

*The Ascetic Teaching of Jesus
and the Apostles*

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AKENSIDE PRESS

60 AKENSIDE ROAD RIVERSIDE, IL 60546

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from *Christian Spirituality (v. 1): From the Time of Our Lord till the Dawn of the Middle Ages*, Chapter 1

First British edition, 1922

by Burns, Oates and Washbourne, LTD., London

Printed and bound in the United States

in 11 pt Baskerville type

by Minuteman Press of Lyons, Rose and Steve Bortman

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Publisher's Introduction

“The whole of the ascetical doctrine of the Gospel is summed up in these words of Jesus Christ: If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” Thus begins Fr Pierre Pourrat’s groundbreaking survey of the four Gospels and the Epistles of Saint John and Saint Paul. *Ascetic* is the corporate journey of obedience that begins in our sense life, redeemed by the Incarnation of Christ (Annunciation through Resurrection) and consummates in the Vision of God. The description of the journey which integrates doctrine with devotion we call *ascetical theology*. Fr Pourrat distills fundamental ascetical principles of Christian discipleship and spirituality necessary in any era: renunciation, perfection, love of neighbor, baptismal incorporation, sin, mortification, imitating Jesus Christ, cooperation with grace—not as inventions of the theologians but derived from close study of the plain yet uncompromising words of the New Testament itself. A classic text of ascetical theology with a bounty of scriptural citations, this work is an ideal foundation for parish catechesis programs, as well as preachers seeking homiletic inspiration.

Fr Martin Thornton gets the last word—as he wrote of Fr Pourrat in his own *English Spirituality*: “Still indispensable.”

Matthew Dallman
Easteride 2015

In this synthetic study, to give any complete exposition of the spiritual teaching of the New Testament is out of the question. It is impossible to cram into the compass of a few pages those divine teachings upon the riches of which souls eager for perfection have fed in the past and will feed until the end of time. Here it will suffice to set forth the fundamental principles of the spirituality bequeathed to us by Jesus and the Apostles, running through in order the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of St John and the Epistles, especially the Epistles of St Paul.

I. The Synoptic Gospels

Our Savior did not put forward His ascetical teaching in didactic form; He addressed it to His hearers, as He did the rest of His Gospel, as circumstances required. The Evangelists made no attempt to gather it together. Indeed, they sometimes even set the counsels of perfection, given by Jesus, side by side with the precepts dealing with the Christian's essential duties. But Catholic tradition has definitely distinguished between those words of the Master which deal with asceticism, with Christian perfection, and those which have to do with evangelical morality.

The whole of the ascetical doctrine of the Gospel is summed up in these words of Jesus Christ:

“If any man would come after Me (i.e., will be My disciple), let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”¹

The Christian life and, *a fortiori*, the perfect life consist in two fundamental and correlative dispositions, each of which calls for the other, unable to exist without each other, which should inspire all our acts: (1) the renunciation of self; (2) the firm determination to follow or imitate Christ. To become more and

1. Lk 9:23. Cf. Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34.

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more detached from everything within or around us which is contrary to the good, and to follow Jesus as closely as possible: such is the rule of perfection. We belong to Jesus so far as we renounce ourselves, and the more detached we are from ourselves the more we are His.

The necessity for renunciation expressed by the powerful image “to bear one’s cross” finds its justification in the fact that since the fall man had to fight against the unruly propensities of his corrupt nature. But it is not only within himself that man discovers foes. Outwardly he finds himself at war with the suggestions of the world and the devil,¹ and to these he must offer an energetic opposition, in which vigilance and prayer will furnish his best weapons.² Jesus Christ’s attitude with regard to temptations,³ which He indeed had no reason to dread, shows the faithful how they must behave on dangerous occasions if they are to emerge from the struggle as victors.

Christian renunciation has different degrees. In all it should go far enough to turn one away from that disorderly love of creatures which constitutes grievous sin. But we shall see how very far it is pushed by those whom God calls to evangelical perfection.

We can easily understand that he who would be perfect must renounce things that are *lawful*, and not only those that are *forbidden*. To abstain solely from that which is condemned by the law of Christ, under pain of grave sin, is to show regard for the precepts of evangelical morality, and to make sure of the minimum Christian life which is absolutely necessary for salvation, but it is not a pursuit of perfection.

1. Mt 13:7. Cf. Lk 8:12.

2. Mk 14:38.

3. Cf. Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13.

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Jesus Himself made clear the distinction between the essential renunciation which is binding upon all and that which is required of followers after perfection. One day a rich young man met and accosted Him thus:

“Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life? And Jesus said to him: keep the commandments. And He said to him, Which? And Jesus said, *You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother. And, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.* The young man said to him, All these I have observed; what do I still lack? Jesus said to him, If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”¹

The possession of worldly good, when kept within the bounds of justice, is lawful. Nevertheless he who, like the young man in the Gospel story, feels higher aspirations and hears the divine call is invited to renounce them.

Nor is worldly wealth the only thing that must be left behind. Evangelical perfection further demands detachment from one’s family, one’s self, and one’s own life also; the cross has to be taken up and the footsteps of Jesus must be followed even to the death, if need be, which He Himself went. Thus the renunciation of things permitted is to be *universal*, an all-round renunciation.

“Now great multitudes accompanied Him; and He turned and said to them, If any one comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple.”²

1. Cf. Mt. 19:16-21; Mk 10:17-31; Lk 28:18-30.

2. Lk 14:25-27; Mt 10:37-38.

He who would follow the Savior in the path of perfection without such a degree of renunciation as this would be like—the comparisons are those of Jesus Himself—a man who proposed to build a tower without calculating whether his means sufficed to finish it, or a king who rashly declared war without first comparing his forces with those of his enemy.¹ “So therefore,” says the Master, “whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple.”²

Such detachment as this is seen to involve the practice of perfect chastity. To abstain from matrimony for the sake of living a life of continence is a sacrifice to be accept by those who would follow out to the full the counsels of perfection of Jesus Christ.³ They thus put themselves upon a higher and more holy plane of life, as was laid down by the Council of Trent,⁴ and can walk in the footsteps of our Lord without let or hindrance. But this counsel only concerns a small minority of Christians, those who have received the gift of perfect chastity. For says Jesus: All men take not this word, but they to whom it is given.⁵

Lastly, this universal renunciation to which Jesus invites His specially beloved must be *de facto*. To attain to the highest degree of evangelical perfection it is not enough to be detached in heart from the things of this world; they must be abandoned in fact. Such is indeed the sense of the passages above quoted.⁶ This absolute detachment is what was practiced by Jesus Himself. From the Crib to Calvary He lived in an unceasing renunciation of all that is earthly: “The foxes have holes and the birds of the

1. Lk 14:28-32.

2. Ibid., 33.

3. Mt 19:11-12.

4. Sess. XXIV, Can. 10.

5. Mt 24:11.

6. St Jerome, *Ep. CXXX, ad Demetriadem*, 14: “The height of the apostolate and the zenith of perfection is to sell all and give to the poor, and then free from all ties to rise heavenwards to Christ.” Cf. St Ambrose, *De officiis ministr.* I, c. xi.

air have nests," He says, "but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."¹ On the cross He carried renunciation to the utmost limit of perfection.

Of His Apostles Jesus demanded a like detachment. "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men," He says to Peter and Andrew as they were casting their nets into the sea. And they immediately left their nets and followed Him. In the same way He called James and John as they were mending their nets in a boat with their father Zebedee, and "immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him."² The publican Levi was seated at the receipt of custom when Jesus saw him and called him to follow Him, "and leaving all things, he rose up and followed Him."³

Our divine Master does not want men to hesitate about leaving all to become His disciples. Hesitation is a mark of inaptitude for evangelical perfection.

"Follow Me," says Jesus to a man whom He once met. And the man answered: "Lord, let me first go and bury my father. But Jesus said to him, Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God. And another said, I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home. Jesus said to him, No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."⁴

It was this prompt and absolute detachment, demanded of the Apostles and those who wanted to follow Jesus to the end, that made St Peter say to his Master with a kind of pride: "Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?" And the Savior replied by pointing to the reward reserved for the

1. Lk 9:58.

2. Mt 4:18-22.

3. Lk 5:27; Matt 9:9; Mk 2:13. See also the instructions as to poverty given to the Apostles and disciples on their being sent out in Mt 10:9-10; Lk 10:4-5.

4. Lk 9:59-62.

Apostles and those who had followed their example in quitting everything for the love of Him: “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for My name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.”¹

Many a saint in his desire truly to imitate his divine Master has given practical effect to such an all-round renunciation. St Antony the Great, after hearing the words spoken by Jesus to the rich young man read in church, sold all that he had, gave what it fetched to the poor, and withdrew into the desert.² How many Christians have done the same! The *Poverello* of Assisi pushed detachment as far as it is possible for a human being to push it, and realized to the letter the whole scheme of evangelical perfection. Lastly, the renunciation counseled in the Gospel has found its traditional expression, officially approved by the Church, in the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which constitute the very essence of the religious state which is embraced by so many of the faithful who have been called to the closely following of Jesus. We may leave to unbelieving expositors their desperate attempts to discover some naturalistic explanation of the ascetical teaching of the Gospel. They cannot understand why Jesus came to counsel so absolute a detachment. Very much to the point is the familiar passage from St Paul: “The unspiritual man (i.e., who has not the light of faith) does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are

1. Mt 19:27-29.

2. St Athanasius, *Vita S Antonii*, 2.

spiritually discerned.”¹ But as for ourselves, we need not be the least surprised that evangelical perfection should be so high; rather should we be astonished at the contrary. By His example and His teaching Jesus set before the world a supreme ideal of perfection, an ideal which is fully attained by the few only, an ideal which will be surpassed by none.

In closing this brief sketch of the doctrine of evangelical renunciation, a reply must be given to a question which naturally comes to mind.

Evangelical perfection appears to be within the reach of a very small number of persons. Christians living in the world—and these form the vast majority—cannot renounce all that they possess in fact. What would become of society if all men followed the counsels of the Gospel to the letter? Must we conclude that Jesus excluded the mass of Christians from perfection to make it the privilege of only a few? Spiritual writers, on the other hand, and particularly St Francis of Sales, teach that wherever we may be and whatever our calling, “we can and ought to aspire to the life of perfection.”²

We answer that evangelical perfection, in its highest degree, so far as it implied a renunciation that is universal and *de facto*, is surely the privilege of but a small number of people. Jesus lets this be clearly understood on many occasions, especially with regard to perfect chastity.

But a lower degree of perfection which does not demand the actual renunciation of worldly good is within the reach of all and no one is excluded from it. This perfection, which may be called *common*, is satisfied with an inward renunciation of one’s family and of this world’s goods. It means that one must have the *will* to

1. 1 Cor 2:14.

2. Introduction *a la Vie Devote*, I.iii.

put the love of Jesus before every lawful earthly affection, and to leave one's possessions, relations, and all things, if such a total renunciation be demanded of us by God. "We must quit all," says Bossuet, "in affection, in desire, in resolution; I mean by an invincible determination to become attached to nothing, to seek no support except in God alone. . . . Happy . . . are they who are able to carry out this desire to the end, to carry it out in practice . . . to a final, actual, and perfect renunciation. . . . But all Christians are bound to carry it out to the end, at least in heart, really, as under the eyes of God; to possess as though not possessing, to be married as though unmarried, to use this world as though using it not, as though not of it, as though not in it."¹

In the *Sermon on the Mount*, our Savior declares, indeed, that those who are poor in spirit.² This spirit of poverty, this inward detachment from all that is not God, is compatible with the actual possession of worldly goods; but it may nevertheless carry the soul very far along the ways of sanctity. This renunciation in spirit of the things of earth united with a constantly increasing fervor of charity constitutes the Christian perfection to which everyone is called. This is the renunciation which St Francis of Sales lays down for those living in the world who "aspire to the devout life."³

Renunciation alone could not be the whole of perfection; its indispensable correlative is the union with Jesus by love and by imitating his virtues. We only renounce all in order to follow our Savior. The Apostles left all solely to become attached to their Master. Christian doctrine, by contrast with that of the Stoics, does not make of renunciation an end in itself; it makes it

1. *Méditation sur l'Évangile*, La Cène, I, 83e jour.

2. Mt 5.3.

3. Cf. *Vie Devote*, III.24-26.

a condition of the love of God. The latter makes progress in the soul in direct proportion to its detachment. The more complete the *abneget seipsum*, the more perfect will be the *sequatur me*.

The true disciple follows his Master closer than the ordinary Christian; for he is within the circle of His intimate friends, and takes a larger share in His trials and persecutions. "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."¹

Perfection implies above all the more rigorous imitation of the love of Jesus for the heavenly Father and for one's neighbor. All the law and also all perfection depend upon the two commandments to love God and to love one's neighbor. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" asked a doctor of the law; and "Jesus said to him: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.* This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."²

St Francis of Sales, following St Thomas,³ teaches that charity, ardent and fervent charity, is of the very essence of perfection.⁴ The Bishop of Geneva does but re-echo the teaching of the Gospel.

The love of God in the Christian finds expression in praise, in adoration, and in the desire to glorify his heavenly Father in all things: "Father . . . hallowed by Thy Name, Thy kingdom come. . . ."⁵ Again, it is shown in an entire conformity with the divine will, not only when it issues in commandments, but when

1. Mt 5:11-12. Cf. Lk 6:22-23.

2. Mt 22:36-40. Cf. Mk 12:28-34.

3. Sum. Theol. 2.2. qu. 184, 42.

4. *Introduction to the Devout Life*. I.1.

5. Lk 11:2.

it orders the happenings of life. In the fullest and the widest sense we must repeat Christ's words of submission in His agony in the garden of Gethsemane: "Father . . . Thy will be done!"¹ And this resignation arising from love blossoms out into a most filial confidence in the goodness of our heavenly Father, who careth far more for His children than for the birds of the air or the flowers of the field. "Therefore I tell you," says Jesus, "do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? . . . And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day."²

A prayer full of confidence rises up from the heart of the Christian who feels himself to be a child of the heavenly Father as truly as this. The Savior promises that such prayer as this will be surely answered if it be persevered in. "And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will

¹ Mt 26:42.

² Mt 6:25-34.

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be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”¹

Prayer as perfect as this, to which Jesus bids us, puts the devout soul into the closest communion with God. It is like the prayer so often addressed by the Savior to His Father when He withdrew into the solitude at night to pray.² And, in the case of the saints, it becomes transformed into those extraordinary states of prayer and divine love which are subjects for study in mystical theology.

Love of our neighbor makes us look upon all men as our brothers. “You have one teacher,” says Jesus, “and all you are brethren.”³ This love in its perfection demands of us humble devotion to the service of others after the pattern of Christ, who came “not to be served but to serve.”⁴ We shall also come to the help of our neighbor when in need, and do our best to render service to him in his necessities. Jesus tells us that on the Day of Judgment He will count as done to Himself whatever we have done for the least of our brethren.⁵ The charitable, following this Gospel teaching, like to see in the sick whom they visit and in the poor whom they help suffering members of the Savior.

To how sublime a height has not love for one’s neighbor thus been raised! The object of this virtue is truly divine; it is Christ who in some sort identifies Himself with our neighbor. In loving

1. Lk 11:9-13. Cf. Lk 18:1: “We ought always to pray, and not to faint.”

2. Lk 6:12; Mt 10:1; Mk 3:13.

3. Mt 23:8.

4. Mt 20:28.

5. Mt 25:35-45.

others, it is Jesus in them whom we love. The love of God and love of our neighbor form in a manner but one and the same theological virtue, and St Thomas goes so far as to say: "The love wherewith we love God is of the same kind as that wherewith we love our neighbor."¹

Jesus brought the law to perfection² by introducing into it the love of one's neighbor. Moreover, the position taken by His disciples with regard to one's neighbor was far higher than that of the Jews of old. We are to forgive fully and untiringly³ the wrongs committed by our brethren against us if we wish our heavenly Father to forgive us our trespasses against Him.⁴ And in order to avoid all appearance of vengeance we are to practice patience and endurance to a heroic degree. "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.⁵ Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you."⁶

But it is not enough to forgive wrongs and to bear with ill-usage. The true disciple of Jesus Christ, following his Master's example, will love even his enemies, will pray for them, will render them every kind of service, and come to their assistance in

1. *Sum. Theol.* 2.2. qu. 25, art. 1.

2. Cf. Mt 5:17-19. See Rom. 13:8-10: "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. . . . Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

3. Mt 18:21-22.

4. Mt 6:14-15. Cf. Mt 5:23-24.

5. An allusion to the compulsory duties laid by the Roman upon the Jews by forcing them to lend their horses to the state carriers.

6. Mt 5:38-42. These counsels are not so much to be taken literally as to be understood of a spiritual disposition to bear everything from one's neighbor.

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need, thus imitating our heavenly Father, the great pattern of perfection, who maketh His sun to shine and His rain to fall upon the just and upon the unjust. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”¹

This love of one’s neighbor, pushed to its farthest limits, will be accompanied by other Christian virtues which follow in its train: gentleness, meekness, mercifulness, virtues declared blessed by our Savior in the *Sermon on the Mount*.² Jesus insists mainly upon humility, which, by preventing us from placing ourselves above others³ makes our intercourse with them easy and pleasant. It brings down upon us the goodwill of God⁴ and makes us avoid ostentation in fulfilling the duties of prayer and fasting and almsgiving.⁵

1. Mt 5:43-48.

2. Mt 5:3-10.

3. Mt 23:2-13; Lk 14:7-41.

4. Lk 18:9-14.

5. Mt 6:3-18.

II. The Gospel of Saint John

The “following of Jesus”—that is to say, being his disciple, belonging to Him, gains a fresh precision of definition in the Fourth Gospel. St John the Apostle was led by his mystical leanings to set forth more fully than the other Evangelists the teaching of our Savior as to the mysteries of the divine life within us. His Gospel may be termed in a certain sense the Gospel of the interior life. Therein the life-giving connections that bind the Christian soul with Jesus are described with remarkable sympathy. We may say that the conception of the life communicated by Christ to men holds the chief place in the Gospel of St John.¹

Faith² and baptismal regeneration³ are the indispensable principles of the quickening action of Christ in the soul. It requires a close union with Jesus.

Man has two kinds of birth: a carnal birth which has the flesh as its principle and gives life to the body, and a spiritual birth which has the water and the Spirit as its principle and gives supernatural life.⁴ The faithful who believe in Christ and are regenerated by Baptism are very closely united with Jesus and incorporated in Him. They receive from Christ the divine life, as the branch received the sap from the vine in which it abides. “I am the vine,” says Jesus, “you are the branches.”⁵ The branch

1. “In Him was life” (Jn 1:4). “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25). “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6).

2. Jn 3:36: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life.” Cf. 6:43-47.

3. John 3:5: “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

4. Jn 3:3-6.

5. Jn 15:5.

cannot live and bear fruit if it is cut off from the vine in which it grows. So likewise is the Christian absolutely and vitally dependent upon Christ: "As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. . . . He who abides in Me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in Me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned."¹

St Paul expresses the same idea by using another image, that of the human body. The union of the believer with Christ is like the organic and quickening union between the head and the body of man.² The divine life flows down from Christ into the faithful, the members of His mystical body, in the same way as the life flows from the head to be diffused throughout the body, and as the sap comes from the vine and permeates the branches to make them grow and bear fruit. Through Christ the believer also becomes a "participator" in the divine life.³

It is to bear fruit and to do meritorious acts that the Christian receives supernatural life from Jesus. The divine Husbandman, the heavenly Father, would cut off from the mystical vine the branch that bears no fruit. But the fruitful branch is trimmed with the pruning-knife of tribulation that it may yield more fruit.⁴

Thus the Christian is in the most entire dependence upon Jesus Christ with regard to all that concerns the economy of the spiritual life. He is thus under the happy necessity of having to apply unceasingly to Him by constant prayer. If he gets severed from Jesus he no longer receives the life of grace, and death ensues. The more he desires to live a supernatural life, the more

1. Jn 15:4-6.

2. 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 5:30.

3. Cf. 2 Pet 1:4.

4. Jn 15:1-2.

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closely must he unite with the Savior through feeling his own fundamental indigence.

This quickening union of Christ with the faithful, begun in faith and the grace of Baptism, finds its consummation in the Eucharist. The flesh of Jesus is food, and His blood is drink. The Eucharist is the spiritual food of the Christian; it produces in the soul effects analogous to those which material food produces in the body. The latter food becomes assimilated with the body and feeds it. By Holy Communion the Savior is closely united with the faithful: He dwells in the believer and the believer dwells in Him. A sort of sacramental “circuminsession”¹ is set up between Jesus and the communicant. And in this supernatural life, which the manhood of Christ received from the Father, inundates the soul of the fervent believer. Thus the Eucharist is the supremely efficacious means by which the Christian is closely united with Jesus to receive life in abundance from it while waiting to participate in the resurrection in glory on the last day. “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever.”²

1. *Circuminsession* is a theological term which marks the fact that the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, on account of their divine nature, indwell in one another: “I am in the Father, and the Father in Me,” says Jesus (Jn 14:10). An *analogous* phenomenon results from the intercommunion of Christ and the Christian.

2. Jn 6:54-58.

It is thus that Jesus the good shepherd feeds His sheep. Early Christian tradition rightly saw a link between the Eucharist and the Johannine allegory of the good shepherd. The pictures in the catacombs like to represent Jesus as a shepherd carrying a pail of milk, a symbol of the Eucharist. Christ came into the world not only to give His life for the sheep, and to gather them all together into one fold, the Church, but also in order to feed them with His flesh and blood and to give them life in abundance.¹

The union of the faithful with Jesus by the grace of Baptism and the Eucharist conceals also other mysteries. These were revealed in the wonderful discourse addressed by the Savior to His Apostles after the Last Supper. A part of it applies exclusively to the Apostles and the Church which it was their mission to found; the rest refers to the personal relations of the soul of the Christian with God. These relations are so perfect that they ensure a permanent presence in the soul of the divine person of Jesus and of the two other Persons of the Blessed Trinity.

The sacramental union of the communicant with Jesus is transitory, whereas the union effected by divine love, by grace, is lasting. Jesus dwells within the Christian. "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in Me, and I in you.² . . . Abide in Me: and I in you."³

These intimate relations of mutual love are compared by Jesus with those which rule between the Father and Himself. "As the

1. Jn 10:10-11: "I came that they (i.e., My sheep) may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

2. Jn 14:18-20.

3. Jn 15:4.

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Father has loved Me, so have I loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.”¹

But Jesus the believer is also united with the Father, for the Father comes with Jesus to abide in the soul of the just who keeps God's commandments by love. “He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. . . . If a man loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.”²

A kind of mystical association is set up between the soul of the Christian and the Father and the Son, a truly divine *consortium*, by which the believer is in intimate communion with the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity.³ For the Holy Spirit, too, comes to dwell in the soul of the faithful keeper of Christ's commandment.⁴ “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; you know Him, for He dwells with you, and will be in you.”⁵

1. Jn 15:9-10. Cf. 1 Jn 4:16.

2. Jn 14:21, 23.

3. Cf. 1 Jn 1:3: “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

4. The keeping of the commandments for the love of Jesus is the condition required for all the wonders wrought in the soul of the just man (Jn 14:15; 15:14; 14:24). Cf. 1 Jn 5:3: “For this is the love of God: that we keep His commandments.”

5. Jn 14:15-17.

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The soul of the Christ, now a temple of the Holy Trinity, is in a manner made divine.¹ It does acts which are truly meritorious for life eternal. God the Father regards Christians as His children, He confers upon them the love which He has for His Son,² and answers the prayers made in His name.³ The glory of Jesus Christ is reflected upon them, and a day will come when they will be in heaven with Him.⁴ Meanwhile on earth the world will persecute them as it has persecuted Jesus Himself.⁵

Who could recount the mystical impulses arising in souls captured by divine love through meditation upon these teachings of Jesus Christ? And how readily do we understand as we read these sublime passages the singular attraction of the Gospel of St John for those who are devoted to the interior life! These inspired teachings give us a lofty idea of the dignity of the Christian, and make us realize how holy his life should be.

A disciple of Christ, who is “the light of the world,”⁶ the believer is a “child of light.”⁷ He will walk no more in the darkness of error and evil, but in the light of truth and virtue. He will not go back to his former low levels by living in a manner unworthy of his condition, which would mean flying from the light. “For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.”⁸

1. 2 Pet 1:4: “that you may become partakers of the divine nature.”

2. Jn 17:26; 16:27. Cf. 1 Jn 3:1: “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”

3. Jn 16:23-27.

4. Jn 17:24.

5. Jn 15:18-26; 16:1-4, 19-20.

6. Jn 7:12; 1:4-9; 9:5; 12:46.

7. Jn 12:35-36.

8. Jn 3:20-21.

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With the love of God the disciple of Christ will unite the love of his neighbor. The commandment to love another, “the new commandment,” was given by Jesus the night before He left His Apostles, and He puts it in the front rank. He reverts to it on many occasions. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”¹

“The love of one’s neighbor, as Jesus understands it, differs from that of the Jews not only in its breadth and intensity, but also in its nature; it is quite a different affection from any till then known by the world, a love arising from a supernatural principle, a mystical bond by which the souls of men are to be joined together to make one spiritual family; in a word, it is Christian charity. To love our neighbor in Christ and for Christ, such is the commandment of the New Law, such is the object of the ‘new commandment.’ Furthermore, charity is to be the characteristic and distinctive mark of the disciple of Jesus Christ.”² And it is the infinitely close union existing between the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity that is given by Jesus as the pattern and the bond of union between Christians: “Father . . . that they may be one even as We are one.”³

The teaching of Jesus as to the love of God and one’s neighbor is admirably commented on by St John himself, and Apostle of divine love, in his first Epistle.

He teaches that we ought to love God because He first loved us, and testified His love by giving up His Son to die for our salvation. This is the great motive for charity towards God. “God

1. Jn 13:34-35. Cf. 15:12, 17.

2. Calmes, *L'Évangile selon saint Jean*, p. 384.

3. Jn 17:22.

is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the expiation for our sins.”¹

The fruits of divine love are first of all the indwelling of God in our souls,² and next confidence, the most perfect of its kind, a child’s confidence that excludes all servile fear. “In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment. . . . There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us.”³

The sign whereby we may know whether we love God, if we have charity within us, is the keeping of His commandments, particularly the commandment to believe in Jesus and to love our brethren. “Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth. . . . And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as He has commanded us.⁴ . . . If any one says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.”⁵

No more beautiful pages have been written on the love of God and of our neighbor than those that came from the pen of St John. The beloved Apostle profited more than the other disciples through His divine Master’s love for him. Moreover, he shows

1. 1 Jn 4:8-10. Cf. Jn 3:16: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.”

2. 1 Jn 4:16. Cf 4:12-13.

3. 1 Jn 4:17-19. Cf. 3:12-13.

4. 1 Jn 3:18-23. Cf. 2:4-6.

5. 1 Jn 4:20. Cf. 2 Jn 1:6: “And this is love, that we follow his commandments; this is the commandment, as you have heard from the beginning, that you follow love.”

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greater acuteness in noting the loving sayings which form part of the Gospel message, and he reports them more fully. These words of love inspired his own life in an eminent degree, and he strongly urges the first Christians to live in their spirit, as his Epistles testify. St John is the personification of charity, and we can well understand how in his extreme old age he was never tired of repeating to the faithful of Ephesus: "My little children, love one another. This is the Lord's commandment: if you keep it, that is enough."¹

1. St Jerome, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, iii, 6.

III. The Teaching of Saint Paul

St Paul, in accordance with the teaching of Jesus, enforces the two great laws of the spiritual life: the mortification of evil propensities, the *abneget seipsum*, and a life in constant union with Jesus Christ, who is to be the rule of our thoughts, feelings, and actions, *et sequatur me*.

St John's Gospel declares the necessity of spiritual regeneration in Baptism in order to participate in the divine life with Jesus Christ, for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit."¹ St Paul draws forth this teaching of Christ, and from it deduces his entire notion of Christian life, in which the spirit is likewise opposed to the flesh.

Baptism regenerates man, transforms him, creates a new being within him, and incorporates him into Christ.² It makes him participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and grafts him into Christ, who died and rose again. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin."³

1. Jn 3:6.

2. 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10, 15, 22; Gal 6:15.

3. Rom 6:3-6.

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The baptismal waters in which the newly converted believer is completely immersed¹ in order to cleanse him from all defilement symbolize the death of Christ and the tomb in which He was buried. The neophyte emerging from the baptismal laver in which he has gathered a new life which he is never to lose, represents Christ coming forth from the grave, alive with a new and immortal life. The baptismal rite, effecting what it signifies, thus works in us a death unto sin, the crucifixion and destruction of the old man buried in the water as Christ was in the grave; it also works a new life, the new man regenerated in the likeness of the risen Christ.

Unlike the death of the body, death unto sin and incorporation into Christ may be more or less complete. For in the Christian there are two component and opposed parts, the flesh and the spirit; in him are, as it were, two men who fight one another as enemies, the old man and the new. With the help of grace the Christian has to make the spirit triumph over the flesh, the new man over the old. Salvation depends upon winning this victory. Christian life, and the degree of perfection attained by everyone, are measured by the increase of the spirit with regard to the flesh, of the new man as compared with the old.

Hence, to set forth the spiritual teaching of St Paul is: (1) to describe his conception of the flesh, the old man, and to show its opposition to the spirit, the new man; (2) to explain what constitutes the spirit, the new man; (3) to point out the ascetical and mystical consequences of the connections between the spirit, the new man, and the Holy Spirit and Jesus.

1. In the days of St Paul and in the early ages of the Church, Baptism was usually administered by immersion. The candidate for Baptism was plunged entirely in the water by him who administered the sacrament. It is the baptismal ceremony that suggests to St Paul his teaching as to the Christian life.

A. The Flesh and the Old Man—the Christian Combat

The flesh, so far as we are here concerned, “is (human) nature as it actually exists, vitiated by sin, infected by concupiscence.”¹ It means man in the state wherein he was left by original sin. The tainted flesh, or concupiscence, becomes in turn the source of personal sins. It is also a principle of death, in constant rebellion against the spirit, and the will by itself without grace is powerless to hold it in check. Listen to the groanings of St Paul in regard thereto: “For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”²

The “works of the flesh” are sin, and finally death eternal; “the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot.”³ The “fruits of the Spirit,” on the contrary, are “life and peace.”⁴ The Christian, regenerated in Christ by Baptism, ought not to live any more according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit, otherwise he will not inherit the kingdom of God. “Brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the

1. Prat, *La theologie de S Paul*, 107.

2. Rom 7:18-24. Cf. Gal 5:17.

3. Rom 8:7.

4. Gal 5:21; Rom 8:6.

body you will live.”¹ “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”²

The work of the Christian consists in the constant mortification of the flesh in order to give life to the spirit, in stripping himself more and more completely of the old man which was “crucified” with Christ in Baptism in order to put on the new man. You have been taught, writes St Paul to the Ephesians, “to put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”³ The evil tendencies of our fallen nature, although destroyed indeed in principle in Baptism, are incessantly springing up afresh. St Paul on every page of his Epistles recommends Christians to check them and to make it impossible for them to do any harm.⁴ He says of himself: “I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”⁵

The flesh is opposed to the spirit, the old man to the new; and the Christian has to secure the victory of the spirit over the flesh, of the new man over the old. Thus the state of the disciple of Jesus Christ is that of a fighter.

And indeed to St Paul the Christian life is a combat. “I have fought the good fight,”⁶ he said at the end of his life. He exhorts his friend Timothy to fight in the same way “the good fight of

1. Rom 8:12-13.

2. Eph 5:24-25.

3. Eph 4:22-24. Cf. Col 3:9-10.

4. Rom 8:13; Gal 5:24. Col 3:5; 2 Cor 4:10.

5. 1 Cor 9:27.

6. 2 Tim 4:7.

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faith,” and to “take hold of the eternal life.”¹ Our Savior Himself declares that the kingdom of heaven must be taken with violence, and that “men of violence” bear it away.²

In his first Epistle to the Corinthians St Paul compares the Christian to an athlete in the public games,³ to the wrestler, so popular with the Greeks, who strives for a “perishable wreath,” and does not shrink from submitting to strict training to give his body the necessary strength and suppleness. We who strive for an “imperishable wreath” must therefore not fear to be hard upon our bodies to make sure of victory.

Nor have we to strive against ourselves only, but also against the devil, the great tempter who continues to seduce men⁴ as he seduced Eve by his cunning.⁵ St Paul puts Christians on their guard against Satan and his tools, and taking a suggestion from the equipment of the Roman soldier, gives a striking image to describe the spiritual arms which must be used in the fight. “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of

1. 1 Tim 6:12.

2. Mt 11:12.

3. 1 Cor 9:25.

4. 1 Thess 3:5.

5. 2 Cor 11:3.

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the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”¹

Another enemy conspires along with the devil against the Christian, and this is the world, or the mass of men whose spirit is opposed to the Spirit of God,² which is inspired with a spirit of disobedience and lives according to the lusts of the flesh.³ The Apostle St John, too, declares that “all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.”⁴ Upon this passage is based the doctrine of threefold concupiscence, which holds such a fundamental place in spirituality.

Therefore the Christ must “not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him.”⁵ The Christian’s motto must be that of St Paul: “The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”⁶

In his desperate and perpetual struggle with the enemies of his salvation the Christian must possess confidence. He will meet with no temptation “not common to man”⁷ to bear when his strength is sustained by grace. St Paul reminds the Corinthians of this to encourage them in the fight, and to urge them to put up a victorious resistance against the seductions of evil. “God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”⁸

1. Eph 6:11-17. St Peter gave similar advice to the faithful: “Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith.” (1 Pt 5:8-9).

2. 1 Cor 2:12.

3. Eph 2:1-3.

4. 1 Jn 2:16.

5. 1 Jn 2:15.

6. Gal 6:14.

7. 1 Cor 10:13.

8. Ibid.

This quotation from St Paul sheds a ray of consolation upon the mystery of temptation. However great may be his fury against us, the tempter can only touch us so far as God allows. And if we are faithful in “pray constantly”¹ we shall be strong enough to repel all assaults.

The fight with the devil and the world and the mortification of the flesh will be carried all the farther the more intense the Christian life and the greater the desire for perfection. There is the mortification that is strictly necessary to avoid sins which prevent our “inheriting the kingdom of God.”² There is also the mortification which is able to renounce what is lawful, a mortification put into practice by those who are enamored of an ideal of sanctity above the common. To such as these St Paul commends virginity. “Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy. I think that in view of the present distress it is well for a person to remain as he is.”³

Marriage is good and lawful; nevertheless virginity is better. It enables one to belong to God without division and to give oneself to lengthened prayer. “The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband.”⁴

1. 1 Thess 5:17.

2. Gal 5:21.

3. 1 Cor 7:25-26.

4. 1 Cor 7:32-34.

St Paul gives a definite interpretation of the mind of Jesus Christ as to virginity, and throws into strong relief the excellence of that state. The author of the Apocalypse, too, exalts virginity. He sees the Lamb of God in heaven surrounded by virgins who follow Him wherever He goes; and there he also hears the new canticle which none but virgins can sing.¹

This apostolic teaching on the subject of virginity wins immense favor in all the ages that come after, and determines a great number of Christians to embrace the state of celibacy, in which the victory of the spirit over the flesh is singularly striking.

B. The Spirit, the New Man—Their Relationship to the Holy Spirit and to Jesus Christ.

The spirit which rises in the Christian out of the ruins of the flesh and the old man, is, according to St Paul, man regenerated and restored by the grace of Baptism. “The old man and the new are two consecutive states of the same person, first given over to the influences of sin of which Adam is the origin, and then to the state of grace of which Jesus Christ is the dispenser. . . . The new man is the same in meaning as the spirit, and the old man corresponds with the flesh.² . . . The spirit and the flesh, in the moral sense which is characteristic of the theology of St Paul, comprise the whole man from different points of view: the spirit stands for man under the influence of the Holy Spirit; the flesh stands for man without the Holy Spirit.”³

1. Apoc 14:1-5: “And they sing a new song. . . . No one could learn that song except . . . these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are chaste; it is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.”

2. Prat, *La theologie de S Paul*, II.

3. Ibid.

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This idea of the spirit, the new man, according to St Paul, will be further defined by a study of the relations which unite the Christian regenerated in Baptism to the Holy Spirit and to Jesus Christ. It is here that we shall discover all the wealth and beauty of the spiritual doctrine of the great Apostle.

Man in Baptism is incorporated into Christ; he becomes a member of His mystical body, which is the Church. Now, the Holy Spirit, according to St Paul, is to the Church what the soul is to a man's body.¹ He is present in her, quickens her, and makes her bring forth supernatural fruits. The Holy Spirit is likewise the soul of our souls. He dwells in us and sanctifies us, and makes us act in a supernatural manner with a view to eternal life.

St John teaches us that the Holy Spirit abides in the souls of the just along with the Father and the Son. St Paul similarly declares that the believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that therefore the Christian must keep himself in the greatest purity. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own? Shun immorality."²

The Holy Spirit takes possession of our souls, He moves them, He guides them and helps them to overcome the temptations of the flesh. He it is, too, who bears witness to us of our sonship by adoption, and makes us call God our Father with confidence: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did

1. 1 Cor 12:13.

2. 1 Cor 6:19, 18. Cf. 3:16: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" The three divine Persons dwell in the Christian (2 Cor 6:16; 1 Cor 3:17), but St Paul attributes the work of our sanctification to the action of the Holy Spirit within us.

not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”¹

Again, it is the Holy Spirit who teaches us to pray. “For we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.”² And these prayers, being always in conformity with what it behooves us to ask, are accepted by God.

Thus the divine Guest within us is not inactive. He constantly prompts us to do good and to the practice of Christian virtues. “His action includes all Christians and all manifestations of the supernatural life, from baptismal regeneration to eternal happiness. To obey the promptings of grace is commonly called ‘walking according to the Spirit, being led by the Spirit’;³ the sum-total of virtue is the ‘fruit of the Spirit’;⁴ all that raises us above our carnal nature . . . all that surrounds us with a divine atmosphere, all that transforms us into ‘spiritual’ beings, according to a favorite expression of St Paul, receives the general name of ‘spirit,’⁵ thus alluding to the source from which it springs.”⁶

We are called upon not to resist the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and not to “grieve” Him.⁷

If the Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church, Jesus Christ is the Church’s head. The quickening activity of the head,

1. Rom 8.13.16. Cf. 8.9-11; 2 Tim 1.14.

2. Rom 8.26.

3. Rom 8.4, 14.

4. Gal 5.22.

5. 1 Cor 14.14-16; 2 Cor 4.13; Gal 6.1; etc.

6. Prat, *ibid.*

7. Eph 4.30: “Do not grieve at the Holy Spirit of God.”

according to St Paul, is not inferior to that of the soul, and Christ, just as the Holy Spirit does, sanctifies the Church and each of her individual members.

Baptism effects a very close union between Jesus and the Christian, a union compared by St Paul to that between the head¹ and the members in a man's body; compared also to the graft which inwardly mingles two lives, that of the stem with that of the branch grafted into it.² St John, too, likened this union to that of the vine with its branches. Thus are Christ and ourselves "animated with the same vital principle," and "subject to the same principle of action." We have "put on Christ,"³ we are "rooted and built up in Him,"⁴ as St Paul says, and we live with the same life as He does.

This common life assimilates the Christian to Jesus; it makes of him, in truth, another Christ. All that takes place in Jesus is reproduced in the believer, just as in the human body the head reacts upon the members, and as in the graft the closest solidarity exists between the branch and the stock into which it is grafted.

This union that binds us to Jesus is such that the mysteries of our Savior's life are spiritually reproduced in us, and especially the mysteries of His death and resurrection and ascension.

Baptism baptizes us into the death of Christ to make us die unto sin.⁵

Jesus took upon His mortal and innocent flesh all the sins of men. He put to death upon the cross that flesh "in the likeness of sinful flesh,"⁶ and buried it in the grave to destroy sin together

1. Col 1:18; Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col 2:10, 18; 1 Cor 12:12.

2. Rom 6:5; 11:17-24.

3. Gal 3:27; Eph 4:24; Rom 13:14.

4. Col 2:7.

5. Rom 6:2-3.

6. Rom 8:3.

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with it. “The sinless flesh of our Savior, in the likeness of sinful flesh, was delivered into the hands of the tormentors to deal with at their will. They smote it, and their blows fell upon sin; they crucified it, and sin was crucified; they took away its life, and sin was slain.”¹ The risen Christ stripped Himself of His mortal flesh, the symbol of sin and of the old man, on which hung all the sins of mankind; He put on a glorious body, and He lives with a new life. Thus it is that, according to St Paul, “the death He died he died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God.”²

We, too, must look upon ourselves, like our Savior, as “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”³ A mystical death, like the bloody death of the Crucified Jesus, is supernaturally wrought in us in the regeneration of Baptism. It has destroyed sin in us. Our sinful flesh, the old man, has vanished in the waters of Baptism in which they are “buried with him.”⁴ If sin, as well as the old man, which is the cause of sin in us, is crucified and destroyed with the mortal flesh of Jesus, we then must be dead unto sin. Therefore we are no longer “slaves of sin”; by our spiritual death in Christ we are “freed” from sin.⁵

According to the teaching of St Paul, true conversion is a death. It is a participation in the death of Jesus by the destruction of our old man and our passions which are kept under. Bossuet eloquently interprets these thoughts in his Easter Sermons on the Christian Life. When the Apostle declares that our old man and our flesh with its lusts have been “crucified,” he does not mean to use a mere metaphor. He intends his words to express realities: our sinful flesh has been really put to death in us in Baptism by our incorporate in Christ crucified.

1. Bossuet, *Sermon pour le Samedi-Saint*.
2. Rom 6:10.
3. Rom 6:11.
4. Col 2:12.
5. Rom 6:7.

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This participation in the death of Jesus, begun in Baptism, is continued in the Eucharist. The Christian who partakes of the eucharistic bread and drinks the cup of the new covenant communicates in the sacrifice of the cross, for the celebration of the Eucharist is a mystical “sacramental” reiteration of the immolation of Jesus on Calvary.¹ The communion of the body and blood of Christ is also the great means of participating in His redeeming death and of putting to death our evil tendencies.

But this death to our corrupt inclinations is not solely the effect of the grace of the sacraments; it is also, as we know, the result of our efforts. St Paul constantly exhorts us to bear in our bodies the likeness of Christ crucified, and to “put to death therefore what is earthly in you.”² The old man is destroyed in principle, in right, by our incorporation into Christ crucified. It remains for us to destroy it in fact. Hence come Christian mortification and the austerities of penance and the strictness of asceticism, which find in the spirituality of St Paul their full justification.

“**B**uried with Him in baptism,” in it, too, we are “raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”³ Baptism effects, indeed, in our spiritual nature a mystical resurrection, which is a participation in the resurrection of Jesus. The old man destroyed in the waters of Baptism is followed, and the correlation is inevitable, by the regenerated new man. The Christian is thus “a new creation,”⁴ “walking in newness of life”⁵ in the likeness of the risen Christ.

The believer spiritually and mystically risen with Jesus must try to make his life conform with the life of the risen Savior. But

1. 1 Cor 10:14-21; 9:24.-26.
2. 2 Cor 4:10; Col 3:5.
3. Col 2:12.
4. Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17.
5. Rom 6:4.

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Christ once risen dies no more; and the Christian born to the life of grace must no more do evil. To die to the divine life by relapsing into sin after being incorporated into the risen and immortal Jesus is to fall into a state contrary to one's nature. Moreover, it is to compel the Savior, who is Himself living, to support dead members in His mystical body: "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. The death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions."¹

This theme of moral exhortation constantly recurs in the writings of the Apostle² in order to forewarn the faithful against backsliding. Far from relapsing into evil, the Christian must try to "put on" more and more entirely "the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness,"³ so as to be like the risen Christ.

We can see the effect of this beautiful doctrine upon the life of the Christian. The obligation to continue in well-doing is laid strictly upon him who has received the life of grace in Baptism, or who are recovered it by means of penance.

Risen with Jesus, the Christian is also caught up to heaven with Him. After His resurrection Christ ascended into heaven; we who are "grafted" into Him, "rooted" in Him, are therefore spiritually with Him in the heavenly home. If we listen to St Paul,

1. Rom 6:8-12.

2. 2 Cor 5:14-15: "The love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that One has died for all; therefore all have died. And He died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised."

3. Eph 4:24; Col 3:10.

we are already in heaven seated by the side of Jesus. “But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”¹

If the Christian is in heaven in mind and heart with Christ, his life will be entirely celestial. He will try to set his affections “on things that are above, not on things that are on earth,” and “to seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”² For the believer is dead to the things of this world. He real life is in heaven, “hidden with Christ in God.” A day will come when this life will appear in heavenly glory.³ “Our commonwealth is in heaven.”⁴ Let us then live as citizens of the heavenly city, as “children of light” who have altogether left behind “the works of darkness,”⁵ as the Apostle says, following in the steps of St John. “For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).”⁶

God makes Christians “conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the first-born among many brethren.”⁷ The faithful are incorporated into Christ; they are in a way identified with Him; God loves them with the same love as that

1. Eph 2:4-7.

2. Col 3:1-2.

3. Col 3:3-4.

4. Phil 3:20.

5. Rom 13:12.

6. Eph 5:8-9. Cf. 5:5; Rom 13:12. This comparison of conversion to light led to Baptism being called “illumination” in the early Church, and the baptized were called “illuminati.”

7. Rom 8:29.

which He loves His Son, and makes them partake of His glorious destiny. He sees in them the “heirs” of His Son and “fellow heirs” who are to be “glorified with Him.”¹ In a word, Christians are “children of God”² made like unto Jesus.

The mysterious bond which unites the Christian so closely with Christ uplifts the confidence of St Paul. It leads the Apostle to reckon as of small account “the sufferings of this present time” as compared “with the glory that is to be revealed to us,”³ which is laid up for the friends of the Savior. It gives him the assurance “that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.”⁴ Lastly, it affords him the firm conviction that nothing whatever can separate the faithful from the love that Christ and God bear toward them. Listen to the following cry of enthusiasm that breaks forth from the soul of St Paul: “Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁵

1. Ibid., 8.17.

2. Ibid., 8.16.

3. Ibid., 8.18.

4. Ibid., 8.28.

5. Ibid., 8.35, 38-39.

C. The Ascetical and Mystical Consequences of the Relationship between the New Man and the Holy Spirit and Christ: the Imitation of Christ; St Paul an “Imitator of Christ”¹—Christian Virtues

We have tried to sum up in what is, unfortunately, a very imperfect sketch, St Paul’s wonderful teaching as to the new man within us. We have surveyed with admiration the marvels of our incorporation into Christ and our supernatural quickening by the Holy Spirit. It is above all the “ontological” side of our sanctification, God’s part in the work of our salvation, which has been brought out. But the Apostle also strongly insists upon — and we have often noted it — the “psychological” aspect of holiness; that is to say, on the efforts we must make to realize it within us.

Christian life is the result of twofold co-operation: that of God, who makes us conformable to the image of His Son; and our own, whereby we reproduce that image within us. Regarded from our own side, as to the part which is left to our personal efforts, the work of our sanctification—St Paul constantly reminds us of it—comes back to the imitation of Jesus. If the Christian is incorporated into the Savior by divine grace, it is his duty to make his life conform with Christ’s and to imitate Him. The members who make up the mystical body of Christ would be unfaithful to their calling if they did not reproduce the likeness of their Head as perfectly as possible within themselves.

Let us then dwell upon this teaching of St Paul, since it is only the corollary of his conception of the Christian life.

The believer will labor above all to appropriate to himself the inward dispositions of Jesus, following the advice of the Apostle:

1. 1 Cor 11:1; 4:10.

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”¹ Outward actions are but the outward translation and manifestation of the dispositions of the soul. If we think as Jesus thought, we shall act as He acted. Therefore it is essential for us to make our thoughts and inmost feelings of humility which led Him, “though He was in the form of God,” to “take the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men,” and with the obedient mind which made Him “become obedient unto death, even to death on the cross.”²

The Christian will study Christ in the various circumstances of His life, to find out the dispositions with which He was animated and to appropriate them. His thoughts and acts will thus become like Christ’s, who will truly be his “life” as the Apostle desires.³

Our efforts to be in conformity with Christ and to imitate Him tend, as the Apostle says, to make us “put on” Christ and to “form” Him within us.⁴ This fashioning of Christ within us takes place by degrees in so far as we co-operate with the work of grace. Its various steps constitute, according to St Paul, the very degrees of perfection, and correspond with the different ages of Christ. Jesus is once more a child in the newly converted one who is a *beginner*. Then He grows up in proportion to the believer’s growth in virtue. He who is *perfect* has attained to “mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”⁵ But the life of Jesus within us may go on increasing

1. Phil 2:5.

2. Phil 2:6-8.

3. Col 3:4: “Christ who is our life.” Eph 3:17: “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”

4. Gal 4:19: “My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!”

5. Eph 4:13.

indefinitely, and just as our Savior never tires of infusing His grace into us, so ought we to continue unceasingly “speaking the truth in love,” for “we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ.”¹ . . . Our supreme desire, the goal of all our efforts, is indeed to become morally identified with Jesus.

Very completely was the great Apostle identified with Jesus when he said: “To me, to live is Christ.”² These words are inscribed upon St Paul’s tomb in Rome as the epitome of his whole life and the true expression of his soul. Christ and St Paul were really only one: it was no more Paul who lived, but Christ who was living in him.³ St Paul’s thoughts were those of Jesus, his feelings were those of His divine Master; he spoke and acted as Christ did, and he could write in all truth to the Corinthians: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”⁴

The strong and almost astonishing expressions used by St Paul to signify his union with Jesus call to mind the mystical union with which many of the saints were favored. Paul is, in fact, a great mystic, to use the word in the classical signification attached to it by St Teresa, St John of the Cross, and Catholic theologians. In his Epistles, he gives us, as it were, a mystical autobiography, which has been compared with the chapters dealing with the Prayer of Union in the *Autobiography of St Teresa*.

The characteristic of mystical union, that supernatural state “which we cannot bring about of ourselves, despite all our

1. Eph 4:15. Cf. 5:1-2.

2. Phil 1:21.

3. Gal 2:20. It was the moral Ego of St Paul that was swallowed up in Christ. The physical Ego, the Apostle’s personality, had not disappeared. Whatever heights of sanctity may be attained by the Christian, he always remains a human personality.

4. 1 Cor 11:1. Cf. 4:16.

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efforts,”¹ is to experience the feeling of the presence of God in the soul. These states are intermittent, and they alternate with periods of interior desolation and darkness. From time to time God floods the soul of the mystic in a sensible manner, and makes His presence felt by inundating it with happiness: “Sometimes in the midst of a reading,” writes St Teresa, “I was suddenly gripped with a sense of the presence of God. It was absolutely impossible for me to be in any doubt but that He was within me and that I was lost in Him.² . . . I thought that I felt the presence of God, and this was true: and I tried to keep myself in a recollected state with Him.”³

St Paul must have plainly felt Christ present and living in his own soul when he cried out: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me.”⁴

“I have been crucified with Christ”; Paul is thus not merely in the manner of ordinary Christians who are united with the crucified Christ by curbing their passions and by the acceptance of suffering. He is so far more by a close communion with the Passion of Christ after the manner of St Francis of Assisi: “Far be it from me to glory,” he says, “except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁵ St Paul preeminently belongs to that group of saints which has a special “devotion” to the Passion of Christ. When he thinks of Him who “died for all” the love of the Apostle

1. St Teresa, *Chemin de la perfection*, ch. 33.

2. *Vie écrite par elle-meme*, ch. 10.

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

4. Gal 2:20. For St Paul's sufferings see 2 Cor 11:23-33.

5. Gal 6:14. In verse 17 St Paul alludes to the “marks” of the Lord Jesus “in my body.” But he is not speaking of such stigmata as St Francis of Assisi bore, but of the scars which he had received for Christ's sake.

is fired, and he becomes eager to live entirely and to die “for Him who for their sake died and was raised” for us.¹

St Paul’s love for Christ became so perfect, ardent, and strong that it expressed itself in an intense desire to die and go to the Savior to enjoy Him in heaven. “My desire is to depart and be with Christ,” he wrote to the Philippians.² Nothing but the need of souls for him could mitigate the bitter separation.

Nowhere shall we find more burning words in the writings of the greatest of the mystics who are to be met with in the history of spirituality. And to complete St Paul’s likeness to the mystics there are the extraordinary gifts, visions, raptures, and ecstasies with which he was favored. In addition to the miraculous manifestation of Jesus on the road to Damascus,³ there were in the Apostle’s life other supernatural phenomena. Of these we should be entirely ignorant had not St Paul been constrained to reveal them in order to defend himself from attacks upon his reputation at Corinth by judaizing Christians. It is only with excuses and in spite of himself that he sets forth his claims to glory: “I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.”⁴

1. 2 Cor 5:14-15. Cf. Rom 14:8.

2. Phil. 1:23.

3. Acts 9:1-19.

4. 2 Cor 12:1-4. We do not know what these visions were.

St Paul's Epistles nearly always end in exhortation to the practice of Christian virtues. Indeed, commentators divide almost all of them into two parts: dogmatic and moral. In the moral portion we find what are brief tracts on Christian virtues, true storehouses for spiritual writers, and here it will be enough to give a few extracts from them.

St Paul's moral exhortations are derived from his fundamental doctrine of the incorporation of the believer in Christ. Those who have put on Christ must live like Him, "put off the old nature with its practices and . . . put on the new nature. . . . Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, or bearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another.¹ . . . I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called."²

To the newly converted who are obliged to live in the midst of paganism the Apostle urgently commends purity of life.³ To all he preaches humility,⁴ obedience to superiors,⁵ submission to the civil authorities,⁶ prudence,⁷ the duty of almsgiving,⁸ the practice of domestic virtues, and the necessity of prayer. In the pastoral Epistles⁹ the Apostle gives pastors of souls a real code of sacerdotal holiness.

1. Col 3:9-10, 12-13. Cf. 1 Thess 4:1-11; Gal 5:23.

2. Eph 4:1.

3. Rom 13:11-14; Eph 4:17-30; 5:3-4; Phil 3:18-19; Gal 5:16,25.

4. Phil 2:3-11; Eph 4:2; Rom 12:16; Gal 6:3-5. Cf. St Peter: "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you" (1 Pet 5:5-6.).

5. 1 Thess 5:12-13.

6. Rom 12:1-7; Titus 3:1.

7. Col 4:5-6.

8. 2 Cor 8:1-9; 15.

9. The Epistles to Timothy and Titus

But, above all, fraternal charity and reciprocal honor and help are recommended with the greatest frequency by St Paul. One may say that he reverts to it in one way or another in all his Epistles.

Christians are members of one body of which Jesus is the Head. A close solidarity knits them to one another, however different their circumstances may be, just as in the human body in which members with different functions depend upon one another.¹ The inference is that we should love and help one another.

In these moving words does the Apostle invite us thus to act. "Love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. . . . Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. . . . Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, '*Vengeance is mine, I will repay*, says the Lord.' No, '*if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink*.'² . . . Then let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.³ . . . Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him.⁴ . . . Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."⁵

St Paul attaches such importance to the precept of fraternal charity that he regards it as the summing up of the whole law of God, the commandment which replaces all the rest and ensure the perfect keeping of them. "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, '*You shall not commit adultery, You shall not*

1. Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-27.
2. Rom 12:10-20.
3. Rom 14:13.
4. Rom 15:2.
5. Gal 6:2. Cf. 1 Thess 5:14-22.

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kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet, and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, *‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’* Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”¹

What St Paul wrote on the subject of fraternal charity constitutes some of the finest portions of his Epistles. It springs from a large heart, affectionate by nature and transformed by grace. The heart of St Paul was “enlarged”² to take in the faithful of all the churches; ingratitude and persecution could do nothing to contradict it. St Paul’s heart was indeed the heart of Christ, as St John Chrysostom remarks.³ “Although loving you more, I be loved less,” says he. “I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls.”⁴

And this fair virtue of charity which he practiced to such perfection he not only preached, but celebrated its excellence in the following lyrical strain: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never

1. Rom 12:8-10. Cf. Gal 5:14: “All the law is fulfilled in one word: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

2. 2 Cor 6:11-13: “Our mouth is open to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return—I speak as to children—widen your hearts also.”

3. In *Ep. ad Romanos*, Homil. 32.3.

4. 2 Cor 12:15. Cf. 1 Thess 2:1-10; 2 Cor 6:1-10.

ends. . . . So faith,¹ hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."²

Mortification to the point of renouncing more or less thoroughly even lawful things, following Jesus under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, union with Him by love, making Him living within us and the imitation of Him by the practice of Christian virtue in such wise as to copy Him faithfully therein: this is the ascetical teaching of the Scriptures, this is its conception of Christian perfection.

1. Cf. Rom 10.17; Gal 5.6; 2 Cor 5.7; Heb 11; Jam 2.

2. 1 Cor 13.1-8, 13.

