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him constantly and deliberately in all his thoughts, thoughts which are wholly loving and in intention unending, thoughts upon which he meditates unceasingly wherever he sits or wherever he goes, seeking interiorly to love only Christ, he will certainly not know any heavenly song, or sing joyfully to Jesus, or sound his praises either mentally or aloud.

Pride indeed is the downfall of many, for when they think they have done something which others are not accustomed to, at once they put themselves forward and quite improperly snub those who could well be better than they. But let them realize this: that man does not know love who presumes to despise what is common to himself and his neighbour. He injures his own case who does not acknowledge the right of another, and he violates the law of common humanity because he does not respect his bond with his neighbour. It is in this way that men stray from the love of God, and they do not know how to attain it because they do not give themselves to love their neighbour as they ought. Him they dismiss as altogether sinful and wrong, or if they begin to correct or rebuke him they speak with such asperity and harshness that they often make him worse by their correction.

They should speak, with gentleness, so as to win him by soft words. Unbridled correction only makes matters worse.

Chapter 26

my whole heart to see my Love in all his beauty. But meanwhile he visit me with his sweet love as I toil and struggle on through this pilgrimage. And may he turn my heart to himself so as to delight me with the warmth of greater and greater love. Until I can see my Beloved clearly I shall sing at every remembrance of his sweet name; it is never far from mind.

He who delights to do what his Saviour wishes not surprisingly finds delights in this present world as well. Nothing is more pleasant than praising Jesus; nothing more delectable than hearing him. For hearing rejoices my mind, and praising lifts me to himself. And when I am deprived of these things I sigh in my need, for then I hunger and thirst, and know myself bereft. Yet when I feel the embrace and caress of my Sweetheart I swoon with unspeakable delight, for it is he - he whom true lovers put before all else, for love of him alone, and because of his unbounded goodness!

And when he comes, may he come into me, suffusing me with his perfect love. May he refresh my heart by his continual gifts, and by removing every hindrance to his love make me glow and expand. Who will dare to say that a man is going to fall into the foul filth of the flesh, if Christ has deigned to refresh him with the heavenly sweetness of celestial vision? This is why such a man sings sweetly something like this, ‘We will rejoice as we remember your breasts that are better than wine,’ as if to say,

‘We are wanting your honour, your glory: we are rejoicing in your delights.
The pleasures and plenty of passing vanity have been put away, things which so bemuse those who love them, that they cannot see the evils they will suffer.

And although as yet we cannot see your Face our longing is still so ardent that were we to live for ever thus


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2. Canticles 1:1 (Vulgate).
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we would seek no other object of our love.
The longer we live the more fervently we want you,
and the greater joy we experience in your love.
We sigh earnestly for you.
Things cease to be unpleasant when men love you,
and they become happy and joyful.
For the soul that truly loves you, Jesus,
would rather die the most awful death
than consent to sin, however little.'

A man’s love for Christ is not true or perfect if he is
afraid of anyone else. All things work together for good to
those who love God. Love that is perfect conquers pain
and overcomes threats, because it is afraid of no one. It
rejects the proud, yet in its humility yields place to all. It is
truly said, The righteous love you, for the righteous are
humble, and love in truth, and do all the things they should.
Though they live in high perfection, in thought and deed
they bear themselves in great humility. And so each true
lover may say to himself, ‘All men are better than I in their
contempt of the world, their hatred of sin, their desire for
heaven, their sweet and fervent love for Christ, their charity
towards their neighbour. Some abound in virtue, some
glitter with miracles, some are exalted with the heavenly
gift of contemplation, some search out the secrets of Scripture.
When I think of the worthy lives of such people in
comparison with my own I am reduced, as it were, to nothing:
I give way to the very lowest.’

The righteous are those who deliberately run away from
earthly hindrances, for they pant only after everlasting joys.
All appetite for transient things fades, and they run after
the love of God with urgent longing. Quite properly they
are said to love God, for they go by the right, straightforward
way of shining charity, and have no taste or longing
for anything but Christ. They do not resemble those mentioned
by the Psalmist, Let their eyes be blinded so that
they cannot see, and ever bow down their backs, referring
to those who cling to earthly things, and make eternal
things second to transitory. Which is why the wrath of God
is poured out upon them, and justice is vindicated in the
great and violent torments which overwhelm them.

For without pause the righteous aim at enjoying the
vision of God, and this they do with heart and voice and
effort, all pretence put away. They do not turn aside to love
pointless vanity lest they be deflected in their pilgrimage
from following the path of righteousness. When a man
wants to please Christ he will do anything, good as well
as bad, contrary to Christ’s will. It is indeed ghastly to go
down into the fires of Gehenna, but more hateful still to
want to sin for one’s own pleasure. In this way one can lose
Christ for ever!

The soul that is truly separated from vice, and is a
stranger to venal and carnal sweetness, the soul that is
wholly given to heavenly desire, and is enthralled thereby,
joys quite remarkable pleasure because she is in some
way experiencing the delight of her Beloved’s love. Now she
is able to contemplate more clearly, and her pleasure is all
the keener. Now is the time when she demands her Spouse’s
most gracious lips, and his sweetest kiss. ‘All earthly things
I despise,’ she cries, ‘I know how much I love my Beloved, I
am aware of his most wonderful comfort, I yearn for his
sweetness, I am not going to fail now that the greatest
temptations have been put behind me. Love is making me
bold to summon my Beloved that he might comfort me,
come unto me, and kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.’ For
the more I am raised above earthly thoughts the more fully
do I enjoy the pleasure I long for; the more carnal longings
are banished, so much the more truly do the eternal ones
flare up. Let him kiss me and refresh me with his sweet
love; let him hold me tight and kiss me on the mouth, else I
die; let him pour his grace into me, that I may grow in
love.’ Children are fed and nourished with mother’s milk;
and elect souls, blazing with love, are fed with supernal
delights, and so led on to the vision of the everlasting Glory.
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To be sure, the delights of loving Christ are sweeter than all the tasty pleasures of the world and the flesh. Indeed, unimaginable carnal pleasure, and abundant earthly possession, in comparison with the minutest sweetness poured by God into an elect soul are paltry and appalling!

Vast as the difference may be
   between the sum total of earthly wealth
   and the greatest depth of worldly poverty,
so the sweetness of your love, my Beloved,
is infinitely greater
than all those delectable earthly joys
the lustful thirst after,
and the worldly live for,
and in which alone they glory.
They have no experience of that love of yours
which ought to be their delight.

But spiritual gifts oblige the devout soul to love fervently,
to meditate sweetly, to contemplate deeply, to pray joyfully,
to praise worthily, to long for Jesus and him only, to cleanse
the mind from the filth of sin, to quench the desires of the
flesh, to despise all things of earth, to have a mental picture
of the cross and wounds of Christ, and with tireless longing
to pant and sigh for the vision of that most glorious purity.
These are the ointments best suited for beautifying the soul
who is dedicated to the love of God.

CHAPTER 27

True humility; the way of benefiting by adversities, and the
examples of the saints; meditation on the Passion of Christ.

Humble men do not look at other people’s sins but at
their own, nor do they praise their own good deeds but
those of others. The reprobate, however, do just the opposite,
because they concentrate more on the evils of others
than on their own, these latter being in comparison (they
say) either non-existent or trivial. But their own good deeds
– assuming there are any – they prefer to anybody else’s,
whose goodness indeed they are anxious to play down when
they cannot altogether dismiss it.

But there are two things which it hurts me to hear. The
first is when I, wretched I, have known myself praised when
I ought properly to have been despised. The second is when
I see my neighbour whom I have loved in God, and for God,
slandered and denigrated. Nevertheless, you who are giving
up the world in the attempt to follow Christ in his path of
poverty must strive to know yourself. Because if you do in
fact renounce the greed of riches and of this day and age, you
are binding yourself for Christ’s sake to bear cheerfully the
rebuffs of the world, and with all your might to run away
from riches. Were you to be unaware of this, and give no
heed to it, you would be led astray and away from the love
of Christ.

Do not be surprised therefore if you are worn out with
troubles of every sort, or are attacked by a variety of
temptations. Withstand them unmoved, and you will be
sweeter and dearer in the sight of God. Remember that he
proves them as gold in the furnace is proved.1 Those who
know for themselves the sweet love of Christ can embrace
tribulation gladly, because they are not seeking any outward
consolation at all. Such is the sweetness poured into
the mind of the true lover of Christ that if all the pleasures
of the world were to be put together in one place he would
still run off into the wilderness, rather than cast even a
single glance at it. To such a man the sum total of earthly
comfort seems desolation rather than consolation; for a soul
regularly visited by God’s love and joy just cannot feed
itself with empty glory. His heart never leaves his Beloved,
and he would rather die than even once offend his Redeemer.

But that you also may obtain this grace, keep well in
mind the examples of sinners who repented, and try to
imitate the life of the saints. Then you who also are a

sinner (though converted to the service of God) may get a
glimmer of hope through the example of sinners who have
been raised to his Kingdom, and by studying the lives of the
righteous may keep yourself from undue elation! It is by
the recollection of these better things that the holy man
becomes humble. Because whoever it is that you find de-
scribed or written about, you can always reckon that he is
incomparably more worthy than yourself. It is such people
who are called the lovers of Christ: those who for his sake
get the knocks and blows of the world; who because they
desire wealth and empty glory are subjected to contempt,
insult and slander; whose very praise is torture to them. Yet
they live as solitary, for God’s sake, living a dying life –
and they are taken up to the company of angels in their
fatherland!

I myself fled to the wilderness when it proved no longer
possible to live harmoniously with men, who, admittedly,
were a frequent obstacle to my inner joy. Because I did not
do the kind of things they did, they attributed waywardness
and bad temper to me. But when I found trouble and
heaviness, I called on the name of the Lord.\(^3\)

But lest we give way through temptations let us make it
our aim to let earthly coveting go, and to keep the crown of
eternal glory firmly before our mind. And then, as we have
been found watchful, we will receive the promised blessed-
ness. But in the meantime we take whatever steps we can to
ensure that carnal lust is held in check at source, and the
heart, most sensibly, relinquishes its physical greed, so that
in the service of God our body can stand firm and strong.

The man who really gives up everything for love of Jesus,
who lets go the will to possess, both stands fast and benefits
through this. He will own joyfully that he has found what
his soul loves.\(^4\) For Christ is found in the heart warmed by
eternal love – and that warmth is longing to be sought out,
and no mistake!

For Christ comes down into the soul with a warmth of
honeyed sweetness, and with a joyful song, and he who


experiences this can boldly say, ‘I have found my Love.’ The
man who in his prayer sees his mind really lifted out of
itself and raised beyond the material heaven (assuming of
course that he does not give up but yearns more and more
for the taste of eternity) can cheerfully wait for the mercy
of Christ, for in a few short years he knows he will be
captured up to contemplate glory. So with humble heart he
keeps going and ceases not till he reaches the fellowship of
everlasting rest.

But if in your prayer your inner eye is ravished by con-
templating heavenly things, the time is near when your
soul, risen above earthly matters, is going forward in the
love of Christ. But the man who prays without being raised
to things supernal will be wise not to stop meditation,
prayer and vigil until he sees these higher things. Else he
will grovel, feeling himself despised, in anguish and afflic-
tion.

Go forth, daughters of Sion, says the Scripture, meaning
‘you souls who are newborn’, and see King Solomon
crowned,\(^5\) meaning ‘understand Christ is truly our peace,
for he suffered for our salvation. Gaze at him, and you will
see that divine head crowned with thorns, his face spit-
covered, those clear eyes languid and wan, his back scarred
with flogging, his breast bare and bleeding, his venerable
hands transfixed, his dear side pierced with the spear, his
feet nailed through, and all that tender flesh marked with
wounds, as it was written, from the sole of the foot to the
crown of the head there is no health in him.\(^6\) Leave then,
leave your illicit lusts, and see what Christ suffered for you,
so that your sins can clearly be cast away, and your hearts
taught to burn with love.’


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CHAPTER 28

The true lover spurns earthly things, and sighs for eternal; the avoiding of pride, and the embracing of humility.

See, wretched little man, how the delights of carnal lust cover up the terror of the coming damnation! Which is why you must withstand them, because they seek to take away virtues, things that belong to Christ. For before your heart can burn with the love of Christ it will have to get rid of its appetite for all passing vanity whatever. A mind on fire with the spirit of Christ finds its sole nourishment in its love of eternity, and its gladness in joyful song.

If the sweetness of eternal love is present in your soul, undoubtedly it will destroy lascivious and carnal wickedness. It does not allow you who delight in Christ to know anything but Christ, because now you cannot fall from him or know any other sweetness than his. The perfect, indeed, when they die are duly presented to God, and are sat down in the seats of blessed rest, because they see Christ to be God, and they are in peace.

Those who really begin to love Christ will subsequently have great and loving joy and honey-sweet fervour, and will never cease in their love-songs to the Lord Jesus. No earthly thing can possibly please the man who truly loves Christ, since because of his great love he can find no value in anything merely passing. Though the righteous see physical things, of course, with their bodily eyes, they are in fact looking at celestial things with hearts humble and clean. They are alight with the flame of the heavenly vision, and know themselves free from the burden of sin, and now no longer sin in their wills. The heart that has turned to fire, embraces nothing of the world, but strives always to pierce heaven.

Those indeed who are destined for holiness, at the outset of their conversion give up their evil crimes and worldly vanities through fear of God; next they subdue their flesh by severe penance; and then, when they have put the love of Christ before all else, they taste something of the delight of heavenly sweetness and progress rapidly in devotion of soul. So they mount up, step by step, abounding in spiritual virtues; and thus are made beautiful by the grace of God, to come at last to the perfection which affects heart, speech, and toil.

But he who has been absorbed by the love of Christ is made dead as it were to the attraction of outward things; he is savouring and seeking the things that are above and not the things of earth. It is no surprise that in his mind he sighs as he longs for the heavenly Kingdom, or that he grows in his love for the Bridegroom, or that he rejoices in deep interior happiness, or that he loses his passion for worldly things, or that he is full of longing for his true love, his whole mind bent on seeing God in his beauty. Abaze with flaming love for God, he wants only what God desires, and he himself desires nothing save God. For when a faithful soul longs most fervently only for the presence of the Bridegroom, she is completely frigid towards all lascivious and empty glory. And so she pines for love, because she holds everything earthly as nothing; and she sighs, while she hastens on to the everlasting joys.

He who delights himself in Christ's love, and longs to have this consolation continually, not only does not seek human solace, but even flees from it most strenuously, as if it were smoke hurting his eyes. For just as air is suffused by the sun's rays and becomes itself splendid with the splendour of its light, so the devout mind, inflamed by the fire of Christ's love and filled with desire for heavenly joys, seems to be all love. It is totally transformed into something different, indescribably delightful, though it retains its fundamental essence. For when the mind is kindled by the fire of the Holy Spirit, it is liberated from all idleness and uncleanness. It is made sweet in the torrent of God's love, for it is always looking at him, and not considering earthly

things at all, until that day when it is glorified with the
perfect vision of its Beloved.

But one must beware of pride and a spiritual swollen
head, because this can throw the most noble of men into
profound dejection. For what is more loathsome, or de-
serving of punishment, what is more worthless and abom-
nable, than that which is most despisable worm, the worst sinner,
the lowest of the low, should swagger about and exalt
himself here on earth, this world for which the King most high,
the Lord of Lords, condescended to humble himself?
If you were to consider Christ’s humility deeply, whatever
your own background or wealth or virtue, not in your self
would you find reason for pride, so much as cause to despise
yourself – and then, humility. You, therefore, the despiser
of sinners, look at yourself lest you are in fact making your-
self worse than other people, for a proud righteous man
displeases God more than does a humble sinner.

But when true humility has taken root in your mind,
whatever good you do is done in praise of your Maker, so
that you despise your own virtue and seek his glory, lest you
succumb to vanity and lose your everlasting reward.

Think therefore of Jesus with a longing heart; let your
prayer go out to him; let it continually seek him; your only
care be to possess him. Happy the rich man who has such a
possession! For this, let go all the emptiness of the world;
he will conquer your enemy and bring you to his kingdom.

The devil who assails you will be overcome, the flesh
which is so aggravating will be subdued, the world which
tries to deceive you will be despised – all this, if your heart
does not give up its quest for the love of Christ.

That man is not sitting idle who in his heart is crying out
to Christ, however silent his tongue might be; for there is
no physical rest for the body when the mind is tirelessly
desiring heavenly things. The man who persistently and
always covets eternal things will not be thought lazy. The
thoughts of a lover of Christ rise upwards swiftly and
smoothly. They do not allow themselves to go after passing
things, or get involved in carnal matters, but they go on
and up until they reach the heavenly places.

For sometimes when the body is tired in the service of
Christ, the spirit is exalted, and the mind is caught up to
heavenly refreshment and, indeed, to the contemplation of
God. For he who prays devoutly does not have a heart
which wanders about in worldly things, but one that is
transported to God in heaven. He who wants to have what
he prays for pays careful attention both to the subject-
matter of his prayer, to the one he is addressing, and to the
reason he is making it, so that he may love him to whom he
prays, lest like some outcast he is asking in vain for a re-
ward from life.

The saints, however, are so profoundly humble that they
believe themselves to know nothing and to achieve nothing.
Their claim is that they are more worthless and wretched
than anybody else, worse even than those they correct and
chastise! In obedience to the Lord’s command they take
the lowest seat, yet that lowly seat of theirs receives not
rebuke from God, but honour: not demerit or the denigra-
tion of their merits, but the reward of praise and promotion
to splendour. To this humility best disposes! For that very
humility brings praise to Christ, torment to the devil, and
glory to the people of God. It makes the servant of Christ
love more ardently, serve more devotedly, praise more
worthily; and it produces a fuller degree of charity. The
more a man humbles himself the more does he promote the
praise of God. He who really perseveres in loving God and
his neighbour, and yet in his humility and self-knowledge
reckons himself to be of no value and inferior to others,
will conquer his enemies, have a confident hope in the love
of the great Judge, and when he passes from the light of
this world be received by angels into eternal joy.
CHAPTER 29

Instruction for the simple and beginners who are eager to love; the avoiding of women.

The faithful soul, bride of Jesus Christ, rejects pride because she loves humility so profoundly. She abominates vainglory because her only desire is for eternal joy and to follow Christ. She loathes carnal pleasure with its softness because she is already tasting the sweetness of eternity, and is burning to have for ever the love of the Beloved. There is no bitterness or resentment about her because through her love for Christ she is ready to endure anything. Indeed, she does not even know how to be envious of other people, since, radiant with real love, she rejoices in the progress and salvation of everybody.

As a matter of fact no one is ever jealous unless he is in truth less than the larger size he thinks himself to be! Such a man will heap insults on people lest they should seem equal to himself! But if anyone is said to be more important, beautiful, or strong, he at once becomes terribly jealous and deserted. But a soul which has been kindled however slightly by the fire of the eternal vision does not look for empty glory and passing praise. It is obvious that men who backbite and are envious of each other do so because they have no love for God — unlike God’s elect. Where they are who love God, there too are men as eager for the good of their fellows as they are for themselves. So if you want to love God supremely, learn to abominate all earthly praise. For Christ’s sake embrace the contempt of man and his mockery — and brace your mind for the everlasting sequel! You would choose rather to experience fiery torment with the reprobate in hell, than to have any part with them in sin. For the man who loves Christ ardently, and rejoices and sings in the sheer delight of that love, is the one who lives secure and sure. To him it would seem more pleasant to fall into the flames of eternity than to commit just one mortal sin! Such are the saints, for they live purely, despise all worldly things, and now sing melodiously what once they could only say — such is their fervour and spiritual joy. They burn with love for Christ, their eyes are set on heaven, and to the utmost of their power they occupy themselves with good works; they abound in the delights of everlasting life, yet to themselves they seem the vilest of men, and the lowest and worst of all.

Therefore you who till now have been uncouth and ignorant must make every effort to withstand your spiritual enemies, and not allow any wrong thought to find room in your heart. Set your wisdom against the wiles of the devil. When some unclean imagination or thought has obstructed itself against your better judgement, do not yield to it, but fight it manfully, and cry unceasingly to Christ until you are clothed with God’s armour. If you want to imitate those who despise the world, never think about what you are giving up, but what you are despising, with what devotion you are presenting your vows to God, with what longing and love you offer your prayers, with what fervour you yearn to see God, and to be united to him. If you truly hate all sin, if you do not banter after passing things, if your soul refuses to comfort herself with earthly consolation, if you savour things supernal, if you crave to contemplate heavenly things (and supremely the Son of God), if your speech is controlled and wise — for whoever’s spirit is absorbed in the sweetness of loving God and singing to Jesus does not speak unless obliged to — by such means and such training you will reach perfection.

It is not surprising that God should approve one who in this way despises the world. The soul, made sweet through her shining conscience, and beautiful through her love of eternal charity, can be called ‘the garden of Christ’; for when the vices have been weeded out she flowers with virtue and rejoices with joyful song — like the singing of birds! We must, then, give all diligence to obeying God, to serving him, to loving him, and in all our good works our purpose must be to attain to him.
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For what is the point of wanting earthly things, or desiring carnal love, if the only lasting result is the wrath of the Judge, and everlasting punishment? For carnal love inevitably excites temptations; it blinds the soul from following real purity; it hides the sins that have been committed, and foolishly precipitates new wrongs; it inflames the soul with every sort of depraved delight. Moreover it troubles quiet of every kind, and hinders fervent love for Christ; it corrupts the virtues earlier won.

And so it follows that a man who honestly wants to love Christ must not let his imagination toy with the love of women. When women love, they love without reserve, because they do not know how to restrain their manner of loving. On the other hand loving them can be a very tricky and prickly business! One eye they keep on the main chance, and the other on genuine emotion. Loving women upsets the balance, disturbs the reason, changes wisdom to folly, estranges the heart from God, takes the soul captive, and subjects it to demons! And he who looks at a woman with natural affection yet not with lustful desire finds he is unable to keep free from illicit urges or unclean thoughts. Often enough he feels in himself the stain of filth and even may take pleasure in the thought of developing it.

Womanly beauty leads many astray. Desire for it can sometimes subvert even righteous hearts, so that what began in spirit ends up in flesh. So beware of entering into conversation with a woman just because she is lovely. You will be caught by the poisonous disease of pleasure, and, knowingly deceived, you will set about implementing your dirty thoughts. Fool that you are, you will allow yourself to be taken captive by your enemies. Be wise then, and flee from women. Do not ever think about them, because even if a woman is good, the devil’s attack and his insinuations, the attraction of her beauty, and the weakness of your flesh can beguile your will beyond measure.

But if you brood ceaselessly on the love of Christ, and wherever you are keep it reverently before you, I warrant you will never be deceived by false female flattery. Indeed, the more you see you are attracted and tempted by their empty endearments, so the more you will despise them for the stuff and nonsense that they are, and, not surprisingly, the more richly you will rejoice in God’s love.

For in those who love him Christ works in the most wonderful fashion, and with tender, special love takes them to himself. They have no desire for luxury or for physical beauty, and they have consigned all transitory things to oblivion; they do not care about worldly success, nor do they fear opposition. They love especially to be alone, to hasten unhindered towards the joy of knowing God’s love. Suffering for Christ seems to them something very sweet, not very hard. If anyone wants to honour a martyr’s triumph worthily let him show his devotion to his virtue by his imitation of it; let him share the martyr’s cause even if he does not have to submit to his pain; let him persist in patience, for in so doing he will have complete victory.

The soul which gives up the folly of evil love enters upon the narrow way. It is on this way that the foretaste of the life of heaven is experienced. The consolation felt is such that it overcomes all delight in passing things; the soul asks her Beloved to grant his comfort and inner refreshment, and to pour in the grace of perseverance lest she be fatigued by her errors, and falter. So when a young man begins to do well let him always remember that he must persevere and never drag his feet or give up his good purpose. Mentally at least let him always advance, and rise from lesser to greater things. When he has rejected even the shadow of error and has spurned with contempt the sweet poison of lawless living he will lay hold of the narrow life and embrace the sweetness of a life devoted to God. Thus step by step and helped by the Holy Spirit’s gifts within him he climbs the heights of the contemplation of God. He is refreshed and delighted by the warmth of everlasting love, and in this heavenly joy he abounds – up to the very limit possible for mortal man.

To be sure, the beloved soul who is troubled on every side and tormented by raging temptation is unable to savour the
sweetness of love as it is in itself. Yet she has experienced its joy, and she keeps steadily reaching out to her Beloved. It is quite possible not to have this marvellous sweetness, but she loves Christ with such longing that she keeps going for love of him alone.

How greatly ought we to praise this most generous help! Every true lover among us has known it. It comforts the distressed, sweetens the heartbroken, soothes the troubled, scatters and destroys confusion. The soul, now separated from vice, and a stranger to carnal lust, is purged from sin. She knows that sweet and certain delight is awaiting her in the future, and so she is confirmed in hope, sure of attaining the Kingdom. And now, in her life here, she offers Christ a draught most delightful, warm with fervent love, laced with spiritual gifts, and adorned with the flowers of virtue. And Christ is pleased to accept it, for he, for the sake of love, drank from the torrent on the way.

Chapter 30

We must be men who fear, then, while we are on the road, and never those who foolishly presume. No man knows whether he is worth hating or loving, or how he is going to finish when this life ends. Good people should fear lest they fall into evil, and evil men should hope to overcome their ill.

Moreover if men persist in their greed and wickedness, there is no point in their expecting to receive mercy before their sin has been dealt with. Sin is never forgiven before it is forsaken, and then only when satisfaction has been made by the sinner at the first opportunity.

But the worldly rich and powerful are consumed with an insatiable desire to get hold of other people's possessions, and by such wealth and goods to increase their own earthly greatness and worldly power, buying at small cost what is of great worth from the point of view of passing substance. They hold established positions in the service of kings or great men; they receive many gifts undeserved and unjustified; they get sensual delights and pleasures along with their honours. Let them hear the words, not of me, but of blessed Job: They lead their lives in pleasure, he says, and they descend to hell in a moment. In a single moment they lose everything that throughout their life they had sought to acquire. With these people has dwelt the wisdom of this world which is called foolishness with God. They have known the prudence of the flesh – and the enmity of God. And so the mighty suffer mighty torments, because though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God but rather glorified themselves, and banished him from their thoughts. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. And now those who had experienced the fame and delights of this life are come to the depths of stinking hell.

Indeed, of all those who have been bound up with the vices of this world, none, I reckon, have so little hope of salvation as those commonly called 'exploiters'? For when they have spent all their youthful energy in getting hold of others' property by hook or crook, afterwards, in their old


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age, they sit back as if they were quite safe. Of course, they hang on to what they have wrongfully acquired. But conscience can be afraid, and their wickedness carries its own witness of condemnation. All they have done is merely to have ceased from their unjust actions, for they do not hesitate to use others' property as if it were their own. Perhaps if they were to give it all back little would remain for themselves. But their pride will not allow them to beg, and they could not endure to fall from their erstwhile rank. To dig they are unable. And so they choose, because demons have deceived them, to escape worldly woe in favour of suffering an eternal, endless hell!

Indeed, when such people lord it on earth they oppress lesser folk by their tyrannical power; and yet for others, the fact that they have not been exalted to such heights in their exile, is not a thing to be feared so much as to rejoice over; for lest the beloved of God should get like this, God restrains them, and they fulfil what the Psalmist says, Be not afraid, though one be made rich, or if the glory of his house be increased. A man takes none of it with him when he dies, nor does his earthly splendour accompany him. There is not even a drop of water for the tongue of the rich man burning in hell. He forfeits all his glory at death, and when he goes down into the shades only sin is his companion. For that he will be tormented in eternity.

Chapter 31

Why perfect contemplatives do not heed outward singing; the mistake of blaming them; the way of advance in contemplation.

Because there are in the church men and women duly appointed to sing the praise of God, and to stimulate people's devotion, folk have sometimes come and asked me why I do not want to do the same as the others, for they have often seen me at Solemn Mass. They thought my attitude was wrong, for they said that all men ought to sing aloud to their Creator, and give voice audibly. But I gave no answer, because they knew neither the kind of music I made for my Mediator, nor the sweet strains I bore. For they fancied that no one could perceive spiritual song because they themselves were unable to discover how it could be. But it is stupid to think that one who wholly belongs to God may not receive a special gift from his Beloved, merely because they have had no such experience themselves.

For this reason I thought I ought to show them some sort of an answer, and not let those who argue in this way get away with it. For what business is it of theirs the way other people live, about whose manner of life they know nothing, whose life in many ways excels their own, and who in the matter of 'things unseen' are much superior? Is God not to be allowed to do what he wants? Are their eyes evil because he is good? Are they really wanting to cut the will of God down to their size? Surely all men belong to God, and he can take whom he wants, and leave whom he wills? To whomsoever he wishes, whenever he chooses, he gives whatever he pleases - and shows the magnificence of his bounty!

I fancy the reason they grumble and grouse is that they want those who are better than themselves to come down to their level, and so conform to their inferiors. These people think they are superior when in fact they are less! And so my soul summoned up enough courage and I opened up to them something of my music, which was springing from the fire of love; that music in which I sing to Jesus, and sound forth notes of sweetest harmony. But then they withstood me even more fiercely, because I sought to flee from the 'outward' songs customarily sung in church, and from the organ pieces that worshippers listen to; and because I was only present when I needed to hear Mass - I could hear it no other way - or when the importance of the day de-

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manded it, to avoid arousing thereby the bitterness and
backbiting of people!

Above all else I have always longed to sit and concentrate
on Christ, and him alone. This was why he gave me
spiritual song, by which I could offer praises and prayers to
him. But those who argued with me did not share this
opinion, and tried to make me conform to their pattern.
But I could not possibly desert the grace of Christ, and
accept the views of foolish men who were completely igno-
ant of all that was going on within me. I put up with all
their talk, and I did what I had to do according to the state
in which the Lord had placed me.

But I say all this, and give thanks and glory to Christ, so
that now there need no longer be this sort of folly among
people, this venturing to sit in judgement. What I have
been doing has not been done in pretence or for fun, as
some interpret my actions. Many indeed are led astray by
such things, and believe themselves to have got what in fact
is not theirs. But an unseen joy really has come to me, and
in my soul I have been truly warmed with the fire of love.

It has lifted my heart above these lesser things, so that I
now rejoice in Jesus, far away from outward melodies, but
with one that is within.

In addition to my hatred of things that contaminate and
my rejection of empty words, I have at the same time
striven not to eat more food than necessary, nor to disci-
pline myself stupidly - though I have been described as one
who is addicted to rich men's houses, the pleasures of the
table, and high living generally! But through the overl-
ruling of God I have had a soul differently ordered, which
samples heavenly things rather than sweetmeats.

From that time I have never ceased to love solitude, and
have chosen to live apart from men, as far as the needs of
the body allow - and I have been continually upheld by
him whom I love.

We must not be surprised if a man does not attain the
heights of contemplation or experience its sweetness at the
beginning of his Christian life. It is quite simple: to acquire

contemplation means much time and hard work, and it is
not given to anyone any time anyhow, even though its
possession brings unspeakable joy. It is not within man's
power to achieve it, and however great his efforts they will
be inadequate. But God is generous, and it is granted to
those who truly love him, and who have sought to love
Christ beyond what men consider possible.

Yet many people after repentance fall away from their
cleanliness back into slackness and, indeed, into the abomi-
nation of the Egyptians. Because they were not consumed
with love their experience of the sweetness of contemplation
was only occasional, and then but slight. And so, inade-
quate, they wilted under trial. Or perhaps it was that they
became bored and scornful of God's manna, and harked
back to the fleshpots, wanting once again to live in worldly
feasting and comfort.

If one is to despise the world, to desire the Kingdom, to
hunger for the love of God, to hate sin, it is a great help to
read or meditate regularly upon holy books. By these means
the devout and instructed soul profits and develops, and has
a ready defence against the darts of the enemy. The devil is
confounded when we raise the word of God against his
temptations. If indeed men can endure it, bearing the
burden and heat of the day patiently, never allowing
themselves to be drawn into the love of false delights, after
many tears and diligent prayers they will be inflamed with
everlasting love, and feel within themselves a continual,
enending warmth. For while they are thus musing the fire
kindled."

Chapter 31

2. Exodus 16:3.
5. Psalms 39:3.
Chapter 32

Instruction on the contemplative life, through prayer, meditation, fasting, watching; false contemplatives and true; true jubilant song.

Therefore an elect soul, completely absorbed in his longing to love Christ, and Christ alone, transforms himself into his Beloved. He has neither worldly possessions nor the wish to possess any; in voluntary poverty he follows Christ, and lives content on the alms of others. His conscience is clear and sweet with heavenly savour, and he pours his whole heart out in love for his Maker, striving every day to grow in, and be consumed with, his longing for heaven. No one who renounces this world in his zeal to be set alight on fire by the Holy Spirit is going to allow his practice of prayer and meditation to cool. For it is in this way, and by the tears that result, and indeed by the favour of Christ that the mind kindles in love most wonderfully, and kindled rejoices, and rejoicing is raised to the life of contemplation. The soul which is in this excellent state flies up in ecstasy; she is taken out of herself, and to her inner eye the opened heaven offers its secrets for her gaze.

But first of all a man must exercise himself vigorously in prayer and meditation for some years, virtually heedless of his bodily needs. By his ardent use of these means, he rejects all that is unreal, and day and night eagerly seeks to feel the love of God. In this way the almighty Lover inspires the one who loves him to fresh love, and raises him to sublime heights, far above earthly things and the tumult of vain and vicious thoughts. Now no dead flies destroy the sweetness of the ointment; for they have disappeared, completely dead! And at last the love of God will become sweet to him indeed, and he will be intoxicated with sweetness ever more rare; he will taste the honey of surpassing wonder, so that in himself he knows only the comforting infusion of this heavenly savour, token of the highest sanctuary. Anointed with sweetness of this sort he will strive to keep watching, for one who really feels his heart burn with the fire of eternal love is not going to let his mind turn away from this bright and sweet mystery. And yet some who were thought to be his equal had such fire only in their imagination. People like these, who are living, not in the truth but in the shades, when they are summoned to the Marriage Feast, think themselves fit to take the chief place. Not surprisingly at the true Judgement they will go down with shame to find a lower place. For it is said of them, A thousand shall fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand. If only they would try to know themselves, and search their own consciences! They would never then presume, or compare themselves with others’ merits, and thus insult their betters!

The lover of the Godhead, whose whole being is shot through with love for the unseen Beauty, rejoices in the deep recesses of his soul; he is gladdened by that most delightful fire, for he has given himself to God with utter devotion. And so, not because he deserves it, but when Christ wills it, he will receive into his heart a sound sent from heaven; and then his meditation will be turned into melody, and his mind will dwell in marvellous harmony.

For it is angelic sweetness which he has received into his soul, and the songs of angels too, although his praise of God is not expressed in identical words. Yet his melody is similar to that of the angels, though again it is not as great or exact, for he is still hampered by corruptible flesh. He who has experienced this sweetness, has at the same time experienced the songs of angels, because they are both of one and the same kind: one here, the other in heaven. It is the tune that makes the song, not the words that are chanted. This praising is angelic food, not for the casual passer-by, but only for those who are most fervent in their love. They rejoice and delight in Jesus now that they have themselves been adjudged worthy to join in the etern-


nal praise ever sung by the angels to God. The Psalmist sang of this, *Man has eaten angels' food.* And so his nature is renewed, and will change into a divine glory and happiness. He will be sweet and godly and full of song because now he is feeling the delights of eternal love, singing unweariedly with the greatest sweetness. Then it is that there happens to such a lover what I have never found in any learned writing or have heard expounded, namely that this song will spring to his very lips, and he will sing his prayers in a spiritual symphony of celestial sweetness. It will make him slow of speech, because the abundance of his inner joy and the singular nature of his song impose delay, and what once occupied him not more than an hour he will now find difficult to complete in half a day. And while this is happening he will sit alone, mixing as little as possible with those who sing psalms, and deliberately not singing with the rest. I am not saying that all should try this, but let him to whom it is given do what he wishes, for he is being led by the Holy Spirit, and his way of life is not going to be diverted by what men say.

Moreover his heart will be living in splendour and fire, and marvellous music will exalt him. He will pay no particular respect to any one, even if he is thus thought to be an oaf or a bumpkin. In the depths of his being there is the praise of God and jubilant song, and his praise bursts out aloud; his most sweet voice rises up to heaven, and the Divine Majesty delights to hear it.

He whose beauty the King desires has a lovely face, because he holds within himself the uncreated wisdom. For his wisdom is drawn from the secret place, and her pleasures are for those who love eternity; she is not found by worldlings and their soft living. But she dwells in him of whom I have been speaking, because his whole being is absorbed in loving Christ, and all within him cries out for God. This cry is his love and his song, and he lifts a great shout to the ears of God. It is the longing of a good man, this eagerness for perfection. His is no worldly shout, for he

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Chapter 33

is craving Christ and none else. His inner being is ablaze with the fire of love; his very heart is alight and burning; he engages in no outward work which cannot be turned to good. He prays God in song – but his song is in silence. His lays are not meant for the ears of men; but in the sight of God he utters his praise in unspeakable sweetness.

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A man raised to holiness can know that he has the song of which I have been speaking in this way: he cannot abide the noise of psalmody unless his own inner song is mentally attuned to it; it is destroyed if he has to speak outwardly. Some indeed are distracted in their singing and psalmody, not because they are perfect, but because they are not yet settled in their own minds, and people’s words interrupt and disturb their prayers; a thing which does not happen with the perfect. For those who are well founded cannot be distracted from prayer or meditation by noise or tumult or anything else: it is only from song that such things pluck them. For that sweet, spiritual song is very special, and given only to the most special! It is not an affair of those outward cadences which are used in church and elsewhere; nor does it blend much with those audible sounds made by the human voice and heard by physical ears; but among angel melodies it has its own acceptable harmony, and those who have known it speak of it with wonder and approval.

See and understand, you men, and do not be misled, because I have shown you, for the honour of God Almighty and our own blessing, why I used to escape these songsters, and why I was not anxious to mix with them, or wanting to hear organs play. As far as I am concerned they put an
obstacle in the way of sweet sound and oblige these splendid songs to cease. Do not be surprised then if I have fled from what would have been my undoing. I would have been at fault not to have left what I knew to be preventing me from this loveliest of songs. It would have been wrong to have acted otherwise. I know quite well from whom I received it, and I have striven to make myself do his will, lest he should take from graceless me what he had so graciously bestowed.

I used to delight indeed to sit alone, so that away from all the racket my song could flow more easily. With heartfelt fervour I would feel the sweetest joy, and undoubtedly I received this as a gift from him, him whom I have loved above all things and beyond description.

For it is not as though my heart has been seething with bodily lust, nor was it from any creature that I got these consoling songs which I delight to sing to Jesus. It is love that has been poured into me, not that I should live depressed like some outcast, but rather that I should be lifted up beyond the most exalted of things visible, and aflame and radiant, praise God from heaven: his praise is not seemly from a foul mouth!

Therefore it is to him that the window will be opened, that window which is opaque to all those who love any but the one thing needful. Not surprisingly such a man’s nature is transformed into a nobility of immeasurable worth, free and splendid. This noble freedom they shall never know who know neither the love nor the sweetness which is in Christ here on earth.

Quite obviously I must not stop my devotion which has now been so thoroughly tested just because some detractors have been snarling maliciously against my innocence. Indeed I must fight all wickedness, and still love those who stir up even greater trouble for me. For grace will increase for the lover all the while he heeds not windy words, but reaches out with perfect heart to his Beloved, tireless in the pursuit of his purpose.

And so his love of vanity vanishes, for true love is unfold-

ing in his mind, for to him who loves there is no cooling down of soul, but a persistent strengthening of warmth, and a heart unwavering in its continual meditation on the Beloved. In this steadfastness, indeed, the true lover experiences the excellence of love, for it means that he will be taken up into the fiery heaven, and there set ablaze with unspeakable love, his whole being inwardly on fire more fully than can be expressed. There he will make his own the degrees of grace from which have come his wisdom and insight, so that now he knows how to speak among the wise, and to state boldly what he thinks needs saying, even though hitherto people have taken him for a fool and simpleton – as perhaps he was.

But those who have acquired their learning not directly but second-hand, and who are puffed up with their complicated arguments, say scornfully, ‘Where did he learn all this? To which teacher has he been listening?’ They do not believe that lovers of eternity can be taught by an inner Teacher, or speak more eloquently than those taught by men who have spent their whole life studying for empty honours.

But if the Holy Spirit inspired many people in days gone by, why should he not raise his lovers to contemplate the glory of God today? For some of our contemporaries are approved as being the equals of those of the past. Yet I am not calling what is only an opinion of men ‘approval’, because men are often wrong in what they approve, for they choose people that God has rejected, and reject those whom he has chosen. But those are ‘approved’ whom the love of eternity inflames through and through, whom the grace of the Holy Spirit inspires to all good. These are marked out because they are adorned with every kind of virtue; because they always rejoice in God’s love; and because everything that belongs to vain and worldly pleasure, to the sham honours and the detestable pride of life, their affections tread underfoot. No doubt they are rejected by men – but in the sight of God and his holy angels they are thought magnificent. Their hearts are resolute to endure all
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opposition, nor will they let themselves be blown about by the wind of vanity. And in the end they are carried up to
Christ, in sublime holiness, while those who were chosen and ‘approved’ by men are cast out into damnation, dragged into torment, and punished with the fiends for ever.

CHAPTER 34

The supreme excellence of jubilant song: it cannot be told or recorded; it has no peer: the love of those who sing, and the pride of those who have acquired knowledge.

It is both understandable and right that the lover of God should be caught up to gaze mentally on things above, and to sing of the love that surges through his soul. There the fire of love blazes fierce and bright, filling him with sweet devotion. His whole being is a hymn, beautiful and fragrant with his Redeemer’s sweetness. And as he sings he is led on to utter delight; and with the inner fount of fervour welling up he is taken into the sweet, warm caress of God. The lover is overwhelmed and enriched with the most intense ardour through this unique consolation, and carried on his glorious way. He shines whiter than snow, and glows redder than any rose, for he is alight with God’s fire. Arrayed with a clean conscience, he walks in white. He has been taken up, almost as it were in secret, above all others because of the melody that is ever in his heart, and the sweet, persisting richness of his fervour. And not only does he offer in his own person a wholehearted sacrifice as he praises Christ in spiritual music, but he also encourages others to love, so that they hurry to give themselves wholly and devoutly to God. And this, to anyone who loves him and cleaves to him with all his heart, brings joy in their exile. For the delightful taste that the love of Jesus has brought him exceeds the bounds of experience, and I am not adequate to describe even slightly the smallest part of this joy. For who can describe ineffable fervour? Who lay

beware infinite sweetness? Certainly if I were wanting to speak about this inexpressible joy I would seem to be trying to empty the sea drop by drop, and bit by bit to squeeze it all into a tiny hole in the earth!

Little wonder that I who have scarcely tasted a drop of that excellence am quite unable to find words to tell of the immensity of such eternal sweetness! Small wonder, too, that you with your dulled sensitivity and distracting carnal thoughts are incapable of receiving it, even though you might be wise and clever and always about God’s business.

Yet if you really sought to acquire a taste for heavenly things, and studied to be kindled with love for God, there can be no doubt that the same delightful sweetness would flow abundantly into you, and impart its wonderful pleasure wherever it could find a place in your soul. The fuller you are of charity, the greater your capacity, you may reckon, for that joy. Certainly in eternity those will stand closer to God who have loved him more fervently and sweetly here. But they who have no love for God whatever are full of earthly corruption, and so they cling to empty fairy-tales, and look for satisfaction in the enjoyment of outward and visible possessions. They know nothing of those inner blessings whose upward reach is hidden from mortal eyes. Because they wholeheartedly give themselves over to passing comforts, in their pride they lose sight of any glorious future!

In the life to come it is clear that it will be greed that will be exiled, and charity that will reign – contrary to what is held by many today, indeed by nearly everyone. For greed has found its way even into the royal court, and charity, as if it were some sort of traitor, is imprisoned, or banished from the realm. Yet it finds a home in the hearts of the elect. It turns away from the proud; it stays with the humble.

Many pitiful creatures are deceived, thinking they are loving God when they are not. They imagine they can engage in worldly business, and at the same time really enjoy the love of Jesus Christ and his sweetness. They believe they can rush about the world and still be contempla-
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tives – something which those who love God fervently and
who have entered the contemplative life know to be impos-
sible. But they in their folly and lack of heavenly wisdom,
are puffed up with such knowledge as they have acquired,
and have a wrong idea of themselves. They do not yet know
how to hold on to God with love.

So I look up with longing and cry, ‘Save me, God, for
your saint is weak.’ The hymn-singing fails, the voice of
the songsters falls silent, the fervour of saintly lovers is
missing. Everyone is going about his own evil way; the
deceit each has conceived in his heart is not prevented from
bearing fruit. They spend their days with vanity, and their
years with haste. Alas, the fire of lust has swollen up
youth and maid alike, baby and old man.

Good Jesus, how good it is to cleave to you!
For my soul will not come into their counsels,
but I will sit in solitude, and sing to you in my joy.
Your sweetness increases with praising,
so to praise you continually is no hard matter, but
rather sweet;
no bitter thing, but something more pleasant by far
than any amount of physical and worldly delight.
It is at once delightful and desirable to live and praise
you,
for all that exists has been fashioned with such love,
and is redolent of such fragrance
– and who can wonder at it?

Once he has been purged of his obscenities and all those
thoughts which are not directed to this one thing, the lover,
ablaze through these same spiritual caresses, strains with all
his might to gaze upon his Beloved. And his shout, excited
and bursting out from the core of his longing love, goes up,
of course, to his Maker, though to him it seems as if he
were shouting from far off. He lifts up that inner voice,
which only exists in those who love most fervently, to the
utmost of his power...

Chapter 34

But here I have to ‘give up’ because of my inherent
stupidity and dullness; I have not the wit to describe this
shout or its magnitude, or even the pleasure it gives just to
think of it, or feel it, or experience it. Neither now nor in the
future will I be able to tell you, because I do not know how
to overcome the limitations of my senses; all I want to say is
that the shout is the song.

Then where is one who will sing me the music of my
songs, the joys of my longing, the fervour of my love, the
warmth of my youthful yearning, so that from this fellow-
ship of love and song I might at least search out my inmost
being? So that the measure of music for which I was
thought worthy might be made known to me? So that I
might find myself freed from unhappiness? What I cannot
claim for myself, because I have not found what I hope for
so eagerly, I might be able to enjoy in the sweet comfort of
my friend.

If indeed I thought that that shout and song were always
hidden from outward ears – which is actually what I am
venturing to say – what would I give to find a man who was
experienced in that melody? Having recorded that which
was unspoken he could sing to me my joy, and produce
those flowing notes and songs which in the Name above all
others I have not been ashamed to set before my Beloved. I
would love such a one above gold, and none of the precious
things we have here in our exile would I deem his equal.
For the beauty of virtue would dwell with him, and he
would in truth search out the mysteries of love. In short, I
would love him as I love my heart, nor would I dream of
hiding anything from him. He would reveal to me the song
I long to understand, and he would make plain and clear
my joyous shout. The more I understood, the fuller
would be my exultation, and surely the more fruitful my emula-
tion of him. The fire of love would be shown me, and my
joy and song would shine out for all to see. My confused
thoughts would then lack no one to put them into praise,
nor would I toil to no purpose.

Yet now the fatigues of this deplorable exile press heavily
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upon me, and their burdens aggravate and nearly kill me. And though within I am glowing with uncreated warmth, outwardly I appear depressed, skulking in misery, with no light at all!

So, my God, to whom I offer my heartfelt devotion, will you not remember me in your mercy? I am wretched, and I need your mercy. Will you not bring up into your light the longing which so grips me, that in your own good time I may have what I crave? The toil by which I atone for my sin, you will transform into a dwelling of great sweetness, so that where sadness has dwelt melody may now live, and I see in the splendour of his beauty my Beloved and my Desire. Held in his clasp I would praise him for ever, for after him I long.

CHAPTER 35

The meditation of one who longs for his Beloved, and his lack of any companion; the orderly progress of him who comes to the fire of love.

Jesus, when I am in you, and on fire with joy, and when the heat of love is surging in, I want to embrace you, the most loving, with my whole being.

Yet, my Beloved, I am held back from what I long for. And, too, there are difficulties to be met, for a vast wilderness bars the way to stop the lovers’ homes from being united.

If only you would send me a companion for my journey so that the longing could be lightened by his encouragement, and the chain of my sighings loosed!

For if that lovely vision of yourself does not come quickly and release me, it will press so heavily on your lover as to force him to leave this prison of flesh,

and by reason of the very greatness of his love to throw himself down before your Majesty! In the meantime I would indeed rejoice to hymn you, and live in happiness with the one you had given me with much positive and honest talk.

Our very eating, to be sure, would be enjoyed in love, and in turn we would pour out our loving lays, until we were released from our visible prison, brought into our invisible home, and allotted a place among heaven’s folk, who have loved Christ even as we have.

But, alas, what am I to do? How long have I to wait? To whom shall I flee to enjoy what I am longing for? For I am needy and famished, tortured and afflicted, wounded and wan because my Love is not here; for this immense love torments me, and the hope deferred afflicts my soul. And so the cry of my heart goes up, and in the midst of the heavenly choir there moves my music and my musing, eager to be raised to audience with the Most High. And when it gets there it proclaims its business, and says

‘My love, my honey, my harp, my psalter and song the whole day long! When are you going to heal my grief? You, the root of my heart, when are you coming to receive my spirit which is always looking for you? I am wounded to the quick by your fair beauty. My longing knows no respite, but builds up more and more. My present afflictions pierce and oppress me, so I hasten to you, for from you only can I hope for solace and healing. But who meanwhile will show me the end of my trials and troubles? And who is going to tell me about the fullness of my joy, and the fulfilling of my song,'
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so that I get comfort from these things,
and rejoice in my happiness?

And this, moreover, so that I might know
that my own perfecting
and the finish of my misery was at hand?’

Then would I burst out with splendid song, and maybe
my voice would soften the severity of my Beloved did he
want to chastise me, or strike me down. He would not mock
the innocent’s pain, as little by little he punished him.

And hencethrough I could be called happy, and enjoy the
eternal, delightful refreshment of love, freed from all un-
cleanness. And rid of grief I would live in perfect holiness,
pouring out my joyful praise in harmony with the heavenly
symphony – even as I try to do now in my poverty and
hardship.

The warmth of this sweet-sounding love rejoices my
inmost being: the sweet, deep recollection of Jesus en-
trances my mind as it were with music, and much
cheered by this heavenly song I feel nothing of the sweet
poison of those worthless delights which they who flourish
in the flesh find so attractive. No troublesome earthiness
will get hold of me!

You who are the most lovely,
lovable, and beautiful,
remember that it is through you
that I am no longer afraid of any passing power;
and remember, too, that in order to cling closely to you
I have rejected the love
which seduces fools from loving you, my God.
Remember how quickly I fled those fleeting beauties
which captivate men,
and make women, poor things, so wicked.
I have never wanted to indulge
in those youthful, unclean follies
which subject souls freeborn to such foolish servitude.
More, I have never ceased to show you my heart
stricken with longing for yourself.

Chapter 35

And you have kept it safe,
lest it should drain away into lustful wastes,
and you have implanted it
with the remembrance of your Name,
and have opened to its eye
the window of contemplation.
And now at last I have run to you
with my song and devotion.
But not before my heart had kindled
with the fire of love,
and deep within me I had burst into songs of love.
And since these things are ever in your sight
your boundless mercy reminds you
not to leave your lovers in the cold too long,
and so I believe you will ease my misery,
and not turn your face from my longing.
Pain and misery are ever the lot of the body;
but my soul persists in its longing
until you give me what I have been wanting so intensely.
Because of this love my flesh has withered
and become of little worth,
in the midst of so much that is attractive in this life.
And in the same way my soul has languished
until she see you,
for she has been wanting you so vehemently,
longing to be seated in deepest heaven,
and to rest in the fellowship so much desired,
taken up where the angels sing,
to enjoy you in perfection and for ever.
See, my inmost being is in ferment,
and the flame of charity
has consumed the hateful confusion of my heart,
and eliminated the slimy happiness of unclean friend-
ships,
and wiped out the stupid thoughts
which were so odious when one honestly looked at them.
I have genuinely attained a real love,
I who once was asleep in my varied and devious errors,
enveloped in spiritual darkness.
And I have felt the delight of devotion sweetest
where now I most grieve that I once failed.

Listen to me, friends, I beg you lest you be led astray too! These words, and words which in the sight of our Creator are like them, flare up from my love. No one strange to this vast love should dare to handle such things, nor he who is disturbed by tempting, vain, and useless thoughts, nor he whose mind is not surely set on Christ, nor he who loves created things, whose heart does not go wholly out to God, because it feels itself bound by some earthly affection.

On the other hand he is supreme in charity whose heart has sung the love-songs of devotion. Preserved and nourished spiritually, he has no time for outward follies. Indeed, he is wonderfully cheered by these everlasting delights, and by them raises himself to contemplate heavenly things. There he glows with sweetest love, his thirst slaked on his heavenly way by most delightful refreshment. The radiance of his coming happiness is already surrounding and transforming him, so that he eschews all temptation, set as he is on the pinnacle of the contemplative life. And thereafter he triumphs in constant song to the praise of Christ.

Chapter 36

The different gifts of the elect; how the saints progressed towards love, by prayer, meditation, loving, enduring hardship, and by hating vice; love comes from God; remembrance of sin by the lover is needful; the lover does not fall into carnal temptations as do the imperfect; he is not hurt by the spark of sin, though it persists.

The chosen of God who have loved him beyond all measure, and whose minds are set on loving him more than anything else, show us in a remarkable way the secret of such love, for they have welcomed the fire of love with a fervour that is above telling and beyond nature, yearning for their beloved Jesus with indescribable affection. For the lovers of God are endowed with a variety of gifts; some are chosen for action, some for teaching, some for loving. Yet all his saints care for this one thing, and hasten in the same direction, though by different paths. For in the providence of God each one goes on to the Kingdom by way of that virtue to which he is most accustomed. And if the virtue he excels in draws him to cleave more fervently to the sweetness of God's love — it is reckoned to be stronger where there is the greatest peace — assuredly he will come to God, and receive for his prize that eternal, glorious mansion and throne which has been ordained by Christ to be the everlasting possession of those who love most perfectly.

Those lovers who used to sing the glorious songs of love were accustomed to say that he who is chosen primarily to love cares above all that his heart shall never depart from his Beloved, and that the recollection of Jesus may be as music at a feast, sweeter to the taste than honey and the honeycomb. And the longer he exercises himself in spiritual studies the sweeter does Jesus seem. So then he withdraws his mind from silly and sinful thoughts and puts it to wanting his Creator. Everything he brings into Christ to set it in him, the fount of love. To love him only, and find joy in him alone, is his unceasing prayer.

And now there come into his soul sweet desires and wonderful meditations directed to God alone. When he has brooded on them, and given his mind to develop them, they have an unutterable effect on him, and with great delight and spiritual sweetness lead him on to the contemplation of heavenly things, purging his mind from the hunger for worldly comfort. At this time the lover of God wants nothing so much as to be alone, to attend only to the wishes of his Maker. And when he has been well exercised in all this, and is given over to prayer and meditation in great quiet, and when all wickedness and uncleanness have been destroyed, and he takes up his arduous journey with prudence, he will make wonderful progress in the virtue of