

The Life of God in the Soul of Man

by Henry Scougal

Preface to this version

Henry Scougal (1650–1678) was Professor of Philosophy at King’s College, University of Aberdeen, Scotland. He taught there for five years before he died of tuberculosis. “The Life Of God In The Soul Of Man” was originally written to a friend. This work had a profound effect on many of the leaders of the 18th century revival and the Great Awakening.

Scougal’s original prose is beautiful, but may seem archaic and laborious to a modern reader. I have therefore updated his style to a more modern form, while omitting only a few words or phrases of his original. I have also changed the text of many of the section headings. It is my hope that this version will make this lovely work more accessible to modern ears. Nevertheless, for those who wish to experience first-hand his happy turn of phrase and delightful cadence, I recommend the original version.

Throughout the treatise Scougal uses the word “religion”. In his day this was understood to mean Christianity exclusively. However, Scougal’s use of the term denotes more than Christian belief, or theology, or even Christian practice. It includes all these things, but adds to them the concept of an inward disposition, and a relationship with God which is available to us exclusively through Jesus Christ. Scougal defines it as “the image of the Almighty shining in the soul of man” (page 5). When editing the text, I considered replacing “religion” with something less ambiguous to modern readers. However, none of the words or phrases that I tried conveyed Scougal’s meaning. I therefore elected to leave it as it is, in the hope that the reader, having read this explanation, will understand it in the way that Scougal intended.

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of 1611. Scougal did not give references, so I have added them.

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London, Canada, 2011

Introduction

MY Dear Friend

The designation of “friend” gives you a claim on any effort by which I can serve your interests; and your spiritual inclinations harmonize so happily with my duty that it presents no inconvenience to me to gratify you. I can now do an act of friendship, and discharge my duty at the same time, since the advancing of virtue and holiness (which I hope you make your greatest study) is the particular business of my calling.

This, therefore, is the best way I can show my affection and express my gratitude towards you, and I shall no longer delay the fulfilment of the promise I made you in this regard. I know you have better helps of this nature than any I can offer you, and are unlikely to find anything here that you did not know already. However, I hope you will kindly accept what comes from one whom you honour with your friendship. And then, God’s providence may perhaps direct my thoughts so that something or other may prove useful to you.

You will not mind if I begin with a basic review of the nature and properties of religion, as a means to laying a foundation for what will come later. Some of the things that I say will doubtless be unnecessary, considering the one to whom I am writing, but I trust you will not be offended by it.

What religion is, and what it is not

I CANNOT speak of religion without lamenting that among so many who profess to have it, so few understand what it means.

Some think religion is merely a matter of understanding, of orthodox notions and opinions. All they can say about their religion is that they are of this or the other persuasion, and belong to one of the many sects that divide Christendom. Others think it consists of the performance of external duties. If they live peaceably with their neighbours, eat sparingly, observe the church calendar, go to church, spend time in prayer, and sometimes give to the poor, they think that’s all there is to it and they have done well enough.

Others again think of religion in terms of affections—rapturous passions and ecstatic devotion. They pray fervently, and think heavenly thoughts. They are full of wonderful expressions of affection to their Saviour, and convince themselves that they are deeply in love with Him. From this they derive great assurance of salvation, and think that assurance is the greatest of Christian graces. So people mistake things that resemble

piety, and are at best only means of obtaining it, or particular expressions of it, for religion itself.

Sometimes even wickedness and vice go by the name of religion. I am not referring now to the awful things that the heathen do to worship their gods—no, there are too many Christians who pass off their vices as virtues. Their dour expressions and sullen pride are called “Christian severity”. Their bitter rage against their enemies is termed “holy zeal”. And their complaints about their superiors, and rebellion against those in authority over them, are called “Christian courage and resolution”.

What religion is

BUT real religion is something else entirely. Those who know it disdain all those shadows and false imitations of it. They know by experience that true religion is the union of the soul with God—a real participation in the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul. In the Apostle Paul’s phrase, *it is Christ formed within us* (Galatians 4:19). I know no better way to express it than by calling it *a divine life*. And so I will deal with it using these terms.

First, I want to show why I call it *a life*, and then how it is *divine*.

Its unchanging nature

I USE the term *life*, first, because it implies permanence and stability. Religion is not a sudden start, or a passion of the mind—not even if it brings a person to the heights of rapture and leads to extraordinary acts. The great majority of people think they must contribute something to the salvation of their souls; and this conviction may push them forward a few steps with a great deal of apparent haste. But they quickly flag and give up. They were in a hot mood, and now they have cooled off. They shot up like weeds, fresh and high, but are quickly withered because they had no root in themselves.

These sudden fits are like the convulsive motions of bodies with the head cut off. They twitch and jerk with the agitation of the animal spirits, though the soul is gone. However violent their movements, they don’t last long.

In contrast, the motions of holy souls are constant and regular, proceeding from a permanent and living principle.

It is true that this divine life does not always manifest the same strength and vigour. In fact, many times it decays, and holy men find it more difficult to resist temptations, and are less inclined to perform their duties. But it does not go out, and they are not left to the power of those corrupt affections which rule the rest of the world.

Its free and unrestricted nature

FURTHERMORE, religion may be termed a *life* because it is an inward, free, and self-moving principle. Those who have made progress in it are not moved only by external motives. They are not driven by threats, or bribed by promises, or constrained by laws. Instead, they are powerfully inclined to that which is good, and they delight in doing it.

A godly man doesn't love God and goodness because he has been commanded to do so, even though his new nature prompts him to it. He doesn't pay his devotions as an unavoidable tribute, or to appease divine justice, or to pacify an accusing conscience. No, his religious deeds are the fruit of the divine life, the natural occupations of the new-born soul. He prays, and gives thanks, and repents not because these things are commanded, but because he is aware of his needs, and of God's goodness, and of the folly and misery of a sinful life. His giving is not forced; nobody forces him to give. Love makes him want to give, and even if there were no outward obligation, his heart would *devise liberal things* (Isaiah 32:8). Injustice, excess, and all other vices are as contrary to his demeanour as the basest actions are to the most generous spirit. As St. John says, *whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God* (1 John 3:9).

Although truly religious people *do* dwell much on the law of God, and regard it highly, it is not the threats of the law but its reasonableness, purity, and goodness that prevail with them. They see the law as excellent and desirable in itself, and understand that in keeping of it there is great reward. The divine love that moves them causes them to become a law unto themselves.

Quis legem det amantibus?

Major est amor lex ipse sibi.

Who shall prescribe a law to those that love?

Love's a more powerful law which doth them move.

In a word, what our blessed Saviour said of Himself is in some measure true of His followers: *it is their meat and drink to do their Father's will* (John 4:34). Our natural appetite craves food, even though we don't think about it in terms of the preservation of our lives. In the same way, holy people have a natural and unforced inclination towards that which is good and commendable.

It is true that external motives are often useful to stir up this inward principle, especially when it is new and weak. It may be so weak that the man himself can scarcely discern it. He may hardly be able to move one step forward unless he is pushed by hopes or fears, or by sickness, or by receiving some kind of blessing, or by the authority of the law, or by the persuasion of others. But if he is conscientious and diligent, and longs to

overcome his dullness and to perform his duties with more spirit—these are the first motions of the divine life. Even though it is faint and weak, it will surely be cherished by the influences of heaven, and will grow to greater maturity.

In contrast, there are many people who don't have this inward principle, and have no interest in it. They are content with doing the things that education or custom dictate. They may have a fear of hell, or notions of heaven. But they can no more be thought to be truly religious than a puppet can be called a man.

This forced and artificial religion is usually heavy and languid, like a weight being pushed upwards. It is cold and spiritless, like the uneasy compliance of a wife married against her will. She does her duty to the husband that she doesn't love, out of a sense of obligation or virtue. Similarly, this religion is scant and niggardly, especially in duties that go most against men's carnal inclinations. These slavish spirits ensure they do no more than is absolutely required. They are compelled by a law, and they will be loath to go beyond what it requires of them. No, they do their best to reinterpret the law so as to be obliged to do as little as possible.

But the spirit of true religion is frank and liberal, far from such peevish and narrow reckoning; and he who has given himself entirely to God will never think he does too much for Him.

Religion as a divine principle

AT this point I hope I have made it clear why I refer to religion as a *life* or vital principle. I hope I have also made it clear that it is essential to distinguish between real religion on the one hand, and an obedience that is constrained and depends on external causes on the other.

My next purpose is to explain why I defined it as a *divine life*.

It is a divine life not only because of its source in God, and not only because it is created in the souls of men by the power of his Holy Spirit. It is also called a divine life because of its nature. True religion is a resemblance of the divine perfections, the image of the Almighty shining in the soul of man. It is a real participation in His nature. It is a beam of the eternal light, a drop of that infinite ocean of goodness. And those who are endued with it may be said to have God dwelling in their souls and Christ formed within them.

The natural life

BEFORE I go into more detail about that divine life that constitutes true religion, it is appropriate to say a little about the natural or animal life that prevails in those who know nothing of the divine life.

By “animal life” I mean our inclination for things that are pleasing and acceptable to nature. It is our self-love, evident in as many forms as there are appetites and inclinations. The foundation of the animal life is *sense*, in the broad sense—our perception of things that are either welcome or troublesome to us—as opposed to *faith*.

These natural affections are part of our nature; they are not wrong or blameable. On the contrary, they are instances of the wisdom of the Creator in supplying His creatures with appetites that are necessary for their welfare. They function like a law for animals, directing them towards the ends for which they were made.

Man, however is made for higher purposes than the animals. He is to be guided by more excellent laws. He becomes guilty when he is so much under the sway of this lower life that he neglects the higher and nobler purposes of his creation. Our natural affections are not to be completely extirpated and destroyed, but to be moderated and overruled by a superior principle.

In short, the difference between a religious man and a wicked man is that in the one the divine life rules, while in the other the animal life rules.

The tendencies of the natural life

IT IS interesting to see the different ways in which this natural principle takes those who are guided by it, influenced as it is by different circumstances. Often it leads to dangerous delusions, as in the case of a man who thinks well of himself because he is not like other men—not realising that his actions flow from the same animal nature as theirs.

Some people have a light, airy temper, making their behaviour extravagant and ridiculous. Others are naturally serious and severe, and their grave demeanour brings them a great deal of reverence and esteem. Others again have a rugged and morose temper. They are difficult to please, and don't like others to be pleased either.

But not all are born with such sour and unhappy dispositions. Some people have a certain sweetness and kindness in their natures. They enjoy company, and the mutual love of friends, and want nothing more than to have everybody like them. It is a good thing that this tender nature exists; it makes up for the lack of real love in the world, and does at least incline people to do something for one another's welfare.

Again, upbringing has a great influence. Some people have never been taught to follow anything other than pleasure or advantage. Others are taught to observe the strictest rules of decency and honour, and some forms of virtue; they can hardly think of doing anything that they have been taught to look upon as base and unworthy.

There are many differences in the deportment of mere natural men, all arising from the strength or weakness of their wit or judgment, and from their care or negligence. Intemperance and lust, injustice, oppression, and all the other evils that make the world so miserable, are the result of self-love. They are the effect of the *animal life* when it is neither controlled by religion, nor governed by natural reason.

On the other hand, if the animal life does take hold of reason, it will often disdain the grosser vices and produce instead what seems like virtue and goodness. A man may realise the dangers that intemperance and lust bring to his health, his fortune, and his reputation, so self-love may restrain him. Another man realises that he will more likely prosper and be highly regarded if he deals justly with others.

This animal principle operates in the field of religion too. Imagine a man who wants to study divine truths (why not? these things may be as pleasant to an inquisitive mind as other fields of study). He maintains and propagates his opinions, and is keen to “convert” others to his views. He enjoys hearing or composing great sermons (eloquence is always impressive, whatever the subject). He reads the glorious things spoken of heaven, and his carnal heart loves it. He reads in scripture of crowns and sceptres, and rivers of pleasure, and so on, and he so wants to be there—even though he neither understands nor wants the spiritual pleasures that they represent. He believes that Christ has purchased those glorious things for him, and feels a kind of affection towards such a great benefactor. He thinks he loves Him. Yet all the time he is a complete stranger to the holy temper and spirit of Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, natural life, aided by reason, can accomplish everything necessary to make a man’s life pleasant, or to make him famous or reputable. Though I don’t condemn these things in themselves, it is important that we should understand their nature. Only if we do that will we learn never to value ourselves on account of such attainments. And if we understand these things, we will not put the emphasis of religion upon our natural appetites or performances.

The divine life

IT is now time to return and consider that *divine life* which I spoke of previously. It is the *life which is hid with Christ in God* (Colossians 3:3), and it therefore has no great appearance in the world. To the natural man it is insignificant and insipid.

The animal life consists of a narrow, selfish love that is directed towards self and things that are pleasing to nature. The divine life, in contrast, consists of a universal and unbounded affection, and mastery over our

natural inclinations, so that they do not lead us into things that we know are blameable.

The *root* of the divine life is faith. The main *branches* are (1) love to God, (2) love to man, (3) purity, and (4) humility. As someone has well observed, however common or mean these terms may sound, the tongue of man or angel can pronounce nothing more weighty or excellent.

Faith in the divine life corresponds to *sense* in the natural. It is indeed itself a kind of sense, a felt persuasion of spiritual things. It extends into all divine truths, but in our fallen state it relates particularly to the truth of God's mercy and His willingness to be reconciled to sinners through a Mediator. And so, since it is directed towards that Mediator, it is termed *faith in Jesus Christ*.

The *love* of God is a delightful and affectionate sense of the divine perfections. It leads the soul to resign and sacrifice itself wholly unto Him, and to desire above all things to please Him. The soul delights in nothing so much as in fellowship and communion with Him, and is ready to do or suffer anything for His sake. Although this affection arises first from the favours and mercies of God towards ourselves, it grows to transcend such personal considerations. It bases itself on His infinite goodness as shown in all His works of creation and providence.

A soul possessed with this divine love is unavoidably enlarged towards all mankind with a sincere and unbounded affection, because they are His creatures and have something of His image stamped on them. This affection is the *love* that I mentioned as the second branch of religion. It comprehends all the justice and all the obligations that we have towards our neighbour; for whoever truly loves the whole world will be concerned for the interests of everyone in particular. Far from wronging or injuring any person, such a soul mourns the evil that befalls others as if it happened to himself.

By *purity* I mean a proper abstractedness from the body, and mastery over the baser appetites. It is a state of mind that makes a man despise and abstain from all sensual pleasures and delights that are either sinful in themselves or tend to lessen our enjoyment of divine things. This implies a willingness to endure any hardships he may meet with in performing his duty. So not only chastity and self-control, but also Christian courage and magnanimity may come under this heading.

Humility implies a deep sense of our own weakness, and a hearty and affectionate acknowledgment that we owe all that we are to God's goodness. It is always accompanied by a deep submission to the will of God, and indifference to the applause of the world.

These are the highest perfections that either men or angels are capable of. They are the very foundation of heaven laid in the soul. And the one who has attained them does not need to pry into the hidden rolls of God's

decrees, or search the volumes of heaven, to know his soul's fate. Rather, he finds a copy of God's thoughts about him written in his own heart. His love to God assures him of God's favour to him. The happiness that he feels in conforming the powers of his soul to the nature of God, and in compliance with His will, are a sure pledge that his happiness will continue to all eternity. It is not without reason that one said, "I would rather see the real impressions of a God-like nature upon my own soul, than have a vision from heaven, or an angel sent to tell me that my name was enrolled in the book of life."

Actions rather than words

WHEN all is said and done, the secret mysteries of a new nature and divine life can never be fully expressed. Language cannot do them justice, and they can never be truly understood except by those souls that are awakened to a sense of spiritual things. *But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding* (Job 32:8).

The power and life of religion is better expressed in actions than in words. Actions are more representative of the inward principle from which they proceed. The inward grace should be gauged by the outward actions. We see this perfectly exemplified in the holy life of our Saviour. One of His main activities in the world was to show in practice what He required of others. He lived according to the things that He taught, and if ever true goodness was visible to mortal eyes, it was when He graced this world with His presence.

The example of our Saviour

His diligence in doing God's will

THE sincere and devout affection with which His blessed soul constantly burned towards his heavenly Father expressed itself in complete resignation to His will. It was his *very meat, to do His will, and to finish the work, of him that sent him* (John 4:34). This was His preoccupation in His childhood and the constant occupation of His later age. He spared no pains when He was about his Father's business. Instead, He derived infinite content and satisfaction in doing it.

Think, for example, of the occasion when He was weary with his journey, and rested on Jacob's well. He asked the Samaritan woman for water; but His conversation with her was so successful in extending the kingdom of God, that it filled His mind with a delight that seemed to spread to His body too. His spirits were so refreshed that He forgot the

thirst that He had complained of, and refused the food that He had sent his disciples to buy.

He was as patient and submissive in suffering the will of God as He was diligent in doing it. He endured without a discontented word the sharpest afflictions and the most extreme miseries that ever were inflicted on any mortal. He was not numb, or possessed of a stoical obstinacy. He had as quick a sense of pain as other men, and the deepest apprehension of what He was to suffer in his soul. His *bloody sweat* and the *sore amazement* and *sorrow* that He professed make that abundantly clear. But He submitted entirely to those severe pains, and willingly acquiesced.

He prayed to God, that *if it were possible* (or, as one of the evangelists says, *if he were willing*), that cup might be removed; yet He gently added, *Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done* (Luke 22:42).

See the striking expressions in John 12:27, where He acknowledges the anguish of his spirit. *Now is my soul troubled*. But He quickly follows it with *And what shall I say?* and then goes on to deplore His sufferings, *Father, save me from this hour*. But no sooner had He said this, than it seems He utters His second thoughts: *But for this cause came I into the world*. And then He concludes, *Father, glorify thy name* (John 12:27,28).

We must not regard this as blameable weakness in the Lord Jesus. He knew all along what He was to suffer, and resolutely underwent it. But it shows us the inconceivable weight and pressure that He had to bear. It was so heavy and contrary to His nature that He could not think of it without terror. Yet when He considered the will of God, and the glory that was to redound to Him, He was not only content but eager to suffer it.

His constant devotion

ANOTHER instance of His love to God was His delight in talking to Him in prayer. He frequently withdrew from the world, and with the greatest devotion and pleasure spent whole nights in that heavenly exercise. He certainly had no sins to confess, and very few worldly cares to pray about—which, alas, are about the only things that drive us to our knees. No: we could say that His whole life was a kind of prayer, a constant stream of communion with God. Though the sacrifice was not always being offered, the fire always burned. The blessed Jesus was never taken with the kind of spiritual dullness that we so often have to wrestle with before we are fit for our devotions.

His love to men

IN the second place, I shall speak of His love towards all men. To express this properly we need only relate the story of the gospel. Almost everything that He did or said was for the good of someone or other. All

His miraculous works were instances of His goodness as well as of His power. They benefited those who experienced them as much as they amazed the onlookers. His love was not confined to his family or relations, and His kindness was not only directed at “the beloved disciple.” Everyone was His friend, He said, who obeyed his holy commands (John 15:14). And *whosoever did the will of his Father*, the same was to Him as *His brother, and sister, and mother* (Matthew 12:50).

Nobody was unwelcome to Him who came with honest intention. He never denied any request that tended to the good of those that asked it. What was spoken of that Roman Emperor, who was called the *darling of mankind* on account of his goodness, was actually true of Jesus. Nobody left Him with a heavy heart, except for that rich youth (Mark 10), who was sorry to hear that the kingdom of heaven would cost him so much, and that he couldn't save his soul and his money too. And certainly it troubled our Saviour to see him refuse it when he had the opportunity to gain wisdom. Jesus loved him when he first approached Him, for it is said, *and Jesus beholding him loved him* (Mark 10:21). But could the Lord make for him a new way to heaven, and alter the nature of things, for a covetous man to be happy?

And what should I say of His meekness? He met the monstrous ingratitude and pretence of that miscreant who betrayed him with no harsher terms than these: *Judas, do you betray the Son of man with a kiss?* (Luke 22:48) What further evidence do we need of His fervent and unbounded love, than that He willingly laid down his life for His bitterest enemies? that, mingling His prayers with His blood, He pleaded with the Father that His death might not be laid to their charge, but that it might become the means of eternal life to the very ones who engineered it?

His purity

THE third branch of the divine life is *purity*. This, as I said, consists of an indifference to worldly enjoyments and comforts, and resolute endurance in all the troubles we meet with in doing our duty. Surely, if ever anyone was wholly dead to all the pleasures of the natural life, it was the blessed Jesus! He seldom tasted those pleasures when they came His way, and never went out of his way to seek them. He allowed others the comforts of marriage, and honoured it with His presence. He even supplied their lack of wine with a miracle. Yet He would not work a miracle to relieve His own hunger in the wilderness. The temper of His soul was so gracious in allowing others the lawful indulgences from which He Himself abstained. He went further, and supplied not only their more pressing necessities, but also their wants. We many times hear of our Saviour's sighs, and groans, and tears, but never that He laughed, and only once that he rejoiced in spirit. Throughout His life He exactly fitted the

description given by the prophet of old: He was *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief* (Isaiah 53:3).

The troubles and discomforts of His life were matters of choice. Never in the history of the world had one appeared who could have achieved greater status and comfort than He. The one who could gather such a great number of fish into his disciples' net, or pay His taxes from a the mouth of a fish, could easily have made Himself the richest person in the world.

But no. Without *any* money He could have maintained an army powerful enough to have jostled *Caesar* out of his throne. He more than once fed several thousand people with a few loaves and small fish. But He showed how little He esteemed the enjoyments in the world by living a poor and lowly life. Though *the foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests, He who was lord and heir of all things had nothing on which to lay His head* (Luke 9:58). He didn't frequent the courts of princes, or seek the acquaintance of great ones. Reputedly the son of a carpenter, He sought the company of fishermen and other poor people, and lived a life like theirs.

His humility

LET US move on to His *humility*, the last branch of the divine life. In this He was an exact pattern for us, so that we might *learn from him to be meek and lowly in heart* (Matthew 11:29). I need not mention the infinite condescension of the eternal Son of God in taking our nature upon him. I need only refer to His lowly and humble demeanour while He was in the world. He had none of the sins and imperfections that justly humble the best of men. He had such a deep sense of the infinite perfections of God that He appeared as nothing in His own eyes, at least as far as His human nature was concerned. He considered those perfections which shone in His blessed soul as not His own, but the gifts of God. He therefore claimed no credit for them, but with the profoundest humility renounced all claim to them. That is why He refused that ordinary appellation of *good master* when it was addressed to his human nature by one who was apparently ignorant of His divinity. *Why do you call me good? There is none good but God alone* (Matthew 19:17). It was as if He had said, "The goodness of any creature (which is what you take me to be) is not worthy to be named or even noticed; it is God alone who is originally and essentially good."

He never used His miraculous power for vanity or show. He would not gratify the curiosity of the Jews with a sign from heaven. Neither would He follow the advice of His countrymen and family, who wanted Him to perform all His great works in the eyes of the world, so as to gain greater fame. On the contrary; when His love prompted Him to the relief of the miserable, His humility often made Him ask them to tell nobody about it.

And when the glory of God, or the purpose for which He came into the world, required that His miracles be known, he ascribed all the honour to his Father, saying that *of himself he was able to do nothing* (John 5:19).

I have no space to list all the instances of humility in His behaviour towards men. He withdrew Himself when they wanted to make Him a king. As a child He subjected Himself not only to His blessed mother, but also to her husband. He submitted to all the indignities and affronts of His enemies. The story of His holy life, recorded by those who conversed with Him, is full of such examples.

Indeed, the best way to understand what humility is would be to study His life seriously and attentively. And not only humility, but all the other parts of religion which I have been endeavouring to describe.

This letter is getting long, so to make it easier to read I will pause. The following prayer may be suitable for someone who previously had wrong ideas about real religion, but is beginning to discover what it really is.

A prayer

INFINITE and eternal Majesty, author and fountain of being and blessedness, how little we poor, sinful creatures know of You, or the way to serve and please You! We talk about religion, and lay claim unto it, but how few there are that know and consider what it means! How easily we mistake the affections of our nature, and the issues of self-love, for those divine graces which alone can make us acceptable to You!

It grieves me to think how long I wandered, contenting myself with vain shadows and false images of religion. Yet I acknowledge and worship your goodness, for You have been pleased in some measure to open my eyes, and let me see what I ought to aim at.

I rejoice to consider the great improvements my nature is capable of, and what a divine temper of spirit shines in those whom You choose and allow to approach You. Blessed be your infinite mercy! You sent your own Son to dwell among men, and to instruct them by His example as well as His laws, and gave them a perfect example of what they ought to be. Oh that the holy life of the blessed Jesus may be always in my thoughts, and before my eyes, till I gain a full appreciations of those excellent graces that shone so brightly in Him! Let me never cease my endeavours till that new, divine nature prevails in my soul and Christ is formed within me!

The excellence of religion

AND now, my dear friend, having described the nature of true religion, before I proceed any further it is fitting to think a little about the

excellence and advantages of it. I hope that by considering them we may be stimulated to more diligent use of the means to attain such a desirable end.

But how can we express that inward satisfaction and those hidden pleasures, which can never be understood except by those holy souls who feel them? *A stranger doth not intermeddle with their joy* (Proverbs 14:10).

Holiness is the proper temper and the healthy constitution of the soul. Its faculties were formerly enfeebled and disordered, so that they could not function properly. The soul had wearied itself with endless tossing and turning, and was never able to find any rest. But now that its disorder has been cured, it feels well; there is harmony in its faculties, and a sprightly vigour in every part. The understanding discerns what is good, and the will cleaves to it. The affections are no longer tied to the motions of sense and the influence of external objects. Instead, they are stirred by divine impressions, and are touched by a sense of invisible things.

The excellence of divine love

LET us take a closer look at religion, using the branches of it that we have listed. We will begin with the love and affection by which holy souls are united to God, so that we may see the excellence and happiness that it brings.

Love is that powerful, prevailing passion by which all the faculties and inclinations of the soul are determined, and on which both its perfection and happiness depend.

The real worth of a soul is measured by what it loves. The soul that loves base and sordid things becomes base and vile. The one whose affection is well placed improves his spirit until it conforms to the perfections that it loves. The images of these perfections occur frequently to the mind, and by a secret force and energy they insinuate themselves into the very constitution of the soul, and mould it to their own likeness.

See how easily lovers or friends begin to imitate the one they love. Before they know it, they begin to resemble them, not only in obvious aspects of behaviour but also in voice, gesture, and what we call their mien or air. In the same way, if we love virtue and the inward beauties of the soul, they begin to be duplicated in our own souls.

All the creatures we interact with have their mixture of good and bad, and if we place our affections on them we shall always be in danger of becoming sullied and corrupted. Passion easily blinds our eyes; we first excuse, and then begin to imitate, the things that are blameable in them.

The true way to improve and ennoble our souls is by fixing our love on the *divine* perfections. If we have them always before us, they leave their impression on us, and *beholding with open face, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory* (2 Corinthians 3:18). The one who looks up to that uncreated beauty and goodness, and fixes his affection there, is of quite a different spirit, a more heroic temper, than the rest of the world. He disdains all mean and unworthy things, and will not entertain any low or base thoughts that might sully his noble desires.

Love is the greatest and most excellent thing we possess; it is foolish to bestow it unworthily. It is indeed the only thing we can call our own. Other things may be taken from us by violence, but nothing can take away our love. Whatever else we possess, in giving our love we give everything; we bestow the hearts and wills through which we possess other enjoyments.

It is impossible to refuse anything to the one to whom we have given ourselves in love. Gifts receive their value from the mind of the giver. They are not measured by the event but by the desire. So the one who loves not only bestows all he has, he may be said to give everything else too that would make his beloved happy, since he heartily wishes it, and would readily give it if he had it. In that sense divine love may be said to give God unto Himself, because of the gratification it derives from the perfection of His own nature. But though this may seem a little strained, certainly love is the worthiest present we can offer to God. It is debased when we bestow it any other direction.

When this affection is misplaced, it often expresses itself in ways that point to its genuine and proper object, ways that suggest where it really ought to be placed. Men sometimes express their adoration in terms that are blasphemous, in language that was designed for God. A person who often speaks to some great personage may sometimes address someone else, using the same titles unawares. But certainly a passion that expresses itself in terms of deity ought to be bestowed on God. Such expressions of adoration, which debase the soul when directed to someone else, exalt and ennoble it when placed there. Those chains and cords of love are infinitely more glorious than liberty itself. They are a form of slavery more noble than all the empires in the world.

The advantages of divine love

JUST as divine love advances and elevates the soul, so only that same love can make it happy. The greatest pleasures, and the most substantial delights that human nature is capable of, are those that arise from a well-placed and successful affection. Love is embittered, and becomes troubling and hurtful, when it is placed on someone who is unworthy of it, or who shows no gratitude for it. It sours when the loved one's

absence deprives us of the pleasure of their company, or when their miseries cause us trouble. Any person whose chief and supreme affection is placed on creatures like himself is exposed to all these evils. Only the love of God delivers us from them all.

The worth of the object

LOVE becomes miserable and full of trouble when its object is unworthy and cannot satisfy its capacity. Such an eager and violent passion can only fret and torment the spirit if there is nothing to satisfy its cravings. And indeed, love is so large and unbounded that it must be extremely constrained when it is confined to any creature. Nothing less than an infinite good can give it space to stretch itself and exert itself.

What is a little skin-deep beauty, or some small degree of goodness, to match or satisfy a passion that was made for God, and designed to embrace an infinite good? No wonder lovers cannot bear a rival, and don't want anyone to endorse their passion by imitating it. They know the limits of the good that they love; it is insufficient for two, and too little even for one. Hence love, *which is strong as death, gives rise to jealousy which is fierce as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire* (Song of Solomon 8:6).

But divine love has none of this gall. When the soul is fixed on that supreme good, it finds enough perfection and goodness not only to satisfy it but also to overpower it. It finds all its own love to be too faint and languid for such a noble object, and is only sorry that it cannot love more. It wishes for the flames of a seraph, and longs for the time when it shall be wholly melted and dissolved into love. And because it can do so little itself, it enlists the help of all creation, calling on angels and men to join with it in admiring and loving of those infinite perfections.

The certainty that love will be reciprocated

LOVE is painful if there is no return of affection. Love is the most valuable thing we can bestow, and by giving it we in effect give all that we have. It is no surprise, therefore, that to have such a great gift despised and unreturned is a great affliction.

Perfect love is a kind of self-dereliction, a wandering out of ourselves. It is a kind of voluntary death, in which the lover dies to himself and all his own interests; he doesn't think of them or care about them any more, but thinks only of how he may please and gratify the one he loves. And so he is quite undone if his love is not reciprocated. He neglects himself, while the other person cares nothing for it. But if he is loved, he revives, as it were, and lives in the soul and care of the person whom he loves. Now he begins to think of his own concern, not because they are his but because

the beloved shows an interest in them. He becomes dear to himself, because he is so to the other.

But why should I enlarge on a matter that is common knowledge? Nothing can be clearer than that the happiness of love depends on the return it receives. And in this the one who loves God has an inestimable advantage. He has placed his affection on Him whose nature is love, whose goodness is as infinite as He is, and whose mercy went before us when we were still His enemies. He cannot help but embrace us when we become His friends.

It is utterly impossible that God should deny His love to a soul that is wholly devoted to Him, and that desires nothing so much as to serve and please Him. He cannot disdain His own image, or the heart on which it is engraved. Love is all the tribute that we can pay Him, and it is the sacrifice which He will not despise.

The presence of the beloved

ANOTHER thing that disturbs the pleasure of love, and makes it a miserable passion, is separation from the one we love. Friends part with a sense of pain, even though the parting may be only for a short time. It is sad to be deprived of the company that is so delightful. Our life becomes tedious as we wait impatiently for the hour when we shall meet again. But if the separation is caused by death, as sometime or other it must be, the grief can scarcely be equalled in all the misfortunes of human life. Thus do we pay dearly for the comforts of friendship.

But how happy are they who have placed their love on Him who can never be absent from them! They only need to open their eyes, and they shall see everywhere the traces of His presence and His glory, and are able to converse with the one whom their soul loves. This makes the darkest prison, or the wildest desert, not only supportable but delightful.

Love for God gives us infinite happiness

A LOVER is miserable if the one he loves is miserable. Those who have exchanged their hearts in love have a stake in the other's happiness and misery. As a result, love is a troublesome passion when its object is on the earth. The most fortunate person on earth experiences enough grief to upset the tranquility of his friend. So it is hard to bear when we are assailed on all fronts, and suffer not only in our own selves but also in another.

But if God is the object of our love, we share in an infinite happiness, without any mixture or possibility of decline. We rejoice to see the glory of God, and we receive comfort and pleasure from all the praises with which men and angels worship Him. It delights us beyond all expression to know that the beloved of our souls is infinitely happy in Himself, and

that all His enemies cannot shake or unsettle His throne. *Our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased* (Psalm 115:3).

Think of the happiness of the one whose soul is possessed with divine love. What a foundation it is built on! His will is transformed into the will of God, and his greatest desire is to please his Maker. What peace, what rest, what satisfaction is afforded by such a temper of mind!

He who loves God finds sweetness in all circumstances

WHAT an infinite pleasure it must be, thus to lose ourselves in Him, and, being swallowed up in the overwhelming sense of His goodness, to offer ourselves a living sacrifice, always ascending unto Him in flames of love! We will never know what real joy and substantial pleasure are until we are weary of self and we give ourselves up to the Author of our being. Only then can we say with inward conviction, *My beloved is mine* (all His is mine) *and I am his* (I will be anything for Him, and want only to serve Him) (Song of Solomon 2:6).

Those who are of this mind find pleasure in all the dispensations of Providence. Even temporal enjoyments have a new delight, as they recognize them as tokens of love sent by their dear Lord and master. Chastisements, though not pleasant, lose their sting. The rod comforts them as well as the staff. They snatch a kiss from the hand that was afflicting them, and gather sweetness from the severity. They rejoice that God is not doing their will (foolish creatures as they are), but His own will, which is infinitely more holy and wise.

The duties of religion are delightful to him

THE exercises of religion may be tedious to others, but to souls possessed with divine love they yield the highest pleasure and delight. They rejoice when they are called to *go up to the house of the Lord*, that they may *see his power and glory, so as they have seen him in the sanctuary* (Psalm 63:2). They are never so happy as when they have withdrawn from the world, freed themselves from the noise and hurry of life, and silenced all their clamorous passions, to place themselves in the presence of God, and entertain fellowship and communion with Him. They delight to adore His perfections, and recall His favours, and tell Him a thousand times that they love Him. They lay their troubles or needs before Him, and unburden their hearts to Him.

Even repentance is a delightful exercise when it flows from the principle of love. There is a secret sweetness that accompanies those tears of remorse, that melting of a soul returning unto God and lamenting its former unkindness.

Those who have no “law in their minds” to incline their heart to God find it bothersome to live a holy life, and to keep watch over their hearts and

ways. They are ruled merely by an external law. But where divine love possesses the soul, it stands guard and keeps out everything that may offend the Beloved. It disdainfully repulses those temptations that assail it. It delights to perform not only the explicit commands but also the secret indications of the Beloved's pleasure. It seeks out what is pleasing to Him. It transforms mortification and self-denial, making them easy, sweet, and delightful things.

But this part of my letter has become bigger than I intended. Indeed, who wouldn't be tempted to dwell on such a pleasant a theme? I will try to compensate by being brief in the other points.

The excellence of love

THE next branch of the divine life is universal love. The excellence of this grace will be easily acknowledged. What can be more noble and generous than a heart enlarged to embrace the whole world, whose wish is the good of the universe, and considers every man's interest its own?

He who loves his neighbour as himself can never entertain any base or injurious thought, or be lacking in expressions of generosity. He would rather suffer a thousand wrongs than be guilty of one, and never accounts himself happy unless someone has been benefited by him. The malice or ingratitude of men is not able to resist his love. He overlooks their injuries, and pities their folly, and overcomes their evil with good. He never seeks any revenge against his enemies, but does as much good to them as he can, whether they want it or not.

Is it any wonder that such a person is admired, and accounted the darling of mankind? This inward goodness and benignity of spirit is reflected in a sweetness and serenity on the face, making it amiable and lovely. It inspires the soul with noble resolution and courage, and makes it capable of accomplishing the highest things. The heroic actions that we love to read about have for the most part resulted from the love of one's country, or from particular friendships. Certainly a more extensive and universal affection must be even more powerful.

The pleasure that accompanies love

JUST as love flows from a noble and excellent temper, so it is accompanied with great satisfaction and pleasure. It is a delight to feel oneself enlarged, delivered from malice, hatred, and envy, and to have become gentle and sweet.

If I could choose from all the things that might make me happy, I would choose this—to have my heart possessed with the greatest kindness and affection for everyone in the world. As a result I would share in all the

happiness of others. Everything that benefits them would give me comfort and pleasure. And even though there may be occasions of grief and compassion, there is a sweetness in commiseration that makes it infinitely more desirable than a dull insensibility.

Next to the love and enjoyment of God, the pure love and affection with which blessed souls embrace one another is one of the greatest joys of heaven. If it were to prevail in the world, it would anticipate that blessedness, and make us taste the joys of heaven upon earth.

The excellence of purity

I PREVIOUSLY listed *purity* as the third branch of religion. I described it as a contempt for sensual pleasures, and a resolve to undergo the troubles and pains that we may meet in performing our duty.

There is no slavery like that by which a man becomes enslaved to his own lusts; and there is no victory as great as the victory over them. Nothing noble or worthy can be done by someone who is sunk in the foul pleasures of sense, or bewitched by the airy gratifications of fancy. But the religious soul knows it was made for higher things, and scorns to set foot outside the way of holiness in order to obtain any of these false pleasures.

The delight afforded by purity

THIS purity is accompanied with a great deal of pleasure. Impure delights have a sting in them, and leave pain and trouble behind them. Excess, intemperance, and inordinate lusts do such harm to the body that anyone who thinks about it would forbear from them on that score alone. If a religious person goes further, abstaining not only from harmful pleasures but also from innocent ones, it is not because of some self-imposed restraint. It is the effect of a better choice; his mind is occupied in the pursuit of more sublime delights.

Anyone who is in the throes of a passionate affection will easily forget ordinary gratifications such as food or comfort, or the amusements that he used to delight in. It is no wonder, then, if souls overpowered with divine love despise baser pleasures and begrudge the necessities of the body, judging them irrelevant to the higher enjoyments that they pursue. As for the hardships they meet with, they rejoice in them as opportunities to exercise and testify their affection. Since they are able to do so little for God, they are glad of the honour to suffer for Him.

The excellence of humility

THE last branch of religion is *humility*. Carnal people regard this as abject, base, and despicable; but in reality it is the noblest endowment of the human soul. Silly ignorance begets pride. Humility arises from an appreciation of things that are excellent. It saves us from doting on trifles, or admiring ourselves because of some small attainment. Noble and well-educated people don't value themselves in terms of their wealth, or beauty, or strength, or anything like that. Neither do they despise those who lack them. As for inward worth and real goodness, they place little value on their own accomplishments, being so much more aware of the divine perfections. On the contrary, they still seek to improve and to approach more nearly the infinite excellencies that they so admire.

I do not know what people think of humility. Almost everyone pretends to it, and they are anxious to avoid expressions and actions that may make them appear arrogant or presumptuous. Those who are most desirous of praise are loath to commend themselves. Look at the everyday compliments and modes of civility that we use so frequently—they all express our esteem of others and our low thoughts of ourselves. Don't you think humility must be a noble and excellent thing if the very shadows of it are deemed to be a necessary part of good breeding?

The pleasure and sweetness of a humble temper

HUMILITY is accompanied with a great deal of happiness and tranquility. A proud and arrogant person is a weariness to all who meet him, but most of all to himself. Anything can vex him; scarcely anything pleases him. He is ready to quarrel with everything around him. You would think that he was so important that God Almighty should do everything to please him, and all the creatures of heaven and earth should wait upon him and obey his will.

The leaves of high trees shake with every blast of wind; and every breath, every evil word will trouble and torment an arrogant man. The humble person, on the other hand, is untroubled when he is despised; nobody thinks less of him than he does of himself. He is therefore not troubled at all, but easily bears the reproaches that wound the other man.

Contention, which comes from pride (Proverbs 13:10), betrays a man into a thousand inconveniences which the meek and lowly seldom encounter. Genuine humility earns the love and respect of wise persons, whereas pride defeats its own purpose and deprives a man of the honour to which he pretends.

The chief exercises of humility are those which relate to Almighty God. These are accompanied with the greatest satisfaction and sweetness. It is impossible to express the pleasure and delight that religious people feel

when they prostrate their souls before God. Filled with a deep sense of the divine majesty and glory, they sink (so to speak) to the bottom of their beings, and vanish and disappear in the presence of God. They acknowledge their own nothingness, and the smallness and imperfections of their attainments. They understand what the Psalmist meant when he said, *Lord, what is man?* (Psalm 8:4). No haughty and ambitious person ever received praise and applause with as much pleasure as the humble renounce them. *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory* (Psalm 115:1).

And so I have spoken something of the excellence and advantage of religion in its several branches, though I cannot pretend to have done it full justice. Let us acquaint ourselves with it, my dear friend. Let us acquaint ourselves with it, and then experience will teach us more than anything that has ever been spoken or written about it.

But if the soul is now prompted to go after so great blessedness, it will be good to give vent to that desire in some such form as the following:

A prayer

GRACIOUS God! What a great happiness it is to which we are called! How graciously you have joined our duty and our happiness together, and tasked us with something that has such great reward! Should such silly worms as we are be raised to so great a height? Will you allow us to raise our eyes to you? Will you receive our affection? Shall we begin to understand your divine excellencies, by seeing and admiring them? Shall we partake of your infinite blessedness and glory?

How happy are those who have broken the fetters of self-love, and disentangled their affection from small things, however good. How blessed are they whose understanding is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and whose wills are enlarged like yours, who love you above everything and all mankind for your sake!

I am persuaded, O God! I am persuaded that I can never be happy till my carnal and corrupt affections are mortified, and the pride and vanity of my spirit are subdued; till I come seriously to despise the world, and think nothing of myself. But oh, when shall it be? Oh, when will you come unto me, and satisfy my soul with your likeness, making me holy as you are holy, in every aspect of my life? Have you given me a view of such great happiness without intending to bring me unto it? Have you excited these desires in my soul, and will you not also satisfy them?

Oh, teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Your Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness. Quicken me, O Lord, for your

name's sake, and perfect that which concerns me. Your mercy, O Lord, endures for ever; forsake not the work of your own hands.

A guard against despondent thoughts

So far I have considered what true religion consists of, and how desirable it is. But when you see how infinitely distant the usual temper and attitude of men are from it, you may be tempted to give up and think it unattainable. You may say to yourself:

“Those whose souls are awakened to divine life are indeed happy, and renewed in the spirit of their minds. But, alas! I am completely different from them, and I cannot manage such a great change. If outward behaviour could have done it, I might have hoped to accomplish it by diligence and care. But since nothing but a new nature can suffice, what can I do? I could give all my goods as offerings to God, or alms to the poor, but I cannot work up that love without which it profits me nothing.

“This gift of God cannot be purchased with money. If a man gave all his substance for love, it would be despised. If I buffet my body, and undergo many hardships and troubles, I still cannot starve all my corruptions, or wean my affections from earthly things. There are still worldly desires lurking in my heart. The vanities that I shut out of the doors are always getting in by the windows.

“I am convinced of my own meanness, of the weakness of my body, and the far greater weakness of my soul. But this conviction brings discontent rather than true humility of spirit. And even if I come to think meanly of myself, I still cannot endure it if others think the same of me.

“When I reflect on my highest attainments, I suspect they are all just the effects of nature, the issues of self-love acting under several guises. This principle is so powerful, and so deeply rooted in me, that I can never hope to be delivered from it. I can never truly get clear of self, which is still the centre of all my motives. So when I consider the advantages of religion, all I see is the huge distance between myself and the blessedness that I cannot reach. I am like a man in a shipwreck, who sees the land but knows it is impossible to get to shore.”

The unreasonableness of these fears

THESE, or some such thoughts, arise in the minds of people who begin to realise the nature and excellence of religion more than they did before. They have spied the land, and seen that it is very good. It flows with milk and honey, but they find they have the children of Anak to overcome, and many powerful lusts and corruptions to master. They fear they will never prevail against them.

But why should we give way to such discouraging suggestions? Why should we entertain such unreasonable fears, dampening our spirits and weakening our hands, and augmenting the difficulties of our way? Let us encourage ourselves, my dear friend, let us encourage ourselves with those mighty aids that we are to expect in this spiritual warfare. For greater is He that is for us than all that can rise up against us. *The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.* (Deuteronomy 33:27). *Let us be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might* (Ephesians 6:10); *for he it is that shall tread down our enemies* (Psalm 60:12).

God has a tender regard for the souls of men, and He is infinitely willing to promote their welfare. He has condescended to our weakness, and declared with an oath that he has no pleasure in our destruction. There is no such thing as spite or envy in the heart of that ever blessed being, whose name and nature is Love.

When He created us we were in a blessed state. Now that we have fallen from it, He has *“laid help upon one that is mighty (Psalm 89:19) to save.”* He has committed the care of our souls to no less a person than the eternal Son of his love. He is the Captain of our salvation; what enemy can be too strong for us when we fight under His banner? Didn't the Son of God come down from the bosom of his Father, and pitch His tent among men, so that He could recover the divine life, and restore the image of God in their souls? All the mighty works which He performed; all the sad afflictions which He endured, had this as their aim and purpose. He laboured and toiled for this; He bled and died for it. Has He *wrought no deliverance in the earth?* (Isaiah 28:18). Shall He not see the travail of His soul?

It is impossible that heaven should fail in this great purpose. It has already proved effective for the salvation of many thousands who were as far from the kingdom of heaven as we think we are. Our High Priest *“continues for ever, and is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him”* (Hebrews 7:25). He is tender and compassionate. He knows our infirmities, and has experienced our temptations. *A bruised reed will he not break, and smoking fax will he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory* (Isaiah 42:3). He has sent out his Holy Spirit, who is still moving all over the world to quicken and revive the souls of men, and to awaken them to the sense of those divine things for which they were made. He is ready to help weak creatures like us as we grope towards holiness and blessedness. When the Spirit has kindled in a soul the smallest spark of divine love, He will certainly cherish that spark and bring forth a flame that many waters shall not quench. Whenever this day begins to dawn, and the day-star arises in the heart, it will easily dispel the powers of darkness. It will make ignorance and folly, and all the corrupt and selfish affections of men, flee away like the shades of

night when the sun rises. *For the path of the just is as the shining light which shines more and more unto the perfect day* (Proverbs 4:18). *They shall go on from strength to strength, till every one of them appear before God in Zion* (Psalm 84:7).

Why should we think it impossible that true goodness and universal love should ever come to prevail in our souls? Isn't that how they were in the beginning, when they came from the hands of their Maker? Sin and corruption are usurpers. Though they have long had possession, *from the beginning it was not so*.

We are tempted to think inordinate self-love is part of our very being—but it is of foreign extraction, and didn't exist in our state of innocence. Even now we still have enough sense to condemn it. We know instinctively that we ought to be wholly devoted to the One who made us, and to love Him infinitely more than ourselves, who is infinitely better than we are. Our wills would readily comply with this if they were not disordered and put out of tune.

But isn't He who made our souls in the first place able to mend them again? Should we be unable, with His help, to overcome and expel those violent intruders, *and turn to flight the armies of the aliens*? As soon as we take up arms in this holy war, we have all the saints on earth and all the angels in heaven engaged on our side. The holy church throughout the world intercedes daily for the success of such endeavours. Without doubt the hosts above watch closely the progress of religion. They long to see the will of God done on earth, as it is done by themselves in heaven.

Let us then encourage ourselves, as the prophet did his servant, when he showed him the horses and chariots of fire. *Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be against us* (2 Kings 6:16).

What we must do, with God's help

AWAY then with all perplexing fears and despondent thoughts! It is more than half the battle to set out vigorously, and to rely confidently on divine assistance. *Let us arise, and be doing, and the Lord will be with us*.

It is true that religion in the souls of men is the work of God. All our natural endeavours cannot produce it, or even merit the supernatural aid that can create it. The Holy Ghost must come upon us, and the power of the Highest must overshadow us, before that holy thing can be begotten, and Christ be formed in us.

But we must not expect that everything happens without our own effort. We must not lie grovelling in the ditch, waiting till Omnipotence pulls us out of it. No, no: we must stir ourselves and use those powers that we have already received. We must exert ourselves as much as we can, and

then we can hope that *our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

All the knowledge and labour of man cannot create a blade of grass, or make a stalk of corn grow in the field. It is the energy of nature, and the influences of heaven, that do it. It is God *who causes the grass to grow, and herb for the service of man* (Psalm 104:14). Yet nobody will say that the farmer's labour is unnecessary. Likewise, the human soul is created by God. It is He who forms and quickens the child; and yet He has appointed the marriage-bed as the ordinary means for the propagation of mankind.

Though we need a stroke of Omnipotence to produce this mighty change in our souls, yet we ought to do what we can to prepare ourselves. We must break up our fallow ground, and root out the weeds, and pull up the thorns, so that we are more ready to receive the seeds of grace and the dew of heaven.

It is true that God has been found by some who never sought Him. He has placed Himself in their way, and laid hold on them, and suddenly stopped them in their tracks. So it was with St. Paul on his journey to Damascus. But this is not God's usual way of dealing with men. Though He has not tied Himself to means, He has tied us to the use of them, and we have never more reason to expect divine assistance than when we are doing our utmost.

My next purpose is therefore to show what we need to do if we are to attain that blessed temper that I have described. I do not want to appear to contradict or oppose others on this matter, any more than doctors do when they prescribe several remedies for the same disease, all of which may be useful and good. Anyone may propose what he judges to be best, but he would be foolish to pretend that there can be no cure unless his method is exactly observed. I'm sure that some writers have to admit that things in their souls are not quite as regular and orderly as they are in their books! I suspect too that they have not all passed through all the stages of conversion that some (who perhaps have felt them in themselves) have too peremptorily prescribed to others. God has many ways of dealing with the souls of men, and it is enough if the work be accomplished, whatever the methods.

I will give my directions in an order that appears logical. I don't intend to give the impression that they must be practised in order, or that the later ones should not be attempted until the earlier ones are mastered. The directions I give are mutually conducive, and are all to be performed as occasion arises and we find ourselves able to perform them.

Shun all forms of sin

If we want to be holy, to become partakers of the divine nature, and have Christ formed in our hearts, we must seriously resolve and carefully endeavour to avoid and abandon all sinful practices.

There can be no peace treaty till we lay down the weapons of rebellion with which we fight against heaven. We cannot expect to have our sickness cured if we are feeding daily on poison. Every wilful sin gives the soul a mortal wound, and separates it further from God and goodness. We can never hope to have our hearts purified unless we cleanse our hands from harmful actions.

If it no use excusing ourselves by saying it is impossible. Our outward man is to some extent in our power; we are in control of our feet, hands, and tongue – and of our thoughts and fancies too. We can at least divert them from impure and sinful objects, and turn our mind another way. And the more we do it, the easier it will become. In the meantime, I acknowledge that our corruptions are so strong, and our temptations so many, that it will require a great deal of steadfastness and resolution, of watchfulness and care, to get even this far in innocence and purity.

Recognise what is sinful

BUT first, let us make sure we know what those sins are from which we ought to abstain. Here we must not take our measures from the maxims of the world, or the practices of those whom we reckon to be good men. Most people have very light views of these things, and don't recognize a fault unless it is gross and flagitious. And for them there is nothing worse than what they call "fastidiousness".

Even those who are more serious often allow themselves too great latitude. Alas! how much pride and vanity, passion, weakness, and sin is shown every day in their conversation and behaviour. They may be ashamed of it, and striving against it. They may be gaining ground against it, but their progress is so slight, and their failings so many, that we need to choose a more exact pattern.

Every one of us must answer for himself. What others do should have no influence on our own behaviour. It makes no sense to regulate our actions by any other standard than that by which they will be judged. If ever we would "*cleanse our way*", it must be "*by taking heed thereunto according to*" the word of God. And that word, which is "*quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*" (Hebrews 4:12), will

certainly reveal many things as sinful that pass for innocent in the eyes of the world.

Let us therefore imitate the Psalmist, who said, *“By the words of thy lips I have kept myself from the paths of the destroyer”* (Psalm 17:4). Let us acquaint ourselves with the strict and holy laws of our religion. Let us consider the sayings of our blessed Saviour (especially the Sermon on the Mount,) and the writings of his holy apostles. By reading these, an unbiased mind may clearly see the limits to which our actions ought to be confined. Then let us never look upon any sin as of little consequence. Let us view the smallest sin as infinitely heinous in the sight of God, and prejudicial to the souls of men. If we have a right sense of things, we should be as deeply affected by the smallest trespasses as much as by the largest.

Resist temptation

NOW we find that, among the things that we now know to be sinful, there are some we are so fond of, because of our disposition, or long custom, or the endearments of pleasure, that to abandon them is like cutting off the right hand or pulling out the right eye. So should we therefore sit down and wait until all difficulties are over, and every temptation is gone? That would be to imitate the fool in the poem who stood all day by the side of the river, waiting for all the water to run by. We must not indulge our inclinations, like little children, till they grow weary of the thing they are unwilling to let go. We must not continue our sinful practices in the hope that divine grace will one day overpower our spirits, and make us hate them.

Let us take the worst case. Suppose that we are to receive no supernatural help, and that there is nothing in us that discerns and abhors perverse things. There are still good reasons to reform. Even if the inherent deformity and heinous nature of sin does not affect us, we should at least be frightened by its dreadful consequences. The same selfish principle that pushes us onward in pursuing sinful pleasures will make us loath to buy them at the cost of everlasting misery. So we may confront self-love with its own weapons, and use one natural inclination to repress another.

Let us therefore make it our practice to consider seriously what a fearful thing it must be to offend that infinite Being on whom we depend every moment. He need only withdraw His mercies to make us miserable, or His assistance to make us nothing. Let us recall how short and uncertain our lives are. Let us remember that, after we have taken a few more turns in the world, and conversed a little longer among men, we must all go down into the dark and silent grave. We shall carry nothing with us

except anguish and regret for all our sinful enjoyments. And then think what horror must seize the guilty soul, to find itself naked and all alone before the severe and impartial Judge of the world, and know that it must give an exact account of every word uttered, and the swiftest and most secret thought that ever passed through the mind.

Let us remind ourselves of the terrors of that dreadful day when the foundations of the earth shall be shaken, and the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the present frame of nature will be dissolved. Our eyes shall see the blessed Jesus (who came once into the world in humility to visit us, to purchase pardon for us, and beseech us to accept it) now appearing in the majesty of his glory, and descending from heaven in flaming fire, to take vengeance on those that have despised his mercy, and persisted in rebellion against him.

All the hidden things of darkness will be brought to light, and the counsels of the heart will be made manifest. All the secret impurities and subtle frauds that the world never suspected of us shall be exposed and laid open to public view. Thousands of actions that we never dreamed to be sinful, or had forgotten, shall be rammed home to our consciences, with such evident conviction of guilt that we shall be unable either to deny or to excuse them.

Then the angels in heaven, and all the saints that ever lived on earth, shall approve the dreadful sentence that will be passed on wicked men. And those who perhaps loved and esteemed them when they were in the world shall now look on them with indignation and abhorrence, and never make one plea for their deliverance.

Let us consider the future punishment of evil-doers. Scripture portrays them with metaphors taken from the most terrible and grievous things in the world. And yet all the metaphors cannot convey their full import to our minds. When we have added them all together, along with whatever our imagination can conceive of misery and torment, we shall still come infinitely short of the truth and reality of the thing.

This is a sad and melancholy subject. Even to think of it is anguish and horror. But it must be infinitely more dreadful to endure it. Such thoughts as these may serve to turn us from actions that would lead us there. However fond we may be of sinful pleasures, the fear of hell should make us abstain from them. Our most pressing inclinations will startle and retreat when pressed with the prophet's question, "*Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?*" (Isaiah 33:14).

This is why the terrors of another world are mentioned so frequently in scripture, and in such terms as to influence the most carnal mind.

It is true that these fears can never make anyone good, but certainly they may restrain us from much evil, and they have often prepared the way for more positive impressions.

Keep a constant watch

BUT it is no use considering these things again and again, or making resolutions to forsake our sins, unless we maintain a constant guard, and continually watch against them.

Sometimes the mind is awakened to see the awful consequences of a sinful life, and we are immediately resolved to change. But, alas! The mind soon falls asleep again, and forgets what it saw. Then temptations take advantage. They continually beg and demand our attention, and frequently get our consent before we are aware of it.

Most people live a moment at a time, taking in everything that comes along, seldom considering what they are about to say or do. If we want our resolutions to take effect, we must pay heed to our ways, and set a watch before the door of our lips, and examine the motions that arise in our hearts. We must recognize where they come from and where they are going. We must know whether it is pride or passion, or any corrupt motive, that prompts us to do anything, and whether God will be offended or anybody harmed by it.

If we have no time for long reasonings, let us at least turn our eyes towards God, and place ourselves in His presence, to ask His permission and approval for what we are doing. Let us see ourselves as under the all-seeing eye of divine Majesty, as if we were in the middle of an infinite globe of light, surrounding us and piercing to the innermost corners of our soul. That sense and remembrance of the divine presence is the most effective means of discovering what is unlawful, and of restraining us from it. Sometimes a person may defend a course of action, yet he dare not look almighty God in the face and continue with it. If we look unto him, we shall be lightened; if we *“set him always before us, he will guide us by his eye, and instruct us in the way wherein we ought to walk”* (Psalm 16:8; 32:8).

Examine our actions

THIS care and watchfulness over our actions must be accompanied by frequent and serious reflection upon them. By this we shall not only obtain pardon for our sins, by humbly acknowledging them; we shall also strengthen our resolution, and learn to decline or resist temptations that have deceived us in the past.

Although not from a Christian writer, the following advice still stands worthy of adoption: “Before we go to rest, we should review the events of the day, so that we may take comfort from what we have done aright, and redress what was amiss. Thereby we shall turn the shipwrecks of one day into marks to direct our course in another.”

This is the art of virtuous living. It will be of wonderful help in advancing our reformation and preserving our innocence. But along with it we must not forget to implore the divine assistance, especially against those sins that most easily beset us. And though our hearts are not yet in the state where our devotions are acceptable, the ideas that have been proposed to deter us from sin may also make us more serious, and make our prayers against sin at least as earnest as they are against other calamities. I have no doubt that God, who hears the cry of the ravens, will pay some heed to such prayers that proceed from the natural passions He has implanted in us.

Also, these prayers against sin will incite us to watchfulness and care, and make us ashamed to relapse into the faults that we have just bewailed before God, and against which we have begged His help.

Restrain ourselves in lawful things

THE first efforts towards recovering the divine life consist in restraining the natural inclinations so that they do not result in actual sin. But we must learn to abstain also from pleasures that are not clearly unlawful. In this way we will not only retain our innocence, which would be in constant danger if we pushed our liberty to its limits; we will also weaken the forces of nature, and teach our appetites to obey.

We must deal with ourselves in the same way wise parents deal with their children. They cross their wills in many small things, to make them manageable and submissive in more important things.

If you want to mortify pride and vanity, don't listen when people praise you deservedly. Don't justify yourself when they criticize you, especially if their criticisms are directed at your wisdom and behaviour, and not at your virtue. To check a vengeful spirit, deny yourself the satisfaction of telling others about the injuries you have suffered.

If we want to gain control over our tongue, we must practise solitude and silence. Sometimes, with the Psalmist, we must *hold our peace even from good*, until we have got some command over that unruly member.

So we may restrain our natural inclinations, and moderate our appetites, by making them used to frequent refusals.

Disentangle ourselves from the world

OUR next effort must be to wean our affections from created things, and all the delights and entertainments of the baser life. They sink and depress the souls of men, and hinder their movement towards God and heaven. So we must convince ourselves of the vanity and emptiness of worldly enjoyments.

Many people talk about this, but few understand and believe what they say. These notions float in our brains, and come sliding off our tongues, but there is no deep sense of them in our spirits, and we do not feel the truth that we pretend to believe. We realize that all the glory, the splendour, the pleasures and enjoyments of the world are vanity and nothing; yet these nothings take up all our thoughts and affections. They stifle our better inclinations and entice us into many a sin. Perhaps when we are in a serious mood we shrug them off, and resolve not to waste any more time on them. But such thoughts seldom outlive the next temptation, and the vanities that we have shut out at the door get in at the window.

We flatter ourselves with false hopes. Even when we have been frustrated a thousand times, we continually repeat the experiment. We constantly think that the *next* thing will give us the satisfaction that all the others did not afford. If we could only get free of this thinking, and come to a real and serious contempt of worldly things, it would be a definite step forward.

Our soul has an insatiable thirst, a kind of fire, always catching at some object or other that it thinks will make us happy. If we could just tear it away from the world and all its bewitching enjoyments, this thirst would look for some more excellent object to satisfy its cravings. No longer dazzled by glittering vanities, it would fix on that supreme and all-sufficient Good, where it would discover enough beauty and sweetness to overpower all its affections.

Love of the world and love for God are like the scales of a balance; as one falls, the other rises. When our natural inclinations are indulged, and the soul feeds itself on creaturely things, religion languishes. But when earthly objects lose their attraction, and the soul begins to seek them less, then the seeds of grace take root and the divine life begins to flourish. It is important, therefore, to convince ourselves of the emptiness of creature-enjoyments, and dissuade our hearts from the love of them.

We should seriously consider all that reason, faith, experience, and the observations of others tell us about this. We need to consider it over and over, and fix our thoughts on this truth, until we are heartily persuaded of it. Amid all our pursuits and aims, let us stop and ask ourselves: What is the point of all this? What am I aiming at? Can sensual pleasures, or a

heap of white and yellow earth, or the esteem of silly creatures like myself, satisfy a rational and immortal soul? Haven't I tried these things already? Will they taste better or satisfy me better today than they did yesterday? They may be slightly different from what I pursued before, but those former things looked a lot more pleasant than they turned out to be. Like a rainbow, they looked glorious at a distance, but when I got closer I found only emptiness and vapour. What a poor thing the life of man would be if it was incapable of any higher enjoyments!

Considering who I am writing to, I will not say any more on this subject. I know that you have as much experience as anyone of the emptiness and vanity of human things, and have few worldly engagements. When I reflect on those passages of your life that you have told me of, I think I see the hand of divine Providence weaning your affections from everything here below. You have tried the things that the world dotes on, and have come to despise them. You have found by experience that neither the endowments of nature nor the advantages of fortune are sufficient for happiness. Every rose has its thorn, and the most beautiful plant may have a worm at its root. People who are thought to be fortunate often have some secret grief that, if known, would evoke the pity of those who envy them.

If any earthly comforts have taken up too much of your heart, I think it may have been your relations and friends; but now the dearest of these are gone. Thus God has provided for your heart to be loosed from the world, and that He should have no rival for your affection.

Do what is commanded

WHEN we have restrained our corruptions, and to some extent subdued our natural inclinations towards worldly things, we must pay attention to those duties that are conducive to the awakening of divine life. Firstly, we should conscientiously perform those duties that religion requires; ones that religion would incline us to if it were to prevail in our souls.

If we cannot change our inward disposition, let us study at least to regulate our outward behaviour. If our hearts are not yet inflamed with divine love, let us still own our allegiance to that infinite Majesty, by attending service, and listening to His word, by speaking reverently of His name, and praising His goodness, and exhorting others to serve and obey Him. If we lack the love and compassion that we ought to have towards our neighbours, we must still not omit any occasion of doing them good. If our hearts are haughty and proud, we must nevertheless study a modest and humble deportment.

These external performances are of little value in themselves, yet they may help us forward to better things. The apostle tells us that *bodily*

exercise profits little; but he does not say it is altogether useless. It is always good to be doing what we can, for then God is likely to pity our weakness, and assist our feeble endeavours. When true charity and humility, and other graces of the Spirit, come to take root in our souls, they will express themselves more freely if we have been accustomed to express them in our outward manner of life. If our actions outrun our affections, we need not fear being accused of hypocrisy. Our intention is not to *appear* better than we are, but to *become* better than we are.

Practise internal acts of devotion

INWARD acts have a more immediate impact on the soul, to mould it to a right temper, and so we ought to be very diligent in them. We should often be lifting up our hearts toward God. Though we cannot say that we love Him above all things, let us at least acknowledge that it is our duty and our happiness to do so. Let us lament the dishonour done unto Him by foolish and sinful men, and applaud the praises and adorations that are given Him by that blessed and glorious company above. Let us resign and yield ourselves up unto Him a thousand times, to be governed by His laws, and disposed of at His pleasure. And even if our stubborn hearts shrink from it, let us tell Him we are convinced that His will is always just and good; and therefore ask Him to do whatever He pleases with us, whether we like it or not.

If love to men is to be begotten in us, we must frequently pray for their happiness, and bless everyone that we see. And when we have done anything to help those less fortunate than ourselves, we should follow it up with earnest desires that God would take care of them, and deliver them out of all their distresses.

In this way we should exercise ourselves unto godliness. When we are using the powers that we have, the Spirit of God may well join in and elevate these acts of our soul beyond the natural, and give them a divine impression. And as we repeat them we shall find ourselves more inclined unto them, and they will flow with greater freedom.

The usefulness of reflection

I SHALL now mention two other means of creating that holy frame that we are considering.

The first is to consider seriously the truths of our religion, especially their certainty and their importance.

In most cases a person's mental assent to divine truths is very languid and ineffectual. It stems from a blind inclination to follow whatever form of religion is in fashion, and a lazy indifference as to whether things are

true or not. People tend to go with the crowd, following the religion of their country or their neighbours. They seldom give any attention to the evidence of those truths, or think about the importance of them. It is therefore not surprising that their beliefs have so little influence on their affections and practice. Someone rightly called them “*spiritless and paralytic thoughts*”. They do not move the will or direct the actions.

We must gird up our minds to serious belief and full persuasion of divine truths, and a sense and feeling of spiritual things. We must dwell upon them till we are both convinced of them and deeply affected by them. Let us urge our spirits toward the invisible world, and fix our minds on immaterial things, till we clearly see that they are not dreams; indeed, that everything else is just a dream and a shadow.

When we look around and see the order and harmony of all creation, let our thoughts ascend towards the omnipotent wisdom and goodness that created it and still sustains it. Let us consider ourselves. We are not merely a piece of organized matter, or a complex and well-designed machine. There is more to us than flesh and blood and bones. We have a divine spark, capable of knowing and loving and enjoying our Maker. Though it is presently clogged and dulled by mortal flesh, it will be delivered from it before long. It can as easily exist without the body as the body can exist without the clothes it wears.

Let us often withdraw our thoughts from earth, this scene of misery, folly, and sin, and raise them towards that vast and glorious world, whose blessed inhabitants eternally enjoy the divine presence. They know no other passion, only unmixed joy and unbounded love.

Consider how the blessed Son of God came down to this lower world to live among us, and die for us, so that He might bring us to the same blessedness. Think how he has overcome the sting of death, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. He is now sat down on the *right hand of the Majesty on high* (Hebrews 1:3), and yet is no less mindful of us. He receives our prayers, and presents them to His Father. He daily visits His church with the influences of His Spirit, just as the sun reaches us with his beams.

Reflect upon the excellence of the divine nature

SERIOUS and frequent consideration of these things, along with other divine truths, is the surest way to beget living faith, the foundation of religion and the spring and root of the divine life. Now let me suggest some further subjects of meditation for producing the branches of it.

First, to inflame our souls with the love of God, let us consider the excellence of His nature, and His love and kindness towards us. We

know little of the divine perfection, and yet that little may suffice to fill our souls with admiration and love, to ravish our affections and excite wonder. We are not merely creatures of sense, incapable of any other affection but that which enters through the eyes. Often our hearts are attracted by the character of an excellent person whom we have never seen, and we become involved in all his interests. And what engages us more than those whom we meet day by day? It must be more than the colour of their face, or their comely proportions, otherwise we would fall in love with statues and pictures and flowers!

These outward accomplishments may delight the eye a little, but they would never be able to affect our hearts so much if they did not represent some vital perfection. We see some greatness of mind, or vigour of spirit, or sweetness of disposition, some sprightliness, or wisdom, or goodness, that charms us and commands our love. Such perfections are not obvious to the sight; we can only discern the signs and effects of them.

If it is the understanding that directs our affections, the excellencies of the divine nature (traces of which we discover in everything we see) will not fail to engage our hearts if we consider them seriously. The faint shadow of almighty wisdom and goodness that we see in our fellow-creatures is not to be compared with the reality. That is seen everywhere in creation. It establishes the frame of nature, and turns the mighty wheels of providence, and keeps the world from disorder and ruin.

Would we be impressed by the scattered pieces of an imperfect picture, and not moved much more by the original? That would be short-sighted indeed. Likewise, when we see beauty in a friend, or in a saint, it ought not to engross but to elevate our affection. We should remind ourselves that if there is so much sweetness in a drop, there must be infinitely more in the fountain. If there is so much splendour in a ray of light, what must the sun be in its glory?

One may object that God is too far away to be the object of our love. But *He is not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being* (Acts 17:28). We cannot open our eyes without seeing some footsteps of His glory. We cannot turn toward him without finding Him waiting, as it were, to catch a look, ready to entertain the most intimate fellowship and communion with us.

Let us therefore endeavour to raise our minds to the clearest conceptions of the divine nature. Let us consider all that His works declare, all that His word tells us about Him. Let us especially think of that visible representation of Him made in our own nature by His Son, who was the *brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person* (Hebrews 1:3). He came into the world to reveal what God is and what we ought to be. Let us see Him as He is described in the gospel. There we see the perfections of the divine nature, though covered with the veil of human

infirmities. And when our hearts have formed the clearest notion they can of a Being who is infinite in power, in wisdom, and goodness, the author and fountain of all perfections—then let us fix the eyes of our soul upon it. Then our eyes will affect our heart, and while we are musing, the fire will burn.

Reflect upon God's goodness and love

ADD to this the consideration of God's favour and goodwill towards us. Nothing is more likely to engage our affection, than to find that we are *loved*.

We always enjoy receiving expressions of kindness, even if the person is otherwise unimportant. But to have the love of One who is altogether lovely, to know that the glorious Majesty of heaven has any regard to us, how it astonishes and delights us! How it overwhelms us, and melts our hearts, and sets our whole soul aflame!

Just as the word of God is full of expressions of His love towards man, so also all His works proclaim it. He gave us our being. By preserving us alive, He renews that gift every moment. He has placed us in a rich and well-furnished world, and liberally provided for all our necessities. He rains down blessings from heaven upon us, and causes the earth to bring forth our provision. He gives us food and clothing, and while we are spending the product of one year, He is preparing for the next. He sweetens our lives with innumerable comforts, and gratifies every faculty with suitable objects. The eye of His providence is always upon us, and He watches for our safety when we are fast asleep, not thinking of either Him or ourselves.

However, His watching over us is not merely a manifestation of omnipotence. His love for us has been much more fully demonstrated by suffering and by deeds. Because He could not suffer in His own nature, He assumed ours. The eternal Son of God assumed the infirmities of our flesh, and left the company of those innocent and blessed spirits who ever love and adore Him, in order to dwell among men. He wrestled with our obstinacy and rebellion, brought us to allegiance and faith, and then offered Himself up as a sacrifice and propitiation for us. One of the poets expresses the feeling that overcame him after a long resistance: "The God of love had shot all His golden arrows at me, but could never pierce my heart, till at length He put *Himself* into the bow, and darted Himself straight into my breast."

I think this describes God's method of dealing with men. He had long contended with a stubborn world, and poured down many blessings upon them; and when all His other gifts could not prevail, He at last made a gift of Himself, to show His affection and to engage theirs. The

account of our Saviour's life given in the gospel tells us at every turn the story of His love. All the pains that He took, and the troubles that He endured, were the amazing effects and evidence of it.

But oh, that last, dismal scene! Is it possible to remember it and at the same time question His kindness, or deny Him ours? That, my dear friend, is where we should fix our most serious and solemn thoughts, so *“that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith: that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is breadth and length and depth and height; the and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God”* (Ephesians 3:17-19).

We should also think frequently about the particular tokens of favour and love that God has bestowed on us individually. How long He has borne with our follies and sins, and waited to be gracious unto us. He has wrestled, as it were, with the stubbornness of our hearts, and tried every method to reclaim us. Let us keep an account in our minds of all the signal blessings and deliverances we have experienced. Some of them have come in such a way that we know they were not the results of mere chance; they were proofs of divine favour, and answers to our prayers.

Neither should we suspect that these deliverances were only designed to enhance our guilt and heighten our eternal damnation. No, no, my friend. God is love, and He has no pleasure in the ruin of His creatures. If they abuse His goodness, and turn His grace into wantonness, and thereby plunge themselves into greater depths of guilt and misery, it is the effect of their obstinate wickedness, and not the purpose of the benefits that He bestows.

Once these considerations have begotten in our hearts a real love towards Almighty God, it will easily lead us to the other branches of religion. I shall therefore need to say less about them.

Remember that all People are closely related to God

WE shall find our hearts enlarged in love towards men when we consider the relationship they have to God, and the stamp of His image that they bear. They are not only His creatures, the workmanship of His hands. He takes special care of them, and has a very tender regard for them. He intended their happiness before the foundations of the world, and was willing to live and converse with them unto eternity.

The most contemptible person we see is still the offspring of heaven, and one of the children of the Most High. However unworthy he may be—if God has not finally cast him off, He expects us to view him as one of His, and as such to embrace him with sincere affection. We naturally take an

interest in those who belong to the person we love; we gladly take every opportunity to gratify the child or servant of a friend. Surely our love for God would as naturally result in love for men if we were to recall the interest that He is pleased to take in them. Every soul is dearer unto Him than all the world. He did not reckon the blood of his son too great a price for their redemption.

They bear God's image

JUST as all people have a near relationship to God, they also bear enough of His image to incite us to love them. This image is more evident in some than in others, and we can discern the lovely traces of wisdom and goodness. But although in others it is sullied and defaced, it is not altogether erased; some traces still remain.

All people have rational, immortal souls. Their understanding and will are capable of the highest and most excellent things. Though they may be disordered and out of tune because of wickedness and folly, this should move our compassion, and not stifle our love. When we see someone who is perverse, full of malice and pretence, foolish and proud, it is hard to love them because they appear so ungrateful and unlovely. But if we see these evil qualities as diseases of a soul that is capable of all the wisdom and goodness that has adorned the best of saints—a soul that can still be raised to such heights of perfection as to be a fit companion for the holy angels—our aversion turns into pity. We regard that person as we would a beautiful body that has been disfigured with wounds, or by some loathsome disease. However much we hate the vices, we shall not cease to love the person.

Consider the dignity of our nature

THE next thing we should consider, if we are to purify our souls and disentangle our affections from the pleasures and enjoyments of this lower life, is the excellence and dignity of our nature. What a shameful and unworthy thing it is for such a noble and divine creature as the soul of man to be sunk in brutish and sensual lust, or amused with airy and frivolous pleasures, and to have lost the taste for solid and spiritual pleasures! What a tragedy that the beast should be fed and pampered, and the man and the Christian be starved in us! If we considered who we are, and for what we were made, it would teach us to respect and stand in awe of ourselves. It would beget a modesty and shamefacedness, and make us very shy and reserved in the use of the most innocent and allowable pleasures.

Meditate on the joys of heaven

TO the same end it will be very effectual if we frequently raise our minds towards heaven, and recall the joys that are at God's right hand, *those pleasures that endure for evermore* (Psalm 16:11). *For every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as He is pure* (1 John 3:3). If our heavenly country is often in our thoughts, it will cause us, as strangers and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul, and to keep ourselves unspotted from this world, so that we may be fit for the enjoyments of that other world.

But let us ensure that our ideas of heaven are not carnal, that we do not dream of a Mohammedan paradise, or settle only for the metaphors that are used to describe those joys. That would have quite a contrary effect. It would entangle us further in carnal affections, and we would be the more inclined to indulge ourselves in the meantime. But when we come to a true understanding of those pure, spiritual pleasures; when we know that the happiness we look forward lies in seeing and loving and enjoying God; and our minds are filled with the anticipation of that—how mean and contemptible all the things here below will appear to us! With what disdain we shall reject the gross and muddy pleasures that deprive us of those heavenly enjoyments, and make us unfit for them.

Consider our failings

THE last branch of religion is humility. Certainly we will never lack suitable material for consideration here! All our sins, imperfections, and follies will help to pull down the overweening conceit with which we often think of ourselves. Anyone who esteems us knows some small good about us, but there is a lot of evil in us that they are ignorant of. If they knew us properly they would quickly change their opinion!

If all the thoughts that passed through our heart on the best and most serious day of our life were exposed to public view, we would appear either hateful or ridiculous. And though we can conceal our failings from one another, we are still conscious of them ourselves. If we reflected seriously upon these failings it would do much to allay the vanity of our spirits. Thus holy men have come to think worse of themselves than of any other person in the world. They are much more intent on their own failings than those of their neighbours. They spend time considering the seriousness of their own failings, while doing all they can to diminish and excuse their neighbours' faults.

Think of God—put yourself in perspective

A godly writer has observed that the deepest and most pure humility arises not so much from the consideration of our own defects, as from a calm and quiet contemplation of the divine purity and goodness. Our blemishes never appear so clearly as when we place them before this infinite light. We never seem less in our own eyes than when we look down upon ourselves from on high. How insignificant all those shadows of perfection with which we compliment ourselves then appear! The humility that comes from knowing our own sinfulness is subject to ebb and flow; but the consideration of divine perfection has just as potent an effect on our souls.

The use of prayer

THERE is one more means for begetting a holy and religious disposition in the soul that we have not mentioned. That is fervent and hearty prayer. Holiness is the gift of God—indeed, it is the greatest gift He can bestow or we can receive. He has promised his Holy Spirit to those who seek holiness. In prayer we make the closest approach to God, and lie open to the influences of heaven. Then it is that the Sun of Righteousness visits us with His most direct rays, and dissipates our darkness, and imprints His image on our souls.

I cannot expand now on the advantages of this exercise, or the disposition with which it ought to be performed. There are many books on the subject. I will only tell you this:

There is one kind of prayer in which we use our voice. This is necessary in public, and may sometimes be useful in private. There is another kind of prayer in which, though we make no sound, we form the words, as it were, in our minds. But there is a third and more sublime kind of prayer, in which the soul takes flight, and having collected all its forces by long and serious meditation, it darts itself (if I may so speak) towards God in sighs, and groans, and thoughts too big for expression.

For example, after contemplating the divine perfections as they appear in all His works, the soul addresses itself to Him in the profoundest adoration of His majesty and glory. Or, after sad reflections on its own vileness and failures, it prostrates itself before Him with the greatest confusion and sorrow, not daring to lift up its eyes, or utter one word in His presence. Or, having dwelt upon the beauty of holiness, and the unspeakable blessedness of those who are truly good, it pants after God, and conveys such ardent desires as no words can properly express. The soul continues and repeats these acts as long as it is sustained by the force of its previous meditations.

This mental prayer is the most effective of the three in purifying the soul, and disposing it to a holy and religious temper. It is the great secret of devotion, and one of the most powerful instruments of the divine life. Perhaps the apostle refers to it when he says, *the Spirit helps our infirmities, making intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered (or, that cannot be worded)* (Romans 8:26).

However, I am not recommending this sort of prayer as *superseding* the other forms. Every petition of this kind requires so much time and devotion of spirit that we would not be able to encompass all the things we need to pray for. Furthermore, the deep sighs and heavings of the heart that often accompany it can be oppressive and hard to bear for long periods. But certainly a few of these inward aspirations will do more good than a great many spoken words.

Start off as you mean to go on

AND SO, my dear friend, I have briefly described the method that I judge best for inspiring the soul into a holy frame. The same means that serve to beget this divine temper must still be practised in order to strengthen and advance it. I shall therefore recommend just one more means: the frequent and conscientious use of the holy Sacrament.

The Sacrament is particularly designed to nourish and increase the spiritual life, when once it has been begotten in the soul. In this ordinance all the branches of religion meet, and when we give it its due place we cannot but practise all the rules that we mentioned before. There we are required to do a thorough review of our actions, and impose the strictest obligations on ourselves. There our minds are raised to the highest contempt of the world, and every grace is exercised with the greatest activity and vigour. All the subjects of contemplation are presented to us most effectively. And it is then, if ever, that the soul make its most powerful flights towards heaven. Certainly by neglecting it, or treating it carelessly, we stunt our religion.

But it is time for me to close this letter, which has grown far longer than I intended. If these poor pages can do you the smallest service, I shall think myself very happy. At least I hope that you will kindly accept the sincere endeavours of one who wishes to repay a small part of all that he owes you.

A prayer

AND now, most gracious God, Father and Fountain of mercy and goodness, who has blessed us with the knowledge of our happiness, and the way that leads to it: excite in our souls such ardent desires after the one, as may make us diligent in pursuing the other. Let us neither

presume on our own strength, nor distrust your divine assistance; but while we are doing our utmost endeavours, teach us still to depend on You for success. Open our eyes, O God, and teach us out of your law. Bless us with an exact and tender sense of our duty, and a knowledge to discern perverse things. Oh that our ways were directed to keep your statutes; then shall we not be ashamed, when we have respect unto all your commandments. Possess our hearts with a generous and holy disdain of all those poor enjoyments which this world holds out to allure us, that they may never be able to inveigle our affections, or betray us to any sin. Turn away our eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken us in your law. Fill our souls with such a deep sense and full persuasion of those great truths which you have revealed in the gospel, as may influence and regulate our whole conversation; and that the life which we henceforth live in the flesh, we may live through faith in the Son of God.

Oh that the infinite perfections of your blessed nature, and the astonishing expressions of your goodness and love, may conquer and overpower our hearts, that they may be constantly rising towards you in flames of the devoutest affection, and enlarging themselves in sincere and cordial love towards all the world, for your sake; and that we may cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, without which we can never hope to behold and enjoy you.

Finally, O God, grant that the consideration of what you are, and what we ourselves are, may both humble and lay us low before you, and also stir up in us the strongest and most ardent aspirations towards you. We desire to resign and give up ourselves to the conduct of your Holy Spirit. Lead us in your truth, and teach us, for you are the God of our salvation. Guide us with your counsel, and afterwards receive us unto glory, for the merits and intercession of your blessed Son our Saviour." Amen.