregory, Saint Bernard, Saint Catherine of Genoa, Saint Ignatius, Saint Teresa, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Alphonsus Liguori, et cetera, as well as Saint Thomas' principles concerning religious knowledge, whether the natural knowledge of man or angel, or super-natural knowledge given through faith. It is out of the comparison between these two orders of information — the experience of contemplatives on the one hand, and the principles of the theologian on the other — that light may emerge. For the last three centuries and more, this topic has given rise to works, which have ignited or fed the flame of ardent controversies, the echoes of which I shall not awaken in these pages.

1. THE METHOD OF THE PROCESS OF CONTEMPLATION.

Instead of using intellectual representations borrowed from the senses by the method of abstraction under the light of reason, which reflect the individual under universal traits, the contemplative attains to God by a process still analogical indeed, but not abstractive, and comparable to angelic knowledge, which does not separate, as does our knowledge, the universal from the individual, but reaches objects in their integrity.

With reference to God, it is the essence itself of the angel, which plays the part of representation or mirror. God, like all other objects, is attained by the angel without rational discourse: which does not mean without any intermediary, because, in the case of knowledge, whether of God or of creatures, there is necessarily the intermediary of an image or resemblance through which the vision of the spirit passes. Only the spirit does not use this mental substitute as a point of departure from which it gradually proceeds in its journey towards God. God is neither deduced nor inferred by way of causation or finality or exemplarity; all these methods being methods that belong to the abstractive intelligence. But in one single act, the intelligence of the angel attains both to the mirror in which God is reflected and to God Himself, whose image appears to the spirit: an image which bears in itself the testimony of its truth, that is, of the Divine existence, because it is not part of the order of abstraction to which alone it belongs to isolate from each other in God, subject and the predicate existence, in order to associate them afterwards in a judgment which is the conclusion of a piece of reasoning. The intermediary in the case of the angel is then not the middle term of a syllogism; it is the luminous medium, as it were, the refracting prism, through which the Divine Sun shines.

The case is the same with the contemplative. It remains to be seen what is this luminous medium in which the contemplative attains to God. Up to the present, we only know what it is not. It is not an abstract idea derived from the normal process of human information. Is it a new "species" placed in the spirit miraculously by God, and, in consequence, distinct not only from reason and its products, but also from faith, which is presupposed as present: since contemplation is the act of a believer, a faithful Christian, in fact, necessarily the act of a just soul in a state of grace, bound by charity to God?

Here we must distinguish. It may, and does sometimes, happen that the intelligence of a contemplative is endowed by God with distinct pieces of knowledge bearing on certain supernatural objects: this is the case with intellectual vision which necessarily demands the medium of distinct representations. But such intellectual vision is not essential to contemplation. The proper and characteristic object of contemplation is the Sovereign Good, the good of the future life: an object supremely indistinct on account of its infinity, which prevents its circumscription or definition, either proper and formal definition, or definition of any kind supposing a common measure with the object: so much so that contemplation becomes higher and purer in proportion as it further reveals and makes this transcendent darkness shine more splendidly.

This is the contemplative way of knowing the Divine Goodness in all its excess. It is evident that no distinct representation will give us that. On the contrary, the light of faith, which is an obscure ray of the Eternal Brightness, if it emerges and disengages itself from rational knowledge founded on the senses, has the property of informing the soul about God, the central core of light from which it beams forth. *In lumine tuo videbimus lumen.* (In Your light, we shall see light.) Contemplation is faith when it attains through the medium of its own light, which is itself the author and object of this illumination, Him who reveals Himself as our future happiness, the First Truth for us to contemplate eternally in the uniqueness of His Essence seen face to face, the Last End and Supreme Goodness which the soul will enjoy without veils, without any medium or obscurity.

Then once more, and in the full meaning of the terms, *in lumine tuo videbimus lumen* (In Your light, we shall see light): in the light no longer of faith, but of the Uncreated Glory we shall see the Beauty, the Divine Goodness which beatifies us, both glorifying and glorified, in the words of Saint Irenaeus: *Gloria Dei vivens homo; vita autem hominis visio Del.* "The living man is the Glory of God: but the life of man is the vision of God" (Book 4 Against Heresies, 38, 7; P.G., 7, 1037). Here below this goes on in faith. But it must be noted that faith in the just soul is furnished with an octave the seven notes of which are fitted to receive the pressure of the divine finger, of the Holy Spirit, *digitu, paternae dexteræ* (the finger of the Father's right hand).

It is not a question of new "species" or representations or of an additional light: the notes of this octave are the susceptibilities of the soul towards the Divine Good which is the object of faith: susceptibilities which may be modified and affected in different ways by this Unique Object, which, nevertheless, possesses the great variety of flavors, aspects, and characteristics in its infinite simplicity. So it may present itself, thanks to the communication of the gift of wisdom, as the felicity to be lovingly tasted at the present moment in anticipation of the happiness of tomorrow: a delicious foretaste and a pure enjoyment. This is what the mystics mean by "the taste of eternal life," which is known to those who take "long draughts of the living waters of wisdom and love." Or, again, the same unique object may present itself as the goodness which cannot endure contact with any impurity or irregularity however slight, and then this light flashing on the conscience of the contemplative, which, as is inevitable on this earth, is still stained by some imperfection, will

produce in it an inexpressible and intolerable suffering: it is the gift of fear which comes into exercise, bearing not on the fear of punishment, but on the fear and horror of incurring the slightest displeasure of God, or the slightest divergence between one's own disposition and His. And so on with the other gifts, according to the speciality of each.

That is enough with regard to the object and the medium of contemplation with the diverse modalities which we find there. It remains to be seen how contemplation itself is introduced into the soul.

2. THE DOOR OF ENTRY OF CONTEMPLATION.

No intellectual effort nor any positive effort can produce it, whether reasonings or far-reaching thoughts; nor any negative effort, such as suppression of distinct thoughts, silence of the faculties, et cetera. Its mode of entry, like faith, is not of the intellectual but of the affective order, per viam voluntatis (through the way of the will or desire) (Saint Thomas, Commentary on Boethius' Book, On the Trinity, lecture 1, 9, 1. article 1, answer to objection 4, m.). Faith, even in its ordinary state, is engendered in the spirit by a pressure of the will — that is, under the influence of at least a beginning of love (or appetite) for the goodness which promises itself in eternal life, appetitus boni repromissi (Saint Thomas, Disputed Questions on Truth, question 14, article 2, answer to objection 10, m). Actuated by this love, the intelligence itself is attached to the Supreme Good by a voluntary and loving affirmation, which attain its Object at the same time as the End to which the affirmation refers.

The conscious finality of the intellectual act commanded by the will — this is the intellectual motive inherent in the act of faith. It is a motive which, to say the truth, is outside the category of rational motives.

And since all evidence is either rational or not, we must say that it is without any evidence at all. In this sense, it is in-evident; not in the sense in which an opinion may be in-evident through defect, as basing itself on motives of the rational order, which lack the perfection of that order. Faith is in-evident because it is foreign to that order which it surpasses; because it is outside that category which exists on a plane infinitely inferior to its own: more or less in the same way as an angel is in-extended, not in the sense that he possesses the dimensions of an indivisible point, but because he has no intrinsic relation to the category of extension.

Thus, the act of faith resides in the intelligence as the product of love: the product of the rudimentary beginning of love, the love of concupiscence, at least, in the case of a man who has only faith; the product of the love of charity in the case of him who is in a state of grace. Here we may remark that if faith comes first in relation to love, considered as a disposition to love, love, on the contrary, comes first in relation to faith considered as the generative principle of faith. Such reciprocal precessions constantly occur in theology and create no real difficulty because they have to be looked at as referring to two different schemes of causality, efficient causality on the one hand, material causality on the other. Thus the light of faith, although residing in the spirit, did not enter man by way of the spirit, but by way of the heart: there is its door of entrance; there is the passage through which God pours it more or less abundantly, more or less vividly, according to the degree to which love itself is living in us above every other affection or contrariwise is dominated or oppressed by self-love.

The life of faith is love: the life—that is to say, union with the principle of life, which is God in the community of the same spirit. Faith is only united to God in the community of the same life if it

hangs on God by charity: then only does faith look on God as effectively being to us what He should be: another self and more than a self. Then only do we look with friendship on our Friend. Before that point is reached, we look on Him who wishes to be our friend, but not with a gaze of friendship. I see that friendship ought to be there, I see that it is desirable, I even see in myself a desire for friendship, which my look carries because it proceeds from it. But I do not see what is not there, and I do not yet see with the eyes of a friend; although with my faith, such as it is, I see in God the love which calls forth friendship. All that is in faith, an inanimate or a living faith as the case may be. In the case of a living faith, all the perfection of a gaze of friendship on God is realized, if not to its highest degree, at least in an essential measure. Now contemplation, as we have seen, is nothing but a loving fixing of the gaze on the Sovereign Good in the medium at once luminous and dark of faith. It is nothing but a particular and superior exercise of the virtue of faith.

Hence, it is clear that it is born under the empire of a love which is charity. But what kind of charity? Charity is in every just man, and in every just man it actuates faith; and yet every just man is not a contemplative; most people in this life are limited to a discursive prayer, to the knowledge of faith based on abstracted species on which the light of faith does not visibly fall, while the light of reason, of which they are full, is clearly visible in them. And comparing one with the other, contemplatives with non-contemplatives, the difference in charity is not necessarily a difference in degree. If a contemplative were to think himself superior in charity to one or other of his brethren who is not a contemplative, great would be his error.

There may exist much greater charity in the Good Samaritan without contemplative light than in the mystic prevented by the gifts of God. The truth is that in the same subject, charity grows in proportion to the development of contemplation and vice versa. So that confining his comparison to himself, the mystic who notes his own progress in contemplation has the right to consider himself more highly endowed with charity than in the time in which he had not entered the contemplative path, and to believe in his further enrichment in proportion to his progress in contemplation. But the value of this testimony is confined to the time of actual contemplation; the contemplative cannot during the intervals rely on a past attestation of charity, for he may since then have lost the grace of God by his sins. It is true that a time comes for certain eminently favored souls when their contemplation, as far as the substance of their intimate commerce with God is concerned, has no longer, or scarcely, any interruptions, although it is not always in the same state of vehemence or clear vision.

Whatever may be true in these cases, inasmuch as a non-contemplative soul may have more charity than others who are contemplative, we cannot say that the charity of the contemplative differs from that of the non-contemplative in degree. How, then, does it differ? If we ask the contemplative, he tells us that the love which envelopes and points the direction of his gaze is an "infused" love. But theologians know that all love is infused, the least clairvoyant charity as much as the most highly developed. Where, then, is the difference? It lies precisely in this, that the theologian is pronouncing in the matter on the authority of Scripture and tradition, and does not base his conclusion on experience; whereas the mystic speaks from experience, with a certitude which would remain what it is, even if the evidence of tradition and Scripture, of which indeed he may be quite ignorant, were lacking on this particular point. This is to say that charity in the case of the mystic is not only infused, but is consciously infused, which is not the case with the theologian as such.

The mystic has the consciousness of receiving from God a ready-made love, if such a phrase may be allowed, and this is why he says that he is passive, although love is an act, and the prayer

proceeding there-from also an act. Nevertheless, there is also passivity and conscious passivity in the fact that the soul knows and feels itself invested with this love of God. And this is why the contemplative soul attains the presence of God in herself, for the Sovereign Good is there enriching the soul with her full knowledge. She does not proceed by dialectical regress from the gift to the Giver; no; she receives the gift from the hand of the Giver, who is, therefore, present in a manner perceptible to the experience of the soul. This consciousness of the gift, this experience of the Giver, does not come about by means of the natural intelligence with ideas illuminated by reason; it occurs exclusively in the light of faith, which "infused" love pours into the soul, in the same way as the Sovereign Good who diffuses this light makes Himself known in it.

Such, then, is the origin of contemplation. It is contained in this love, which is passively received, and in the consciousness of this passivity, which swoops on the intelligence and carries it above itself towards the Sovereign Good to which it attaches it in a dark light.

3. THE TRIALS OF CONTEMPLATION.

Hence the trials of the contemplative life: we are not speaking of those which may attack it externally through the action of natural agents, human wills or evil spirits, but of those which are inherent in the contemplative life by its nature, and which far surpass, in the case of certain souls, even the most acute external suffering in the world. To tell the truth, there is no proportion, no common measure between mystical sufferings and others.

The first suffering, usually far the least severe, is that of the progressive and laborious birth of contemplation. The light of faith does not emerge without tearing its human covering, without causing a strange discomfort, and involving painful renunciations of every-thing which composes the normal equipment of a life of nature already furnished with many habits, habits of the spirit, habits of the feelings, science, memory, points of view, ways of looking at things, corresponding attachments, et cetera. An operation occurs at this point in the spiritual order which resembles (if so commonplace a comparison may be made) the cutting of teeth in little children. And it may happen that the soul is for a certain time much more alive to what she is losing, to what is being mortified in her, to what is being reduced to silence and inactivity, to what is being dropped into the void, than to what is climbing the still clouded horizon. The more so that after all it is the soul herself, this self-same soul with her natural fires damped down, that has to gaze and see in this light, in accordance with a new and unaccustomed formula, and she requires exercise and practice before she can find herself at her ease in the task. Moreover, this new and obscure light, which only adapts itself well to eyes purified from the world of the souls, and from everything issuing from that world, will wound her eyes at first.

Purification usually comes slowly, and the state of the soul during this period is that of an obscure night, called the night of senses, because everything happens as if no light were any longer shining in our relations with God; while the light derived from the senses and of the abstract intelligence has gone out, the light of the spirit, the pure ray of super-nature has not yet got its clear outline, and is still unfamiliar. It should be noted that these initial sufferings are spared to children when God presents them with contemplative grace, because the child's soul, fresh and new, has not yet any acquired habits to confine the exercise of the gifts and to obscure the light of faith; hence no rending of the soul is necessary; there are no living fibers to be destroyed. On this account, too, that light rises with much greater rapidity. This is why it is important that children should receive the Holy Spirit at the moment at which they can most profit by His gifts — that is, when they arrive at the

age of the knowledge of God — and it is equally important that they should receive the Eucharist at the same age, because the Eucharist is properly the sacrament of charity, and charity, as has been said, is the force which initiates the soul into contemplation.

It astonishes us, though unreasonably, to see that little children receive from their early first communion an enrichment of divine gifts, such as many adults, though pious and exemplary, will never receive in this life.

The birth of contemplation being thus effected, it remains for the contemplative light now established in possession of the place to develop and emancipate itself more and more from all servitude and dependence and constraint coming from the nature of the senses (by which we must understand not only the interior and exterior senses, but also the whole moral and intellectual organism which rests on the senses, the whole ensemble of abstract knowledge, and the judgments which it engenders, and the affections and inclinations which it governs). There has to be accomplished in these faculties under the action of the light of contemplation, which confuses without enlightening or nourishing them, a work of stripping and subjection which may be very painful.

It is easy to see that the work of contemplation would be interfered with if the spirit, instead of being wholly applied to it in peace and silence, were agitating itself and moving about in all directions under the influence of its own natural activity. All that has to be mortified. There is more: in the case of most men, the tendencies, which have developed in their moral being under the influence of their free activity, are full of impurities and irregularities. All this has to be straightened out or cut off — a painful task, and the more so that it may be accomplished without any compensation.

In certain cases, the light of faith under a delightful touch of God will send rippling through the entire being a heavenly and intoxicating joy, which the natural faculties can hardly contain, so intensely are they saturated with it. But under a different touch, which either does not correspond with joy, but with suffering or fear, or merely corresponds with a secret joy withdrawn to the closed centre or inhabiting an inaccessible height of the soul, and absolutely without communication with the natural man, the purification of the human element has to go on either without any correlative enjoyment (the second case), or in a state of torment and desolation due to the painful character of the contemplation itself (the first case).

But all this is only the smallest part of the sufferings of contemplatives. The highest, the keenest, as also the most incomprehensible of these sufferings does not occur in the domain of the natural man, but in that of the spiritual man, in the very region where the contemplative light dwells in the sensibility (not only immaterial but ultra-human) of those mysterious peaks and hidden depths of the soul which receive and experience the Divine Gift.

The reason of this suffering is that the Divine Gift is the gift of the Sovereign Goodness; and the Sovereign Goodness is so great, so immeasurably lovable that it causes a thousand tortures.

First of all, the contemplative light may clearly bring out the disproportion between what God deserves and the little love that we can give Him, especially the little that, in fact, we do give Him. Under such an illumination as this, the soul could die of grief, could annihilate herself with shame, as a bankrupt debtor, as the most unjust and, consequently, the most criminal of creatures — in any case, the most unhappy. And the stronger the goodness of God shines, the more crucifying becomes the soul's impotence to return it.

Secondly, the contemplative light may fall no longer only on our fundamental insufficiency, but also on some remains of attachment to the ego and of fraudulent dealing with God in the enjoyment of pride imperceptibly fed by our very sacrifices, and make this appear in the face of the Divine Goodness in an aspect of horror which constitutes a real hell. The more the soul is urged by love to unite herself to God and live in His light, the more the sentiment of her own disorder drives her to fly, if that were possible, the glance of the Divine Love and to hasten to expiate, in some place of unheard-of punishments, the discord and the incompatibility which she has allowed to slip between her and perfect union. God is too good; His goodness crushes whatever is not absolutely and totally absorbed and lost in it, whatever keeps a self differentiated, however slightly (as to its views and preoccupations) from the Divine Friend.

The perfect union of the soul to God may be compared to the unity of the Three Divine Persons. They are distinct in this sense only, that One is not the Other; but there is no diversity between them; All that One of them is, the Others are, without any exception. So the soul is not lost in God, as long as there remains even the slightest backward look on self which does not correspond to the manner in which God loves us and wishes us to love ourselves. The slightest touch or shade of self-love is a magnum chaos. And here is one of the highest, as it seems, and one of the hardest of mystical sufferings, the one which most resembles purgatory; it is the pain of the expropriation of the soul itself from the spiritual life, so that she neither loves nor desires anything, nor receives these gifts, and even eternal life except in a spirit of friendship. This state of mind does not, however, exclude the impetuous movements of love and desire, of love which places all its happiness in the good of one's Friend, of desire which longs to know more deeply and more truly how beautiful, good, glorious, happy and perfect the Friend is.

Now comes the time of Sovereign Charity when the soul only loves herself for time and for eternity, in accordance with the divine order. This state is not possible on earth in plenitude. It does not exclude hope — far from it — but it excludes from hope any purely mercenary element that prevents the soul from being concentrated in the gaze of a filial love.

There is nothing beyond but heaven, where hope gives place to enjoyment, to the purest of all enjoyments: *sufficit mihi si Deus meus vivit.* (It suffices for me if my God lives.) I see the life of God, His happiness, His glory, His Sanctity, His goodness: and my happiness lies in seeing Him to be so good, so great, so holy, so happy: in seeing Him to be what He is.

4. ITS PLACE IN THE ECONOMY OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

Is contemplation an extraordinary phenomenon in the economy of grace like a miracle in the economy of the visible world, or is it a normal development as the tree is the development of the seed, and the flowers and fruit of the tree? We must reply differently according to the point of view from which the question is asked. Are we considering contemplation in relation to the Divine Providence, which ordains the course of events, establishing a bond of continuity between imperfect antecedents, and consequences which, although they greatly surpass those antecedents, nevertheless follow them in virtue of a law, such as the appearance of a human soul in the course of a generative process in which organic elements of a material order are the only ones engaged? Or, on the contrary, are we looking at contemplation in its relations with the subject in which it resides? There is nothing to prevent one and the same gift having in the will of Providence its place marked out for it in the normal prolongation of every spiritual life rightly conducted through a series of favorable circumstances — and this would permit us to describe it as "ordinary" and yet remaining

transcendent with regard either to the elements composing human nature, or to the mental processes which give its specification to that nature — and this would permit us to describe it as "extraordinary."

Now, that contemplation transcends the characteristic notions of the natural man and the means at his disposal, even when helped by grace, appears evident from what has been said as to the character of its origin, which has no relation either to the sense-order or to the man's property of abstract thought. But when this has been once admitted, it by no means follows that it ought to be so far classed among phenomena, which are exceptions to the divine law, and, in consequence, miraculous. On the contrary, the law of Providence on the growth and development of grace being granted, we can say in the case of a given subject, that when he has passed a certain point to which he can attain by his human exercise of virtue and supernatural gifts, there will be no more regular and normal progress for him, except by the path of passivity.

This point of juncture is far from being the same for all souls. For some it is close to the beginnings of the Christian life; for others it is situated on a higher level of spirituality. So that certain souls may progress for a long time and very far and relatively speaking to great heights, by their own means with the assistance of grace, before reaching the point at which they have to pass beyond the confines of humanity, in order to enter the region of the infused light, which suffices to itself without any commerce with the sense-faculties, or borrowing anything from language and the conceptions of reason. Perhaps even this point may be further on the way than the last stage of their journey in this world, however faithful they may have been to the grace which was given them: the moment of the change had not arrived for them when death faced them although it would certainly have arrived one day or another, had they continued to live with the same fidelity for the necessary length of time. They lose nothing in comparison with others, since their sanctity may be greater than that of others already advanced on the contemplative path.

Purgatory, if both contemplative and non-contemplative have to pass through it, will make things equal even as regards the process of union. There, both will be contemplatives, but the contemplation of the soul who possessed the highest degree of charity, whatever may have been her state of prayer on earth, will be incomparably higher, more lost in joy, and yet (all other things being equal) more rigorous and consuming, more painful as regards the purification which may remain to be accomplished; because love itself is the fire which attacks and devours the impurities of the soul, and that with a greater violence proportionately to its greater intensity and consequent hostility to them.

So contemplation in relation to the just man is at once both supernatural, and yet, in a certain sense, connatural. The ground on which these two different relations, the one to the subject, the other to the Ordainer of grace, meet, is that of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, of those passivities mobile under the touch of God, which are already in the just man before he receives the gift of contemplation, and which in the contemplative state are moved by God in the special manner required to cause the light of faith to emerge in its "nudity" before the soul, as a new and, henceforward, an independent medium, self-sufficing as regards both information and evidence concerning the God who emits it.

5. SOME CONSEQUENCES WITH REGARD TO DIRECTION.

Firstly, since the soul even in a state of grace cannot obtain for herself contemplation by the exercise of her own faculties, it is useless for her to make efforts with that intention.

Secondly, since contemplation occurs in the course of the normal prolongation of the life of grace, it is right that the soul should dispose herself towards it, first and principally by charity, to which the function of the introduction of contemplative light belongs, and secondly by the correction of bad habits of the spirit on the heart which might prevent this light from rising or being able to disengage itself from the surrounding darkness. As to desiring the arrival of this light as a proximate event, and asking God expressly for it as we ask for the things necessary or advantageous for us at the moment, it would be as if a child on going to bed at night were to ask God to wake him the next morning 10 inches taller. He will have those extra 10 inches one day; he will have them in their due time, if God gives him life. Meanwhile, such indiscreet desires are merely a waste of time.

So much for the period of approach. Once, on the other hand, contemplation has been constated or established, the soul should be urged to feed upon it and make progress in it, which means that she should devote herself to it, and make the necessary sacrifices: the sacrifice of curiosities of the spirit, of wanderings of the imagination, of the futilities of conversation, of occupations not definitely ordained to charity towards God or the neighbor, and, above all, of the liberties of the heart and sentiments, liberties which for charity are a slavery and fetters from which it has to be freed. It is most important to put the soul on her guard against self-love and egotism. She must not adhere to the element of delight in the divine communications; she ought, in spite of and beyond that delight, to seek God purely; that is, she should endeavor to enjoy God solely for His own sake, as do the elect in heaven: *sufficit mihi si Deus meus vivit.* (It is sufficient for me if my God lives.) She should refrain from staining her enjoyment by such reflex glances of an egotistic complacency as would result from the pleasure she was taking for her own sake in the divine union rather than from the enjoyment of God for His own sake. If this tendency is not combated, it may become the most decisive obstacle to progress, and, at the same time, a source of deplorable illusion.

Pride grows with illusion, and the final issue may be a very dangerous state; possibly a state of despair. *Impossibile est enim eos qui semel sunt illuminati, gustaverunt etiam donum celeste, et participes facti sunt Spiritus Sancti, gustaverunt nihilominus bonum Dei verbum, virtutesque saeculi venturi, et prolapsi sunt, rursus renovari ad penitentiam, rursum crucifigentes sibimetipsis Filium Dei et ostentui habentes.* Hebrews, 6:4-6. “For it is Impossible for those who were once illuminated, who have tasted also the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, who have moreover tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, and are fallen away: to be renewed again to penance, crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making him a mockery.”

They cannot begin over again at the beginning, by the modest debut of an initial rupture with sin and a first sketch of the ideal prescribed by the Divine Model. They can only resume their course with a sure and persevering step at the point at which they left it. Their only chance of salvation (normally speaking) lies in their progress in the path of contemplation: and if they have fallen, if they have returned to the damnable love of self, with all the cupidities which it involves, what a gulf between their present state and the point to which they must raise themselves in order to start again without a further fall! Without reckoning that very likely, if Grace knocks again at their hearts, it will, it can be, no longer under the form of a union of delight, it will rather come under the form of a union of crucifixion. Nevertheless, God's gifts are without repentance, and to those to whom He has given much He is ready to restore everything at once, and give them much more than He had given them before, if only they will let Him re-enter their hearts by breaking down the pride that

blocks His passage and resists Him. Only it is important that they should not dispute one parcel of their co-operation with grace, but give themselves up completely.

Humility and renunciation are, then, absolutely necessary for contemplative souls, and those are the dispositions which must be specially cultivated in them. The touchstone and the best exercise of these dispositions is charity towards our neighbor, the neighbor who is humanly speaking without attractions — that is, ordinarily speaking, those who have been abandoned and disinherited by nature and grace, the ignorant, coarse, and uncultivated, those who have lost their way, the ungrateful, our enemies: those whom we despise, who disgust us and wound our feelings. Here hardly any illusion is possible: here are gains without number for humility; here are the spending and expansion of a charity which is truly charity towards God, and which, consequently, produces a new impulse towards prayer, which in its turn stimulates charity afresh, and so on. But when the time comes that contemplation so completely oppresses the human functions of the soul that apart from moments of respite, she is incapable of occupying herself with her neighbor or his service, it is evident that this rule no longer applies, except in intervals of calm.

In any case, during this period, the task of the director is not so much to direct as to sustain, to comfort, one can hardly say to console, this soul all of whose human faculties are in distress. It is the moment to show the reason blinded and abandoned by the light of faith withdrawn into its most distant home where, in all probability, it causes the spirit to agonize, that that light illuminates at least much more than it leaves in darkness; it is the moment to present to the heart the objects and truths the memory of which may bring a motive of action or rather of power to suffer, an encouragement to self-abandonment, to peaceful acquiescence and repose in union with the will of God. As to the direction of such a soul in her interior in which the divine light dwells, there is no need to trouble about it, for God takes charge of it. This condition, moreover, will normally be resolved into a higher state, in which the contemplative light, fully mistress of a fully purified soul, far from diminishing or countering her natural activity, marvelously helps it and multiplies its fertility. It is then that charity towards the neighbor reaches its height. This summit was for the Blessed Virgin her debut and point of departure, for she was all pure and perfectly governed from the first instant of her existence by the law of love and charity.

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