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C.C.W. Newcastle upon Tyne, 1970
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These were added later by an unknown hand. They follow the natural divisions of the book.

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PROLOGUE

I cannot tell you how surprised I was the first time I felt my heart begin to warm. It was real warmth too, not imaginary, and it felt as if it were actually on fire. I was astonished at the way the heat surged up, and how this new sensation brought great and unexpected comfort. I had to keep feeling my breast to make sure there was no physical reason for it! But once I realized that it came entirely from within, that this fire of love had no cause, material or sinful, but was the gift of my Maker, I was absolutely delighted, and wanted my love to be even greater. And this longing was all the more urgent because of the delightful effect and the interior sweetness which this spiritual flame fed into my soul. Before the infusion of this comfort I had never thought that we exiles could possibly have known such warmth, so sweet was the devotion it kindled. It set my soul aglow as if a real fire was burning there.

Yet as some may well remind us, there are people on fire with love for Christ, for we can see how utterly they despise the world, and how wholly they are given over to the service of God. If we put our finger near a fire we feel the heat; in much the same way a soul on fire with love feels, I say, a genuine warmth. Sometimes it is more, sometimes less: it depends on our particular capacity.

What mortal man could survive that heat at its peak – as we can know it, even here – if it persisted? He must inevitably wilt before the vastness and sweetness of love so fervid, and heat so indescribable. Yet at the same time he is bound to long eagerly for just this to happen: to breathe his soul out, with all its superb endowment of mind, in this honeyed flame, and, quit of this world, be held in thrall with those who sing their Maker’s praise.

But some things are opposed to charity: carnal, sordid things which beguile a mind at peace. And sometimes in
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this bitter exile physical need and strong human affection obtrude into this warmth, to disturb and quench this flame (which metaphorically I call 'fire', because it burns and enlightens). They cannot take away what is irremovable, of course, because this is something which has taken hold of my heart. Yet because of these things this cheering warmth is for a while absent. It will reappear in time, though until it does I am going to be spiritually frozen, and because I am missing what I have become accustomed to, will feel myself bereft. It is then that I want to recapture that awareness of inner fire which my whole being, physical as well as spiritual, so much approves; with it it knows itself to be secure.

Nowadays I find that even sleep ranges itself against me! The only spare time I have is that which I am obliged to give to slumber. When I am awake I can try to warm my soul up, though it is numb with cold. For I know how to kindle it when the soul is settled in devotion and how to raise it above earthly things with overwhelming desire. But this eternal and overflowing love does not come when I am relaxing, nor do I feel this spiritual ardour when I am tired out after, say, travelling; nor is it when I am absorbed with worldly interests, or engrossed in never-ending arguments. At times like these I catch myself growing cold: cold until once again I put away all things external, and make a real effort to stand in my Saviour's presence: only then do I abide in this inner warmth.

I offer, therefore, this book for the attention, not of the philosophers and sages of this world, not of great theologians bogged down in their interminable questionings, but of the simple and unlearned, who are seeking rather to love God than to amass knowledge. For he is not known by argument, but by what we do and how we love. I think that while the matters contained in such questionings are the most demanding of all intellectually, they are much less important when the love of Christ is under consideration. Anyhow they are impossible to understand! So I have not written for the experts, unless they have forgotten and put

Prologue

behind them all those things that belong to the world; unless now they are eager to surrender to a longing for God.

To achieve this however they must, first, fly from every worldly honour; they must hate all vainglory and the parade of knowledge. And then, conditioned by great poverty, through prayer and meditation they can devote themselves to the love of God. It will not be surprising if then an inner spark of the uncreated charity should appear to them and prepare their hearts for the fire which consumes everything that is dark, and raises them to that pitch of ardour which is so lovely and pleasant. Then will they pass beyond the things of time, and sit enthroned in infinite peace. The more learned they are, the more ability they naturally have for loving, always provided of course that they both despise themselves, and rejoice to be despised by others. And so, because I would stir up by these means every man to love God, and because I am trying to make plain the ardent nature of love and how it is supernatural, the title selected for this book will be The Fire of Love.
CHAPTER 1

Man's conversion to God, and matters that help or hinder his conversion.

Everyone who lives in this deplorable exile of ours knows that he cannot be filled with a love of eternity, or anointed with the sweet oil of heaven, unless he be truly converted to God. Before he can experience even a little of God's love he must really be turned to him, and, in mind at least, be wholly turned from every earthly thing. The turning indeed is a matter of duly ordered love, so that, first, he loves what he ought to love and not what he ought not, and, second, his love kindles more towards the former than to the latter. God is to be loved, of course, most of all: heavenly things too are to be much loved; but little love, or at least no more than is necessary, may be given to earthly things. This surely is the way a man turns to Christ: to desire nothing but him. To turn away from those 'good things' of the world, which pervert rather than protect those who love them, involves the withering of physical lust and the hatred of wickedness of any sort. So you will find there are people who have no taste for earthly things, and who deal with mundane matters no more than is absolutely necessary.

Because those who amass fortunes find comfort in such things - they do not know who will ultimately reap the benefit! - they are not therefore entitled to enjoy even a little cheerful, comforting, heavenly love. Yet they reckon they have had already some experience of future bliss - at least they say so - because of their devotion, a devotion which is feigned, and not genuinely holy. But surely it is this graceless presumption that will bring about their downfall, for their love for earthly treasure is unlimited. What is more, they will fall from the sweetness with which God delights his lovers. All love which is not God-directed is bad love, and makes its possessors bad too. And this is the reason why those who love worldly splendour with an evil love catch fire of a different sort, and separate themselves ever further from the fire of divine love, further in fact than the distance separating highest heaven from lowest earth! Indeed such people become like what they love, for they take their tone from the greed of their day and age. Because they will not give up their old ways they come to prefer life's specious emptiness to the warmth of happiness. They exchange the glory of incorruptible charity for a fleeting lust of 'beauty'. And this they could not possibly do were they not blinded by a counterfeit 'fire of love', which both devastates virtue at its source, and encourages vice in its growth.

Yet on the other hand there are many who, because they care nothing for feminine beauty or riotous living, reckon therefore that they will be sure of salvation. Because of this chastity, outward and visible, they see themselves as saints standing out from the rest. But this is a wrong and silly assumption if they are not at the same time destroying the real root of sin, greed. As the Bible says, there is nothing worse than the love of money, for it means that one's heart is everlastingly bothering about the love of the transitory, and not giving itself a chance to acquire devotion. Love for God and love for the world cannot coexist in the same soul: the stronger drives out the weaker, and it soon appears who loves the world, and who follows Christ. The strength of people's love is shown in what they do. The lovers of Christ set themselves against the world and the flesh, just as those who love the world oppose God and their own soul.

The elect of God, indeed, eat and drink 'in God', and all their thinking is directed Godwards; they attend to mundane matters only as need - not lust - may require. They have to talk of earthly things of course, but they do so with reluctance, and they never dwell thereon. Mentally they turn back to God with all speed, and spend the rest of the time with divine duties. They neither loaf nor gad about.

1. 1 Timothy 6:10.
The Fire of Love

after the spectacular or the frivolous – the mark of the reprobate! – for they sincerely care for the things which belong to God. Nor are they backward in speaking about these things, or doing them, or meditating upon them.

The reprobate on the other hand regard the things of God altogether too casually. His word they hear inattentively, their prayers they offer without love, their meditations are made without pleasure. Admittedly they go to church and even pack it to the doors: they beat their breasts and heave great sighs, but none of this means a thing. Seen of men they may be; heard of God they are not. While they are physically in the house of God, mentally they are miles away, thinking of the worldly goods they possess or would like to have, their hearts far from God. They eat and drink, not because they need to, but because they want to, and in sex and food they find all their enjoyment and pleasure. They give bread in plenty to the poor, and perhaps will clothe the cold with a coat, but all the time they are doing their alms in mortal sin, for show. Certainly when they do these things with means unjustly gotten, it is not surprising that they do not please their Redeemer, but rather provoke their Judge to vengeance.

Just as the elect of God, when they are seeing to the needs of the world or of the body, direct their thoughts Godwards, so the reprobate, when they seem to be serving God, are inwardly thinking of the world and things which have to do with worldly or carnal greed. And just as the elect in the relief of need do not grieve God, so the reprobate seemingly busy with good deeds do not please him, because they adulterate their good deeds with bad.

The devil has got hold of many whom we count good. For he possesses those who are merciful, chaste, and humble – self-confessed sinners to a man, of course, hair-shirted and penance-laden! Very often indeed are mortal wounds obscured by the odour of sanctity. He has the busy worker, the compelling preacher, but not, surely, the man whose heart is aglow with charity, ever eager to love God and indifferent to vanity. The eager love of the wicked on

Chapter 2

the other hand is for what is shameful. They have ceased from all spiritual exercise, or at least are flabby and very feeble. Their love has no pattern, being given more to things temporal than eternal, more to bodies than to souls.

CHAPTER 2

No one attains supreme devotion quickly, or is refreshed by the sweetness of contemplation.

It is obvious to those who are in love that no one attains the heights of devotion at once, or is ravished with contemplative sweetness. In fact it is only very occasionally – and then only momentarily – that they are allowed to experience heavenly things; their progress to spiritual strength is a gradual one. When they have attained the gravity of behaviour so necessary and have achieved a certain stability of mind – as much as changing circumstances permit – a certain perfection is acquired after great labour. It is then that they can feel some joy in loving God.

Notwithstanding, it appears that all those who are mighty performers in virtue immediately and genuinely experience the warmth of uncreated or created charity, melt in the immense fire of love, and sing within their hearts the song of divine praise. For this mystery is hidden from the many, and is revealed to the few, and those the most special. So the more sublime such a level is, the fewer – in this world – are those who find it. Rarely in fact have we found a man who is so holy or even perfect in this earthly life endowed with love so great as to be raised up to contemplation to the level of jubilant song. This would mean that he would receive within himself that the sound of the soul harmoniously, pouring forth sweet notes of music and composing spiritual songs as he offers his heavenly praises, and that he would truly experience in his heart the genuine fire of the love of God. It would be surprising if anyone without
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such experience should claim the name of contemplative when the psalmist, speaking in character as the typical contemplative, exclaims, I will go into the house of the Lord, with the voice of praise and thanksgiving. The praise, of course, is the praise offered by the banqueter, one who is feeding on heavenly sweetness.

Further, perfect souls who have been caught up into this friendship—surpassing, abundant, and eternal!—discover that life is suffused with imperishable sweetness from the glittering chalice of sweet charity. In holy happy wisdom they inhale joyful heat into their souls, and as a result are much cheered by the indescribable comfort of God's healing medicine. Here at all events is refreshment for those who love their high and eternal heritage, even though in their earthly exile distress befell them. However they think it not unfitness to endure a few years' hardship in order to be raised to heavenly thrones, and never leave them. They have been selected out of all mankind to be the beloved of their Maker and to be crowned with glory, since, like the seraphim in highest heaven, they have been inflamed with the same love. Physically they may have sat in solitary state, but in mind they have companied with angels, and have yearned for their Beloved. Now they sing most sweetly a prayer of love everlasting as they rejoice in Jesus:

O honeyed flame, sweeter than all sweet, delightful beyond all creation!
My God, my Love, surge over me, pierce me by your love, wound me with your beauty.
Surge over me, I say, who am longing for your comfort.
Reveal your healing medicine to your poor lover.
See, my one desire is for you; it is you my heart is seeking.
My soul pants for you; my whole being is athirst for you.
Yet you will not show yourself to me; you look away;
you bar the door, shun me, pass me over;
You even laugh at my innocent sufferings.

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not sent out on errands, but attend closely to God. Similarly
the masters of contemplative love give themselves to the
things of God, and not to lording it over people. Such mat-
tters are reserved for those more concerned for that kind of
activity, but less interested in spiritual delight.

Each of God’s chosen has his fore-appointed place. That
one may have been chosen for advancement, while this is
striving to surrender himself wholly to God; God within
him is drawing him, and so everything outside is ignored.
Such folk are holy indeed, though men in general rate them
pretty low, since they rarely go out of their way to do
miracles: they prefer rather to remain in interior solitude.

And there are those who quite properly give themselves
to serve God in other people, and who control those under
them with sensitivity.

Again to others who live lives of unsuspected discipline
there are sometimes granted – and made known – ‘signs’,
even before they die; or it may be after death when perhaps
they themselves for some period are enduring the sharp
afflictions of purgatory! Not every saint does, or has done,
a miracle before his death or after; nor, on the other hand,
does every reprobate lack one! The judgement of God is
hidden indeed. Evil men become worse when they see
miracles wrought by sinners; on the other hand, the good-
ness of those who hold lightly to the things which can be
indifferently good or bad increases more and more in the
love of their Maker. Admittedly some evil men have done
works that are good, but from them they have looked for
the praise of men, not of God. When they die, these things
die too, for they have had what they were wanting here on
earth. It often happens that those whose goodness is second-
rate and less than perfect work miracles, but for the most
part it is the outstanding ones who now rest wholly in the
heavenly places before the Face of God, having their re-
ward amongst the great angelic choirs. This lies behind the
special dignity attaching to the Feast of St Michael who is
not generally reckoned to belong to one of the top orders of

Chapter 4

angels. So there are certain people who, though they are
converted to God and are penitent and have forsaken the
affairs of the world, rejoice in the thought that after death
their name may be honoured by those who follow them. A
faithful servant of Christ, of course, pays no attention to
such matters lest he lose all he is working for.

Things common to good and evil alike are not to be
sought by God’s holy ones, unless it means that charity and
spiritual virtues are being planted in our hearts. For these
not only keep the soul from the corruption of sin but, at the
Judgement, will transform the body too into something for
ever memorable. Things done here on earth soon perish,
but there they persist for ever – in honour or in confusion!
Men of action and rank, even if they are outstanding for
their virtue or knowledge, should always put contemplatives
before themselves, reckoning them to be their superiors be-
fore God, and admitting that they themselves are not
capable of contemplation unless, maybe, God’s grace should
inspire them to it.

CHAPTER 4

The difference between God’s lovers and the world’s; their
rewards.

A HUMAN soul cannot know the fire of eternal love unless
first he has completely cut adrift from worldly vanity of
every kind. There must be a serious intention to study
heavenly things, to long continually for the love of God,
and to give every creature its due meed of affection. For if it
is for God’s sake that we love everything, we love God in it
rather than the thing itself. And so we rejoice, not in it but
in God – in whom, indeed, we shall glory and rejoice for
ever. But evil men are out to enjoy this present world, and
they make it the object of their love: they are always seek-
ing things to do with worldly pleasure. What greater folly,
more pitiful and damning, can anyone show than to cling
to things which are by their very nature passing and decaying?

For God the Holy Trinity is to be loved for himself alone. To the triune God let us give our whole mind: let us strive to relate all our thinking to him as its term: that he may be glorified in us for ever and ever. Our very selves, and all those others whom we love, we love for him alone.

The sinner lies who says he loves God, and yet has no qualms about serving sin. For everyone who loves God is free, and in no servitude to sin. For such a man controls himself, and is steadfast in the serving of righteousness. It is when we love earthly things and earthly comforts for their own sake that we show clearly that we are not loving God. If in this way we make creatures our delight we are to be reckoned not as his servants but as his enemies. We are setting things above their Creator, and caring nothing for the desire and pursuit of things eternal. Surely it is a dreadful moment for the soul (and a sign of everlasting perdition) when a man surrenders himself wholly to the world, and deliberately gives himself over to the lust of the flesh, and error of every kind. Small wonder that the poor wretch’s destruction begins while he is living with his pleasures. While he is thinking about wallowing in his lusts, he is hurrying on to everlasting punishment in hell!

Let no one then dare presume, or boast about his prowess; further, let him not defend himself when contempt and insults and obloquy are heaped upon him. He must not return an evil word for evil, but accept everything with equanimity: praise and insult alike. If in fact we do behave like this we shall rejoice in Christ for ever — it being understood of course that we are loving him here all the time and ardently. Our love for him, rooted in our hearts and steadfast, changes us into his own likeness, and with its fiery love feeds into our minds a glory of another sort, one which is divine.

For his love is a fire which sets our hearts aflame so that they glow and burn; and it purges them from all the foulness of sin. This fire blazes in his chosen ones, and makes them (in mind at least) look heavenwards, and to long ceaselessly for the release of death. Meanwhile, so long as there exists a possibility of our sinning, let us set our minds to flee from worldly prosperity, and cheerfully put up with hardship. The evil mind is perishing even in the midst of its joys; it is destroying itself with attractive poison as it searches for happiness in created things. We must try to avoid this contagion by maintaining our appetite for the spiritual nourishment that is reserved in heaven for fiery lovers.

Thus, with Christ’s consent, let us find consolation in the songs of love, and take our delight in the sweetness of devotion. In the meantime the wicked are slumbering in appalling darkness and, filled with their sins, are going down into punishment. It does not seem the least surprising that a mortal man should be seized with such love for God, because in his secret heart he feels no other consolation than that which heaven gives. Like the notes of an organ he rises up to achieve his high and manifest desire, to contemplate God. What others intend to his hurt, he turns to glory, so that his soul already seems quite impervious to suffering: not even the fear of death can disturb him, nor anything whatever shake him out of his poise. For now he is moved by pressing love, and because his mind is constantly on Jesus he quickly discerns his own weaknesses, corrects them, and avoids them. So he consistently practises righteousness until such time as he is led up to his God, to sit with the heaven-born on an everlasting throne. This is the reason why he stands with a clear conscience, unawakening, unaffected by worldly depression, and never carried away by vainglory.

But those who persistently practise uncleanness cannot know any love for Christ, for what fires them is carnal lust. They cannot display the devotion which is God’s due: they are firmly earthbound by the very weight of their desires. Consequently they are not destined to enjoy the delights of Paradise, for they persist in their perverse ways till they die. Quite rightly there is no mitigation of their grief, nor any
alleviation of the pain of damnation: of their own free will they made sensual pleasure their good, and for a love that deceived they wantonly lost the love of their eternal Lover. So in everlasting punishment they will assuredly repent of their ever having sinned; yet they will never be purged by such suffering, but will burn in everlasting fire with none to comfort them.

CHAPTER 5

Why one must heed divine love rather than knowledge or argument.

Out of all the various things that clamour for our attention, let us make it our prime concern to love God rather than to acquire knowledge or to engage in dialogue. For it is love that delights the soul and sweetens the conscience, because it draws it away from lesser pleasures and from the pursuit of one's own glory. Knowledge without love does not edify or contribute to our eternal salvation; it merely puffs up to our own dreadful loss. So our spirit must be strong to undertake hard tasks for God's sake, its wisdom spiced with heaven, not the world. It must long to be enlightened with the wisdom of eternity, and glow with that lovely heat which urges us to long for and love the Maker himself; a heat which empowers us to spur with our whole being everything merely transient. With regard to such things let a man consider it his greatest consolation that they do not endure, whereas he is one who has no present dwelling-place, but is always seeking one to come, not built with hands. So he cries, To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Surely the man who refuses to yield to base pleasure is the man who loves God. A man's distance from the love of

1. 1 Corinthians 8:1.
2. cf. Hebrews 11:10, 16.
The Fire of Love

scorching of lustful flattery and ill will. The very fervour of their sweet love ravishes them with the sight of their Beloved. Flowering through this loving flame into all virtue they rejoice in their Maker. Their mind is changed and passes into lasting melody. From now on their meditations become song. Melancholy has been driven out of the mansion of their spirit, and it now resounds with wondrous melody. The one-time torment of their soul has vanished, and now in glowing health they dwell in the heights of harmony, in the wonderful rhythm of sweet and melodious meditation.

When the time comes for them to leave this irksome, sick world, without a shadow of doubt they are borne up to God. Grief is no more, and there they sit among the seraphim. And it is all because they were completely absorbed in supreme love, an indescribable love that blazed in their souls, and made them love God with such sweetness and devotion. Fundamentally they knew nothing within themselves but spiritual heat, heavenly song, divine sweetness.

It follows that such people die without regret, and thereafter rise with joyful steps to the highest stage of eternal glory, their life crowned with the open vision of their Maker. Their song is absorbed into the most splendid praise, and their longing for him who rules all things is even more intense. And since they now behold openly the Face of Truth and are saturated with the sweetness of deity, it will occasion no surprise if they experience still greater wonders. When the bodies of the saints, now for a while held in the grasp of the earth, are raised from their graves and join up with their souls for the Last Judgement, they will stand out among the people, and will judge those to be condemned, and will make clear that even those who were only averagely good have been blessed by following after blessedness. And when the General Judgement is done they will be borne away to everlasting praise, and ascend with Christ to the utmost glory, and enjoy the vision of God for ever. From which we gather that everlasting sweetness completely fills their minds, and binds them now and hereafter with the indissoluble claim of love.

Chapter 6

So it behoves us to make sure that the love of Christ is in us, and burning. This, rather than that we should indulge in futile discussion! For it is when our minds are giving way to unbridled curiosity that we lose the sweetness and delight of heaven. Nowadays too many are consumed with a desire for knowledge rather than for love, so that they scarcely know what love is or what is its delight. Yet all their study should have been directed to this end, so that they might be consumed with the love of God as well. Shame on them! An old woman can be more expert in the love of God – and less worldly too – than your theologian with his useless studying. He does it for vanity, to get a reputation, to obtain stipends and official positions. Such a fellow ought to be entitled not ‘Doctor’ but ‘Fool’!

CHAPTER 6

About heretics, and faith in the Trinity.

Truth in plenty, whole and holy, reveals itself to those who look for it: ‘closed books’ are open to the sons of God. Then where does the treachery of the heretic spring from if not from his undisciplined and chaotic mind, blinded by its desire for its own reputation? For heretics never cease opposing God in their hearts by their insensate greed. Moreover when the Christian religion would cut away what is opposed to it, and make all agree in the unity of faith and love, they will openly resist truth by manifold argument. It is ever the way of the heretical and proud to ventilate new ideas and to question whatever the Church has asserted. Things that the faithful Christian holds dear they take pleasure in decrying.

We reject their errors, and assert the Son of God to be coeternal with the Father; this we must always believe and understand, for unless the Father had begotten him from all eternity, essentially he would not have been wholly God. For if there had been a time when God the Father had had
no Son, we would not be overstating the case if we said that at such time God was less than he became afterwards when he had begotten him! And that no right thinking man can admit. The unchanging God begets unchanging God, and has begotten him from eternity: nor does he cease to beget him today. For neither can the substance of the Only Begotten sometimes be described as 'begotten', nor can the substance of the Begetter ever be known apart from the Only Begotten born of himself. Indeed the beginning of Deity cannot be discovered either by reason or intellect – because there was no beginning! Similarly the Son's Begetter abides unchangeably in his eternal deity. In fact when in infinity the wonder and the splendour of God Almighty shines out clearly, whatever is human silliness aspiring to when it asserts it knows the mystery inaudible to mortal ears? He knows God perfectly who recognizes that he is beyond our comprehension and capacity. For nothing can be known perfectly if we do not know its origin and its purpose. In this present life we know in part and we understand in part, but in the future life we shall know perfectly and completely, as much as created beings can, and profitably may. But he who wants information about our everlasting Maker beyond what is useful undoubtedly falls short of perfect understanding like a silly fool. You ask, 'What is God?' and I answer briefly, 'He is such that no greater or better exists or can exist.' If you are wanting to know in the strict sense of the words what God is, my reply is that you will find no answer to your question. I do not know: the angels are ignorant; the archangels have not heard! How is it then that you would know what is basically unknowable and incommunicable? God himself, almighty as he is, is unable to teach you what he is. For if you knew what God is you would be as wise as God, which is something quite beyond you, a creature. Stay then where you are, and do not bother about going higher, because if you are wanting to know what God is you are wanting to be as God – and that is all wrong! Face the fact: only God can know himself. It is not weakness on God's part that he is unable to teach you what he is in himself, but is due to his incredible glory, because he cannot possibly be other than he is. If it were really possible for him to be fully known, he would not be incomprehensible. It is enough for you to know that God is; to want to know what he is will only hinder.

It is a praiseworthy thing to be perfectly acquainted with God, that is, to recognize that he is incomprehensible; and recognizing him thus, to love him; and loving him, to rejoice in him; and rejoicing, to rest in him; and in inner quiet to arrive at eternal rest. Do not worry if I have said that you should be perfectly acquainted with God, and yet have said that you cannot know God. You may object that the Psalmist says, Continue your loving kindness unto them that know you.² But if you are not to err you must understand the words, 'unto them that know you' in this way: they mean 'unto those who know that you are a God who is to be loved, praised, adored, glorified: the sole Creator of everything, above all, through all, and in all, blessed for ever and ever. Amen.'

CHAPTER 7

In matter of divinity we ought not to talk of three Lords or three Natures, because we speak of three Persons; a man is great or small according to his love.

If people were to say, mistakenly, that there were three beings, because they speak of three Persons in the Trinity, why should they not go on to call them three Gods, since each is with God, is God, and has the nature of God? We say the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. In the same way, the Father has the nature of God, and so has the Son, and so has the Holy Spirit. Yet we are not speaking of three Gods or three natures, but of one God who is three Persons and one nature, and this we be-

1. 1 Corinthians 13:12.
believable wholeheartedly. The divine majesty of the three Persons is all one, full and perfect, and each in himself contains the whole Godhead; he is equal and identical as regards the nature of deity, and the distinction is that which quite properly accords with the name. Thus there are three Persons and one God, one nature, one substance, one deity. And although ‘Person’ suggests to us a separate being – and here there are three Persons – it is not to be understood that there are three different natures. And just as we call our God, ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’, and say there is one nature, not three, so we will speak of the same supreme Trinity as being three Persons and not one.

The Father is so called because of himself he has begotten the Son; the Son because he is begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit because he is the Spirit of both, Holy Father and Holy Son. The Father who is life in the Son gave him his own total being, so that the Father is as much in the Son as he is in himself. And the Son is not less in the Father than he is in himself. What the Father is he received of no one, but what the Son is in his eternal birth he holds from the Father alone. Moreover the Holy Spirit comes from both Father and Son, and eternally exists in them and with them; nor is he more in himself than he is in them. For he is equal and coeternal with them from whom he comes, with the same being, the same nature, the same glory. He is the third Person in the Trinity. The eternal Son of the Father was made man in time, being born of a virgin that he might redeem the human race from the power of the devil. He is our Lord Jesus Christ – and may he be as firmly fixed in our thought as once he was, for our sakes, fixed to the Cross.

There is nothing so sweet as loving Christ, and because this is so let us not inquire too closely into matters we earthlings cannot possibly understand. In the Father’s home there will be clearer light if we bring our whole heart to the loving of God. We shall all be taught of God1 and so will rejoice in wonderful harmony. We shall have no greater pleasure or sweeter happiness than to praise our Maker – and there will be no more grief or weariness for ever!

It is the one who loves much who is truly great, and it is he who loves little who is less, for our worth before God accords with the degree of love in our hearts. On the human level however it does not happen like this, for it is he who has riches and possessions who is most respected and revered. Of course men ought not to think in such a way, but always honour and respect those whom they consider foremost in knowledge.

The great ones of this earth have no need at all except for their bodies or their possessions. The saints have chosen much greater splendour! Indeed they will have power to close heaven to those who have injured them and who refuse to repent; and to open it to those who have given them honour in God, and have supported them while in this exile – provided that their misfortunes arose through their charity, and that they repudiated all vainglory. So they ought to strive by all means in their power to acquire love, to hold on to it, and to retain it. Then in the day of temptation they can stand up to their enemies like men. Thus proved they will receive the crown of life. For love makes men whole: it is only those who love wholly who are allowed to scale the heights of the contemplative life.

Maybe the poor do live in squalor and dirt, but that is no reason to despise them; they are God’s friends, Christ’s brethren, when they bear the burden of their poverty with thankfulness. Those whom outwardly you might regard with contempt, inwardly you can honour as citizens of heaven. And just as you are developing your respect for them for God’s sake, so he in his divine majesty continues his secret work, for he comforts them as he says Blessed are the poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.2 The great suffering and poverty they experience in this life means the purging of their sins, for when a poor man is being afflicted in body by hunger and thirst, by cold and nakedness, and

1. John 6:45.
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by all the other trials of this world, in soul he is being cleansed from earthly filth and dirt. The poor, to be sure, will not find their future and eternal rest any less sweet for having had to put up with their present hardship. It will be said of them, We have been glad of the days in which you have plagued us, and for the years in which we have seen evil. So welcome joyfully the bearing of poverty, and set your mind to endure cheerfully all the other trials. Patience in tribulation will make you worthy to attain eternal peace and glory.

CHAPTER 8

A perfect lover of God would rather incur great punishment than offend God by a single sin; why God afflicts the righteous with the ungodly.

Out of this vast fire of love such beauty and virtue is developed in the soul that the righteous man would choose to face the utmost punishment rather than for one moment offend God — though he would also know that by penitence he might rise again, and subsequently be more pleasing to God, and more holy too. Because the perfect man, whoever he is, knows this: nothing is dearer to God than innocence, nothing more pleasing than good will. And if we are really to love God, we ought to be willing to lose the great reward of heaven rather than to commit a single sin however venial. Supreme righteousness asks no reward for being righteous, but only for the friendship of God, and that because he is what he is. It is always better to endure hardship, than even for a moment to be consciously and deliberately enticed away from righteousness.

It is clear that those who love Christ with such fervour as never to want to sin again, not only will be free from punishment, but will rejoice for ever with the angel hosts.

3. Psalms 90:15.

But those who give themselves up to evil doing, who depend on filthy and carnal pleasure for their enjoyment — they consider them important and desirable, and pretend they are essential — in one fell swoop will both lose the good (sic) they love, and gain the evil they did not bargain for!

But almost certainly someone is going to ask why does God Almighty chastise the righteous and the ungodly alike? You will have noticed that when men are threshing, they flail chaff as well as grain. When they are winnowing, they throw the chaff out, but the grain is carefully collected for human consumption. If we were all to live good lives, no doubt we should all live in peace and quiet without discord or war. But because evil folk are many, and the good are few, many evil things result; and evil has to be punished. Evil things happen to good men of course because they are involved with evil till they die. The righteous, in order to prevent this sinful tendency coming to a head, are instructed by the rod of their loving Father to accept their present easy discipline, and thereby escape future tribulation. So if you yourself are going through persecution or wretchedness or misery, you are experiencing what is exactly right for your present circumstances. For are you not in fact in a ‘vale of tribulation’? How can you then be wanting to rejoice in what after all is a prison, to flourish greatly in what is our exile, to travel trouble-free throughout the whole length of our journey? Let us remember that Christ and his apostles suffered, and you are wanting to go from one joy to another. It just cannot be done! For either the fire of divine love will burn up the canker of our sins in this life here, purifying our souls to be fit to fly up to God, or after this life the flames of purgatory will torment these same souls. If they are to escape hell, or if, indeed, there is not love strong enough to burn us up wholly, it will be essential for us to be cleansed by tribulation, sickness, and grief.

Further, we know this — and there is no doubt about it — that no young man who is surrounded by feminine beauty and flattery and sweet nothing and enervating luxury can possibly be holy, unless it is through grace, great and ex-
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ceptional. So many and such like things are asking for trouble, and all too often bring a holy man down. I reckon it a major miracle when a man through God’s grace and a love for Christ spurns these allurements completely, and out of the midst of them all (which war against his soul, however pleasant they be to his flesh), rises like a man to the utmost heights of heavenly contemplation. There is no doubt that he is more holy as a result of all this, and inwardly much richer through the comfort brought him by his love of God. If he was thrown into the fire of hell he would not burn! For he has completely extinguished the seductions and delights of life which come to him from outside. It is not surprising, even if it is unusual, that Christ works thus in some of his beloved. It is said of such He has spread a cloud (obviously a cloud of divine grace) for a covering (from carnal lust, by the fire of everlasting love) and fire to give light (within their mind) in the night (of this life); and all this lest they should be taken captive by the attraction of empty beauty. But Christ’s love burns in them with such sweetness that they deem every carnal, illicit pleasure the most appalling filth, and trample it down.

Therefore you are not to touch these slippery things which are unlawful for you either to want or to have. Remember that you are to discipline your hands, your tongue, your appetite, and not be enticed by women. Maybe incitement to soft living is wrapped up with being a man or a woman – and hot food and drink by their very warmth inflame the flesh unduly! Men are ever fashioning comfort for their bodies, and destruction for their souls. These must be eschewed by the chaste.


CHAPTER 9

In adversity God is to be praised and loved; good men are pleasant and humble.

If temporal honour can be destroyed by shame, and earthly glory finished by confusion, it seems to be undoubted that an insult is better than honour, confusion than success, grief than glory. It is by these latter things that a man often enough lapses into vainglory. Yet if he habitually faced the former with patience he would learn humility in this life here, and escape punishment in the life to come, because God does not punish the just twice. More, he would be crowned in splendour because the patience of the poor will not ultimately perish.

These are the things that belong to holiness: first, never to think, say, or do what displeases God and, then, to think, say, and do what does please him! Do this as well as you know how, so as not to cause offence, and do not pretend to a holiness that is not yours. A man is a fool if he is always wanting to appear holy, just as a good man would be abnormal if he wanted to seem bad. There are some things which looked at by themselves are neither good nor bad; which in their natural state are worth neither praise nor blame. The doing of such things does not displease God any more than does their omission. We can see, hear, smell, feel or touch them, and be no better off – or worse either. All sin, however, shows a contempt of God, or is done to hurt one’s neighbour, or to harm oneself. But many human matters are none of these things. All the same, to be despised or to be made a fool of in front of others helps a man rise to the joy of the angels!

Good Jesus, scourge me, wound me, slay me, burn me; do with me here and now whatever in your goodness you decide;
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that in the days to come I may know and feel
not evil but your love – and that, for ever!

To be despised, rejected, insulted by all,
for your sake, is sweeter to me
than to be called the brother of any earthly monarch,
honoured among men, and praised by all.

In this present life I would know misery as my lot in
every place.
if I might be spared by you, my God, these things in
the other!

It is here I would suffer, and be put right;
Christ grant me this now in the present,
if I may not otherwise escape punishment in the
future!

But the conceited and touchy consider themselves so
magnificent as to be beyond any possibility of suffering. Yet
the least word can often upset them, and for no reason at
all. It is better to avoid them rather than argue with them,
because they never let go. They defend whatever position
they take up, however false or wrong it may be. They can-
not be persuaded by reason or authority because they are
not going to be seen to be beaten or ridiculous. Even when
they are ignorant (and know it) they still would be
thought inspired in everything that has to do with God, so
as to lay the law down everywhere without fear of contra-
diction. They would even prefer to remain in error than that
they should be publicly accused of it!

My brothers, give up this mad pride, and proud madness!
Let us be genuinely humble all through life. It is better, and
a good and lovely thing, to have Christ tell us, after we
have died, Friend, go up higher,1 rather than that he
should say, Fool, go down lower. For this is what will
happen to the lowly and the lofty. A righteous man need
not fear tribulation, grief, misery, perplexity, or rejection:
at least, all the while he does not sin, and is advancing in


Chapter 9

contemplation and love for God. For before we can arrive at
the court of the King where with the angels and saints of
God we shall rejoice in sweet plenty, we must ourselves be
proved here below, whether it is by flattery or detraction,
by blandishment or backbiting, by praise or calumny. In
patient humility and love we must cleave to the precepts
and counsels of Christ: so that when judgement is given it
can be said of us, even as it has been written, As gold in the
furnace is tried, so he proved them.2 On every side there has
been fire, and he found them worthy of himself.3 In this
way we pass through things pleasant and unpleasant,
through fire and water, until we attain the living rest of
heaven. So in every unpleasant situation, be it hardship or
poverty, remember never to murmur or speak foolishly or
perversely. If in everything you give thanks,4 with all the
more joy will you be raised to the kingdom of the saints –
always assuming that you have voluntarily endured in the
world those things of which we have been speaking.

My soul, whatever happens, praise the Lord with delight
and devotion. With your praise, taste its sweetness; with
your song, its honey. While I live I will praise the Lord.5
Whether I suffer or prosper, face insult or honour, I will
praise my God while I have my being.6 If I rest in Jesus I
will rejoice: if I undergo persecution I will not forget the
love of God. I only ask to love God and to attain him. I can
do nothing else; my one concern is to love Christ. So far I
have not reached the love of God as did my predecessors;
and they did many useful things beside. Wherefore I hang
my head and shame has covered my face.7 So, Lord, make
my heart bigger, better able to perceive your love. For the
greater a man’s capacity, the fuller the love he gets and
saviours, and the less his concern for the flesh. But even this
must be with common sense, so that it may accord with the
saying of the wise man, I travailed but little, and I found
much rest.8 For after the few years of life here, the right-

3. Wisdom 3:5.
4. 1 Thessalonians 5:18.
5. Psalms 104:33.
7. Ecclesiasticus 51:27.
eous man finds rest for eternity. For while God's saint and lover is in exile here he reveals himself to be a man neither too lighthearted nor too sad. There is a maturity about his cheerfulness.

There are some who disapprove of laughter, and others who praise it. The laughter of a frivolous, silly mind can be reprehensible, but surely that which springs from a cheerful conscience and spiritual buoyancy is worth praising? Only the righteous have it, and they call it *delighting in the love of God*. Yet when we are cheerful and joyful the irreligious call us 'dissolute'; and when we are serious they call us 'hypocrites'? It is unusual for a man to assess as good in another what he does not find in himself, and the sins at which he stumbles he attributes to other folk too. It is the act of a presumptuous man to think that if others do not follow his own particular way of life they are depraved and deceived! And the cause of it all? He has let go humility.

The stages of humility are these: to keep one's eyes down rather than up; to be restrained in speech, and not exaggerated; to listen gladly to those who are better and wiser than oneself; to want others' wisdom to be heard rather than one's own; not to speak out of turn; not to run away from everyday life; to prefer others to oneself; to recognize one's weaknesses; and to reckon oneself the least of all. Were I really anxious to mix with people my ambition would be to sit in the lowest place, with my reputation minimal, so that I might glory in Christ Jesus, caring nothing for human praise or blame, but eager to be united in devotion to God.

For many of those who used to speak with me were like scorpions: with their head they oozed flattery, and with their tail they struck slanders. From whose lying lips and deceitful tongues may God deliver my soul, and establish it in peace and joy!

But where does such madness in the minds of men come from? No one likes to be belittled; no one likes to be reproved; everyone wants to be praised. People rejoice in honours, and are delighted by applause – and this is true of some who have a reputation for sanctity of life. Such people seem to me either too holy for words, or else complete fools, though men call them wise and learned. For what sane man is going to abandon himself to dissipation, and enjoy the empty words of men? If he has a good look at himself, and takes the trouble to learn what sort of man he is in thought and deed, he will find our soon enough, and discover whether he is deserving of praise or blame. And when he sees that in many things he is blameworthy, and laudable only in few, he is not going light-heartedly to accept the honour and favour which he does not deserve – not unless he is mentally deranged. But if in his self-investigation he finds he is glowing with the heat and sweetness of divine love beyond description, and he is setting out on the contemplative life, and is committed thereto, and if moreover he cannot recall ever having committed grave sins or, having committed them, believes them to have been wiped out by penance, he is certainly not going to grieve that men do not honour him; his reward is much greater: his fellowship is with the angels! The man of such disposition takes no more pleasure in sitting next to a king than to a pauper, because he is considering, not the riches and dignities of men generally, but the life and merits of each one singly. He does not regard it as important that he should glitter with gold or be attended by a huge retinue, or go about in episcopal purple, or wear a mitre. No indeed: he esteems a holy and sweet conscience better than all these things and delights.
CHAPTER 10

The lover of God despises the world, weariness and idleness; about hypocrites and covetous men.

It is said in the Canticles that love is strong as death, jealousy is as cruel as hell.\(^1\) Death does indeed slay the living, and hell does not spare the dead. So too, when the love of God takes complete charge of a man, not only does it kill the root of his love for the world, but since he is now dead to the world and one with heaven it fires him to bear for God’s sake whatever tribulation and misery life may bring. You who reckon you love Christ pay attention to this: if you still regard earthly things with pleasure your soul will be unprepared to endure suffering or death. And you will show clearly that you are not a true lover of God. Indeed a true lover of God never lets his eye linger on the world, and if it is for God’s sake, nor does he fear suffering. He allows nothing to take his mind off the Beloved.

And you, a lover of God (or at least desperately anxious to be one!) must study always as best you know how, and with the help of Christ’s grace, not to be ensnared by boredom or affected by sloth. And should your prized facility of prayer or meditation desert you and you cannot raise your mind to joyful and holy contemplation or sing as once you did, you are not on that account to give up your reading or praying or whatever other useful thing you do, be it outward or inward, lest you degenerate into sloth. Boredom drags many people down into sloth, and sloth into carelessness and sin. Therefore you must always be as fervent as you can, and not let your affections go after any worldly thing you covet. No one can be united to God perfectly while he is held by a liking for the created and worldly.

There are some indeed who seem outwardly united to God, who inwardly are given over to the devil: impostors

\(^1\) Canticles (or Song of Songs) 8:6.

who ostensibly despise the world, but who in fact love it! They wish to appear to speak of God, though their hearts are so possessed with the love of money that sometimes they will fall out over a farthing! They serve God with their lips, but are wholly devoid of devotion. And though they have no real faith or love they seem by the way they behave and dress and speak to be the most holy of men. Moreover, people like these profess themselves to be steadfast in light affliction, but when they come up against what must be firmly resisted, then they at once break and fall down. And what was once hidden is now wide open for all to see! When they are rolling in money or living on the fat of the land they protest that they are eating next to nothing: it is their conviction that the whole world is no more than vanity, and therefore (they claim) they can barely survive because of their weakness.

They are deceivers: theirs is the wisdom of the world. They deceive in this way so as not to be seen in their other ploys, inasmuch as they are on guard against worldly loss, disguising their real contempt for eternal things under a specious greed for ‘spiritual quiet’. But however much they may conceal for a while, there can be no doubt that long before the end, or at all events at the end, they will be recognized for what they are. When they give alms, or do any other good deed, they do it publicly, so that everything shall be seen by men.\(^2\) They deservedly provoke the wrath of God because they do not really want to be perfect but only to seem so. In their heart, which is where God sees them, true humility is lacking, and they are after their own glory, and not God’s. It is extremely difficult to have riches and not to love them, and it is no less difficult to hold a profitable job or position and not to want more.

Whence it happens that often among people priests are denigrated: if they are chaste they are found to be avaricious; if they are generous they are dissolute. Often enough it happens that those who have taken priest’s Orders fall more deeply into sin, the more so because they have taken this

\(^2\) Matthew 6:1.
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step unworthily. Some, in truth, carried away by worry or greed, plead future infirmity or poverty, and say they are amassing goods against impending misery. But these are just a joke to the demons, because not only do they let the good things of life slip through their fingers, but the very calamities they fear they run into, since they leave no place for God, who delivers his servants in his sight. Worst of all, when they are full up inside with worldly coveting, outwardly they reckon to shine in the shade of sanctity. But the servant of God puts his trust in God, and such goods as he has beyond his immediate requirements he distributes to the needy. On the other hand the servant of the world seeks to keep everything for himself, for he is insatiably greedy and evil. Moreover, he is so miserly that he can only bring himself to eat what is cheap and nasty, since it is by being mean that he amasses much money. These are those whom the Psalmist condemns, His enemies shall lick the dust.  

CHAPTER 11

The lovers of God will judge with him; the love of knowledge that has been acquired, and the love of God; the true lover of God does not err, nor is he deceived by fastings, abstinence, advice, or presumption.

Since the human soul is capable of receiving God alone, nothing less than God can fill it; which explains why lovers of earthly things are never satisfied. The peace known by lovers of Christ comes from their heart being fixed, in longing and in thought, in the love of God; it is a peace that sings and loves and burns and contemplates. Very sweet indeed is the quiet which the spirit experiences. Music, divine and delectable, comes to rejoice it; the mind is rapt in sublime and gay melody and sings the delights of everlasting love. Now from human lips sounds forth again the praise of God; the praise too, of the Blessed Virgin in

whom he glories beyond measure. This need occasion no surprise, for the heart of the singer is altogether ablaze with heavenly fire. And he is transformed into the likeness of him in whom is all melody and song, and is transported by loving desire for the taste of heaven. A man overflows with inner joy, and his very thought sings as he rejoices in the warmth of his love. All this, to be sure, is meaningless to those who are 'dead', and an outsider cannot understand how anything so sweet and lovely is experienced by a man in a decaying body, limited by its very mortality. But even the one who has all this himself wonders at it, and rejoices at the unspeakable goodness of God who gives liberally and does not upbraid, for it is from him the experience comes. Moreover when he has once had experience of that great thing (and it is a great thing, completely unknown by dying men) he knows that when it is missing he is never at ease, but is always pining for love. So he remains vigilant, and sings and thinks of his love and his Beloved – and if he is on his own sings all the more blithely!

Once a man has known some such experience, he is never thereafter wholly without it, for there always remains a sort of glow, some song or sweetness, even if these are not all present together in equal strength. Yet all are present, unless illness catches him, or he is gripped by intolerable hunger or thirst, or is held up by cold, or heat, or travel. It behoves him then who would sing his love for God and rejoice fervently in such singing, to pass his days in solitude. Yet the abstinence in which he lives should not be excessive, nor on the other hand should he display too much extravagance. Better for him slightly to exceed the limit if it is done in ignorance and with the sound intention of sustaining the body, than that he should falter by over strict fasting, and through physical weakness be unable to sing. But, to be sure, he who is chosen for this life is not overcome by the devil’s deceit whether he eats or abstains. The true lover of Christ, one who is taught by him, does not worry overly whether there is too much or too little.


1. James 1:5.