

Table of Contents

- I. [On Prayer](#)
- II. [Prayer and Meditation](#)
- III. [On Reverence at Prayer](#)
- IV. [Prologue](#)
- V. [On Pursuing Peace](#)
- VI. [On Religious Modesty](#)
- VII. [How We Are Remade](#)
- VIII. [On Repentance](#)
- IX. [Second Chance](#)
- X. [St. Bernard on Self-Knowledge](#)
- XI. [On Self-Renunciation](#)
- XII. [On Superior Ad Nutum](#)
- XIII. [On The Tools For Good Works](#)
- XIV. [Trust in the Lord/in His Holy Name](#)
- XV. [Vocation](#)
- XVI. [On Vocational Discernment](#)

On Prayer

-Prayer is the expression of the relationship of each one of us with God, so the structure of our prayer will be different for other people. It is the fundamental activity of us Christians; to be in the image of God means to communicate with Him.

-It is helpful to know that the monastic Fathers were convinced that prayer is natural to us, like breathing, if we only discover it in ourselves. Prayer shapes us and transforms us. It centers us in God and at the same time in ourselves. It is always changing, as we are always becoming new in God.

Varieties in Prayer [for God reveals himself to each person according to that person's needs]

- a) The [monastic] early monks used the Psalms very heavily in prayer. Past that point, some were wordy and some were silent.
- b) Some describe prayer as warfare or as a very hard work.
- c) Still many others take the command to pray without ceasing so seriously that they devise ways of praying so that prayer becomes integrated into the breath and the heartbeat.
- d) Others fulfill the command to pray without ceasing by giving away their meager earnings to the needy with the expectation that those who receive their charity will pray for them.

-Prayer, no matter how private, is always also the prayer of the Church, and the gift of God.

-The Psalms belong to the great prayers of the Church, and when we pray them they are as truly our prayers as those we speak in our own words from our hearts. They are the prayers of the body of Christ, of which we are a very real part.

St. Benedict's Approach to Prayer

-St. Benedict, along with most of the monastic masters of prayer, tends to speak more about the quality of daily life than about performance during periods of prayer. The general presupposition seems to be that prayer comes readily & unselfconsciously to the one who does his best to implement the teachings of the Gospel in concrete behavior.

-The monk seeks God, not "experiences"; he lives in the luminous twilight of faith & is content with the unpredictability of Divine Providence. Prayer, for St.

Benedict, is not an end sought in itself, but a dimension of a life progressively lived for God.

A Life Characterized by Prayerfulness

-We monks live a life of disciplined fidelity to our divine calling. Progress in this kind of life is signaled by a growing awareness of the will of God in every situation and by a willingness to respond to it. In the course of our lifetime, if we are willing to submit ourselves to the divine pedagogy, we will become a living prayer.

-Our prayer will show us what condition we are in. Theologians say that prayer is the monks mirror (St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*). In the monastic tradition, prayer is not an activity which exists in competition with other activities so that growth in prayer is facilitated by withdrawal from other works.

-The unity of prayer and life means that any attempt to upgrade the experience of prayer without simultaneously attending to lived values is liable to result in distortion.

-A monk who is dissatisfied with his prayer needs to make use of that feeling to motivate himself to greater fidelity to grace rather than to attempt to alleviate his pain by techniques for altering consciousness. To banish contrition, compunction & fear of the Lord by such opiates is not spiritual progress but the concession of defeat.

-Monastic tradition & ordinary common sense remind us that any stage of growth is heralded by initial negative experience. Growing into something new necessarily involves growing out of what is familiar, and that is always hard.

Structure of Prayerful Living

-St. Benedict is aware that the memory of God will be eroded during the day unless it is specifically cultivated on a fairly regular basis. Far from asserting that "work is prayer," St. Benedict realize that the prayerfulness of work is largely dependent on the monks continual re-focusing of his life on God.

-For Benedictines, the liturgy is not a service to be performed at fixed hours and then forgotten, but a framework around which a life of sustained prayerfulness is built.

-The experience of many ordinary monks confirms that the most potent factor in assuring a prayerful liturgy is the quality of responsiveness to grace in daily life. So

what we do outside our liturgical prayers plays an important in the quality of our participation in the liturgy.

-The ability to derive prayer from the Word of God is ordinary indication of cooperation with grace at other times. We nourish ourselves daily with the Scriptures to strengthen our souls. Our internalization of the Scriptures is the bond which unites our life and our prayer.

Prayer of the Heart

-Monastic spirituality is, in fact, a spirituality of the heart; it is entirely directed to helping us discover our own inner source of spiritual vitality and living in substantial accord with it.

-Precipitate & unreflective self-expression is far more likely to be responsive to the urgings of instinct than to the promptings of the Spirit. A short prayer from Scripture, or perhaps a small selection of such texts, may serve as sufficient for sustained prayerfulness.

-The whole purpose of our rejecting secular behavior is the building up of a pre-disposition to act freely and from grace. Monastic tradition knows by experience that a prayerful existence is possible only for one who has found his heart, and to the extent that this discovery proceeds, prayer comes easily, though variously, throughout the day.

-A prayerful existence is the result of the monk's living from the heart. Prayer, for St. Benedict, is movement away from outward occupation and a responsiveness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit leading the heart to God. Such responsiveness is not initiated during prayer but is begun and consolidated by the effort to live a life based on Gospel priorities. It becomes more apparent in prayer when there is nothing to offset it.

The Quality of Monastic Prayer

-One practice which can greatly favor perseverance in prayer is to make a regular review of our attitudes and actions in this area, to verify whether our attempts to pray really correspond to our spiritual needs at this particular season of our life.

-Part of such a review must include an attempt to diagnose the state of our soul. We can do this through introspection (the act of looking within our own mind, self-analysis) or through dialogue with one who knows us well.

Regularity

-One of the fundamental questions which most of us face is whether we pray. Time for prayer is not given us on a plate: we have to find the time or make the time. There is always a range of alternatives. Even if we succeed in allocating a period for prayer, we may find that we have expended a disproportionate amount of effort simply getting started. The energies we could have used in quieting our minds and opening our hearts to God are sometimes squandered in organizing our chaotic lives.

-This is one difficulty that was less rampant in ancient monasticism where prayer was built into the way of life. It was not a question of finding time for prayer but of making good use of the time already made available for this purpose. Drowsiness and distractions were always possible-especially if a monk's heart was elsewhere-but, in general, with good will it was possible to pray with a minimum of worry.

-Perhaps we can learn from these ancient monks the importance of so incorporating prayer into our ordinary lifestyle that, without very much thought or effort, the practice of prayer becomes a constant element in our daily program.

-It is such unselfconscious perseverance which gives prayer depth and even grace of facility. Contemplation is possible only after years of fidelity when our soul not only lives for Christ but has done so for a long time. It is the ordinariness of prayer which gives access to its most profound mysteries.

-One writer said that the only way to pray is to pray; and the way to pray well is to pray much. If one has no time for this, then one must at least pray regularly. But the less one prays, the worse it goes.

-It may be that regularity is not considered exciting today, but it remains an important feature of growth in prayerfulness.

-The quality of prayer improves when it forms an integral element in a personal lifestyle.

-Regularity in prayer is related to a willingness to give our life what Hans Urs von Balthasar terms "form." If we are genuinely serious about prayer, we cannot avoid incorporating this priority in our manner of using time, so that our days and weeks are designed to lead to freedom and facility in prayer.

-Hans Urs von Balthasar said: "What is a person without the form that shapes him, the form that surrounds him inexorably like a coat of armor and which

nonetheless is the very thing that bestows suppleness on him and which make him free of all uncertainty and all paralyzing fears, free for himself and his highest possibilities? What is a person without this? What is a person without a life-form, that is to say, without a form which he has chosen for his life, a form into which and through which to pour out his life, so that his life becomes the soul of the form and the form becomes the expression of his soul?" (*The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, pp.23-24)

-Because prayer was an integral element in ancient monastic *conversatio*, in opting for the monastic life we opted for a life in which prayer had a guaranteed priority. The question was no longer whether to pray, but how best to make use of the opportunities provided.

-Today, even in monasteries, the position of prayer is less secure. Communities are not so regimented: monks can escape from prayer if they are so inclined. Even attendance at the Liturgy of the Hours can be sporadic. Very few would interpret strictly St. Benedict's injunction that "*Nothing* is to be preferred to the works of God." As a result, it is left to the individual monk to inject more prayer into a minimal structure. Those who do, profit from having used their freedom well. Those who fail to do so, through some form of inattention, find that the quality of their monastic life is declining faster than they would wish and without their being fully aware of the factors involved.

-Our prayer will prosper if we can guarantee easy access to it in the course of our daily life. Our measure must be our own spiritual state at this time. It is not always a matter of constantly increasing the amount of prayer. What is of primary importance is that daily life corresponds to our inner ideals as far as possible. To the extent that we feel ourselves called to contemplation, our own integrity obliges us to incorporate the practice of prayer in the rhythms of daily living.

-Even in the strictest monasteries monks can find plenty of diversions if their interest in prayer wanes. To pray well we need a lifestyle which not only allocates time for prayer but which also governs other times wisely. On the contrary, if our values direct us toward a lot of unnecessary chatter and excitement, then prayer will be so much more difficult.

-If our prayer is genuine then, progressively, it will demand some changes in our lifestyle.

Received

-A surer approach is to embrace a way that is already producing the desired results. In general we become spiritual by becoming part of an existing spiritual tradition.

-Monasticism did not invent prayer, nor did it set itself to formulate a specific approach to it. It received as part of a tradition of God-consciousness, the origins of which trace back more than a thousand years before the Christian era. Monastic prayer is not pure emanation from human subjectivity; it is a practice imbedded in history. It owes its essential features to a culture which evolved from the Old to the New Testament and beyond. The monks tried to pray as their ancestors had before them.

-Monastic prayer and behavioral context known to nurture it are products of a developing tradition of experience. What seems to have happened is that the ancient monk's instinct to seek God led them to spend more time in the presence of God's word: reading, reflecting, responding, so that progressively their lives began to be *formed* by the scriptures, particularly by the Psalms and the Gospels. Through a growing familiarity with the biblical texts, they found models for the prayer emerging in their own spirit: lamentation, praise, confidence, thanksgiving. The scripture were seen as a mirror of what was happening in the soul, the texts became vehicles for expressing and reinforcing a deep desire for God.

-St. Athanasius in his letter to Marcellinus said: "It seems to me that these words become like a mirror to the person singing them, so that he might perceive himself and the emotions of his soul and, thus affected, he might recite them. For in fact he who hears the one reading, receives the song as being about him...."

-Prayer is already, as it were, prefabricated in the scriptures. The act of prayer is simply a matter of making our own those forms which have been preserved by tradition precisely because of their suitability for triggering a prayerful response.

-In one sense this ancient format of prayer is both medium and message. The very content of prayer is receptivity, responsiveness, submission.

-The ancient monks did not consciously set out to give their prayer this attitude of receptivity. By the very fact of their being open to the scriptures, they were led to an ever-deeper experience of prayer. They were not so busy trying to pray well that the project of prayer was given a priority over docility to the Holy Spirit. As receptivity, prayer is the opposite of self-programming.

-The spirit of willingness to be formed in a tradition meant that monastic prayer was in radical continuity with the sort of prayer inculcated by Our Lord himself and embedded in the New Testament. The New Testament gives us the commandment to pray: To pray without ceasing, to pray that we may not enter into temptation, for the Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. It also imparts a model for Christian prayer, so that the Lord's Prayer became the norm of all subsequent practice. In addition, we find throughout the Gospels and Epistles a whole range of supporting doctrine which is progressively enriched by the faith and experience of successive generations.

- A) Prayer in the New Testament is addressed to God as Father, using the familiar Aramaic name Abba. It is characterized by tenderness, affection, homeliness. We are to be confident about God's good will in our regard and so motivated to persevere no matter what difficulties we encounter. We are liberated from superstition and formalism. Because God is our Father we have direct access to his love.
- B) New Testament prayer is strongly eschatological: full of the Spirit, it looks to the coming of God's kingdom. Prayer was seen as something closely related to hope; it is the expression of desire for God's transforming power to burst into our lives and bring us to glory.
- C) Prayer in the New Testament is life-related. It is not activity which has no relationship with the events of daily experience; it is not leaving behind the reality of who we are and what sin had made of us. Prayer is the means by which the love of God touches not only our minds and hearts, but the totality of our lives as well. The prayer of Our Lord in Gethsemane and on the Cross arose from life. The prayer of the tax collector who won acceptance reflected his real state before God. In the Lord's Prayer we pray for real needs: for daily bread, forgiveness and protection from harm. "The heart of all prayer is petition, from which indeed it takes its name.
- D) Prayer is corporate. It cannot co-exist with non-forgiveness. It is impossible to turn toward God if we are at enmity with our neighbors, which is why Our Lord Jesus tells us to try to bind ourselves with prayer to those from whom we are separated by hostility.

The Importance of Lectio in Prayer

-The continuing practice of prayer must be nourished by sustained exposure to the scriptures. It is useless to attempt to pray unless the energy for prayer has been received through holy reading. Those who, in the words of Ps. 101:5, "forget to eat their bread" become progressively alienated from God's word and both prayer and behavior begin to decline.

-In our times, the breakdown of monastic life in individuals is often due to the loss of the function of *lectio divina*. Nothing can replace it, neither more liturgy, more prayer nor more work. Daily personal contact with God's word is irreducible. When a monk stops reading well, other monastic observances lose their charm. He ceases to pursue his ideals and they progressively become unrealizable. He becomes downcast. He looks for other activities (including compensatory "good" activities) to fill the void, but the gambit (a chess opening in which a player risks one or more minor pieces to gain an advantage in position; a stratagem) does not work. And so he begins a spiral of decline. He is more tightly locked in with his own problems. The only way to interrupt the cycle is to begin afresh with daily exposure to God's word. Other aids and resources may need to be used but unless faith is fed, the specifically spiritual component of personal crisis will not be attended to.

-*Lectio divina* is a key element in any sustained dedication to prayer. This means that it is located in a war zone. Whatever in us resists the attraction to a life of prayer will provide us with compelling reasons to abandon fidelity to holy reading.

***There are three potential areas in which we will have to struggle if we are to remain faithful to *lectio divina*:**

1. The first enemy is sleep. The ancient monks were not allowed to wear their hoods in a way which would obscure their faces, so that their vigilance could be verified. It is possible that we fall asleep because we are physically exhausted, but this is relatively unusual. If we turn to something else, even to a different sort of reading, then most often the tiredness vanishes and we are fully alert. If we take precautions about posture, surrounding and lifestyle and the drowsiness remains, it would seem that its roots must be psychological rather than physical.

-Sometimes it is due to boredom. We have lost sight of spiritual goals and all our energies are invested in mundane affairs. Lack of interest in *lectio divina* is not normally an indication that we should reduce it or omit it altogether. It is an invitation to reassess our priorities in everyday behavior.

2. A second threat to reading is *acedia*, that near-neurotic state of being unable to commit oneself to anything, except to non-commitment. Wherever the acediac is, his heart is elsewhere; whatever he does, he would rather be doing something else; as soon as he opens one book, he remembers another that would be better.
3. The third area of danger to reading appears towards the second part of the 12th century. This was intellectualism, reading to stimulate the mind rather than to

find the heart. We find warnings about philosophy and literature and the baser sorts of writing appearing in the works of St. Bernard and this remark of St. Aelred's:

"I shall say a few words about the internal curiosity which consists in three things: the appetite for harmful or empty knowledge; the scrutiny of another's life, not for imitation but out of envy, if it is good, or for insult, if it is evil, or simply out of pure curiosity to know about worldly affairs and events. When the mind is caught by these things, it gives birth to much toil, whether it makes the effort to pursue them moderately or freely decides to resist. Those who give themselves to vain "philosophy" experience this. They join the Bucolics with the Gospels in their meditations. They read Horace together with the prophets and Paul with Cicero....Without regard for the strictness of the Rule, they harangue one another, having discussions which are the seedbeds of vanity, the beginning of quarrels.... And so they begin to be depressed or angry.

-Because both study and *lectio* involve contact with books, perhaps the same books, they can become confused. Intellectual dealing with the sacred texts can also be a means of keeping God at a distance. This is why there is practical utility in making clear distinction in our own daily program between holy reading and other bookish activities. *Lectio* is too important to allow it to slip away unnoticed.

The role of Feeling in Prayer

-The lifelong living out of an attraction to the practice of prayer has to cope with a range of counter-attractions. It is not always easy to continue doing the things that promote a prayer existence because our feelings draw us in alternative directions-both the feelings which are aroused by our interaction with external reality and those passions which are governed by unconscious factors. As a result we experience a crisis in motivation when it comes to spiritual activities.

-This is a phenomenon which St. Gregory the Great noted. He said:

"There is a great difference, dear brothers, between the pleasures of the body and those of the heart. Bodily pleasures set alight a strong desire when they are not possessed, but when he who has them partakes of them, he becomes satiated and tires of them. On the other hand, spiritual pleasures are tiresome when they are not possessed; when they are possessed they cause greater desire. He who partakes of them hungers for more, and the more he eats, the hungrier he becomes. In carnal pleasure the appetite is more pleasurable than the experience, but with regard to spiritual pleasures the experience of them is more rewarding; the appetite of them is nothing. In carnal pleasure the appetite causes

satiety and satiety generates disgust. In spiritual pleasures, when the appetite gives birth to satiety, satiety gives birth to even greater appetite. Spiritual delights increase the extent of delight in the mind, even while they satisfy the appetite for them."

-Because our feelings generally act as inhibitors of our spiritual impulses, it is important for us to appreciate how to "fight fire with fire." St. Bernard said that our love for Our Lord Jesus should be both intimate and tender to oppose the sweet enticement of sensual pleasures, for sweetness can be conquered by sweetness just as one nail can be driven by another nail.

-If we are not to condemn ourselves to a feelingless existence, then we must learn how to find our way through to authentic spiritual feelings, the delight which we find in being united with God.

-There are many feeling words in the spiritual vocabulary of western monastic writers: *affectus cordis*, *compunctio*, *intentio* and the whole terminology. In fact absence of such a positive sense of God was understood as an indication that one was not truly seeking God, but was locked in routine, in self-satisfaction, in a total absorption in one's own programs for the future. "The mind of one who does not seek the beauty of his Maker is unnaturally hard and remains frigid within itself," said St. Gregory the Great.

-The important thing about positive feelings of attraction to spiritual reality is that they give us the energy to be generous in breaking away from the gratifying enslavements which inhibit our freedom. Detachment is only possible on the supposition that something better has *already* moved in to take its place. St. Gregory the Great again said, "One who knows perfectly the sweetness of the heavenly life happily leaves behind everything he previously loved on earth."

-The same priority to the positive is found in the parable about treasure hidden in a field: first comes the finding of the treasure, then, in the joy of that discovery, a willingness to give up everything in order to obtain the field that holds the treasure.

-John Cassian's treatment of compunction is important in understanding the role of positive feelings, and had considerable influence in the evolution of western monastic spiritual doctrine. Firstly, compunction was more than sorrow for sin. It is, above all, a spiritual awakening. Not a paralyzing sense of guilt or inadequacy, but a compelling desire to change direction. It is a stimulant, not a depressant. It can arise in various ways: the chanting of the psalms, a glimpse of beauty, a moment of self-revelation, truth, the conferences of a holy person.

-But its effect is that it “can rouse the mind, through God's grace, from its drowsiness and half-heartedness.” It is a moment in which the soul/heart/spirit is lifted up and a new channel opens up into the future. Its forms can vary: it can be positive or negative. The sensibility may be flooded with joy so that even the occupant of the next cell feels the power of the happiness of the heart. Or there may be anguish and tears. Sometimes there is only wordless wonder, when the soul is introduced into a secret abyss of silence. Always there is feeling.

-In the hustle of daily activities we are unaware of what is deepest. It is only in silence – of tongue, of thought, of being – that we begin to perceive what is habitually present.

-What we experience in prayer can never be at odds with objective norms/standards/rules. If it leads us to live a more evangelical life with greater fervor, then it probably comes from God. If it leads to laxity, to complacency, to phoniness (fake, fraudulent) to arrogance, to living beyond our spiritual means, to lack of prudence, then the feelings do not come from God. They need to be subject to discernment.

-Specific behavior traits can poison our prayer; if we are firmly saying “No” to God in a particular area of daily life and refusing even to admit that this is the case, then our prayer can only be an experience of our stonewalling God. If we admit our resistance and our sin, this “confession” can fuel our prayer very successfully.

-The simple task of remaining at peace under the action of God is not as easy as it sounds; it is during such stages as these that many lose heart and give up their spiritual endeavor.

-Having said that prayer is always feelingful, does not mean that it always feels good. Often the feeling is bad. Prayer is a mirror which reflects the real state of our life. If, for example, our life is 45% dedicated to God and 55% directed elsewhere, the proportions are likely to be reflected in our experience of prayer. About half the time we will sense that we are distanced from God. We need to persevere with our practice of prayer, even though it seems more a matter of routine than of positive experiences. We need to stay with this anguish and separation and experience it to the full so that we may grow in a desire to change matters. The only way we improve our prayer is by upgrading our life.

How Prayer is Life-Related

-Much of the quality of what we experience in prayer will be a direct reflection of the quality of our daily living. Our habitual way of dealing with the events of

ordinary experience leaves a residue which manifests itself during the time of prayer.

-Our prayer will show us in what condition we are. Theologians say that prayer is the monk's mirror (St. John Climacus).

-It is for this reason that John Cassian counsels that if we find our prayer unsatisfactory, then it is time to upgrade our life. He said, "Whatever thoughts our mind conceives before the time of prayer will certainly recur in the memory during prayer. For this reason we should try to prepare ourselves before the time of prayer by being the sort of person we would wish to be when we are at prayer. The mind is shaped during its prayer by what it had been beforehand. When we prostrate ourselves in prayer, our previous actions, words, and impressions continue to play before the minds of our imagination, just as they did beforehand, making us angry or sad....This is why before prayer we ought to be quick to exclude from the approaches to our heart anything that would disturb our prayer.

-John Cassian is advocating a life lived in a progressive mindfulness of God, in which pursuits foreign to our ultimate goal of finding God are systematically eliminated and distractions kept to a minimum. In this way the heart becomes "pure" or single, and prayer is able to flow undisturbed.

-We need to give our lives a positive quality by actively seeking the will of God, through "fear of the Lord," the keeping of his commandments and the practice of evangelical virtue. This takes so much effort that we cannot help but be mindful: mindful of our own weakness so that we are motivated to call to God for help.

-It is our prayer which reveals to us the true quality of our behavior. If we are sane, our prayer is a mirror which does not lie.

-This does not mean that prayer is impossible to the extent that we are sinful. Sin does not prevent prayer, but it does change its quality. In prayer we experience the truth of our being: if a large measure of it is turned away from God, then this will be reflected in what we experience during the time of prayer. We do not have to wait to purge away all sin before we begin to pray, but we need to recognize that sin will often render our prayer negative.

-Negative does not mean unprofitable. In fact it is usually the experience of our own weakness that brings us to prayer, breaking through the hard shell of complacency and making us aware of our own fragility and vulnerability.

"Because I am human, therefore I am weak. Because I am weak, therefore I pray," said St. Augustine.

-It is precisely in the experience of our own weakness that we become aware of the Spirit animating our prayer, "interceding for our weakness" (Rom. 8:26), bridging the gap between ourselves and God. Only sin that is repressed, denied or rationalized upsets our prayer. Sin accepted and confessed drives us toward God. Like the publican in the Gospel, we pray on the basis of our sin, and it seems that God is always willing to accept this prayer.

-On a more positive note, this linkage of prayer and life can be a source of hope. Because the quality of prayer is determined by the way we live, this means that by striving to live a more evangelical life we are moving towards an ever more profound experience of God. Union with God in prayer is a matter of union of wills: our will being aligned with God's. This union is not something that can be effected quickly at the beginning of our prayer. It is accomplished through our habitual and heartfelt assent to the concrete manifestations of God's will in our nature, in our personal history, in revelation, in the duties of our way life, and in the many avenues of challenge by which we are invited to move towards a life of greater love. This is how our wills become aligned with God's-step by toilsome step. This is the seedbed of the experience of God.

-In his treatise *On the Necessity of Loving God*, St. Bernard demonstrates ecstasy - the total experience of God which involves a total transcendence of self-begins at a very mundane level. It is not a matter of learning esoteric skills and practicing mysterious asceticism. It is learning to live in self-forgetfulness, going beyond self by reaching out to others in justice and compassion. This humble altruism is the direct way to the highest contemplative experiences.

-It is because prayer and life are inseparably married that variation in our experience of prayer is to be taken as normative. This changeableness, which St. Bernard termed *vicissitude* or *alternation*, is something which continues throughout life, our prayer reflecting each nuance in our total relationship with God.

-John Cassian expresses this aspect of prayer clearly:

"I believe that it is impossible to grasp all the different forms of prayer without great purity of heart and soul. There are many forms of prayer as there are states of soul or, rather, there are as many as the totality of states experienced by all souls together. We are not able to perceive all the various kinds of prayer due to our inner debility, nevertheless, let us try to go through those which we know from our own far from extraordinary

experience. It is certain that nobody is ever able to keep praying in the same way. A person prays in one manner when cheerful, in another when weighed down by sadness or sense of hopelessness. When one is flourishing spiritually, prayer is different from one who is oppressed by the extent of one's struggles. One prays in this manner when seeking pardon for sins, and in another when asking for a particular grace or virtue or the elimination of a particular vice. Sometimes prayer is conditioned by compunction, occasioned by the thought of hell and desire for the good things to come. A person prays in one manner when in dangerous straits and in another when enjoying quiet and security. Prayer is sometimes illumined by the revelation of heavenly mysteries but, at other times, one is forced to be content with the sterile practice of virtue and the experience of aridity" (Conference 9.8).

-It is logical, however, that our choice of prayer form would also be subject to variation, according to the seasons of our lives and the specific fluctuations of recent experience. Each day may see a different blend of the various forms of prayer, made according to the internal and external possibilities which present themselves. A passage from the *Philokolia* exposes this point:

You should spend some of your time in psalmody, some of your time in reciting prayers (by heart), and you must allow some time to examine and guard your thoughts. Do not set limits to yourself as regards psalmody and oral prayer but do as much as the Lord gives you strength for: do not neglect reading and inner prayer. Do some of one, some of another, and you so will spend your day in a manner pleasing to God. Our fathers, who were perfect, had no cut and dried rule, but spent the whole day in following their own rule: some psalmody, some recital of prayers aloud, some examination of thoughts and some, though little, care of food. They did all this in fear of God, for it is said, "Whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

-The life-relatedness of prayer means that the greatest obstacles to our entering into deep prayer will be our rampant [passions. These may be kept temporarily at bay by turning our attention to activities; but when we leave aside our outward pursuits and move into the emptiness of prayer, immediately our unprocessed feelings surge into consciousness.

-Anger, sadness, lust, vainglory will flood the awareness and subvert our attempts at prayer. According to Evagrius we must anticipate that our prayer will be an occasion for the onset of the diemonic and so come to prayer with the idea that stalwart resistance will be necessary.

-The disturbance caused by anger or sadness is especially to be eliminated at its source. Not denied, repressed and driven underground, but faced and sorted out.

-In the *Institutes*, John Cassian makes it clear that he is not so much concerned about changing the external circumstances which provoked these reactions. What he advises is concentrating on our subjective part in the matter. When we discover strong feelings of anger or sadness, we should try to discover *Why* we have responded to a particular situation with (perhaps) disproportionate emotion. Has there been a build-up of pressure which eventually caused an explosion over something minor? Has the dimension of faith diminished in our daily life? This last question is of particular importance to our prayer.

-Christian life and Christian prayer involve participating in the paschal mystery of Our Lord Jesus. It is a question of accepting death in the hope of eternal life. Trying to avoid such death is a certain recipe for prayerlessness.

-The free refusal of an invitation to die or the lack of acceptance of a death imposed by circumstances poisons prayer. It often sets up a complicated cycle of rationalization and compensation to cover its track, but to no avail.

-Our ability to pray is concretely linked with our acceptance of God's providence in our regard. No one can say the prayer "Thy will be done," sincerely except one who believes that every circumstance, favorable and unfavorable, is designed by God's providence for good, and that God thinks and cares more for the good of his people and their salvation than we do ourselves.

-The prayer of Our Lord Jesus in Gethsemane is a model for us in this regard. Do we have faith that God is acting in the events of daily life? To the extent that we do not, negative incidents will play havoc with our emotional life? We will not be like the martyrs who sang Alleluia on their way to death; we will be too busy trying to avoid pain or seeking revenge.

-Faith in God's providence is not only a means to avoiding defeat through anger and sadness, it also acts counter to another inhibitor of prayer, *acedia*. The vice of *acedia* consists in a refusal to take seriously the challenge of the moment. It is an attitude of habitually tending toward the easier and less demanding option, stretching concessions to their furthest limits and minimizing obligations.

-If we have faith in God's working through daily events and experiences, we will often feel drawn to venture something new. Our day will progressively be punctuated by calls to a more Christ-like manner of living, an act of forgiveness or service or self-effacement. To the extent that we are open to such invitations and respond positively, our prayer will remain fresh, and there will be a suppleness about our life in general that will ensure that prayer will flow freely, not only at our regular slots, but unexpectedly as well.

-In fact emphasizing the continuity between prayer and life is a great enrichment. It allows us to build prayer into our ordinary conscious patterns of thoughts and actions. It becomes simply a matter of moving closer to the person of Jesus Christ, as he is known to the ordinary Christian. Christ is our light, our "Yes" to God.

-The ancient monks were convinced that what happened outside prayer was the chief determinant of the quality of our experience of prayer. It was for this reason that detailed guidance about techniques of prayer is singularly lacking in this tradition.

-Authenticity and sincerity were prized in prayer; quantity was thought less important. Without a special grace, excessive prayer can lead to tension and, for various reasons, make life difficult. The result is a progressive cleavage between what happens during prayer and one's experience of daily life. The correct balance tends to result in a progressive overlap of prayer and life: harmony, mutual interaction.

Two Ways of Knowing and Experiencing God in Prayer:

1. **Kataphatic Prayer** (according to Dionysius the Areopagite) [Gregory of Nyssa speaks of this as "calling God by name" or knowing God by created things]. In this we draw near to God as we increasingly learn more and more about who God really is for us, for God's people, and for the world.

2. **Apophatic Prayer.** Paradoxically, in this prayer we come to meet God by finding the ways in which our very real knowledge of God often actually gets in the way of our being with God and learning to set aside that knowledge. This is also called "the way of unknowing."

-These two kinds of prayer are not only closely related, but both are essential to Christian prayer. We do not outgrow the one as we move to the other.

-Calling God by name for St. Gregory of Nyssa means two things: First, to reflect upon a biblical name or image of God until we understand deeply what that name or image means about God to us, and Second, to reflect upon the way in which we, as images and children of God, make this name or image ours by taking on the characteristics of God.

-Learning the names of God involves the uncovering of our own passions, of our distortions of God, the world, and ourselves in a way that we never seen before.

-How we understand God and orient ourselves with respect to God has come to us from many places, from things we have read or heard, from experiences we have had, from people we have known.

Some new Images and Names of God:

-The defender of Widows and Orphans.

-The One who surrounds his people with strength as the mountains surround Jerusalem.

-The One who turns our wildest and most barren places into pastureland.

-Every new name for God carries with it a new name for us, and so we move away from our passions toward freedom and love by God's grace, and our own willingness to be receptive to it and grown in it.

We Relate to God in Two Ways:

1. By what we know, that is, by naming God, and
2. By what we cannot know.

-God is both knowable and unknowable. No matter how many names we are able to call God by, what we know of God can never exhaust who God is. God is beyond us, mysterious, out of our grasp, never in our control.

- We human beings also share this double quality. No matter how close we are to the other person and know each other well, and yet at some point, However, he/she is also stranger to us because he/she is not an extension of ourselves. He/she has an existent so different from our own that we cannot put ourselves in his/her mind even for a minute. He/she is alien to us, other than us. The knowledge we have of him/her is real, but he/she lies beyond and away from that knowledge. If this is true of human beings how much more of God.

The Way of Unknowing.

-This is the silence of being in God's presence without asking for or expecting anything, but just being there. We want to be in the presence of God as

comfortably as we are with a person we love with whom silence itself is a kind of communication, as delightfully as we are with the person with whom we are in love.

On Prayer

- If martyrdom, virginity and the monastic life were the extraordinary means by which a few attained to the experience of God, prayer was the ordinary way of touching the divine, and it was enjoined upon all.

Prayer Without Ceasing

-Prayer ought not to be restricted to the several times daily that were customary in the early Church, but rather whether a person is plowing the ground or sailing the sea and although he is used to praying together with his/her fellow Christians at the appointed time, he/she is not limited to this.

-It was Origen who summarizes the teaching of many of those who had gone before him and at the same time succeeds in broadening the concept of prayer considerably.

-Other Fathers seem to have understood prayer in the strict and classical sense of a conscious elevation of the mind and heart to God in the form of praise, thanksgiving and petition.

-Origen introduces something completely new into the understanding of prayer. In his treatise on Prayer he explains: "Prayer without ceasing means uniting prayer with the works that we are obliged to perform and joining fitting works to our prayer, since virtuous deeds and the fulfillment of what we are commanded to do are included as a part of prayer. If praying without ceasing means anything humanly possible, it can only mean this: that we call the whole life of a Saint a great synthesis of prayer. What we normally call prayer is only a small part of praying, something that we are obliged to do at least three times a day. P. 168

-In a homily preached by St. Jerome's contemporary, Theodore of Mopsuestia, the notion of prayer as the practice of good works is emphasized perhaps even more strongly, so much so that prayer is seen to be the fruit of good works than good works the fruit of prayer.

-Commenting on the Lord's prayer he said:

"Indeed, anyone who is inclined to good works, all his life must needs be in prayer, which is seen in his choice of these good works. Prayer is by necessity connected with good works, because a thing that is not good

to be looked is not good to be prayer for.... A true prayer consists in good works, in love of God and diligence in the things that please him.

-The possibility of work as prayer, as well as the observance of formal hours of prayer, was at the foundation of Cenobitic monasticism.

-St. Basil the Great pointed out that "we should not overlook the fixed times for communal prayer; for these times have been selected with an eye to the necessity that each has its own distinctive way of remembering God's good gifts.

-However, apart from Cenobitic monasticism, represented by St. Basil, among solitaries the ideal of constant formal (conscious) prayer continued to be pursued. This was especially the case with many of the Desert Fathers. P. 169

-It was at least partly in trying to bring together work and prayer that the so-called "prayer of the heart" was developed. This involved the constant repetition of a particular phrase (mantra), which would eventually make its way into the heart of the one praying.

-But St. Augustine brings a wholly new insight to bear on the question of praying without ceasing. His view can be summarized in a passage from one of his homilies, commenting on Psalm 38: 9 ("All my desire is before You"), he says:

"Desire itself is your prayer, and if your desire is continuous your prayer is unceasing. For the apostle did not say in vain: Pray without ceasing. Is it possible that we should unceasingly bend the knee or prostrate our body or raise up our hands, that he should tell us: Pray without ceasing? If we say that we pray in this manner I do not think that we are able to do it unceasingly. There is another prayer that is unceasing and interior, and it is desire.... If you do not wish to stop praying, do not stop desiring (Desiring to be transformed and conformed into Christ). Your unceasing desire is your uninterrupted voice. You will grow cold if you stop loving."

"Desire always pray, even if the tongue should be silent. If you are always experiencing desire you are always praying. Prayer sleeps when desire has grown cold.

The Problem of how to Pray without ceasing was resolved in one of four different ways:

1. By observance of set hours during the day, which effectively serve to sanctify the whole cycle of the day [Hippolytus]

2. By considering all good actions as prayer [Theodore of Mopsuestia, contemporary of St. Jerome]
3. By the practice of the prayer of the heart [method of the Desert Fathers]
4. By the equation of desire with prayer [St. Augustine]

The Atmosphere of Prayer

-A prayer that was "accessible" also demands a certain atmosphere in which it could be carried out more easily.

-For St. Clement of Alexandria and Origen, prayer is principally a constant disposition of the soul that seeks a certain externalization in gesture.

-The best place for all to pray (for Origen) is "where the faithful meet together." There not only the faithful themselves congregate but also the spirits of the dead and the guardian angels of those present as well. It is an assembly whose prayer are all the more effective for its being so numerous. P. 175

-For St. Gregory of Nyssa:

"Coming close to God is not a question of simply changing the place where we pray. No matter where we may be, as long as our soul forms the sort of resting place in which God can dwell and linger, he will visit us. But if we fill our inner self with base thoughts, then we could be standing on the Mt. of Olives or the monument of the Resurrection and we still be as far from welcoming Christ into ourselves as someone who has never begun to confess Him. p. 178

The Interior Life

-Tertullian is especially careful to stress the stance of the Christian at prayer; everything is meant to bespeak humility and moderation, whether it be the position of the hands, elevation of the eyes or the tone of the voice. Extravagant gestures or motions, the element of the Dionysian or the irrational, were characteristic not of orthodox Christianity but of heretical groups and the pagan cults. This sobriety was reflected in both public and private prayer. P. 178

-Prayer had rather be rooted in the ordinary living out of Christian life, which was characterized by the practice of good works.... Good work not only had to accompany prayer but were a part of prayer.

(from various luminaries of the Church)

St. Alphonsus Ligouri

- Let us rest assured that we can never overcome our carnal appetites, if God does not give us help, and this help we cannot have without prayer; but if we pray, we shall assuredly have power to resist the devil in everything, and the strength of God, who strengthens us; as St. Paul says, "I can do all things, through God who strengthens me.

- Final perseverance is not a single grace, but a chain of graces, to which must correspond the chain of our prayers.

- Mental prayer is, in the first place, necessary, in order that we may have light to go on the journey to eternity. Eternal truths are spiritual things that are not seen with eyes of the body, but only by the reflection of the mind.

Anonymous Sainly Authors

- Prayer is basically an act of love.

- To be "in the service" of the Lord reveals a complete submission to his will which can be the fruit of prolonged and frequent prayer.

- Constant prayer is not difficult when prayer is not just confined to the mind, or to the heart, but takes in man's whole being and all his activities.

- A person, who has learned the need of God's help, prays much.

-Faith, hope, charity, humility, all the virtues bloom easily in prayer, and are there in turn developed. A single outburst of the heart may even express them all at one time; and is the best exercise of perfection. And when one's prayer is ended, for prayer is not the only duty even in the life of a monk, we remain enlightened by faith and rich in graces, which enable us to act supernaturally, to suffer with fruit, to correct our faults, to grow in virtue and to do whatever God's will; during our actions we will be in touch with God, because prayer shall have filled our mind and our heart with Him, that is, with God.

- Without the hunger after God derived from prayer, spiritual reading is frigid and almost unfruitful; with prayer, spiritual books move us and merely shed their light upon the intellect, but make it penetrate even to the depths of the heart and of the will.

- The silence of the heart before God is the essence of the prayer life.

- Man is never so great as when he is on his knees.

- When you approach God, then, try to think and realize whom you are about to address and continue to do so while you are addressing Him.

- Prayer is the sum of our relationship with God.
- We are what we pray.
- It is in prayer that our experiences will become intelligible and manageable.
- We are not able to survive as celibates unless we are faithful to prayer.
- A monastic life is a poor one if prayer does not have the primacy in the mind of the monk.
- There is no progress in prayer without progress in faith, a purification of faith.
- There is no renewal of spirit where there is no responsible life of prayer.
- To pray is to acknowledge our dependence on God.
- The more we think of the spiritual life, the more we think about prayer.
- Be convinced that zeal for prayer is food and strength for the soul, a protection against dangers of all kinds, and a bulwark in time of temptation.
- Prayer and penance appease God.
- Nothing is more powerful than the Holy Sacrifice and the sacraments; yet even they never produce so much fruit as when fervent prayer has thrown the doors of the soul wide open to the effusions of grace
- Prayer is pure and free from wandering when the mind guards the heart during prayer.
- The degree of our faith is the degree of our prayer.
- Our ability to love is our ability to pray.
- We can only be person of God if we are person of prayer.
- Devotion to prayer and to work is a sign of charity, a sign of life.
- There has to grow within us a desire for prayer, a nostalgia for prayer, a taste for prayer.
- We have to begin prayer and then the taste and the desire for it come.
- When we are truly praying, then we can begin to see Christ in our neighbor.
- It is prayer which gives spiritual insight.
- A person of prayer equals a person of God; and a person of God equals a person of spiritual influence.
- The best way to pray is the way that suits you.
- However fervent one's prayer may seem to be, it is always open to suspicion if it does not bring one's will into harmony with the will of God.
- If prayer does not change us there must be something wrong in our prayer or in the way we pray.
- When we go to pray we should not look for the experience of God, but God himself because sometimes we have a nice experience of God in prayer but other times it does not work that way, so we will be disappointed.

- No human motive should lead us to pray: neither routine, nor the habit of doing as others do, nor a thirst for spiritual consolations. No, we should go to prayer to render homage to God.

- Naturally, we approach God by saluting Him with a profound and humble act of adoration.

- The more He is asked for the better pleased He is, such joy does it give Him to bestow good gifts on His children!

- Nothing is so important as to keep Him continually before our eyes in order to contemplate Him, in our hearts in order to love Him, in our hands in order to imitate Him.

- It is not possible to be Thy friend, Thy intimate, if I have not Thy sentiments. And yet how far I am from all this!

- For sentiment to be of any value, must lead to action

-In the prayer of simplicity, the work of the intellect is reduced to almost a simple look at God or the things of God.

-Mental prayer or meditation ought to converge to one single end, the destruction of a vice, the acquisition of a virtue, or some spiritual practice which may serve as means to this.

-Accommodating our prayer to our present state renders it profitable and efficacious, sweet and easy; what can be more consoling and more easy than to converse with our Lord about what we are and what we are present experiencing? On the other hand, if our prayer is not accommodated to the present state of our soul, does it not, by the very fact, lose the greater of its attraction and utility?

-The most effective disposition for prayer is a hunger and thirst after holiness, a lively desire to profit by our prayer in order to advance in perfection. Without this desire, the evening preparation will be languid, the morning waking without ardour, the prayer almost always fruitless.

St. Anthony the Great

-The monk is not yet perfect in prayer who is still conscious of himself and aware that he was praying.

-The purest prayer is one in which the monk no longer knew that he was praying and was, indeed, no longer even aware of his own existence.

-That prayer is not perfect in which the monk understands himself and the words which he is praying.

St. Augustine

-In prayer, it is not words we should use in dealing with God to obtain what we want, but it is the things we carry in our mind and the direction of our thoughts, with pure love and single affection.

-The very effort we make in praying calms the heart, makes it clean, and renders it more capable of receiving the divine gifts which are poured upon us in a spiritual manner.

Augustine Roberts (former abbot of Spencer)

-A man of prayer is the only person who can truly practice dialogued obedience.

-Be faithful to the life of prayer, thus you will cultivate a living faith which will indicate to you when to be silent and when to dialogue

St. Bernard of Clairvaux

-Prayer will draw down into your soul the omnipotence of God, "it is stronger than all the demons.

The monks Callistus and Ignatius

-As a Queen entering a town is attended by all kinds of riches, so prayer, entering a soul, brings every virtue in its train.

-Prayers are the nerves of the soul. If you deprive yourself of prayer, it is like taking a fish out of water. For prayers have the same power in the lives of the saints as water in the life of trees.

Blessed Claude de la Colombiere

-The more we pray the more we please God, and the more we receive.

St. Cyril of Cappadocia

-Ask our Lord to make all earthly joy insipid, and to fill you with the constant desire of heaven. This desire will make labor easy and suffering light. It will make you fervent and detached, and bring you even here a foretaste of that eternal joy and peace to which you are hastening (from the reflection of the martyrdom of St. Cyril)

Abba Dorotheous

-“Now this is forgiveness from the heart; this is the great victory over the spirit of anger: to pray for the brother who has offended you,” and we should pray as follows: “O Lord, help my brother (name) and forgive me a sinner, for the sake of that brother’s prayer.

Abba Evagrius

-When during prayer the mind imagines nothing worldly, that means it has become strong.

St. Gregory the Great

-God has His own hours; we must wait for them. He wishes to be prayed and begged and pressed so as to make us appreciate His graces.

St. Gregory Palamas

-As chrism perfumes the jar the more strongly the tighter it is closed, so prayer, the more fast it is imprisoned in the heart, abounds the more in Divine grace.

St. Hesychius of Jerusalem

-As it impossible to cross the expanse of the sea without a large ship, so without calling Jesus Christ it is impossible to banish from the soul the suggestion of a wicked thought.

-A ship will not move forward without water; a man will in no way succeed in guarding his mind without sobriety, humility and prayer to Jesus Christ.

Abbot Isaac

-Progress in prayer goes along, in fact, with progress in the discovery of the richest of Christ.

-Each man is both raised and moulded in its prayer according to the measure of its purity.

St. Isaac of Syria

-Do not oppose the thoughts which the enemy sows in you, but rather out of all converse with them by prayer to God.

-Every prayer which does not make the heart contrite is like an abortive child, for such a prayer is without soul.

-The more he multiplies his prayer, the greater becomes the humility of his heart.

-What we gather during our negligence shames us during prayer.

-Do not approach the words of the mysteries contained in the Divine Scriptures, without prayer and asking God's help. Regard prayer as the key to the true meaning of what is said in the Divine Scripture.

St. John Chrysostom

-As the body cannot live without the soul, so the soul without prayer is dead and fetid.

-Nothing reflects the glory of God than to see in a person who is praying well. It is a sight more noble and glorious than a king in his throne.

St. John Damscene

-Prayer is the asking of what is right and fitting from God.

St. John Mary Vianney

-Everyone who prays well is like an eagle that soars in the sky as if it wanted to reach the sun.

-The person who does not pray is like a hen or a turkey that cannot rise into the air, and if it tries to fly fails down at once.

St. Mark the Ascetic

-Good conscience is attained through prayer, and pure prayer through conscience. By their nature they have need of one another.

-Prayer is not perfect without mental invocation. A mind calling to God without distraction is heard by the Lord.

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi

-When you leave off prayer you should be prepared for reprimands, whether deserved or not, and so to persevere in the same tranquility of soul. This will be the real fruit of your prayer and of your taste of God.

St. Maximus the Confessor

-The power and efficacy of prayer depend on fulfilling the commandments through practice of virtues, as a result of which the righteous man's prayer is powerful and avails much since it is rendered effectual by commandments.

-If no worldly thought ever impinges upon your mind during prayer, know that you are not outside realm of passionless.

-The highest state of, it is said, is when the mind while praying leaves the flesh and the world and is completely devoid of matter and form.

St. Nilus of Sinai

-Prayer is a remedy against sorrow and depression.

-When you pray guard your memory with all your strength, lest it off you something of its own. Lift yourself up in every possible way to the consciousness of standing before God. For during prayer the mind is often greatly robbed by memory.

-Attention seeking prayer will find prayer; for what most naturally follows upon attention is prayer, and it is upon prayer that our greatest effort should be directed.

-If prayers are only uttered by the lips, while the spirit is negligent, it is like offering to the empty air; for God listens to the spirit.

-No matter what our thoughts may be (the fathers say) if the mind is in pious disposition, it is with God; nevertheless we must drive away all evil thoughts.

-Strive to render your mind deaf and dumb during prayer; then you will be able to pray as you should

St. Peter Faber

-As the body sinks under fatigue unless supported by food, so external works, however holy, wear out the soul which is not regularly nourished by prayer. In the most crowded day we can make time briefly and secretly to lift our soul to God and draw new strength from Him.

St. Philemon

-Constant prayer and study of the divine Scriptures open the inner eyes of the heart to see the Lord of hosts.

Pope Pius XI

-Those who devote themselves assiduously to the ministry of prayer and penance contribute more to the development of the Church and to the salvation of mankind than those who, by their apostolic labours, till the field of the Lord.

From a Staretz

-He who prays for his enemy will have no resentment.

-Lord, help my brother and me for the sake of his prayers.

St. Stephen - martyrdom

-If you are tempted to resentment, pray from your heart for him who has offended you.

St. Teresa of Avila (From the Way of Perfection)

-When I see people very anxious to know what sort of prayer they practice, covering their faces and afraid to move or think, lest they should lose any slight tenderness and devotion they feel, I know how little they understand how to attain union with God, since they think it consists in such things as these. No, Sisters, no; our Lord expects works from us! If you see a sick sister whom you can relieve, never fear losing your devotion; compassionate her; if she is in pain, feel for it as if it were your own, and when there is need, fast so that she may eat, not so much for her sake as because you know our Lord asks it of you. This is the true union of our will with the will of God.

4 Elements of Success which have reference to mental prayer itself:

1. We must adopt that which suits our degree of progress.
2. We should choose a subject suitable to our needs.
3. We have to prepare the subject of the morning meditation, to consecrate to it the last thoughts of the evening before and the first thoughts of the next morning.
4. Another element of success, upon which St. Teresa strongly insists, is a determined will to persevere in prayer in spite of temptations, troubles and aridity.

-In the midst of sickness, the best of prayer may be made; and it is a mistake to think that it can only be made in solitude.

St. Therese

-The power of prayer of is really tremendous. It makes one like a queen who can approach the king at any time and get whatever she asks for.

-For me, prayer is an upward leap of the heart, an untroubled glance towards heaven, a cry of gratitude and love which I utter from the depth of sorrow as well as from the heights of joy.

-I pray for the person who occupy my imaginations and in that way they draw profit from my distractions.

Theoleptus, metropolitan of Philadelphia

-Do not abandon prayer under the pretext of infirmity even for one day, so long as you have breath, and listen to the words of the Apostle: "When I am weak, then I am strong (2Cor. 12:10) acting thus you will gain much profit, and prayer will soon restore you by the action of grace.

-Repulse thoughts and do not allow them to run through the heart and settle there. Passionate thoughts settling in the heart revive passions and kill the mind. Therefore, as soon as they come near, from the first moment of their appearances in the mind, hasten to strike them down by the arrow of prayer.

prayer and Meditation

-Our century is probably the most talkative age in the history of the world – not because we have more mechanical devices to diffuse our talking, but also because we have little inside our minds which did not come there from the world outside our minds, so that human communication seems to us a great necessity. As a result, talk is deified as a means of solving all problems. Even the young – who have not yet studied the philosophy of human rights – are called upon to solve the problems of the world in their “progressive” classrooms.

-Hyperactivity and love of noise and chatter characterize our age, as a compensation for the modern man’s distrust of himself. Not knowing clearly what he is, people of today tries to become important by what he does – for the more anxious a person is, the more active he becomes. The rocking chair is a typical example. It enables man to rest as he is restless, to sit in one place and still constantly moving back and forth going nowhere.

-Another result of our loss of inner peace is the replacement of quality by quantity. Having lost Grace, a quality of the soul that makes us God-like, compensation is sought in the worship of quantity. Thus we boast of the “biggest,” the “highest,” the “greatest.” The biggest university becomes the best university.

-As the soul becomes impoverished through want of God-likeness, the body seeks compensation in excessive luxury and show of all sorts. Inner nakedness is atoned for by a new ornateness of dress. A rich boy can dress poorly and still be known as rich; a poor boy who wants to be known as rich must wear the semblance of wealth.

-A truly learned man does not have to talk about all the books he has read to be known as educated; but the sophomore who wants to be a member of the intelligentsia must intersperse his conversation with: “What! You never read that?”

-The show-off in any area is the man who lacks the quality he so carefully pretends to have. For instance, those who love publicity are always people who do not want their real selves to be known to anyone; hence, they have to advertise a legendary self.

-No human being is happy when he is externalized as most men are today. Everyone wants peace of soul, knowing that he cannot be happy on the outside unless he is happy on the inside.

-It is possible that those who today claim to be God's servants are sometimes so busy in their projects for the Kingdom of God that they forget the Kingdom of God itself. All these externalizations are signs that we are trying to escape God and the cultivation of the soul. The very fact that anyone becomes disquieted when noise and excitement cease proves that he is in flight from his true self.

-Gregariousness, the passionate need to lose oneself in a crowd, the urge to identify oneself with the tempo of the modern society, is a strong proof that one is seeking distraction from the inner self, where true joy alone is found. One of the most powerful means of overcoming the externalization of life is to find support in prayer and meditation.

-To have any effectiveness, a prayer for help must express an honest desire to be changed, to be converted, and that desire must be without reservation or conditions on our part. If a person prays to be delivered from alcoholism, and yet refuse to stop drinking, that fact is an acknowledgment that that person did not really pray.

-In like manner, the person who prays to be delivered from sexual perversions and excesses – and that very day deliberately exposes himself to such pleasures – has destroyed the efficacy of the prayer by a reservation.

-All prayer implies an act of the will, a desire for growth, a willingness to sacrifice on our own part; for prayer is not passive, but is a very active collaboration between the soul and God. If the will is inoperative, our prayers are merely a list of the things we would like God to give us, without ever asking us to pay the price they cost in effort and a willingness to change.

-Prayer is dynamic, but only when we cooperate with God through surrender. The man who decides to pray for release from the slavery of carnal pleasures must be prepared, in every part of his being, to utilize the strength which God will give him and to work unreservedly for a complete freedom from the sin.

-It is not difficult to understand why many people do not pray, at all. As a workman can become so interested in what he is doing as not to hear the noonday whistle, so the egotist can become so self-infatuated as to be unconscious of anything outside of himself.

-Just as there are tone-deaf men who are dead to music and color-blind men who are dead to art, so the egotists are Deity-blind, that is, dead to the vision of God. They say they cannot pray, and they are right, they cannot. Their self-centeredness has paralyzed them.

-Many blessings and favors come to those individuals and families which put themselves wholeheartedly in the area of God's love – their lives are in sharp contrast to those who exclude themselves from that area of love.

-The essence of prayer is not the effort to make God give us something – as this is not the basis of sound human friendships – but there is a legitimate prayer of petition.

-God has two kinds of gifts: first, there are those which He sends us whether we pray for them or not; and the second are those which are given on condition that we pray.

-The **first** gifts resemble those things which a child receives in a family, such as food, clothing, shelter care, and watchfulness. These gifts come to every child, whether the child asks for them or not. But there are other gifts, which are conditioned upon the desire of the child. For instance, a father may be eager to have a son go to college, but if the boy refuses to study or becomes delinquent, the gift which the intended for him can never be bestowed. It is not because the father has retracted his gift, but rather because the boy has made the gift impossible.

-Of the first kind of gifts Our Lord spoke when He said: "His rain falls on the just and equally on the unjust" (Mt. 5:45). He spoke of the second kind of gifts when He said: "Ask, and the gift will come."

-Prayer, then, is not just the informing of God of our needs, for He already knows them. "You have a Father in Heaven who knows that you need them all" (Mt. 6:32). Rather, the purpose of prayer is to give Him the opportunity to bestow the gifts He will give us when we are ready to accept them. It is not the eye which makes the light of the sun surround us; it is not the lung which makes the air envelop us. The light of the sun is there if we do not close our eyes to it, and the air is there for our lungs if we do not hold our breath. God's blessings are there – if we do not rebel against His Will to give.

-God does not show Himself equally to all creatures. This does not mean that He has favorites, that He decides to help some and to abandon others, but the difference occurs because it is impossible for Him to manifest Himself to certain hearts under the conditions they set up. The sunlight plays no favorites, but its reflection is very different on a lake and on a swamp.

-A person of prayer often keeps step with his moral life. The closer our behavior corresponds with the Divine Will, the easier it is to pray; the more our conduct is out of joint with Divinity, the harder it is to pray. Just as it is hard to look in the

face of someone whom we have grievously wronged, so it is hard to lift our minds and heart to God if we are in rebellion against Him.

-This is not because God is unwilling to hear sinners. He does hear them, and He has special predilection for them, for as He said: "I have come to call sinners, not the just" (Mk. 2:17). "There will be more rejoicing over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine souls that are justified and have no need of repentance" (Lk 15:7). But these sinners were the ones who corresponded with His Will and abandoned their rebellion against it. Where the sinner has no desire to be lifted from his evil habits, then the essential condition for prayer is lacking.

-Everyone knows enough about God to pray to Him, even those who say that they doubt His existence. If they were lost in the woods, they would have no assurance whatever of anyone nearby who might help them find their way – but they would shout, nevertheless, in the hope that someone would hear. In like manner, the skeptic finds, in catastrophe and in crisis, that though he thought himself incapable of prayer, he nonetheless prays.

-But those who use prayer only as a last resort do not know God very well – they hold Him at arm's length most of the time, refusing Him the intimacy of every day. The little knowledge of God that such people possess does not become fruitful or functional, because they never act upon that knowledge: the Lord ordered that the unproductive talent be taken away.

-Unless a musician acts upon the knowledge that he already has of music, he will not grow either in knowledge or in love of it. In this sense, our conduct, behavior, and moral life become the determinants of our relations with God. When our behavior is Godless, licentious, selfish, egotistic, and cruel, then prayer is an extraneous thing – a mere attempt at magic, an attempt to make God serve our wishes in contradiction to the moral laws He has laid down.

-The man who thinks only of himself says only prayers of petition; he who thinks of his neighbor says prayers of intercession; he who thinks only of loving and serving God, says prayers of abandonment to God's will, and this is the prayer of the saints. The price of this prayer is too high for most people, for it demands the displacement of our ego. Many souls want God to do their will; they bring their completed plans and ask Him to rubberstamp them without a change. The petition of the "Our Father" is changed by them to read: "My will be done on earth."

-It is very difficult for the eternal to give Himself to those who are interested only in the temporal. The soul who lives on the ego-level is like an egg which is kept forever in a walk-in cooler too cool for incubation, so that it is never called upon

to live a life outside the shell of its own incomplete development. Every I is still an embryo of what a man is meant to be.

-Where there is love, there is thought about the one we love. "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:21). The degree of our devotion and love depend upon the value that we put upon a thing. St. Augustine says: "love is the law of gravitation." All things have their center. The schoolboy finds it hard to study, because he does not love knowledge as much as athletics. The carnal-minded find it difficult to love the spirit because their treasure lies in the flesh. Everyone become like that which he loves: if he loves the material, he becomes like the material; if he loves the spiritual, he is converted into it in his outlook, his ideals, and his aspirations.

-Given this relationship between love and prayer, it is easy to understand why some souls say: "I have no time to pray." They really have not, because to them other duties are more pressing; other treasures more precious; other interests more exhilarating.

-As watches that are brought too close to a dynamo cease to keep time, so, too, hearts that become too much absorbed in material things soon lose their capacity to pray. But as a jeweler with a magnet can draw the magnetism out of the watch and reset it by the sky, so, too, it is possible to become de-egotized by prayer, and be reset to the Eternal and to Love Divine.

-We pray as much as we desire to, and we desire to in ratio with our love. But the capacity for prayer belongs to every soul, and even those who do not acknowledge any love of God pray under stress.

-Our Lord told two parables: (Luke 11:5-9; Luke 18:1-8). The real meaning of the parables is this: if a grumpy man selfishly interested in his rest – or a scoundrelly judge – will grant favors to those who solicit them, then how much more will God do good things for us if we ask? Prayer is not the overcoming of a reluctant God, but an identification of our needs with the highest kind of Willingness to help.

-In the parables the tardy selfishness of one man is set against the prompt liberality of God, and the unrighteousness of another man is contrasted with the righteousness of God. A second meaning lies in the stories: they tell us that prayer is natural in time of crisis, for one of them deals with a physical and the other with a social catastrophe. The suggestion is clearly made that if the neighbor were not in need of bread and the widow were not in need of justice, they would not have pled.

-He who says that he cannot pray or will never pray is stating only an opinion, held in times when no grave crisis troubles him. He is not revealing his basic impulses.

-An atomic bomb dropped on any city would make millions pray who had denied such a possibility. Someone said: "He that will learn to pray, let him go to sea" (George Herbert). And Abraham Lincoln said: "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go; my own wisdom and that of all around me seemed insufficient for that day."

-If God sometimes seems to slow to answer our petitions, there are several possible reasons. One is that the delay is for the purpose of deepening our love and increasing our faith; the other is that God is urging us. God may defer for some time the granting of His gifts, that we might the more ardently pursue not the gift, but the Giver. Or we may be asking Him for something He wants us to learn we do not need.

-The greatest gift of God is not the things we think we would like to have, but Himself. And as all love grows, it asks less and less, seeking only to give and give. God, likewise, does not always give us what we want, but He always gives us what we need.

-Our Lord never promised safety to His Apostles; He promised persecution: "You shall be hated by all men because you bear My name." He did not promise them health or comfort; He promised strength to bear their trials. St. Paul prayed that the thorn in his flesh – some kind of illness – should be taken from him. This request was made three times and never granted; yet his prayer was answered. He received the answer: "My grace is sufficient for you." And so, although the illness continued, St. Paul did not rebel against the God Who did not cure him, but rather said: "More than ever, then, I delight to boast of the weaknesses that humiliate me, so that the strength of Christ may enshrine itself in me. I am well content with these humiliations of mine, with the insults, the hardships, the persecutions, the times of difficulty I undergo for Christ; when I am weakest, then I am strongest of all" (2Cor. 12:9-10).

-A higher form of prayer than petition – and a potent remedy against the externalization of life – is meditation. Meditation is a little like a reverie, but with two important differences: in meditation we do not think about the world or ourselves, but about God. And instead of using the imagination to build idle castles in Spain, we use the will to make resolutions that will draw us nearer to one of the Father's mansions.

-Meditation is a more advanced spiritual act than “saying prayers”; it may be likened to the attitude of a child who breaks into the presence of a mother saying: “I’ll not say a word, if you will just let stay here and watch you.” Or, as a soldier once told the Curé of Ars” “I just stand here before the tabernacle; He looks at me and I look at Him.”

-Meditation allows one to suspend the conscious fight against external diversions by an internal realization of the presence of God. It shuts out the world to let in the Spirit. It surrenders our own will to the impetus of the Divine Will. It turns the searchlight of divine truth on the way we think, act, and speak, penetrating beneath the layers of our self-conceit and egotism. It summons us before the bar of Divine Justice, so that we may see ourselves as we really are, and not as we like to think we are.

-It silences the ego with its clamorous demands, in order that it may hear the wishes of the divine heart. It uses our faculties, not to speculate on matter remote from God, but to stir up the will to conform more perfectly with His will.

-It eliminates from our lives the things that would hinder union with God and strengthens our desire that all the good things we do shall be done for His Honor and Glory. It takes our eyes off the flux and change of life and reminds us of our being, the creatureliness, the dependence of all things on God for creation, moment-to-moment existence, and salvation. Meditation is not a petition, a way of using God, or asking things from Him, but rather a surrender, a plea to God that He use us.

-Meditation has two stages –withdrawal from worldly consideration, and concentration on the Nature of God and His Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. Meditation uses three powers of the soul: the memory, the intellect, and the will. By memory we recall His Goodness and our blessings; with the intellect we recall what is known of His Life, Truth, and Love; by the will we strive to love Him above all else. When we study, we know about God; when we meditate, we know God’s Presence in ourselves, and we capture the very heart of our existence.

-For meditation the ear of the soul is more important than the tongue: St. Paul tells us the faith comes from listening. Most people commit the same mistake with God that they do with their friends: they do all the talking. Our Lord warned against those who “use many phrases, like the heathens, who think to make themselves heard by their eloquence” (Mt. 6:7).

-One can be impolite to God, too, by absorbing all the conversation, and by changing the words of scripture from “Speak, Lord, Thy servant hears” to Listen, Lord, Thy servant speaks.” God has things to tell us which will enlighten us – we must wait for Him to speak. No one would rush into a physician’s office, rattle off

all the symptoms, and then dash away without waiting for a diagnosis; no one would tune in the radio and immediately leave the room.

-It is every bit as stupid to ring God's doorbell and then run away. The Lord hears us more readily than we suspect; it is our listening to Him that needs to be improved. When people complain that their prayers are not heard by God, what often has happened is that they did not wait to hear His answer.

-Prayer, then, is not a monologue, but a dialogue. It is not a one-way street, but a boulevard. The child hears a word before he ever speaks it – his tongue is trained through the ears; so our soul, too, is trained through its ears. As the prophet Isaiah said: "He awakens my ear, that I may hear him as a master." St. Paul tells that the Spirit will tell us for what things we ought to pray.

-If our tongues are crude in their petitions, it is because our ears have been dull in their hearing of the faith. One of the important details of the Sacrament of Baptism is the opening of the ear: the priest touches it and says, Our Lord did to the deaf man, "Ephepheta; be thou opened." The words imply that that once a soul is brought into the state of Grace, the ears which were closed are open to the Word of God.

-The best exposition of the steps in meditation is found in the account of Easter Sunday in the Gospel. The disciples on that day were most forlorn. In their sadness they fell into talk about Our Lord with a traveler whom they had met by chance on the Emmaus road. This marks the first stage of meditation: they spoke about Our Lord, not realizing He was present.

-This is followed by Our Lord's disclosure of His presence – we listen, then, as the disciples did when He began to unfold to them the meaning of His Passion and Death. Finally, there comes a stage of communion – signified by the breaking of bread at supper in the Gospel; at this point the soul is united to God, and God to the soul. It is a moment one reluctantly abandons, even when the day is far spent and fatigue is great.

-Beside the joy it brings in itself, meditation has practical effects on our spiritual lives. First, it cures us of the habit of self-deception. Man is the only creature on earth capable of self-reflection; this possibility exists because he has rational soul. Since the soul is also spiritual, it has a longing for the infinite; we sometimes seek to slake our infinite thirst in the waters of the world – which have a glamour for us that is lacking in the things of God – and when this effort temporarily provides us with pleasure, we deceive ourselves.

-Meditation enables us to hold the mirror up to our souls, to perceive the fatal disease of self-love in the blinding light of the Radiant Christ. The silence which meditation demands is the best cure for self-deception; in silence the workmen of the soul clear away its rubbish, as trash collectors clean the cities in the quiet night.

-Anyone awake at night sees his sins more clearly than in daylight; this is because the soul is now beyond the distraction of all noise. Sleeplessness is thus more of a burden to those with a sense of guilt than to the innocent, who, like the Psalmist, can raise their night thoughts to God in prayer.

-The one who sees the most faults in his neighbor is the one who has never looked inside his soul. Unjustified criticism of others is self-flattery, for by finding others worse than ourselves, we become comparatively virtuous; but in meditation, by finding ourselves worse than others, we discover that most of our neighbors are better than ourselves.

-The poorer a man is the greater the fortune of which he dreams; so, the humbler we are in our meditation, the higher the ideal to which we aspire. The clearer we see our souls in relation to God, the less ego-centric we become.

-There is a definite correlation between knowing God and knowing oneself: God cannot be known unless we know ourselves as we really are. The less a man thinks of himself, the more he thinks of God. God's greatness does not depend objectively on our littleness; but it becomes subjective reality to us only if we are humble.

-Meditation improves our behavior. It is often stated that it makes no difference what we believe, that all depends on how we act; but this is meaningless, for we act upon our beliefs. Hitler acted on the theory of Nazism and produced a war; Stalin acted on the ideology of Karl Marx and Lenin and begot slavery. If our thoughts are bad, our actions will also be bad.

-The problem of impure actions is basically the problem of impure thoughts; the way to keep a man from robbing a bank is to distract him from thinking about robbing a bank. Political, social, and economic injustices are, first, psychic evils – they originate in the mind. They become social evils because of the intensity of the thought that begot them.

-Nothing ever happens in the world that does not first happen inside a mind. Hygiene is no cure for immorality, but if the wellsprings of thought were kept clean, there would be no need to care for the effects of evil thinking on the body.

-When one meditates and fills his mind for an hour a day with thoughts and resolutions bearing on the love of God and neighbor above all things, there is a gradual seepage of love down to the level of what is called the subconscious, and finally these good thoughts emerge, of themselves, in the form of effortless good actions.

-Everyone has verified in his own life a thousand times the ideomotor character of thought. For instance, someone watching a football game, the spectator sees a player running with the ball; if there is a beautiful opening around right end, he may twist and turn his own body more than the runner does, to try to take advantage of the chance. The idea is so strong that it influences his bodily movements – as ideas often do.

-Our thoughts make our desires, and our desires are the sculptor of our days. The dominant desire is the predominant destiny. Desires are formed in our thoughts and meditations; and since action follows the lead of desires, the soul, as it becomes flooded with divine promptings, become less and less a prey to the suggestions of the world. This increases happiness; external wants are never completely satisfied, and their elimination thus makes for less anxiety.

-If a man meditates consistently of God, a complete revolution takes place in his behavior. If in a morning meditation he remembers how God became a humble servant of man, he will not lord it over others during the day. If there was a meditation of His redemption of all people, he would cease to be a snob. Since Our Lord took the world's sins upon Himself, the man who has dwelt on this truth will seek to take up the burdens of his neighbor, even though they were not of his making – for the sins the Lord bore were not of His making, either.

-If the meditation stressed the merciful Savior who forgave those who crucified Him, so a man will forgive those who injure him, that he may be worthy of forgiveness. These thoughts do not come from ourselves – for we are incapable of them – nor from the world – for they are unworldly thoughts. They come from God alone.

-We cannot keep evil thoughts out of our minds unless we put good ones in their place. Supernature, too, abhors a vacuum.

-If we meditate before we go to bed, our last thought at night will be our first thought in the morning. There will be none of that brown feeling with which some people face a meaningless day; and in its place will be the joy of beginning another morning of work in Christ's Name.

-As a third largesse, meditation gives us contact with new sources of power and energy. "Come to me, all you that labor and burdened; I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28).

-When our spiritual batteries run down, we cannot charge them by ourselves; and the more active the life is, the greater the need to vitalize its acts by meditation.

-No person is better because he knows the five proofs for the existence of God; but he becomes better when that knowledge is permitted to transform his will. Purity of heart is therefore the condition of prayer; we cannot be intimate with God so long as we cling to unlawful attachments. The needed purity must be fourfold: purity of conscience, so that we will never offend God; purity of heart, so that we keep all our affections for God; purity of mind, so that we persevere a continual consciousness of God; and purity of action, so that we keep our intentions selfless and abandon our self-will.

-A distinguished psychiatrist, J. D. Hadfield, has said: "I attempted to cure nervous patient with suggestions of quiet and confidence, but without success, until I had linked these suggestions on to that faith in the power of God which is the substance of the Christian's confidence and hope. Then the patient became strong."

-Once our helplessness is rendered up to the power of God, life changes and we become less and less the victims of our moods. Instead of letting the world determine our state of mind, we determine the state of with which the world is to be faced. The earth carries its own atmosphere with it as it revolves about the sun; so the soul can carry the atmosphere of God with it, in disregard of turbulent events in the world outside. There is a moment in every good meditation when the God-life our life enters, and another moment when our life enters the God-life.

-It is never true to say that we have no time to meditation; the less one thinks of God, the less time there will always be for Him. The time one has for anything depends on how much he values it. Thinking determines the uses of time; time does not rule over thinking. The problem of spirituality is never, then, a question of time; it is a problem of thought.

-The remedy for the ills that come to us from thinking about time is what might be called the sanctification of the present moment – or the "now." Our Lord laid down the rule for us in these words: "Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day" (Mt. 6:34). This means that each day has its own trials; we are not to borrow troubles from tomorrow, because that day, too, will have its cross. We are to

leave the past to divine mercy and to trust the future, whatever its trials, to His loving providence.

-Each minute of life has its peculiar duty – regardless of the appearance that minute may take. The now-moment is the moment of salvation. Each complaint against it is a defeat; each act of resignation to it is a victory.

-The present moment includes some things over which we have control, but it also carries with it difficulties we cannot avoid – such as a bad cold, rain on panic days, buzzer that doesn't work, a fly in the milk, and a boil on the nose the night before a big celebration. We do not know always why such things as sickness and setback happen to us, for our minds are far too puny to grasp God's plan.

-When Job suffered, he posed questions to God: why was he born, and why was he sufferings? God appeared to him, but instead of answering Job's questions, He began to ask Job to answer some of the larger questions about the universe. When the Creator had finished pouring into the head of the creature, Job realized that the questions of God were wiser than the answers of men.

-Because God's ways are not our ways – because the salvation of a soul is more important than all the material values – the human mind must develop acceptance of the present moment, no matter how hard it may be for us to understand its cargo of pain. We do not walk out of a theater because the hero is hot in the first act; we give the dramatist credit for having a plot in his mind; so the soul does not walk out on the first act of God's drama of salvation – it is the last act that is to crown the play.

-The things that happen to us are not always susceptible to our mind's comprehension or our will's conquering; but they are always within the capacity of our faith to accept and of our will's submission.

-Every moment brings us more treasures than we can gather. The great value of the present moment, spiritually viewed, is that it carries a message God has directed personally to us.

-Nothing is more individually tailored to our spiritual needs than the now-moments; for that reason it is an occasion of knowledge which can come to no one else. This moment is school, our textbook, our lesson. Not even Our Lord disdained to learn from His specific present moment; being God He knew all, but there was still one kind of knowledge He could experience as a man. St. Paul describes it: "Son of God though He was, He learned obedience in the school of suffering" (Heb. 5:8).

On Reverence at Prayer

"Whenever we want to ask some favor of a powerful man, we do it humbly and respectfully, for fear of presumption. How much more important, then, to lay our petitions before the Lord God of all things with the utmost humility and sincere devotion. We must know that God regards our purity of heart and tears and compunction, not our many words."

-No doubt this chapter treats of the whole activity of prayer, pointing out first the principles which govern it and then applying the principles to the actual exercise. The principles remain the same whether applied to liturgical prayer or private prayer.

-From this paragraph, the following list of requirements can be made: humility, reverence, purity of devotion (which can mean either the unelaborated approach of the truly devout who use the simplest prayers, or the singleness of purpose which prays without selfish motive) integrity, contrition.

-It makes a formidable catalogue, assuming dispositions which already themselves assume a measure of perfection. But this is only what might be supposed, that is, the desire to dispose for prayer is already prayer; the endeavor to set our soul to acquire the necessary virtues is already to advance; the supplication for grace is already a use of grace. Grace, attracting our soul to all these dispositions and emotions and virtues, is helping our soul to will and to accomplish. In the process of accomplishment, grace will train our soul as to reduce the multiplicity to simplicity.

-At first there is the conscious effort on the part of the soul to pray with humility, reverence, compunction, and so on, later there is felt to be a more comprehensive activity: grace is seeing to it that the diversity is making for unity that the separate dispositions are swallowed up in charity. All virtues are one in charity; charity reproduces itself in all the virtues.

-But there must be signs to prove the authenticity of the inspiration. And when we examine them, these signs turn out to be precisely the qualities which St. Benedict wants to see, that is, without reverence there is no verifying the soul's desire; without humility no proof that the soul will accept the will of God when it reveals itself; without compunction the vice of presumption would be hard to distinguish from the virtue of perfect trust.

-To deprive any one of the dispositions demanded by St. Benedict would be to put prayer on an uneven, indeed a false foundation. Each of them plays an

essential part in our interior life. Since in connection with the Divine Office, we have heard it in last two chapter talks, and since humility has had a chapter expressly devoted to it, the subject needing attention here is compunction.

-Compunction is something more than remorse for past sins. It is a habitual awareness of the tendency to sin. It has a twofold thrust: 1st, It keeps alive a sense of guilt with regard to previous failures; 2nd, It warns of weakness in the face of future temptations. Compunction views both past and future in terms of God's mercy. The soul, conscious of personal insufficiency and seeing itself powerless to remedy what it sees within itself, puts complete trust in the power of grace.

-Where remorse and self-pitying are often tending towards despair and work its emotion inwards so that it can become to some as an obsession, compunction on the other hand works towards God. Compunction is just as much aware of evil as remorse but sees it chiefly in relation to God rather than to self. An example of this is what St. Paul said in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, "As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produce repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death" (2nd Cor.7:9-10). This is what happened to both Peter and Judas. Peter's grief produces repentance that leads to salvation, but Judas grief produces death because he eventually committed suicide.

-Those who imagine that the soul of compunction is the soul of misery have failed to understand the matter. Compunction has nothing to do with self-appointed misery, which more often than not is, like indulged scrupulosity, a defense against conscience. Remorse may be an escape, a reflex action, a device to screen guilt; compunction cannot be other than the expression of humbled love.

-Compunction is a dual sensitivity. It places before us both the reality of our sinful condition and the urgency of our desire to be possessed totally by God. It is active disgust at our low-level way of living out our lives, knowing that we are made for something better and that nothing less than God can bring us what our nature craves. It is precisely the comparison between what we are and what we could be which constitutes the triggering cause of the experience of compunction.

-It is a gift of divine love which is aimed at bringing us to salvation. It causes in us salutary pain & fear which keeps us from forgetting the possibility of eternal death, and thus serves as a check on carnal desire, a remedy for depravity, and destroys any lack of seriousness or concern with trivialities.

-At the heart of compunction is a sense of pain, a pricking, and a sensation of being stung. It is a question of being pierced, aroused from torpor & complacency & stimulated to action. It has nothing to do with obsessive & depressive sense of guilt, with endless reviewing of past failures & sins.

-Compunction is objective and realist. It does not have to fancy guilt. The guilt is there, and compunction views it in the light of truth. There may be the scorching shame which accompanies remorse (regret for one's sins or for acts that wrong others: distress from a sense of guilt), but the resolution which results from compunction is like to be more effective. Compunction leads to sympathy with others, gratitude to God, and wider understanding of divine Providence.

-Far from inducing depression in a person, true compunction makes for peace and joy. Based on the right kind of fear, it proceeds to the right kind of joy. "The fear of the Lord is honor and glory and gladness and a crown of joy," says Sirach; "the fear of the Lord shall delight the heart....With him that fear the Lord it shall go well in the latter end, and on the day of his death he shall be blessed" (Sirach 1:12,13).

-It is not far from the truth to say that St. Benedict's spirit is close to the Spirit of Sirach, as can be seen in the parallel understanding of power and responsibility and humility and compassion, but nowhere do both of them meet more surely than in their understanding of fear. "The fear of the Lord drives out sin" is the doctrine of Sirach, and is echoed by St. Benedict; "for he that is without fear cannot be justified, for the wrath of his high spirit is his ruin," that is to say, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." "He scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts."

-St. Bernard in sermon 54 on the Song of Song even expresses this more precisely: *"What are you proud of, dust and ashes? The Lord overleaped even the angels, abominating their pride. Let this rejection of the angels result in man's correction, for this was recorded for his instruction....Indeed when I read this & turn my eyes on myself and look carefully, I find myself infected by that pestilence which the Lord so abhorred in the angel that he shunned him because of it. So in fear & trembling I say to myself: if this is what happened to an angel, what will happen to me, to dust and ashes? He got puffed up in heaven, I on a dung-heap. Does anyone not see that pride is more tolerable in the rich than in the poor? Woe to me! If one so powerful was chastised so harshly because his heart was inflated, and the pride so congenial to the powerful availed him nothing, what will be demanded of me, so despicable in my pride?...."*

-I want you not to spare yourselves, but to accuse yourselves as often as you

discern, even slightly, that grace is getting lukewarm, that virtue is languishing, even as I, too, accuse myself of such things. This is how a man acts who cautiously assesses himself, who examines his tendencies and desires and in everything watches relentlessly for the vice of arrogance, lest it take him by stealth.

-In every truth, I have nothing efficacious for the gaining, the retention, and the recovery of grace as to discover that in God's presence you must always stand in awe rather than yield to pride. Blessed is the man who is always fearful. Fear, therefore, when grace smiles on you, fear when it departs, fear when it returns again; this is to be fearful always. These three fears succeed each other, one after another, in the soul, according as grace is sensed as gently present, as withdrawing when offended, or as coming back appeased. When grace is present, fear lest your actions be unworthy of it. The apostle warns us, saying: 'See to it you do not receive the grace of God in vain....'

-Yet another pitfall is hidden here that I must uncover for you, because, as you have in the psalm: the spirit of pride himself lurks there like a lion in his den, all the more dangerous as it is the more concealed. For if he fails to prevent the action he attacks the intention, suggesting and enticing how you may ascribe to yourself the effect of grace.

-Have no doubt that this kind of pride is more intolerable by far than the other. For what is more hateful than the voice in which some have said: 'It was our triumphant hand, and not the Lord, that performed all these things?

-So then we must fear when grace is present. What if it departs? Must we not then fear much more? Obviously much more, because when grace fails you, you fail. Just listen to what the giver of grace says: 'Without me you can do nothing.' Fear, therefore, when grace is withdrawn like a man who is liable to fall. Fear and tremble, as you become aware that God is angry with you. Fear, because your keeper has abandoned you. Do not doubt that pride is the cause, even if it does not seem so, even though you are not conscious of it, for God knows what you do not know, and he is the one who judges you.... The deprivation of grace is a proof of pride. Pride will always be a cause of the withdrawal of grace."

-To round this up he said: "He who fears thus neglects nothing; for how can negligence enter into that which is wholly filled? That which is capable of receiving something more is not absolutely full, for which reason it is not possible to fear and at the same time to indulge in thoughts of pride. There is no place for pride to enter your mind if it be filled with holy fear. And it is the same with other vices: they are of necessity excluded by the fullness of this gracious fear.

Fear without love is but pain and suffering, and love, when perfected, casts out fear."

-With these two virtues of compunction and love, then, the vices are repudiated and the virtues assumed. The combination is accordingly the required disposition for prayer. St. Benedict reminds us further that "not for our much speaking" shall we be heard. It is "purity of heart" that qualifies, not weight of words. The only reason why we were given the law of purifying the heart is to have the clouds of evil thoughts driven away from the atmosphere of our heart, and dispersed by constant attention, so that we can see clearly, as on bright fine day, the sun of truth Our Lord Jesus Christ.

-However, we cannot attain purity of heart unless first of all we accept the fact that our hearts are not pure, but when the eyes of our heart are cleansed, the joy of our heavenly homeland open to us.

"Prayer should therefore be short and pure, unless perhaps it is prolonged under the inspiration of divine grace. In community, however, prayer should always be brief; and when the superior gives the signal, all should rise together."

-The flexibility Benedictine/Cistercian spirituality is nowhere shown better than here. The whole matter depends upon "the inspiration of divine grace." One brother is not to feel inferior if grace does not prompt him to protracted devotions; nor is the brother who believes that he is being called to spend longer in prayer to feel superior.

-The period allotted for prayer in common should be short for two reasons: 1st, because allowance should be made for the weaker rather than for the stronger constitution and attraction; 2nd, because the more interior the exercise, the more liberty must be allowed to the soul in the performance.

-Those who cannot manage longer prayer than the minimum required have ample opportunity of compensating in one way or another. Prayer is not confined, after all, to the time spent in the act of formally addressing God in a sitting or kneeling position while we are in church.

-St. John Chrysostom says how a soul should be as ready to pray in the marketplace as in the oratory, when sitting among friends as when attending services in church. The interior cry of love can still go up to God, he says, when there are no doves for the sacrifice, when there is neither wood nor fire nor knife nor altar. The soul itself is the altar and the sacrifice and the altar.

-In the last analysis what God wants of the monk is what he wanted of Abraham

that we should walk before Him, and be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

Prayer Without Ceasing

The Problem of how to Pray without ceasing was resolved in one of four different ways:

1. By observance of set hours during the day, which effectively serve to sanctify the whole cycle of the day [Hippolytus];
2. By considering all good actions as prayer [Theodore of Mopsuestia, contemporary of St. Jerome];
3. By the practice of the prayer of the heart [method of the Desert Fathers];
4. By the equation of desire with prayer [St. Augustine].

-In a homily preached by St. Jerome's contemporary, Theodore of Mopsuestia, the notion of prayer as the practice of good works is emphasized perhaps even more strongly, so much so that prayer is seen to be the fruit of good works than good works the fruit of prayer.

Commenting on the Lord's prayer he said:

"Indeed, anyone who is inclined to good works, all his life must need be in prayer, which is seen in his choice of these good works. Prayer is by necessity connected with good works, because a thing that is not good to be looked is not good to be prayer for.... A true prayer consists in good works, in love of God and diligence in the things that please him.

-The possibility of work as prayer, as well as the observance of formal hours of prayer, was at the foundation of Cenobitic monasticism. St. Basil the Great pointed out that "we should not overlook the fixed times for communal prayer; for these times have been selected with an eye to the necessity that each has its own distinctive way of remembering God's good gifts."

-However, apart from Cenobitic monasticism, represented by St. Basil, among solitaries the ideal of constant formal (conscious) prayer continued to be pursued. This was especially the case with many of the Desert Fathers. P. 169

-It was at least partly in trying to bring together work and prayer that the so-called "prayer of the heart" was developed. This involved the constant repetition of a particular phrase (mantra), which would eventually make its way into the heart of the one praying.

-But St. Augustine brings a wholly new insight to bear on the question of praying without ceasing. His view can be summarized in a passage from one of his homilies, commenting on Psalm 38: 9 ("All my desire is before You"), he says:

“Desire itself is your prayer, and if your desire is continuous your prayer is unceasing. For the apostle did not say in vain: Pray without ceasing. Is it possible that we should unceasingly bend the knee or prostrate our body or raise up our hands, that he should tell us: Pray without ceasing? If we say that we pray in this manner I do not think that we are able to do it unceasingly. There is another prayer that is unceasing and interior, and it is desire.... If you do not wish to stop praying, do not stop desiring (Desiring to be transformed and conformed into Christ). Your unceasing desire is your uninterrupted voice. You will grow cold if you stop loving.”

-“Desire always to pray, even if the tongue should be silent. If you are always experiencing desire you are always praying. Prayer sleeps when desire has grown cold.”

Varieties in Prayer [for God reveals himself to each person according to that person's needs]

- a) The [monastic] early monks used the Psalms very heavily in prayer. Past that point, some were wordy and some were silent.
- b) Some describe prayer as warfare or as a very hard work.
- c) Still many others take the command to pray without ceasing so seriously that they devise ways of praying so that prayer becomes integrated into the breath and the heartbeat.
- d) Others fulfill the command to pray without ceasing by giving away their meager earnings to the needy with the expectation that those who receive their charity will pray for them.

-Prayer, no matter how private, is always also the prayer of the Church, and the gift of God.

-The Psalms belong to the great prayers of the Church, and when we pray them they are as truly our prayers as those we speak in our own words from our hearts. They are the prayers of the body of Christ, of which we are a very real part.

St. Benedict's Approach to Prayer

-St. Benedict, along with most of the monastic masters of prayer, tends to speak more about the quality of daily life than about performance during periods of prayer.

-The general presupposition seems to be that prayer comes readily & unselfconsciously to the one who does his best to implement the teachings of the Gospel in concrete behavior.

- The monk seeks God, not “experiences”; he lives in the luminous twilight of faith & is content with the unpredictability of Divine Providence.
- Prayer, for St. Benedict, is not an end sought in itself, but a dimension of a life progressively lived for God.

A Life Characterized by Prayerfulness

-We monks live a life of disciplined fidelity to our divine calling. Progress in this kind of life is signaled by a growing awareness of the will of God in every situation and by a willingness to respond to it.

-In the course of our lifetime, if we are willing to submit ourselves to the divine pedagogy, we will become a living prayer. Our prayer will show us what condition we are in. Theologians say that prayer is the monks mirror (St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*).

-In the monastic tradition, prayer is not an activity which exists in competition with other activities so that growth in prayer is facilitated by withdrawal from other works.

-The unity of prayer and life means that any attempt to upgrade the experience of prayer without simultaneously attending to lived values is liable to result in distortion.

-A monk who is dissatisfied with his prayer needs to make use of that feeling to motivate himself to greater fidelity to grace rather than to attempt to alleviate his pain by techniques for altering consciousness. To banish contrition, compunction & fear of the Lord by such opiates is not spiritual progress but the concession of defeat.

-Monastic tradition & ordinary common sense remind us that any stage of growth is heralded by initial negative experience.

-Growing into something new necessarily involves growing out of what is familiar, and that is always hard.

Structure of Prayerful Living

-St. Benedict is aware that the memory of God will be eroded during the day unless it is specifically cultivated on a fairly regular basis. Far from asserting that “work is prayer,” St. Benedict realized that the prayerfulness of work is largely dependent on the monks continual re-focusing of his life on God.

-For Benedictines, the liturgy is not a service to be performed at fixed hours and then forgotten, but a framework around which a life of sustained prayerfulness is built.

-The experience of many ordinary monks confirms that the most potent factor in assuring a prayerful liturgy is the quality of responsiveness to grace in daily life. So what we do outside our liturgical prayers plays an important in the quality of our participation in the liturgy.

-The ability to derive prayer from the Word of God is ordinary indication of cooperation with grace at other times. We nourish ourselves daily with the Scriptures to strengthen our souls. Our internalization of the Scriptures is the bond which unites our life and our prayer.

Prayer of the Heart

-Monastic spirituality is, in fact, a spirituality of the heart; it is entirely directed to helping us discover our own inner source of spiritual vitality and living in substantial accord with it.

-Precipitate & unreflective self-expression is far more likely to be responsive to the urgings of instinct than to the promptings of the Spirit. A short prayer from Scripture, or perhaps a small selection of such texts, may serve as sufficient for sustained prayerfulness.

-The whole purpose of our rejecting secular behavior is the building up of a pre-disposition to act freely and from grace. Monastic tradition knows by experience that a prayerful existence is possible only for one who has found his heart, and to the extent that this discovery proceeds, prayer comes easily, though variously, throughout the day.

-A prayerful existence is the result of the monk's living from the heart. Prayer, for St. Benedict, is movement away from outward occupation and a responsiveness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit leading the heart to God. Such responsiveness is not initiated during prayer but is begun and consolidated by the effort to live a life based on Gospel priorities. It becomes more apparent in prayer when there is nothing to offset it.

The Quality of Monastic Prayer

-One practice which can greatly favor perseverance in prayer is to make a regular review of our attitudes and actions in this area, to verify whether our attempts to pray really correspond to our spiritual needs at this particular season of our life.

-Part of such a review must include an attempt to diagnose the state of our soul. We can do this through introspection (the act of looking within our own mind, self-analysis) or through dialogue with one who knows us well.

Regularity

-One of the fundamental questions which most of us face is whether we pray. Time for prayer is not given us on a plate: we have to find the time or make the time. There is always a range of alternatives. Even if we succeed in allocating a period for prayer, we may find that we have expended a disproportionate amount of effort simply getting started. The energies we could have used in quieting our minds and opening our hearts to God are sometimes squandered in organizing our chaotic lives.

-This is one difficulty that was less rampant in ancient monasticism where prayer was built into the way of life. It was not a question of finding time for prayer but of making good use of the time already made available for this purpose. Drowsiness and distractions were always possible-especially if a monk's heart was elsewhere-but, in general, with good will it was possible to pray with a minimum of worry.

-Perhaps we can learn from these ancient monks the importance of so incorporating prayer into our ordinary lifestyle that, without very much thought or effort, the practice of prayer becomes a constant element in our daily program.

-It is such unselfconscious perseverance which gives prayer depth and even grace of facility. Contemplation is possible only after years of fidelity when our soul not only lives for Christ but has done so for a long time. It is the ordinariness of prayer which gives access to its most profound mysteries.

-One writer said that the only way to pray is to pray; and the way to pray well is to pray much. If one has no time for this, then one must at least pray regularly. But the less one prays, the worse it goes. It may be that regularity is not considered exciting today, but it remains an important feature of growth in prayerfulness.

-The quality of prayer improves when it forms an integral element in a personal lifestyle. Regularity in prayer is related to a willingness to give our life what Hans Urs von Balthasar terms "form." If we are genuinely serious about prayer, we cannot avoid incorporating this priority in our manner of

using time, so that our days and weeks are designed to lead to freedom and facility in prayer.

-Hans Urs von Balthasar said: "What is a person without the form that shapes him, the form that surrounds him inexorably like a coat of armor and which nonetheless is the very thing that bestows suppleness on him and which make him free of all uncertainty and all paralyzing fears, free for himself and his highest possibilities? What is a person without this? What is a person without a life-form, that is to say, without a form which he has chosen for his life, a form into which and through which to pour out his life, so that his life becomes the soul of the form and the form becomes the expression of his soul?" (*The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, pp.23-24)

-Because prayer was an integral element in ancient monastic *conversatio*, in opting for the monastic life we opted for a life in which prayer had a guaranteed priority. The question was no longer whether to pray, but how best to make use of the opportunities provided.

-Today, even in monasteries, the position of prayer is less secure. Communities are not so regimented: monks can escape from prayer if they are so inclined. Even attendance at the Liturgy of the Hours can be sporadic. Very few would interpret strictly St. Benedict's injunction that "Nothing is to be preferred to the works of God." As a result, it is left to the individual monk to inject more prayer into a minimal structure. Those who do, profit from having used their freedom well. Those who fail to do so, through some form of inattention, find that the quality of their monastic life is declining faster than they would wish and without their being fully aware of the factors involved.

-Our prayer will prosper if we can guarantee easy access to it in the course of our daily life. Our measure must be our own spiritual state at this time. It is not always a matter of constantly increasing the amount of prayer. What is of primary importance is that daily life corresponds to our inner ideals as far as possible. To the extent that we feel ourselves called to contemplation, our own integrity obliges us to incorporate the practice of prayer in the rhythms of daily living.

-Even in the strictest monasteries monks can find plenty of diversions if their interest in prayer wanes. To pray well we need a lifestyle which not only allocates time for prayer but which also governs other times wisely. On the contrary, if our values direct us toward a lot of unnecessary chatter and excitement, then prayer will be so much more difficult.

-If our prayer is genuine then, progressively, it will demand some changes in our lifestyle.

Received

-A surer approach is to embrace a way that is already producing the desired results. In general we become spiritual by becoming part of an existing spiritual tradition.

-Monasticism did not invent prayer, nor did it set itself to formulate a specific approach to it. It received as part of a tradition of God-consciousness, the origins of which trace back more than a thousand years before the Christian era. Monastic prayer is not pure emanation from human subjectivity; it is a practice imbedded in history. It owes its essential features to a culture which evolved from the Old to the New Testament and beyond. The monks tried to pray as their ancestors had before them.

-Monastic prayer and behavioral context known to nurture it are products of a developing tradition of experience. What seems to have happened is that the ancient monk's instinct to seek God led them to spend more time in the presence of God's word: reading, reflecting, responding, so that progressively their lives began to be *formed* by the scriptures, particularly by the Psalms and the Gospels. Through a growing familiarity with the biblical texts, they found models for the prayer emerging in their own spirit: lamentation, praise, confidence, thanksgiving. The scripture were seen as a mirror of what was happening in the soul, the texts became vehicles for expressing and reinforcing a deep desire for God.

-St. Athanasius in his letter to Marcellinus said: "It seems to me that these words become like a mirror to the person singing them, so that he might perceive himself and the emotions of his soul and, thus affected, he might recite them. For in fact he who hears the one chanting, receives the song as being about him...."

-Prayer is already, as it were, prefabricated in the scriptures. The act of prayer is simply a matter of making our own those forms which have been preserved by tradition precisely because of their suitability for triggering a prayerful response.

-In one sense this ancient format of prayer is both medium and message. The very content of prayer is receptivity, responsiveness, submission. The ancient monks did not consciously set out to give their prayer this attitude of receptivity. By the very fact of their being open to the scriptures, they

were led to an ever-deeper experience of prayer. They were not so busy trying to pray well that the project of prayer was given a priority over docility to the Holy Spirit. As receptivity, prayer is the opposite of self-programming.

-The spirit of willingness to be formed in a tradition meant that monastic prayer was in radical continuity with the sort of prayer inculcated by Our Lord himself and embedded in the New Testament. The New Testament gives us the commandment to pray: To pray without ceasing, to pray that we may not enter into temptation, for the Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. It also imparts a model for Christian prayer, so that the Lord's Prayer became the norm of all subsequent practice. In addition, we find throughout the Gospels and Epistles a whole range of supporting doctrine which is progressively enriched by the faith and experience of successive generations.

Prayer in the New Testament is addressed to God as Father, using the familiar Aramaic name Abba. It is characterized by tenderness, affection, homeliness. We are to be confident about God's good will in our regard and so motivated to persevere no matter what difficulties we encounter. We are liberated from superstition and formalism. Because God is our Father we have direct access to his love.

New Testament prayer is strongly eschatological: full of the Spirit, it looks to the coming of God's kingdom. Prayer was seen as something closely related to hope; it is the expression of desire for God's transforming power to burst into our lives and bring us to glory.

Prayer in the New Testament is life-related. It is not activity which has no relationship with the events of daily experience; it is not leaving behind the reality of who we are and what sin had made of us. Prayer is the means by which the love of God touches not only our minds and hearts, but the totality of our lives as well. The prayer of Our Lord in Gethsemane and on the Cross arose from life. The prayer of the tax collector who won acceptance reflected his real state before God. In the Lord's Prayer we pray for real needs: for daily bread, forgiveness and protection from harm. "The heart of all prayer is petition, from which indeed it takes its name.

Prayer is corporate. It cannot co-exist with non-forgiveness. It is impossible to turn toward God if we are at enmity with our neighbors, which is why Our Lord Jesus tells us to try to bind ourselves with prayer to those from whom we are separated by hostility.

The Importance of Lectio in Prayer

-The continuing practice of prayer must be nourished by sustained exposure to the scriptures. It is useless to attempt to pray unless the energy for prayer has been received through holy reading. Those who, in the words of Ps. 101:5, "forget to eat their bread" become progressively alienated from God's word and both prayer and behavior begin to decline.

-In our times, the breakdown of monastic life in individuals is often due to the loss of the function of *lectio divina*. Nothing can replace it, neither more liturgy, more prayer nor more work. Daily personal contact with God's word is irreducible. When a monk stops reading well, other monastic observances lose their charm. He ceases to pursue his ideals and they progressively become unrealizable. He becomes downcast. He looks for other activities (including compensatory "good" activities) to fill the void, but the gambit (a chess opening in which a player risks one or more minor pieces to gain an advantage in position; a stratagem) does not work. And so he begins a spiral of decline. He is more tightly locked in with his own problems. The only way to interrupt the cycle is to begin afresh with daily exposure to God's word. Other aids and resources may need to be used but unless faith is fed, the specifically spiritual component of personal crisis will not be attended to.

-*Lectio divina* is a key element in any sustained dedication to prayer. This means that it is located in a war zone. Whatever in us resists the attraction to a life of prayer will provide us with compelling reasons to abandon fidelity to holy reading.

***There are three potential areas in which we will have to struggle if we are to remain faithful to *lectio divina*:**

The first enemy is sleep. The ancient monks were not allowed to wear their hoods in a way which would obscure their faces, so that their vigilance could be verified. It is possible that we fall asleep because we are physically exhausted, but this is relatively unusual. If we turn to something else, even to a different sort of reading, then most often the tiredness vanishes and we are fully alert. If we take precautions about posture, surrounding and lifestyle and the drowsiness remains, it would seem that its roots must be psychological rather than physical.

-Sometimes it is due to boredom. We have lost sight of spiritual goals and all our energies are invested in mundane affairs. Lack of interest in *lectio divina* is not normally an indication that we should reduce it or omit it altogether. It is an invitation to reassess our priorities in everyday behavior.

A second threat to reading is *acedia*, that near-neurotic state of being unable to commit oneself to anything, except to non-commitment. Wherever the *acediac* is, his heart is elsewhere; whatever he does, he would rather be doing something else; as soon as he opens one book, he remembers another that would be better.

-The third area of danger to reading appears towards the second part of the 12th century. This was intellectualism, reading to stimulate the mind rather than to find the heart. We find warnings about philosophy and literature and the baser sorts of writing appearing in the works of St. Bernard and this remark of St. Aelred's:

"I shall say a few words about the internal curiosity which consists in three things: the appetite for harmful or empty knowledge; the scrutiny of another's life, not for imitation but out of envy, if it is good, or for insult, if it is evil, or simply out of pure curiosity to know about worldly affairs and events. When the mind is caught by these things, it gives birth to much toil, whether it makes the effort to pursue them moderately or freely decides to resist. Those who give themselves to vain "philosophy" experience this. They join the *Bucolics* with the Gospels in their meditations. They read Horace together with the prophets and Paul with Cicero....Without regard for the strictness of the Rule, they harangue one another, having discussions which are the seedbeds of vanity, the beginning of quarrels.... And so they begin to be depressed or angry.

-Because both study and *lectio* involve contact with books, perhaps the same books, they can become confused. Intellectual dealing with the sacred texts can also be a means of keeping God at a distance. This is why there is practical utility in making clear distinction in our own daily program between holy reading and other bookish activities. *Lectio* is too important to allow it to slip away unnoticed.

The role of Feeling in Prayer

-The lifelong living out of an attraction to the practice of prayer has to cope with a range of counter-attractions. It is not always easy to continue doing the things that promote a prayer existence because our feelings draw us in alternative directions-both the feelings which are aroused by our interaction with external reality and those passions which are governed by unconscious factors. As a result we experience a crisis in motivation when it comes to spiritual activities.

-This is a phenomenon which St. Gregory the Great noted. He said:

"There is a great difference, dear brothers, between the pleasures of the body and those of the heart. Bodily pleasures set alight a strong desire when they are not possessed, but when he who has them partakes of them, he becomes satiated and tires of them. On the other hand, spiritual pleasures are tiresome when they are not possessed; when they are possessed they cause greater desire. He who partakes of them hungers for more, and the more he eats, the hungrier he becomes. In carnal pleasure the appetite is more pleasurable than the experience, but with regard to spiritual pleasures the experience of them is more rewarding; the appetite of them is nothing. In carnal pleasure the appetite causes satiety and satiety generates disgust. In spiritual pleasures, when the appetite gives birth to satiety, satiety gives birth to even greater appetite. Spiritual delights increase the extent of delight in the mind, even while they satisfy the appetite for them."

-Because our feelings generally act as inhibitors of our spiritual impulses, it is important for us to appreciate how to "fight fire with fire." St. Bernard said that our love for Our Lord Jesus should be both intimate and tender to oppose the sweet enticement of sensual pleasures, for sweetness can be conquered by sweetness just as one nail can be driven by another nail.

-If we are not to condemn ourselves to a feelingless existence, then we must learn how to find our way through to authentic spiritual feelings, the delight which we find in being united with God.

-There are many feeling words in the spiritual vocabulary of western monastic writers: *affectus cordis*, *compunctio*, *intentio* and the whole terminology. In fact absence of such a positive sense of God was understood as an indication that one was not truly seeking God, but was locked in routine, in self-satisfaction, in a total absorption in one's own programs for the future. "The mind of one who does not seek the beauty of his Maker is unnaturally hard and remains frigid within itself," said St. Gregory the Great.

-The important thing about positive feelings of attraction to spiritual reality is that they give us the energy to be generous in breaking away from the gratifying enslavements which inhibit our freedom. Detachment is only possible on the supposition that something better has *already* moved in to take its place. St. Gregory the Great again said, "One who knows perfectly the sweetness of the heavenly life happily leaves behind everything he previously loved on earth."

-The same priority to the positive is found in the parable about treasure hidden in a field: first comes the finding of the treasure, then, in the joy of that discovery, a willingness to give up everything in order to obtain the field that holds the treasure.

-John Cassian's treatment of compunction is important in understanding the role of positive feelings, and had considerable influence in the evolution of western monastic spiritual doctrine. Firstly, compunction was more than sorrow for sin. It is, above all, a spiritual awakening. Not a paralyzing sense of guilt or inadequacy, but a compelling desire to change direction. It is a stimulant, not a depressant. It can arise in various ways: the chanting of the psalms, a glimpse of beauty, a moment of self-revelation, truth, the conferences of a holy person.

-But its effect is that it "can rouse the mind, through God's grace, from its drowsiness and half-heartedness." It is a moment in which the soul/heart/spirit is lifted up and a new channel opens up into the future. Its forms can vary: it can be positive or negative. The sensibility may be flooded with joy so that even the occupant of the next cell feels the power of the happiness of the heart. Or there may be anguish and tears. Sometimes there is only wordless wonder, when the soul is introduced into a secret abyss of silence. Always there is feeling.

-In the hustle of daily activities we are unaware of what is deepest. It is only in silence – of tongue, of thought, of being – that we begin to perceive what is habitually present.

-What we experience in prayer can never be at odds with objective norms/standards/rules. If it leads us to live a more evangelical life with greater fervor, then it probably comes from God. If it leads to laxity, to complacency, to phoniness (fake, fraudulent) to arrogance, to living beyond our spiritual means, to lack of prudence, then the feelings do not come from God. They need to be subject to discernment.

-Specific behavior traits can poison our prayer; if we are firmly saying "No" to God in a particular area of daily life and refusing even to admit that this is the case, then our prayer can only be an experience of our stonewalling God. If we admit our resistance and our sin, this "confession" can fuel our prayer very successfully.

-The simple task of remaining at peace under the action of God is not as easy as it sounds; it is during such stages as these that many lose heart and give up their spiritual endeavor.

-Having said that prayer is always feelingful, does not mean that it always feels good. Often the feeling is bad. Prayer is a mirror which reflects the real state of our life. If, for example, our life is 45% dedicated to God and 55% directed elsewhere, the proportions are like to be reflected in our experience of prayer. About half the time we will sense that we are distanced from God. We need to persevere with our practice of prayer, even though it seems more a matter of routine than of positive experiences. We need to stay with this anguish and separation and experience it to the full so that we may grow in a desire to change matters. The only way we improve our prayer is by upgrading our life.

How Prayer is Life-Related

-Much of the quality of what we experience in prayer will be a direct reflection of the quality of our daily living. Our habitual way of dealing with the events of ordinary experience leaves a residue which manifests itself during the time of prayer.

-Our prayer will show us in what condition we are. Theologians say that prayer is the monk's mirror (St. John Climacus).

-It is for this reason that John Cassian counsels that if we find our prayer unsatisfactory, then it is time to upgrade our life. He said, "Whatever thoughts our mind conceives before the time of prayer will certainly recur in the memory during prayer. For this reason we should try to prepare ourselves before the time of prayer by being the sort of person we would wish to be when we are at prayer. The mind is shaped during its prayer by what it had been beforehand. When we prostrate ourselves in prayer, our previous actions, words, and impressions continue to play before the minds of our imagination, just as they did beforehand, making us angry or sad....This is why before prayer we ought to be quick to exclude from the approaches to our heart anything that would disturb our prayer.

-John Cassian is advocating a life lived in a progressive mindfulness of God, in which pursuits foreign to our ultimate goal of finding God are systematically eliminated and distractions kept to a minimum. In this way the heart becomes "pure" or single, and prayer is able to flow undisturbed.

-We need to give our lives a positive quality by actively seeking the will of God, through "fear of the Lord," the keeping of his commandments and the practice of evangelical virtue. This takes so much effort that we cannot help but be mindful: mindful of our own weakness so that we are

motivated to call to God for help.

-It is our prayer which reveals to us the true quality of our behavior. If we are sane, our prayer is a mirror which does not lie.

-This does not mean that prayer is impossible to the extent that we are sinful. Sin does not prevent prayer, but it does change its quality. In prayer we experience the truth of our being: if a large measure of it is turned away from God, then this will be reflected in what we experience during the time of prayer. We do not have to wait to purge away all sin before we begin to pray, but we need to recognize that sin will often render our prayer negative.

-Negative does not mean unprofitable. In fact it is usually the experience of our own weakness that brings us to prayer, breaking through the hard shell of complacency and making us aware of our own fragility and vulnerability. "Because I am human, therefore I am weak. Because I am weak, therefore I pray," said St. Augustine.

-It is precisely in the experience of our own weakness that we become aware of the Spirit animating our prayer, "interceding for our weakness" (Rom. 8:26), bridging the gap between ourselves and God. Only sin that is repressed, denied or rationalized upsets our prayer. Sin accepted and confessed drives us toward God. Like the publican in the Gospel, we pray on the basis of our sin, and it seems that God is always willing to accept this prayer.

-On a more positive note, this linkage of prayer and life can be a source of hope. Because the quality of prayer is determined by the way we live, this means that by striving to live a more evangelical life we are moving towards an ever more profound experience of God. Union with God in prayer is a matter of union of wills: our will being aligned with God's. This union is not something that can be effected quickly at the beginning of our prayer. It is accomplished through our habitual and heartfelt assent to the concrete manifestations of God's will in our nature, in our personal history, in revelation, in the duties of our way life, and in the many avenues of challenge by which we are invited to move towards a life of greater love. This is how our wills become aligned with God's-step by toilsome step. This is the seedbed of the experience of God.

-In his treatise *On the Necessity of Loving God*, St. Bernard demonstrates ecstasy - the total experience of God which involves a total transcendence of self-begins at a very mundane level. It is not a matter of learning esoteric skills and practicing mysterious asceticism. It is learning to

live in self-forgetfulness, going beyond self by reaching out to others in justice and compassion. This humble altruism is the direct way to the highest contemplative experiences.

-It is because prayer and life are inseparably married that variation in our experience of prayer is to be taken as normative. This changeableness, which St. Bernard termed *vicissitude* or *alternation*, is something which continues throughout life, our prayer reflecting each nuance in our total relationship with God.

-John Cassian expresses this aspect of prayer clearly:

"I believe that it is impossible to grasp all the different forms of prayer without great purity of heart and soul. There are many forms of prayer as there are states of soul or, rather, there are as many as the totality of states experienced by all souls together. We are not able to perceive all the various kinds of prayer due to our inner debility, nevertheless, let us try to go through those which we know from our own far from extraordinary experience. It is certain that nobody is ever able to keep praying in the same way. A person prays in one manner when cheerful, in another when weighed down by sadness or sense of hopelessness. When one is flourishing spiritually, prayer is different from one who is oppressed by the extent of one's struggles. One prays in this manner when seeking pardon for sins, and in another when asking for a particular grace or virtue or the elimination of a particular vice. Sometimes prayer is conditioned by compunction, occasioned by the thought of hell and desire for the good things to come. A person prays in one manner when in dangerous straits and in another when enjoying quiet and security. Prayer is sometimes illumined by the revelation of heavenly mysteries but, at other times, one is forced to be content with the sterile practice of virtue and the experience of aridity" (Conference 9.8).

-It is logical, however, that our choice of prayer form would also be subject to variation, according to the seasons of our lives and the specific fluctuations of recent experience. Each day may see a different blend of the various forms of prayer, made according to the internal and external possibilities which present themselves. A passage from the *Philokalia* exposes this point:

You should spend some of your time in psalmody, some of your time in reciting prayers (by heart), and you must allow some time to examine and guard your thoughts. Do not set limits to yourself as regards psalmody and oral prayer but do as much as the Lord gives

you strength for: do not neglect reading and inner prayer. Do some of one, some of another, and you so will spend your day in a manner pleasing to God. Our fathers, who were perfect, had no cut and dried rule, but spent the whole day in following their own rule: some psalmody, some recital of prayers aloud, some examination of thoughts and some, though little, care of food. They did all this in fear of God, for it is said, "Whatsoever you do, do all to the the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

-The life-relatedness of prayer means that the greatest obstacles to our entering into deep prayer will be our rampant [passions. These may be kept temporarily at bay by turning our attention to activities; but when we leave aside our outward pursuits and move into the emptiness of prayer, immediately our unprocessed feelings surge into consciousness.

-Anger, sadness, lust, vainglory will flood the awareness and subvert our attempts at prayer. According to Evagrius we must anticipate that our prayer will be an occasion for the onset of the diemonic and so come to prayer with the idea that stalwart resistance will be necessary.

-The disturbance caused by anger or sadness is especially to be eliminated at its source. Not denied, repressed and driven underground, but faced and sorted out.

-In the *Institutes*, John Cassian makes it clear that he is not so much concerned about changing the external circumstances which provoked these reactions. What he advises is concentrating on our subjective part in the matter. When we discover strong feelings of anger or sadness, we should try to discover *why* we have responded to a particular situation with (perhaps) disproportionate emotion. Has there been a build-up of pressure which eventually caused an explosion over something minor? Has the dimension of faith diminished in our daily life? This last question is of particular importance to our prayer.

-Christian life and Christian prayer involve participating in the paschal mystery of Our Lord Jesus. It is a question of accepting death in the hope of eternal life. Trying to avoid such death is a certain recipe for prayerlessness.

-The free refusal of an invitation to die or the lack of acceptance of a death imposed by circumstances poisons prayer. It often sets up a complicated cycle of rationalization and compensation to cover its track, but to no avail.

-Our ability to pray is concretely linked with our acceptance of God's providence in our regard. No one can say the prayer "Thy will be done," sincerely except one who believes that every circumstance, favorable and unfavorable, is designed by God's providence for good, and that God thinks and cares more for the good of his people and their salvation than we do ourselves.

-The prayer of Our Lord Jesus in Gethsemane is a model for us in this regard. Do we have faith that God is acting in the events of daily life? To the extent that we do not, negative incidents will play havoc with our emotional life? We will not be like the martyrs who sang Alleluia on their way to death; we will be too busy trying to avoid pain or seeking revenge.

-Faith in God's providence is not only a means to avoiding defeat through anger and sadness, it also acts counter to another inhibitor of prayer, *acedia*. The vice of *acedia* consists in a refusal to take seriously the challenge of the moment. It is an attitude of habitually tending toward the easier and less demanding option, stretching concessions to their furthest limits and minimizing obligations.

-If we have faith in God's working through daily events and experiences, we will often feel drawn to venture something new. Our day will progressively be punctuated by calls to a more Christ-like manner of living, an act of forgiveness or service or self-effacement. To the extent that we are open to such invitations and respond positively, our prayer will remain fresh, and there will be a suppleness about our life in general that will ensure that prayer will flow freely, not only at our regular slots, but unexpectedly as well.

-In fact emphasizing the continuity between prayer and life is a great enrichment. It allows us to build prayer into our ordinary conscious patterns of thoughts and actions. It becomes simply a matter of moving closer to the person of Jesus Christ, as he is known to the ordinary Christian. Christ is our light, our "Yes" to God.

-The ancient monks were convinced that what happened outside prayer was the chief determinant of the quality of our experience of prayer. It was for this reason that detailed guidance about techniques of prayer is singularly lacking in this tradition.

-Authenticity and sincerity were prized in prayer; quantity was thought less important. Without a special grace, excessive prayer can lead to tension and, for various reasons, make life difficult. The result is a progressive cleavage between what happens during prayer and one's experience of

daily life. The correct balance tends to result in a progressive overlap of prayer and life: harmony, mutual interaction.

The Atmosphere of Prayer

-A prayer that was "accessible" also demands a certain atmosphere in which it could be carried out more easily. For St. Clement of Alexandria and Origen, prayer is principally a constant disposition of the soul that seeks a certain externalization in gesture.

-The best place for all to pray (for Origen) is "where the faithful meet together." There not only the faithful themselves congregate but also the spirits of the dead and the guardian angels of those present as well. It as an assembly whose prayer are all the more effective for its being so numerous.

-For St. Gregory of Nyssa:

"Coming close to God is not a question of simply changing the place where we pray. No matter where we may be, as long as our soul forms the sort of resting place in which God can dwell and linger, he will visit us. But if we fill our inner self with base thoughts, then we could be standing or on the Mt. of Olives or the monument of the Resurrection and we still be as far from welcoming Christ into ourselves as someone who has never begun to confess Him.

The Interior Life

-Tertullian is especially careful to stress the stance of the Christian at prayer; everything is meant to bespeak humility and moderation, whether it be the position of the hands, elevation of the eyes or the tone of the voice. Extravagant gestures or motions, the element of the Dionysian or the irrational, were characteristic not of orthodox Christianity but of heretical groups and the pagan cults. This sobriety was reflected in both public and private prayer.

-Prayer had rather be rooted in the ordinary living out of Christian life, which was characterized by the practice of good works.... Good work not only had to accompany prayer but were a part of prayer.

Prologue

"Hearken, O my son, to the precepts of the master, and incline the ear of your heart: willingly receive and faithfully fulfill the admonition of your loving father, that you may return by the labor of obedience to Him from whom you had departed through the sloth of disobedience."

-The condition for future service is to "hearken" and "willingly receive." Our essential work, then, is to listen for the word of God as expressed in one form or another, and then, when it has been recognized, to "fulfill it faithfully."

-“He looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing” (James 1:25). The holy Rule is designed to be law of liberty. Not restrictive but liberative. The monk who continues in it, never forgetting what he hears and always trying to be more perfect doer of the work, must inevitably be blessed in his deed.

-Vocation is the right relation between the word uttered and the response given. Everything depends upon the right reception and interpretation of what is enunciated. Misinterpret the call, and it is better never to have heard it.

-“The voice of my beloved knocking,” sings the bride in the Song of Songs. “Open to me...my love, my dove, my perfect one...I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on?” It is here that we learn how to respond: we put off the old garment which belongs to our former manner of life, and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness & holiness.

-Having “departed from Him through the sloth of disobedience” we return to Him freely and encumbered. Freely we submit to the yoke of obedience. Obedience conquers ignorance, and even a man with the most erroneous ideas about the spiritual life can rapidly become a great saint if he places his judgment in the hands of a capable director.

-Obedience is the test of our availability to God: the measure of our love of Him. When our responsive love melts into obedience, then God makes His dwelling within us. Only obedience wins peace, which means victory.

-In the language of St. John of the Cross, obedience is a penance of the intellect & therefore a more acceptable sacrifice than all corporal

penances. Hence God loves our tiniest act of obedience more than all other homages we think of offering him.

-Obedience has an intimate connection to listening & hearing. To listen is the capacity to receive a word – to allow ourselves to be changed by the word we received. Hearing is the same with listening. It does involve a change of ourselves. It is important to hear and to listen. Listening leads to insight. Insight is seeing.

-St. Teresa of Avila said that since the devil knows that obedience is the quickest road to perfection, he makes it distasteful & offers many objections to it, under the pretext of a higher good.

-The cornerstone of Monastic obedience is the conviction that what the superior decides is what God wants at the present moment. The quality of our obedience is proportional to the quality of our discernment of God's will, for the foundation of obedience to man, is obedience to God.

-The word of God is spoken by the voice of legitimate authority. It is also spoken to in our Lectio Divina, in creation, and in the book of our own experience.

-To wait always upon God's word is to live according to His will. It is to abide in his love. It is to walk in His presence. Where human beings are concerned, their memory is not the same as their presence; but where God is concerned, to remember Him is to recognize His presence. Remembrance of God, then, is tantamount to awareness of His presence. It is like standing before Him. It is where we can gain strength in our trials, difficulties, & challenges. The psalmist said: "I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."

-If union with God is the meaning of our monastic vocation, then our soul must learn to search for God's love and abide in it. We need to learn the mystery of God's presence, must learn to recognize his presence in every situation either in positive or negative experiences that we encounter from time to time.

-When St. Benedict tells us to incline the ear of our heart, he is telling us to listen in faith. As the religious vocation unfolds, it is seen to be nothing else but life in faith. Monastic Observances are good, but would be useless without faith. Our vows would be useless without faith. Faith is the secret of the whole thing, and the only guarantee of love.

-Faith expresses itself in obedience. Obedience is to faith what humility is to truth and what homage is to beauty. Where faith is strong, obedience

follow. Where faith is weak, obedience will be deficient, inexact, inconstant, proportionately natural. The sloth of disobedience reveals our unfaithfulness; so by the labor of obedience we must return to God and grow in faith.

-Fervor is not to be despised – indeed it is one of the signs of love – but neither is it to be preferred before obedience. True fervor is found in obedience. “To you, therefore, my words are addressed, whoever you are, that renouncing your own will, you do take up the strong and bright weapons of obedience in order to fight for the Lord Jesus, our true King.”

-The return to God can be effected only by labor, renunciation, obedience. Even when we have been baptized and are children of God, we can destroy our likeness to God by following our own will instead of God's. So we have to return to the likeness of God by renouncing our own will by obedience.

-For a rebellion to end, it is not enough to obtain a pardon. Rebellion ends only when there is conformity with the will of authority. We, the rebels, must work our way back to favor, to our original status. We come over from the wrong side of the line to the right. We take up the weapons of obedience, and fight for Christ.

-By obedience we can bring order where there was not order before. By obedience we return not only to God's will but also to our destined self, to our proper self. We return to our likeness to Him who made us in His image.

-It is by obedience that we shall come to be united with God and with our true self. It is by our obedience, which binds us to the will of God instead of to our own will, which makes us free: it allows us to be the person whom God has planned. We can be natural, we can then be ourself.

-We are to fight for Christ, we must be free from the tyranny of self. Renunciation is not only the mark of the monk, it is the condition of the monk's response to the vocation. If the monk is to “re-establish all things in Christ,” he must be ready to dis-establish all things in himself.

-St. Benedict comes back to the theme later on in the seventy first chapter: “Let the brethren know that it is by the way of obedience they shall come to God.” He leads his subjects by one method only – in union with Christ in His subjection. Only in this subjection is true liberation.

-If liberty is the ability to be true to God's idea of us, that is, to ourselves and our vocation, we must first know what is wanted of us, and then we

must be single-minded enough not to waste ourselves on other things. Thus we must listen to what God tells us of His will ("Hearken, O my son," and you will come to know what your life is expected to produce), and we must deny ourselves of whatever may stand in the way.

-When we have learned what is our true vocation, then we are free of the things that stood in the way.

-To look for a variety of activities outside our soul is to find a weakening of activity within us. But when our soul has found itself in Christ, the outward activities become inward activities. Our things become God's things.

-For us monk, it is not enough to have the general intention of living our life to please God, we must also go on to do the work willed by God.

-Having warned the neophyte at the beginning that he will have to work, St. Benedict goes on to tell him how to set about it. If the monastery is a school and workshop, the approaches to the craft are of the greatest importance.

"In the first place, whatever good work you begin to do, beg of Him with most earnest prayer to perfect it...."

-Our good works are good only when they are His. God rewards none but His own works. For whatever we do, we need grace: "As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing," says the Lord.

-That the beginner should realize this before he goes any further in religion is St. Benedict's primary concern, so the would-be monk is urged to pray for divine support in every undertaking.

-The undertaking which is of supreme importance to the beginner is the religious life itself, and if he is to launch himself along the right lines he must do so on the impulse of prayer. For this adventure, which is supernatural or it is nothing, there must be complete dependence on God.

-If we had first chosen Him, we might have reason to think that we could attain to Him by force of character and by our own human effort. But He has chosen us, and if our vocations are to bear fruit we must ask the Father in Christ's name that our work may be to His honor.

-“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”

-What we must realize is that it is not only His grace that attracts us in the first place but that it is His grace in us that enables us to respond. Indeed it is His grace in us that is the attraction.

-We can get nearer to the mystery of God's call to our soul if we think of Him saying: “I know you will want to come to Me if I inspire this urge in you. You will not draw near to Me unless I do the drawing for you. I will therefore come to you and be the attraction. In other words, we love because God loves us first. We search for Him because we have been found by Him.

-God is therefore the mover and the moved, the lover and the loved, the caller and the called. “My beloved to me, and I to him.” In the case of religious vocation, God calls and we respond. In the case of sanctity, God directs and we cooperate. We advance not all at once but by stages. We move from stage to stage not by our own power but by faith. In faith, therefore, God teaches and we learn.

-Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, our soul is taught by the Holy Spirit how to respond. The lover and the Beloved are espoused in faith. In such a relationship there must necessarily be an eager docility on the part of our soul: failing this, the offered perfection is not guaranteed on the part of God, because God would not sanctify us against our will and without our cooperation.

-The continuity and harmony in God are reflected in the correspondence and progressive sanctification of our soul. “Draw me,” the bride begs of the Beloved, “and we will run after you to the odor of your ointments.” We cannot run of ourselves: we need to be drawn, and at every step we need new strength.

-If there is one truth which the aspirant to the monastic life must assimilate before he even begins to follow the routine of the monastery, it is the truth that whatever he sets out to achieve must be achieved in him by grace. “Whatever good work you begin to do, beg of Him with most earnest prayer to perfect it.”

-“Let us then arise, since the Scripture stirs us up saying: ‘It is the time now for us to rise from sleep.’ And our eyes being open to the deifying light, let us hear with wondering ears what the divine voice admonishes us, daily crying out: ‘Today if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts.’”

-The light of grace is "deifying" it translates and transforms. Once awake to the reality of the light, we are stirred to action. It is now that we must keep our ears open to the admonishing voice or we shall go to sleep again. "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).

-To prevent the hardening of our heart which sometimes comes instinctively to our soul even though we hear God's voice, there must be a readiness to silence the voices of the world which counsel every sort of alternatives.

On Pursuing Peace

-Peace is always for St. Benedict community peace, fraternal harmony, the concord of brothers living together in unity. This peace is easily destroyed by the unguarded tongue. Control of the tongue must be the habit of the monk in search of purity of heart.

-Not only eternal life but community peace especially is dependent on such custody. Therefore already in the Prologue St. Benedict warns the monk to "keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit."

-For the same reason he devotes a special chapter, Chapter 6, on the custody of the tongue. In it he makes the monk aware of the dangers besetting his use of the power of speech, and he asks that the monk seldom be given permission to talk, even for the sake of pious conversation.

-St. Benedict directs the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 33 to the monk: "If you will have true and everlasting life, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit...seek after peace and pursue it."

-Words of deceit are given special mention by the Psalmist whom St. Benedict quotes, for deceit and deception are singularly effective in destroying the purity of love between brothers.

-The happiness of a monastic community and the love & patience that we should have for one another cannot endure in a monastery where our relationships with each other are tainted by deceit in any of its forms.

-Nowhere in the Rule does St. Benedict demand absolute silence. However, St. Benedict demanded far greater silence than what is the custom today in many Benedictine houses. The restraint he puts on talking are quite rigorous. He is so stringent in this matter because the ideal of purity of heart demands it.

-St. Benedict identifies purity of heart with peace, and asserts that the monk will not attain to either everlasting life (the ultimate goal) or peace (the proximate goal) unless he guards his tongue from evil speech.

-St. James said that if anyone thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man's religion is vain.

-The fruit of wisdom and love is peace. Pure peace is something divine that only wisdom and love can produce. To be peaceful, it is not enough to live in sweet concord with our brother; it is not sufficient to have all our powers in tranquil harmony under the empire of the will. Rather, all the desires of our soul must be fused in one single divine desire, all flowing as one great torrent, with no scattered currents of affection anywhere.

-St. Augustine has profoundly said that peace is the tranquility of order; but order is the simplification of the multiple; thus the peaceful soul is the one who rests tranquilly in divine simplicity.

-Love generates peace; but simplification, which is the tranquil order, is the fruit of wisdom. On earth peace is the daughter of light & love, as in heaven the Word and the Holy Spirit are the eternal founts of the peace that emanates from the bosom of the Father.

-Peace & unity exist only where people live in righteousness & virtue. So, if we do not live in righteousness and virtue there would be no peace & unity. Peace is only possible if we pursue an upright way of life, if we are pleaser of God rather than men.

-All people desire peace, but those alone enjoy it who are completely dead to themselves & love to bear all things for Christ. A stranger to peace is a stranger to joy.

-We cannot make peace with others unless we are at peace with ourselves. We cannot be at peace within ourselves unless we are able to make the sacrifices which peace demands.

On Religious Modesty

-There are four virtues which bear the name of true modesty. 1st, propriety in our external behavior. To this virtue are opposed two vices: want of gravity in our gestures & behavior, that is to say, levity (lack of seriousness) & an unaffected behavior.

-2nd, interior propriety of our understanding & our will, which has also two opposite vices: curiosity in the understanding, that is, multiplicity of desires to know & understand all things, & instability in our undertakings, passing from one exercise to another without staying in any. The other vice is a certain stupidity & carelessness of mind which is unwilling even to know or learn the things necessary for our perfection, and this is an imperfection no less dangerous than the other.

-3rd, relates to our style of conversation and to our words, that is to say, to our manner of conversing with our neighbor, avoiding the two opposite imperfections, which are rusticity & loquacity; rusticity, which prevents us from contributing our share towards keeping up good conversation; loquacity, which makes us talk so much that we give others no opportunity of taking them in their turn.

-4th, neatness & propriety as to our clothing, and the two contrary vices untidiness & superfluity.

-The first, that is, propriety in our external behavior is most highly recommendable for several reasons, & especially because it keeps us in great subjection.

-Now, in the subjection which it imposes lies its great value, for all that brings us into subjection for the love of God is of great merit & wonderfully pleasing to Him.

-It keeps us in subjection not only for a time, but always; both in all places, whether we are alone or whether we are in company, and at all time, even when we are asleep. A great saint wrote to one of his disciples, telling him to lie down at night as in the presence of God, exactly as any would have done if commanded by Our Lord when He was on earth to lie down & sleep in His presence. It is true, the saint added, that you do not see Him and cannot hear the command which He is giving you, but none the less you should act as if you saw & heard Him, since He is truly present & guards you while you sleep.

-Religious modesty, then, keeps us in subjection at every moment of our lives, because the angels are always present, and God Himself, for whose eyes we practice it.

-This virtue is also much recommended on account of the edification of our neighbor. A simple & modest exterior has converted many, as in the case of St. Francis of Assisi who passed once through a town with such great modesty in his behavior that, though he did not speak a single word, a great number of young men followed him, attracted only by his modesty, and desiring to be instructed by him.

-A modest demeanor is a silent sermon; it is a virtue which St. Paul recommends most especially to the Philippians, saying: "Let your modesty be known to all men." And when he tells his disciple St. Timothy that a Bishop must be adorned, he means not with richly clothing but with modesty, so that by his modest bearing he may encourage all to approach him, avoiding alike rusticity & levity, so that while giving liberty to worldlings to come to him, they may not think that he is worldly like themselves.

-Now, the virtue of religious modesty, observes three things: time, place, & person. There are gestures & behavior which would be unseemly out of recreation, but are not at all so at that time.

-We need also to take into consideration place, persons, the circle of which we may form part, and most especially the condition of the person. A demeanor which would be modest in one man would not be so in another, on account of his rank; a gravity extremely suitable in an elderly person would be affectation in a younger one, to whom lowlier & humble modesty belongs.

-The great St. Arsenius (who was chosen by Pope St. Damasus to bring up & instruct Arcadius, who was destined to succeed his father Theodosius in the government of the Empire), after having been honored at the court for many years, and as much favored by the Emperor as could be any man in the world, grew weary at last of all these vanities, although his life at the court had been as truly Christian as it had been honorable, and resolved to retire into the desert among the holy hermit Fathers who were living there, a design which he courageously carried out.

-The Fathers, knowing the virtuous reputation of this great saint, were filled with joy & consolation at receiving him in their company. He attached himself especially to two monks, one of whom was named Pastor, and formed a great friendship with them.

-One day, when all the Fathers were assembled together for a spiritual conference, one of the Fathers informed the superior that Arsenius was in the habit of failing in religious modesty by crossing one leg over the other.

-"It is true," replied the superior, "I have remarked it myself, but the good man has lived a long time in the world, and brought this habit with him from the court. What can be done?"

-The superior made this excuse, for it was painful to vex him by reproving him for so slight a thing, in which there was no sin; at the same time, he was anxious to induce him to correct himself of this the only fault which could be brought against him.

-The monk Pastor then said: "O Father, do not distress yourself; there will be no difficulty in telling him of it, and he will be very glad to be told. Tomorrow, if you please, when we are all assembled together, I will put myself in the same posture; you will correct me for it before all the company, and he will then understand that it must not be done."

-The superior therefore administering the correction to Pastor, the good Arsenius threw himself at the feet of the Father & humbly asked pardon, saying that although perhaps no one had remarked this fault in him, he had always committed it; it was his usual habit at court, and he begged a penance for it. The penance was not given, but he never again seen in that posture.

-In this story we can find several things worthy of consideration. In the first place, the prudence of the superior in fearing to grieve Arsenius by a correction on such slight grounds, though at the same time he tried to find some way of correcting him, proving thereby the exactness of all with regard to the smallest details of religious modesty.

-In the next place, we notice the goodness of Arsenius in acknowledging his fault, and his fidelity in correcting himself, although it was so slight a matter that at court it was not even considered an impropriety, although it was among the Fathers.

-Therefore we must not be troubled if we find some bad habit of the world still clinging to us, since Arsenius retained this one after having lived for a long time in the desert in the company of the Fathers.

-We cannot get rid so quickly of all our imperfections; we must never be disturbed at finding many still remaining in us, if only we have the will to struggle against them.

-We need to observe that we are not judging rashly if we think that the superior is correcting another for a fault which we ourselves commit, in order that, without directly reproving us, we may amend; but we must humble ourselves profoundly, seeing that the superior holds us weak, and knows that we would feel too much a reproof addressed ourselves.

-We must also love this abjection cordially, and humble ourselves as did Arsenius, confessing that we are guilty of the same fault, taking care always to humble ourselves in spirit of gentleness & tranquility.

-The 2nd, that is, interior propriety of our understanding & our will, which is interior, produces the same effects upon the soul as the first does upon the body. As this controls the gestures & behavior of the body, avoiding the two extremes or contrary vices of levity or license, and of a too affectionate character, so in the same way inward modesty maintains the powers of our souls in tranquility & moderation avoiding curiosity of the understanding over which it chiefly exercises its control retrenching also from our will its innumerable desires, & directing it simply to that one thing which Mary chose, and which shall not be taken away from her, that is, the will to please God.

-Martha represents very well the want of control in the will, for she is too eager. She goes here & there without passing for a moment, so anxious is she to treat Our Lord well; and she seems to think she will never have enough dishes prepared to entertain Him. In the same way, the will which is not restrained by moderation move quickly from one subject to another and to desire many means of serving Him, and yet so many things are not needed.

-Better is to cling to God like Magdalene, sitting at His feet, asking Him to give us His love, than to be thinking how and by what means we can acquire it. This modesty keeps our will confined to the exercise of those means of advancement in the love of God which belongs to our own particular vocation.

-This virtue chiefly exercises its control over the understanding; and this because our natural curiosity is very hurtful, and prevents us from ever knowing a thing perfectly, because we never take time enough to learn it thoroughly. It also avoids the vice which lies at the other extreme, namely, that stupidity & carelessness of mind which cares not to know what is necessary.

-Bees cannot rest as long as they have no king. They flutter about incessantly, wandering here & there, there is scarcely any repose in the hive; but as soon as their king is born, they all gather round him, and stay there, never leaving him except to go and gather their spoils, at his commands. In like manner, our understanding & will, our passions & faculties of our soul, like spiritual bees, have no repose until they have king, that is, until they have chosen Our Lord for their king. Our Constitution says that *it is only through the experience of personal love for the Lord Jesus that the specific gifts of the Cistercian vocation can flower. Only if the brothers prefer nothing whatever to Christ will they be happy to persevere in a life that is ordinary, obscure and laborious.*

-Our senses never cease to wander curiously about, drawing our interior faculties after them, wasting themselves now on one subject, now on another. Thus we are in continual affliction of spirit, in continual restlessness, which destroy that peace & tranquility of mind so necessary to us; and this it is which is produced by lack of control of the understanding and the will. But as soon as our souls have chosen Our Lord for our sole & sovereign king, all our powers get quiet, like chaste & mystic bees, cluster around him, and never leave their hive, except for those exercises of fraternal charity which this sacred king commands us to practice.

-As soon as these are accomplished, we return to recollection & holy desirable quiet, in order to distill & store up the honey of the sweet & holy thoughts & affections which we draw from His sacred presence. Thus we will avoid the two extreme mentioned above, cutting off, on the one hand curiosity of the understanding by simple attention to God, and, on the other hand, the stupidity & carelessness of mind by the exercise of charity which we practice toward our neighbors when required.

-Interior modesty keeps our souls in a state between these two extreme, in that happy mean of desiring to know what is necessary, & nothing more.

-The 3rd virtue named modesty refers to dress and the manner of dressing. Of this nothing need be said except that we must avoid any lack of cleanliness & neatness in our apparel, as much as the other extreme of too great attention to dress and an over-care to be well dressed, which is vanity. St. Bernard, however, insists very much upon cleanliness as a good indication of purity & cleanliness of soul. We must not be fastidious, but on the other hand, we must never disregard modesty.

-In the martyrdom of St. Perpetua, a mad heifer tossed her up in the air and fell on her loins. As soon as she could sit up, she noticed that her tunic

was torn at the side; immediately she pulled it together to cover her thighs, more mindful of her modesty than her suffering.

-The 4th department of religious modesty concerns our words & conversation. These are words which would be unsuitable at any other time than that of informal gathering, in which it is just & reasonable to relax our minds a little. There is a time to laugh & a time to weep, and there is also a time to speak & a time to keep silence.

-This holy modesty regulates our manner of speaking, so that it becomes pleasing & gracious, neither too loud nor too low, too slow nor too quick; it keeps us within the bounds of holy moderation, so that when others are speaking we allow them to do so without interrupting them, for that partakes of loquacity, and yet we speak when it is our turn, so as to avoid rusticity & self-sufficiency, which are such hindrances to good conversation. Often, too, occasions arise in which it is necessary to say much without speaking, by our modesty, serenity, patience, and calmness.

-How should we receive correction without letting remain in us any sensitiveness & bitterness of heart? To prevent the feeling of anger from sitting within us, and to keep the blood from showing itself in our face, this cannot be. Happy, indeed, shall we be if we attain to this perfection a quarter of an hour before we die! But to maintain bitterness in our minds in such wise that after this feeling has passed we do not speak with some confidence, gentleness, and calmness as before, this we must take all pains to avoid!

-We may say that we do all in our power to drive away the feeling, but it remains all the same. What must we do at such a time? We must cling closely to Our Lord, and speak to Him of something else. But our feelings are not yet calmed down; they are still suggesting to us to dwell upon the wrong done to us. That must be done after our soul is calmed & quieted, for while it is troubled we must neither do or say anything, but only remain firm & resolved not to yield to passion, whatever excuse we might have; for such times excuses will never be lacking – they will come in crowds – but we must not listen to a single one, however good it may seem.

-We must simply keep close to God, diverting our minds by speaking to Him of other things, after having humbled & abased ourselves before his divine Majesty. When we humble ourselves, it must be with a gentle & peaceful, not with a querulous & impatient humility. Unfortunately, we offer to God acts of humility so much against the grain, and so unwilling, that they do not calm our minds, and are fruitless. But if, on the contrary,

we made these acts in the presence of the divine Goodness with a sweet confidence, we should rise up serene & tranquil, able easily to reject all those reasons which our private judgment & self-love suggest, and which are often, one may say habitually, unreasonable; and we should be ready to converse just as before with those who reproofed or contradicted us.

-There is no one who does not dislike reproof. St. Pachomius, after having lived a most perfect life in the desert for 14 or 15 years, had a revelation from God that he would win a great number of souls, and that many would flock to the desert to place themselves under his guidance.

-He had already several Religious with him, and the first whom he received was his own elder brother, John. St. Pachomius then, having received this revelation, immediately set to work to enlarge his monastery, adding many cells to it. His brother John, either not knowing his intention, or out of his great zeal for poverty, addressed a severe reproof to him one day, asking him, for instance, if it was by building so great a monastery that he expected & wished to imitate Our Lord, who 'had nowhere to lay his head while on earth.'

-St. Pachomius, saint though he was, felt this reproof so keenly that he turned away, in order to conceal his annoyance. Then he went & threw himself on his knees before God, asking pardon for his fault, and lamenting that, after so many years spent in the desert, he should still be so unmortified.

-His prayer was so fervent & humble that he obtained the grace of never again being guilty of impatience.

-Even St. Francis towards the end of his life, after so many ecstasies & having unions with God, after having done so much for His glory, and after having conquered himself in so many ways, one day, when he was planting cabbages in the garden, being reproofed by one of the brothers for not planting them well, was affected by such a strong movement of anger that an abusive word against the brother half escaped his lips.

-He actually opened his mouth to pronounce it, but restrained himself instantly, and stooping to take up some of the manure which he was digging in with the cabbages, cried out: "Ah! wicked tongue, I will teach you what it is to abuse your brother," then suddenly throwing himself on his knees, he entreated the brother to forgive him.

-Now, what rights have we to be surprised at finding ourselves quick to anger, and ready to resent reproof & contradiction? We need to follow the example of these saints, who instantly conquered themselves, the one having recourse to prayer, the other humbly asking pardon of his brother, and neither the one nor the other doing anything to foster their sensitiveness, but turning away from it, and profiting by it.

-The smallest distraction does not withdraw our soul from God, for nothing withdraws us from God except sin, and our resolution, made each morning, to keep our soul united to God & attentive to His presence, keeps us always there, even when we are sleeping, since we sleep in the name of God and according to His most holy will.

-The means of doing well all that we do is to be very attentive to the presence of God, for no one would offend Him if he remembered that God is watching him. Venial sins are unable to turn aside from the path which leads to God.

-As regards prayer, it is not less profitable to us or less pleasing to God when it is full of distractions; it will perhaps be even more useful to us than if we had much consolation in it, because there will be more labor; provided, however, that we are faithful in withdrawing from these distractions, and in refraining from dwelling upon them voluntarily.

-It is the same with regard to difficulty which we experience throughout the day in dwelling upon the thought of God & heavenly things; provided that we are careful to restrain our minds as far as possible from running after these flitting butterflies, as a mother restrains her child.

-What, then, can we do except have patience & not weary of our labors, since they are undertaken for the love of God.

-When we cannot find God, and that He seems so far away, we only mean that we cannot feel His presence. Many people do not distinguish between God & the feeling of God; between faith & the feeling of faith, which is very great defect. It seems to them that when they do not feel God they are not in His presence, which is a mistake.

-There is a difference between possessing the presence of God (being in His presence) and having the feeling of His presence. God alone can give us the latter.

-What must we do in order to keep ourselves always with the deepest reverence before God, as being most unworthy of this grace? Well, there

is nothing to do but to remember that He is our God, and that we are his feeble creatures, all unworthy of this honor. St. Francis did this, when he spent a whole night asking God: 'Who art thou, and who am I.'

-What can we do to acquire the love of God? By willing to love Him; and instead of setting to work to try & find out how we can unite our soul to God, we have to put the thing in practice by a continual application of our mind to Him.

-We must make two equally firm resolutions: one, to be ready to see weeds growing in our gardens; the other, to have the courage to see them pulled up, and to pull them up ourselves, for our self-love, which produces these miseries, will never die while we live.

-We will be deceived, no matter how great progress we made in the spiritual life, if we think there's nothing in us that has to be removed.

-Besides, to fall sometimes into a lesser sin does not make a weak soul, provided that we rise up quickly, by turning the soul towards God and quietly humbling ourselves. We must not imagine that we can live without committing any sins, for only Our Lady had that privilege.

-We must never cease to make good resolutions, even though we may be well aware that, generally speaking, we do not carry them into effect; yes, even if we should see that it will be out of our power to do so when the opportunity offers.

-Indeed, we must make them with still more firmness than if we felt within ourselves courage enough to succeed in our enterprise, saying to Our Lord: "It is true that I shall not have the strength enough to do or to bear such & such a thing myself, but I rejoice in my infirmity, because it will be your strength which will do it in me."

-Relying on this help, we have to go forth courageously to the battle and doubt not but that we will gain the victory.

-Another law of the spiritual life is that if a person is unable to bear temptations, trials, difficulties, or challenges, he will also not be able to receive great gifts. For God does not grant a great gift without a great trial. In his wisdom, which is beyond our human understanding, God has ordained that gifts be bestowed in proportion to temptations.

-The difference between trials coming from God and those due to the activity of the devil is that the trials from God are sent to the friends of

God, that is to say, the humble. The friends of God are placed in trials, not in punishment, but with a view to their spiritual progress. Yet divine providence proportions these trials to the strength and needs of those who suffer them. In them are mingled both consolation & grief, light & darkness, wars & aid. This is the sign of the increase of God's help.

-By contrast, temptations that come from the devil are sent to the enemies of God, that is to say, the proud. These temptations fall upon those who are shameless and who in their pride abuse God's goodness. Temptations of this sort may exceed the limit of human strength and lead to spiritual fall.

-Our Lord treat us a good father or a good mother treat their child, who is allowed to walk alone as long as he is on the soft grass of a meadow, or some mossy carpet, because even if he were to fall he could not do himself much harm; but on rough & dangerous roads they carry the child tenderly in their arms to be sure that the child would suffer no harm.

-We have often seen souls courageously sustaining great assaults, without being vanquished by their enemies, and yet afterwards defeated in very slight combats. Why is this, if not Our Lord, seeing that they would not do themselves much harm by falling, has allowed them to walk alone, which He did not do when they were among the precipices of great temptations, from which His all-powerful hand extricated them.

-St. Paula, who so bravely renounced the world, quitting Rome and all its luxuries, and who could not even be shaken by her maternal affection for her children, so resolute was her heart in forsaking all for God – even she, after having affected these marvelous things, allowed herself to be overcome by the temptation of private judgment, which made her believe that she ought not to submit to the counsel of various holy persons, who would have her give up some of her accustomed austerities, in which St. Jerome confesses that she was to blame.

-Those Christians who truly love God prove their love by bearing trials & temptations and are strengthened in love: they are tested, like gold in fire, and by this testing become friends of God. On the contrary, those who do not love God fall away as dross, since giving way to the enemy they leave the field of battle laden with guilt, either because of the laxity of their mind or because of their pride.

How We Are Remade

-When God made us, He owed it to Himself to endow us with all that makes us a human being: a body and a soul endowed with reason and free-will. He was not obliged to make us share His nature so that we would be His child and could call Him "Father," any more than He was obliged to make a rainbow that wrote poetry. If there is a higher life above the natural, we are no more entitled to it by right, than a crystal has a right to reason, or a cow has a right to sign title-deeds, for these powers are beyond nature: they would be supernatural.

-Original sin, it has been said, is something like a severe illness which has upset our nature, with the result that there is a civil war going on inside us, our body rebelling against our soul, because our soul rebelled against God. Just as one country will sometimes "break off relations" with another country, so man by sin became separated from God and lost the gift by which he could attain his true supernatural end.

-By bringing Divine Life into history, God made it possible for us in some way to receive it: "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly," says the Lord (Jn 10:10).

-If the glorified Christ did send His Spirit into our souls, to restore us to His Friendship, it would be purely gratuitous on His part, and being gratis, or a gift, it could appropriately be called "grace." Every best gift, and every perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of lights," as the letter of St. James puts it (James 1:17).

-As a result of sin, our engine ran out of gasoline. God made us to run on His Divine fuel, and not even the best of human fuel will ignite in the combustion of love. By God's grace, however, we are made "partakers of the Divine Nature" so that something of God's life and activity is in us. In virtue of this, we grow up to be His children, and God is our Father. Christ is our Brother, the Holy Spirit is the Love in our soul, and the Blessed Virgin Mary is our Mother, and we are made a sharer in that kingdom through which we share in the Truth of Christ the Teacher, the Authority of Christ the King, and the sanctification of Christ the Priest

-Upon what conditions can we receive this gift of a higher life? What are the normal ways in which this Divine Life is given? What effect will it have on us? How can we contact this Divine Life which Christ merited for us?

-In somewhat the same way that everything in nature received a higher life than that which it naturally possesses: a) by something higher coming down to that which is lower, and b) by the lower surrendering its imperfect nature in order to be incorporated into something higher.

-Take for instance the moisture, the carbons and the phosphates in the earth how they ever live in the plant. First, the plant life must descend to them; take them into its roots and branches, while the chemicals themselves must abandon the crude lifeless state they have in nature.

-If the plant could speak, it would say to the chemical: "Unless you die to yourselves, you cannot live in my kingdom." Actually, the sunshine, chemicals, and moisture now begin to thrill with life and vitality in the plant.

-If the animal could speak, it would say to the plants: "Unless you die to your lower life of mere vegetation and submit yourself momentarily to the jaws of death, you cannot live in my kingdom. Once you live in me, you will share a life that not merely vegetates, but feels moves and tastes and sees."

-Man in his turn, going down to that which is lower, says to the animals: "Unless you die to yourself by submitting to the sacrificial death, you cannot live in my kingdom. But if you die to yourself, you shall share a life that is not merely sensible, but one that thinks and loves and wills, has ideals, laughs, and is artistic."

-This is precisely what Christ says to us: "Unless you die to yourself, you cannot live in My Kingdom" – but with this difference: since we are persons, which chemicals, plants and animals are not, the sacrifice enjoined on us is not physical, but spiritual. We do not have our personality destroyed, as a plant's nature is destroyed when taken into the animal.

-Otherwise the law holds good. The higher comes down to the lower; the Divine descends into the human. Such was the Incarnation: God came down to man. On the other hand, man must die to his sinful nature, his old Adam, his heritage of the Fall, and this he can do only by sacrifice and by taking up "his cross daily" and following Christ. "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and die, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings much fruit. He that loves his life will lose it, but he who loses his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn. 12: 24, 25).

-The law of transformation holds sway; chemicals are lifted into plants, plants into animals, animals into man, and since man is free, he can freely

will, through the Graciousness of God, to be lifted up into Christ, so that he can say: It is no longer I that lives, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2: 20). God came down to the level of man that He might in some way lift man to the level of God.

-To be a Christian is to be born of Christ, so that our poor, weak, sinful human nature is not gilded over as so much brass, but rather is re-created, so that we become a "new creature." Our human nature inherited from Adam does not become better; it dies and is reborn as Christ died on Calvary and rose from the dead.

-Even with this infusion of Divine life we must still use our will. For instance, after our car is filled with gasoline, it will not drive itself. Grace does not work like a penny in a slot machine. Grace will move us only when we want it to move us, and only when we let it move us.

-The supernatural order supposes the freedom of the natural order, but it does not destroy it. An alarm clock will awaken us in the morning but it will not make us get up. God's grace will aid, direct, and perfect your human actions, but only on condition that we freely cooperate with it. God breaks down no doors.

-Becoming a Christian is, therefore, regeneration; the living of a new life above the human. The life of the body is the soul; the life of the soul is Christ. What the grace of God does is to set you on the right road.

-Never think that when the Church tells us: "Avoid this path – Poison Ivy," that is restricting your freedom. The Church gives you a map and marks your destination.

-Calvary is a great and tremendous reservoir of merit. From it flow seven channels to the human soul, and through those channels passes the same Divine Life which fills the reservoir, the only difference being the measure of the life received. While Christ is the Natural Son of God, we are only adopted sons.

-Like Adam in the Garden, we walk in the company of God. God is nearer to us, if our soul is in the state of grace, than the air we breathe and the friends we see. This presence is not psychological, that is, we do not achieve it by imagining ourselves in His Presence; neither is it a presence through a keen memory of the episodes of our Lord's Life; it is obviously not a material presence as salt is in a box, for we are in the realm of spirit. It is not the same as the universal presence of God in the world by His creative act for otherwise there would be no difference a soul in the state of grace and a soul in the state of sin.

-In like manner, by grace, God dwells in our soul more intimately than He is by creation. God is present by creation in the stars, and the flowers, and the sunset, without any answering presence on their part; there is no consciousness of His Presence. By grace, however, God becomes present to us in a new way; He is now not only present to us by power, He is in us by love.

-He is present more intimately than the truth of the multiplication table in our mind. A new conscious relationship is established, not that of Creator and creature, but of Bridegroom and bride. Our soul now looks on God not just as a Being who made us and to whom we are bound by justice, but as Love who redeemed us and to whom we are united by reciprocal acts of love.

-It is only when we can freely use a thing and enjoys it, that we can be said to possess it. By grace, God is in our soul.

-Christianity is not a system of ethics; it is life. It is not good advice; it is Divine adoption. It is first and foremost a love relationship.

-As we can never become a member of a family by doing generous deeds, but only by being born into it out of love, so we can never become a Christian by doing good things alone, but by being born to it through Divine Love. Doing good things to a man does not make you his son, but being a son does make you do good things.

-Christianity begins with being, not with doing, with life and not with action. If we have the life of a plant, we will bloom like a plant; if we have life of a monkey, we will act like a monkey. If we have the life of a human person, we will do things a human being does, but if we have the life of Christ in us, we will act like a Christian. We are like our parents because we partake of their nature; we are like God if we partake of His Nature. What a human being does is the externalization of what he is.

-Most people have their actions governed by their backgrounds, example, they think a certain way in order to defend their class or their wealth or their want of it; they even build up philosophy to suit the way they live; they do certain things because they are profitable or pleasant to them; they hate certain people because they challenge their egotism. Their psycho-physical disposition is the center of their lives and, therefore, of their actions. They are, in a word, self-determined.

-To be a Christian means to discard self as the supreme determinant of actions; it means to put on the mind of Christ so as to be governed by Christ's truths; to surrender our will to His Will, and to do all things that are pleasing to Him, not to us; to control our emotional attitudes. In other words, our life instead of being self-determined is Christ-determined, that is, Christo Centric.

-As a result of this Divine indwelling these consequences follow: Our body by grace becomes a Temple of God. A temple is a place where God dwells and since God dwells in our soul by grace, our body is His Temple: "do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). This is the basic reason why we as a Christian must be pure in thought and deed, not that we must avoid diseases and by hygienic but because, conscious that our body is the Temple of God, we will never pollute it by sin.

-The fact that God dwells in our soul is the foundation of what is called our interior life.

-One of the reasons we seldom advert to the Divine Presence in our soul by grace is because we are too absorbed by creatures. That is why the Christian life is called warfare; why it demands mortification. As physical life is the sum of forces which resist death, so the supernatural life is, in a way, the sum of the forces which resist sin.

-By virtue of God's grace, we become an adopted son of God and cease to be just a mere creature. Adoption means the reception of a stranger into a family. A person will adopt a child because he lacks one. God never does that for God already has a Son which exhausts the fullness of perfection.

-Furthermore, though an adopted child on earth can be given the name, the title, the wealth and the influence of him who adopted, yet the adopted one could never receive his life. But God can make us share His life.

-Just as your beauty, your strength, your learning, your honesty, make you pleasing to your friends, so God by the infusion of His good makes us share in His Nature, His Goodness, His Truth, and His Beauty and, therefore, makes us pleasing to Him.

-Thus we become, through Our Lord's merits, that which Adam lost by sin: God's own child. Because we are children of the Heavenly Father, and a brother of Christ, we also have Christ's Mother as our Mother. More than that, we are made partaker of the divine nature and, as such, of the Holy

spirit of God. As the Holy Spirit is the eternal bond, which unites the Father and the Son, so the Holy Spirit now becomes the bond uniting us both to God and to all the other members of the Mystical Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit of God thus becomes the source of our inspiration and guidance.

-In moments of crisis and doubt, in worries whether to undertake this task or omit it, to go on this journey or not, listen to the voice of the Spirit within. **The union of our soul and the Holy Spirit can become a kind of a spiritual marriage, giving the joys of the spirit born of a unity which leaves all other joys as sorrows, and all other beauty as pain.** For the first time in our life, we would begin to love not that which is lovely, but that which is Love: the Spirit of the Most High God.

-When we fail to measure up to our Christian privilege, we should not be discouraged for discouragement is a form of pride. The reason we are sad is because we look to ourselves and not to God; to our failing, not to His Love. We will shake off our faults more readily when we love God than when we criticize ourselves. The sick person looks happily at the physician, not at his wounds. We have always the right to love God in our heart, even though now and then we do not love Him in our acts.

-God is more lenient than us because He is perfectly good and, therefore, loves us more. We should be bold, then, to believe that God is on our side, even when we forget to on His. We should live our life, then, according to the law of love. As St. Augustine puts it: "Love God and then do whatever you please." If we love God, we will never do anything to hurt Him and, therefore, never make ourselves unhappy.

On Repentance

-There's a story of an early Saxon king who had to leave his throne in order to put down a rebellion. After the battle had died down, the king set up a candle in the doorway of the castle where he had his temporary headquarters. He lit the candle and announce to all who had rebelled against him that those who surrendered and took the oath of loyalty while the candle was burning, would be spared. The king offered mercy and forgiveness only for the life of the candle. Heaven does the same; the candle is our life span on earth... (Arthur Tonne)

-The concept of the Greek and Latin Fathers for repentance is that repentance was to heal one's insanity because to offend a powerful man who can harm us physically is madness; to offend God who can condemn our soul for all eternity is pure insanity.

-“If we truly repent and determine not to offend Him”, says St. Teresa of Avila, “God will resume His former friendship with us and grant us the favors which He granted aforetime, and sometimes many more, if our repentance merits it.”

-For St. Isaac of Syria repentance is the door to mercy, open to those who seek it diligently; by this door we enter into Divine mercy and by no other entrance can we find mercy.

-As we discover our complicity with evil, we progressively discover our need for a greater power than our own if we are to find the courage necessary to face and change our situation.

-“Mourning is a sorrowful thing”, says St. Augustine, “for it is the sob of one who is sorry. Does anyone mourn, except for one who is dead? But, every sinner ought to mourn for himself, since there is nothing else so dead as a man in sin. Yet, how marvelous! If he mourns for himself, he comes to life again. Let him mourn through repentance, and he shall be comforted through forgiveness.”

-It is right to say that Contemplation of ourselves troubles us and humbles us, but out of that come repentance which leads to salvation. Contemplation of God restores us and brings us hope and love in the Holy Spirit. Therefore without this grace-given knowledge of self there can be no monastic life.

-“To have fallen is not a grievous thing,” pointed out St. John Chrysostom, “but to remain prostrate after falling, and not to get up again; and playing the coward and the sluggard, to conceal feebleness or moral purpose under the reasoning of despair.” To whom also the prophet spoke in perplexity, saying: “The Lord says this, ‘If someone falls, can he not stand up again? If people stray can they not turn back?’” (Jer. 8: 4; St.).

-Hence, the deepest of all spiritual things is inward repentance. It is based on a supernaturally-illuminated self-knowledge. It implies a profound view of the sinfulness of sin. It lives in a clear vision of the perfections of God, which almost anticipates the brightness of the Vision hereafter.

-As the Psalmist says in Ps. 95:8-9 “Oh that today you would listen to His voice; harden not your hearts. Now that expression “today”, may be uttered every time of our life, even on the verge of old age, if you desire it: for repentance is judged not by quantity of time, but by disposition of the soul. For the Ninevites did not need many days to blot out their sins, but the short space of one day availed to efface all their iniquities. And the good thief also did not take a long time to effect his entrance into Paradise, but in such a brief moment as one might occupy in uttering a single word, did he wash off all the sins he had committed in his whole life, and received the prized bestowed by the divine approval even before the Apostles” (St. John Chrysostom).

-A conscience, burdened with the guilt of past sins, is fearful of Divine Judgment. But God in His Mercy has given us two remedies for such unhappiness: one is the Sacrament of Penance, which blots out the past by remission of our sins and lightens the future by our hope for Divine Mercy through continued repentance and amendment of our lives.

-Moreover, repentance for sin is inseparable from love. Our hatred of sin is a measure of the deepness of love. God would not be good unless He hated evil, nor can any of us claim to value the Divine Love unless we avoid all that would wound that Love.

-The idea that we should at all times be above reproach makes us a mockery of repentance and forgiveness as well as of love, because it suggests the need always to look good in the sight of our brothers, and never to be caught in fault. No one can really escape the truth that sooner or later we will discover our own shortcomings as far as living in community is concerned.

-There are three essential elements to an authentic Christian spirituality:

1. Penance/Repentance or conversion

2. Contemplation or adoration

3. Service or response

-Any spirituality which leaves one of these must be judged seriously impoverished and to that extent deficient. Without a powerful moment of repentance or conversion, activity at the third stage is dangerous, both for the individual and for those around him or her.

-A person who has made spiritual progress will be able to enter into each phase more deeply, and to move from one to the other more naturally and aptly. Each eventually seems to make little sense without the others; it is powerful in its own right, but also facilitates our movement into and deepens the effect the others have upon us. These three are thus the “trinity” of the practical experience of our Christian faith.

-Usually one who has made progress can think back and remember having gone through each phase as a distinct moment – especially the conversion experience, which is often painful and requires a substantial exercise in personal honesty and courage.

-As we discover our complicity with evil, we progressively discover our need for a greater power than our own if we are to find the courage necessary to face and change our situation. *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*: The way we pray determines the content of our beliefs.

-Christian maturity is not a state one reaches once and definitively, it is rather a cycle of experiences, of which contemplation is an important element, but still only one.

-For most people there is an early, powerful, and canonical set of experiences to which they later look back as having been a turning point in their foundational, the “bedrock” for their later spiritual growth – experiences to which they return in prayer continually for nutrition and re-orientation. They recall being somewhat different people before and after that event.

-This cycle of penance or conversion, adoration or contemplation, and service or response becomes regularized in one’s devotional life. A healthy spirituality has to encompass and move back and forth between all these three.

-In sum, if we ignore this cycle, it is to our spiritual loss and impoverishment, our efforts will fail to get traction or to obtain firm footing. This cycle is like the practice of bar to which every ballet dancer, no matter how expert

they become, must return each morning, to do again the same basic exercises done the first day.

-Analogously, this cycle presents the fundamental spiritual discipline which, deepened by experience and improved through habit, sharpens and strengthens us until we come to dance with divine providence, with God.

-Remorse is the negative presence of God in the soul, as grace is the positive presence of God. Remorse is incomplete, for it is self-disgust divorced from God; but remorse can become sorrow, and then hope, the moment the soul turns to God for help. God is saying to uneasy soul: "peace is not along the way that you are traveling; if it were, I would not have troubled you." Unrelated to God, the emptiness and loneliness of a guilty conscience beget despair. But once related to God, the misery of remorse becomes repentance from sin. As soon as the soul turns to the Redeeming Savior, the burden of guilt disappears – just as a patient forgets his pain in the joy of seeing the physician who can cure him.

-It must never be thought that hardening of the heart is hopeless; as long as any man has life, there is hope for his soul. An egotist may have led a most wicked and perverse, most voluptuous and atheistic existence – and yet if, at any moment, he turns to God and asks for His forgiveness, he will be saved.

-So long as there is smoking flax, and so long as there is a broken reed that daily tries to lift itself, the Good Lord will provide the needed energy. The eye of any sinner, if he turns it to God, can become dim with tears, and the stiff neck can bend in adoration and prayer. The hardened heart may relax its defenses against God at any stage, early or late, and He will enter it.

-A conscience, burdened with the guilt of past sins, is fearful of Divine Judgment. But God in His Mercy has given us two remedies for such unhappiness: one is the Sacrament of Penance, which blots out the past by remission of our sins and lightens the future by our hope for Divine Mercy through continued repentance and amendment of our lives.

-Repentance for sin is inseparable from love. Our hatred of sin is a measure of the deepness of love. God would not be good unless He hated evil, nor can any of us claim to value the Divine Love unless we avoid all that would wound that Love.

-The effort to apply these laws of love eventually brings us to a higher kind of repentance, in which some souls do penance, not only for their own

sins, but for the sins of others. Deeply loving souls are conscious of their unity with all mankind and wish to satisfy for the guilt of others as their own. Their mission in life is to make pardon available to those too blind to ask for it themselves.

-The sinful conscience is cruel and cynical; the repentant conscience is kind and filled with Charity.

-Repentance without amendment will profit you nothing. But because this amendment of life cannot long be sustained, unless the soul keeps watch and ward over herself, with wakeful and unwearying circumspection, she has need of the third degree of knowledge which produces solicitude, so that she may begin to walk carefully with her God, ever and in all things anxiously vigilant, lest she should offend, even in the very least, the eyes of so tremendous a Majesty.

-Thus, in repentance she is warmed; in amendment she is set on fire; in solicitude she becomes all luminous and radiant, so that the whole man is renewed within and without.

second Chance

-Christ told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground? And he answered him, 'Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

-The *Dallas morning News* carried a photo of some prisoners on a work-release program. They were restoring a condemned house on the city's west side. Several days later one of the prisoners wrote the editor, saying: "Thank you for the coverage....The last time my name and photograph were printed in a newspaper took place the day I was sentenced....So it was a real joy to see my picture in your paper doing something good....When I entered prison 18 months ago, I was a lot like the house we just remodeled....But God took charge of my life and has made me a new creation in Christ."

-We could hardly find a better illustration of the point Christ is making in the parable of the fig tree. A fig tree normally takes three years to reach maturity. If it is not fruiting by that time it is not likely to fruit at all. This explains why the owner of the vineyard instructed his gardener to cut the tree down. And so it is remarkable that instead of cutting the tree down, the gardener begs the owner to give it a second chance. "Leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it," he says.

-The group of people for whom the Lord Jesus told this parable is, of course, the people of Israel. He told them that God gave them a choice place in His plan and took special care of them. But they did not bear fruit. He tells them further that in spite of this failure, God will be patient with them a little longer. He will give them a second chance, like the fig tree.

-The wider group of people for whom the Lord told this parable includes all of us today. Christ's parable also applies to us. We are like Israel. God has given us a choice place in His plan, and He has taken special care of us. God expects us to bear fruit. If we don't, then, like Israel, God will give us a genuine opportunity to repent. If we don't repent, then, like Israel, we will be cut down.

-This brings us back to the coverage of the *Dallas Morning News* about some prisoners on a work-release program. Both the prisoner and the house illustrate the point of Christ's parable. Both were given a second chance. The house was condemned by the city. It was scheduled to be torn down. But some persuaded the officials to give it a second chance. "Let the prisoners work on it," they said. "If they can make it a useful property again, then we won't tear it down."

-The prisoner himself was also condemned. He was considered unfit for society. He was put behind bars. Although society gave up on him, the Lord Jesus did not. Christ gave him a second chance. Like the gardener in the parable of the fig tree, Christ watered and cared for his soul. The man responded and became a new creation, transformed again into the likeness of God.

-All of us can relate to that story. At one point in our lives, many of us were like the fig tree, the house, and the prisoner. We too were in danger of being rejected as useless. But in His mercy, God took pity on us. Like the house, the prisoner, and the fig tree, we were given another chance.

-It is always Christ's way to give a person chance after chance. Peter and Paul, Mary Magdalene and Augustine, would all gladly have witnessed to that. God is infinitely kind to the person who falls and rises again. But the parable also makes it clear that there is a final chance. If we refuse chance after chance, If God's appeal and challenge come again and again in vain, the day finally comes, not when God has shut us out, but when we by deliberate choice have shut ourselves out.

-The same Lord that bids us repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, bids us repent, for otherwise we shall be cut down. He has set before us life and death, good and evil. Therefore, we ought to choose good that we may live and bear fruit that befits repentance.

-Hence, this parable calls forth from us deep gratitude to God for the second chance he has given us. It also calls forth a deep determination to make the most of our second chance. Thus we say to Our Lord Jesus, "Thank you, Lord Jesus, for our second chance. Help us make the most of it. Help us carry out your plan for us. Help us do this especially during these remaining weeks of Lent."

st. Bernard on Self-Knowledge

-“Knowledge of God preserves us from despair, because God is full of mercy, his nature is all good, and his actions pity and pardon. Knowledge of self preserves us from pride, for nothing is more efficacious in acquiring humility than knowledge of ourselves as we really are. These twofold knowledge assures salvation, because in its light there appears the need for an encounter between man’s misery and God’s mercy. Here is the foundation of humble hope.

-Although all knowledge is good so long as it does not puff up, this is the most useful because it leads to God” (St. Bernard, Sermon 36 on the Song of Songs).

-Prior to its first conversion, St. Bernard believes, the soul suffers not only from self ignorance, but also from a self-deception, a false self-knowledge born of pride, by which it imagines itself superior to others and therefore not in need of conversion or healing. It is precisely because he recognizes the seductive power of this self-deception that St. Bernard so frequently insists upon the soul’s humbling recognition of its own sad disfigurement as the prerequisite for its return to God. Yet, the soul’s humbling self-awareness as a defaced image of God is far from St. Bernard’s final word on the subject of the soul’s self knowledge.

-For as the soul undertakes the way of its restoration in the lost divine likeness by its gradual conformity to the humility and charity of Christ, it comes to know itself again, as one gradually assuming the figure of Christ’s own Bride, radiant with her Bridegroom’s own beauty.

-In the opening to the second book of his treatise *On Consideration, an advice to Pope Eugene III, written in 1151*, St. Bernard offers the following counsel to his former Cistercian monastic son, Pope Eugenius III: “Even if you should know every mystery, the breadth of the earth, the height of the heavens, and the depth of the seas, if you do not know yourself, you will be like a building without a foundation. You will construct a ruin rather than a structure. Whatever you may construct outside yourself will be like so much dust blown by the wind.... So let your consideration begins with yourself and end with yourself. Wherever it wanders, call it back to yourself with the fruit of your salvation. You must be first and last in your own consideration.”

-Self-knowledge is the indispensable foundation of Christian life, and a foundation that can never be transcended. For wherever he and Eugene

may direct their consideration, they must never lose sight of themselves and the truth of themselves in the undeceived and undeceiving eyes of their Creator and Redeemer. They may take their example, St. Bernard suggests, from "the supreme Father of all, who sends forth his Word and yet retains Him." "Your word is your consideration," St. Bernard explains, "if it goes forth, let it not leave you. Let it go forth, but never wander away from you. Let it go out, but not depart."²

Throughout his life as a teacher, preacher, and father of monks, St. Bernard never ceased to underscore the importance of this continual recourse to self-knowledge in the sight of the Triune God, with his particular concern for the category of *experiential knowledge*, or the personal appropriation of the truths of the faith.

-Thus, in the thirty-sixth of the Song of Songs, St. Bernard wrote vividly of his own search for self-knowledge and the knowledge of God: "As long as I look at myself, my eye is consumed with bitterness. Yet when I lift my eye to the aid of divine mercy, this joyous vision of God soon tempers my bitter vision of myself."

-Indeed the pursuit of the knowledge of self, and the knowledge of God that emerges within this pursuit, was of such importance to St. Bernard that he made these the twin foundations of his entire spiritual theology and his entire conception of the Cistercian life. For him "the sum total of our spiritual life consists in these two things: when we consider ourselves, we are troubled and saddened to our salvation, but when we consider God, we are revived and consoled with the joy of the Holy Spirit. From the knowledge of ourselves, we conceive fear and humility, but from the knowledge of God, hope and love."

-As a devoted son of St. Benedict and a leading Cistercian champion of fidelity to his *Rule*, St. Bernard knew well that the primary aim of the Benedictine life is to seek the knowledge of God. Particular to his own monastic spirituality, however, is Bernard's insistence that it is only through genuine self-knowledge that one arrives at the true knowledge of God.

-For unless one has first honestly acknowledged the humbling truth of his or her fallen condition, as an image of God disfigured by sin, one is not moved to seek God's healing or to know him in the truth of his compassionate love revealed in Christ and the Spirit.

-For St. Bernard, then, humble self-knowledge is the very origin of conversion and the wellspring of that life of continuing conversion that is the monastic vocation. So, in Sermon 36 on the Song of Songs, in words which echo his later counsel to pope Eugene, St. Bernard writes: "I wish,

therefore, before all else, that the soul should know itself...because such knowledge does not puff us up, but humbles us, and is a certain foundation on which to build. For unless it is founded on the firm foundation of humility, the spiritual building cannot stand."

-In his pioneering work of 1934, *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard*, Étienne Gilson, who first proposed Bernard as a true systematic theologian, identified the soul's knowledge of itself as disfigured image of God as "one of the foundations of St. Bernard's mysticism." Gilson argues that Bernard's writings espouse a systematic mystical theology centered on the concept of the soul as the image of God and on the soul's restoration in the lost divine likeness of charity.

-Within the Cistercian *School of Charity*, the monk recovers this lost likeness through an "apprenticeship of charity" which begins in humility, consists in the passage from the unlikeness of self-will to the likeness of charity, and culminates in the ecstatic union with God this restored likeness effects. For St. Bernard, Gilson contends, self-knowledge constitutes the "first moment" in this apprenticeship of charity because true knowledge of self alone gives birth to humility, which in turn gives birth to charity. By a method of psychological self-analysis which Gilson dubs Bernard's "Christian Socratism," the novice monk comes to see himself in truth as an image of God disfigured through sin: "To know ourselves is essentially, in [St. Bernard's] view, to recognize that we are defaced images of God.

-In coming to know himself as he has made himself through sin, the novice begins to recognize himself as at once miserable and yet great, miserable for having lost the divine likeness, yet great for having retained the divine image. This two-fold self-knowledge moves the monk to conversion inasmuch as it both teaches him humility before God and yet fires his hope for his restoration in the divine likeness of love through God's merciful gifts of grace.

-For St. Bernard, Gilson continues, self-knowledge is the foundation of humility, and humility is in turn the foundation of charity: when the monk humbly accepts his responsibility for his fallen condition, he judges himself in accordance with God's will and learns compassionate love for his neighbor who shares this misery and, above all, for the suffering God-Man who models humility and charity by his Incarnation.

-As he goes on to trace the monk's passage from the carnal to the spiritual love of Christ and his resulting ecstatic union with him, Gilson devotes relatively little attention to the ongoing role of self-knowledge in St. Bernard's conception of the spiritual life. He observes that the soul

once refashioned in the divine likeness comes to know itself again in the fullness of its restored being and even to delight in the peace of its purified conscience.

-In his study of spiritual desire in Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, Michael Casey argues that, for Bernard, "desire for God begins with self-knowledge" (Michael Casey, *Athirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, Cistercian Studies 77 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1988).

-This self-knowledge consists in acknowledging both one's underlying orientation to God as created in his image and one's suffering as the consequence of having lost the divine likeness through sin. In recognizing one's orientation to God as made in his image, one grows discontent with the ephemeral satisfactions of this life and so begins to desire another, better life. In accepting suffering as the consequence of the loss of the divine likeness through sin, one confesses one's need for God's forgiveness and healing and so begins the journey of restoration in the divine likeness.

-In his *The Spiritual Teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, Dr. John R. Sommerfeldt follows Gilson in closely associating Bernard's teaching on self-knowledge with his understanding of humility as the foundation of the spiritual life. "In Bernard's educational program," Sommerfeldt contends, "the first step on the path to perfection, to happiness, is humility" and "humility...is an intellectual virtue; it is self-knowledge."

-More precisely, "humility is seeing oneself as one truly is; in humility one measures this self-knowledge against another knowledge, the knowledge of what one could be" (John R. Sommerfeldt, *The Spiritual Teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux: An Intellectual History of the Early Cistercian Order*, Cistercian Studies 125 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991).

-For St. Bernard, Dr. Sommerfeldt continues, humility entails a right ordering of the intellect, a just self-judgment in imitation of the Son of God as Judge, and a "realistic, honest appraisal of oneself" that "leads to knowledge of one's weakness and one's strength...and the source of one's strength, which is God." Sommerfeldt has, moreover, reiterated these points in his more recent studies of the abbot's epistemology and the relational dimensions of his spirituality (See especially John R. Sommerfeldt, *Bernard of Clairvaux: On the Life of the Mind* (New York: Newman Press, 2004), 92-93, 96-97; *Bernard of Clairvaux: On the Spirituality of Relationship* (New York: Newman Press, 2004), 39-40, 91-92.

-Similarly, in his own study of Bernard's mystical theology, Bernard McGinn has taken up Gilson's insight that, for St. Bernard, the soul's knowledge of its simultaneous grandeur and misery as a disfigured image of God constitutes the origin of the soul's life of continuing conversion. McGinn writes: "For the abbot of Clairvaux, our experience of life is one of an

almost unbearable tension between what we were meant to be and what we are – between the grandeur and misery of the human condition.”

-For St. Bernard, McGinn continues, “self-knowledge, then, is the knowledge of our sinfulness and the predominance of ‘carnality’ in the evil sense in our lives.” This self-knowledge, this honest recognition of our sinfulness, is so foundational for St. Bernard because it both reveals “the necessity for humility as the essential starting point of the spiritual life” and at the same time opens us to the knowledge of God’s mercy and so “brings hope for a change in our condition...the first step in a lifelong process of conversion” (McGinn, “Bernard of Clairvaux: ‘That Contemplative’ (*Quel Contemplante*).”

-Though the examples cited above do indicate a certain preoccupation with Bernard’s doctrine of self-knowledge specifically as it applies the cultivation of humility and the earliest stages of the spiritual journey, this is not to say that students of the works of St. Bernard have not intimated elements of a broader teaching on the question of the soul’s self-awareness. For example, some have alluded to a Bernadine teaching on the false or defective self-awareness the soul suffers prior to its first conversion on account of its pride. In particular, Dr. John Sommerfeldt has referred to Bernard’s theory of “self-deception”: “If [for Bernard] humility is self-knowledge, then it is clear that pride is self-deception” (Sommerfeldt, *The Spiritual Teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux*).

-For St. Bernard, Dr. John Sommerfeldt notes that this proud delusion or self-deception threatens all types of persons – monks, clerics, and laity alike – and must be resisted by assiduous and honest self-consideration.

-More broadly, Fr. Michael Casey has argued that, for St. Bernard, “self-deception was the cause of the fall” and that fallen human beings find themselves continually susceptible to this same self-deception (Casey, *Athirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs*).

-Though they do not use the expression “self-deception” per se, other scholars of St. Bernard scholars have identified this same element of his thought in similar terms. For instance, the Trappist monk Charles Dumont suggests that, for St. Bernard, the fallen human being suffers from a “falsification” of the truth concerning himself (Charles Dumont, *Pathway of Peace: Cistercian Wisdom According to Saint Bernard*, trans. Elizabeth Connor, Cistercian Studies 187 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1999), 43-46.

-Dr. James De Francis, in his dissertation: MY BELOVED IS MINE AND I AM HIS: SELF-KNOWLEDGE IN THE THEOLOGY OF BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, contends that the proud

soul is compelled to face the humbling truth of itself as an image of God disfigured by sin, this humbling self-knowledge not only spurs its conversion to Christ, but also transforms its understanding of others and its relation to them. By a process Bernard describes with fine psychological insight, the monk who has learned to accept the humbling truth of his own sinfulness will, with time, begin to recognize that same sinfulness in his brothers, and so learn to love them with genuine compassion.

-Though this gradual, graced growth in humility and compassionate charity, moreover, the soul will be restored in the lost divine likeness as it is progressively likened to the humility and compassionate love of Christ the Incarnate Word. And, by this progressive likening to Christ, the renewed soul will begin to recognize within itself the figure of Christ's own, unique Bride, the Church. As this *spouse of the soul* sees herself to be ever more bound to her *spouse – the Word*, in the bonds of love, she will likewise see herself as ever more bound to each and all of Christ's members, the *Church*, in the bonds of compassionate charity. Thus, just as the proud monk once understood himself, falsely, in terms of his superiority over others, the monk renewed in the likeness of Christ's humility and compassion will now understand himself, truly, as a member of that congregation of holy souls, the Church, which though now both earthly and heavenly, longs with one, unifying desire for the eschatological consummation of her eternal espousal to Christ, her divine Bridegroom.

-Since it is, for St. Bernard, by the grace of the Incarnate Word that the soul is enabled to pass through these successive phases of self-awareness, there's need to attend closely to St. Bernard's Christology, his teaching on the person and saving work of Jesus Christ. St. Bernard has, in fact, developed a systematic and thoroughly incarnational Christology in the great tradition of Chalcedon and the Church Fathers.

-Moreover, it is by means of this Christology that St. Bernard is able credibly to claim that by his Incarnation, the divine Person of the Word has undertaken his own journey of self-knowledge in the flesh. By this journey of self-knowledge, the Incarnate Word has rendered himself both the model and the source of grace for those souls who would undertake their own, similar journey of self-understanding.

-On Sermon One on the Song of Song (1:7) St. Bernard wrote: "If you do not know yourself, most beautiful of women, go forth, and follow after the flocks of your companions, and feed your kids beside the shepherd's tents." St. Bernard's sermons on these verses have often been cited as evidence of the importance he attaches to humbling self-knowledge in the experience of conversion and the foundational stages of the spiritual

life, and they do indeed provide ample witness to this aspect of his teaching.

-When these sermons are read as a "set" or whole, they in fact show that St. Bernard's teaching on self-knowledge extends considerably beyond the experience of conversion, and in two directions: backwards, as it were, to an account of the soul's self-deception prior to its first conversion, and forward to an account of the graced soul's newfound self-knowledge as one being renewed in the lost divine likeness. So, St. Bernard offers in this brief sermon the outline of a comprehensive account of the various forms and roles self-knowledge takes throughout the sequentially linked stages of the spiritual journey to God.

-St. Bernard himself derives from the seventh chapter of Benedict's *Rule*: We descend by exaltation and ascend by humility. By these paradoxical dynamics of the spiritual life, Bernard concludes that pride, which appears to be a form of ascent, ultimately culminates in the soul's descent into the region of unlikeness, while humility, which appears to be a form of descent, is, in fact, the first step in the soul's ascent to God by restoration in the divine likeness. For St. Bernard, the ascent of pride involves a descent into self-deception while the descent of humility begins the soul's ascent to self-knowledge, first as an image disfigured and then as image renewed.

Bernard's Patristic Sources on Self-Knowledge:

-With regard to Bernard's patristic sources, it is obvious that he depends on the teaching of the *Rule of Benedict* for the most basic foundations of his spiritual theology. Following Benedict, Bernard teaches that the spiritual life is, most fundamentally, the soul's search for God. The monk who seeks God will truly ascend to God by the descent of humility, and descend from God by the false ascent of pride. In charting these journeys of ascent and descent by humility and pride, St. Bernard relies, of course, on Benedict's seventh chapter and his twelve steps of humility from which St. Bernard, in his *On the Steps of Humility and Pride*, derives his inverted and opposed twelve steps of pride.

-From the same chapter, St. Bernard also derives one of his most common schemas of the spiritual life: the soul returning to God will begin in humility and fear, but gradually ascend, by way of humility, to hope and charity through the Spirit's gifts of grace. In RB 7.67-70, St. Benedict concludes his twelve steps of humility as follows: "Now, therefore, after ascending all these steps of humility, the monk will quickly arrive at that *perfect love* of God which *casts out all fear* (1 John 4:18). Through this love, all that he once performed with dread, he will now begin to observe without effort, as though naturally, from habit, no longer out of fear of hell, but out of

love for Christ, good habit and delight in virtue. All this the Lord will manifest in his workman now cleansed of vices and sins."

-Further, when St. Bernard teaches that the soul's ascent to God will proceed by its restoration in the lost divine likeness of humility and charity through its gradual conformation to the humility and charity of the Incarnate Word, above all in his Passion, he certainly seems to take his inspiration from St. Benedict's own Prologue. Although St. Benedict does not employ the concept of the soul as created in the image and likeness of God to expound his monastic rule, he does, in his Prologue, teaches that those who enter the monastic "school for the Lord's service,"³⁶ will return to God by their participation in the humility, obedience, and love Christ displays in his suffering and death.

-In the very opening verses of his Prologue, St. Benedict describes the monastic life as a return to God by way of the renunciation of self-will in favor of obedience to the will of Christ, which is, for St. Bernard, charity: "The labor of obedience will bring you back to him from whom you had drifted through the sloth of disobedience. This message of mine is for you, then, if you are ready to give up your own will, once and for all, and armed with the strong and noble weapons of obedience to do battle for the true King, Christ the Lord" (RB Prol. 46).

-As St. Benedict writes in the conclusion to his Prologue: "As we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with inexpressible delights of love. Never swerving from his instructions, then, but faithfully observing his teaching in the monastery until death, we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his glory" (RB Prol.49-50).

-One of the most significant Scriptural foundations for St. Bernard's doctrine of self-knowledge is the Bridegroom's rebuke of his Bride in Canticle 1:7: "If you do not know yourself, most beautiful of women, go forth, and follow after the flocks of your companions, and feed your kids beside the shepherd's tents." When St. Bernard interprets this verse as the Bridegroom's warning to his Bride to seek self-knowledge, he follows a long interpretive tradition stemming back to Origen and St. Gregory the Great. Origen associates this verse with the celebrated Greek maxim "Know yourself" or "Understand yourself."

-Though Origen acknowledges a tradition attributing this maxim to one of the seven Greek sages, he insists that, long before the Greeks, it was Solomon himself who formulated this precept when he wrote: "If you do

not know yourself, most beautiful of women, go forth, and follow after the flocks of your companions, and feed your kids beside the shepherd's tents."

-Of particular importance to St. Bernard is Origen's suggestion that, in this verse, the *Bridegroom* warns the *soul* to know herself as beautiful, on account of its original creation in the image of God (Gen 1:26). In a lengthy, and rather adventurous, paraphrase of the Bridegroom's admonition, Origen writes: If you do not know yourself, O beautiful among women, and if you do not understand the source of your beauty – namely that you were created in the image of God, on account of which there is in you an abundance of natural beauty – and if you do not understand how beautiful you have been from the beginning, although even now you excel other women and alone among them are said to be beautiful, nevertheless, if you do not know yourself and who you are – for I do not wish your beauty to appear good by comparison with your inferiors, but rather that you judge yourself in accordance with yourself and your own beauty – if you do not know this, I command you to go forth and follow in the footsteps of the flocks, and to pasture neither sheep nor lambs, but goats, who, on account of their perversity and wickedness, will stand to the left of the King when he sits in judgment (Mt 25:32-33). [from Origen's commentary on the Song of Songs].

-It is interesting to notice that in his own commentary on the Song of Songs, and elsewhere in his *writings*, St. Bernard follows Origen in associating self-knowledge with the knowledge of oneself as created in the image of God: to know oneself in truth is, for St. Bernard, as for Origen, to recognize oneself as a creature made to God's image, and to acknowledge honestly the degree to which one has either cultivated that likeness to God by a life of virtue, or lost that likeness by a life of sin.

-St. Bernard also follows Origen's interpretation of the second half of the verse, concerning the consequences of failing to seek this self-knowledge.

-For Origen, the "goats" mentioned by the Bridegroom refer to the "restless and wayward senses" which lead the soul to pursue sinful, but ultimately transitory satisfactions not fit for one made in God's image. If the soul neglects to know itself, it will come to resemble not God, but senseless beasts who trail after their senses and fleshly desires. In this case, however, the soul will descend to a state even lower than that of the animals, for while the former act according to their nature, the soul will willfully defy its own nature by seeking its fulfillment apart from the God in whose image it has been made [cf Origen's commentary on the Song of Song].

-Once Origen has established the fundamental importance of this self-knowledge to the soul's progress in the spiritual life, he next proposes to apply this verse to "Christ and the Church." In this instance, Origen refers to the *Bride* of the *Canticle* as "the souls of the faithful," establishing many different aspects for the Bride that St. Bernard adopted in his efforts to unfold the Bride's simultaneous psychological and ecclesiological dimensions.

-The souls of the faithful, Origen continues, ought to seek self-knowledge in two ways: the soul must consider first "what it is like in its essence," and second, "what it is like in its affections." In brief, Origen identifies two distinct aspects under which the soul will seek to understand itself as created in the image of God, the metaphysical and the moral respectively. He also exhorts them to seek the knowledge of the Trinity [cf Origen's commentary on the Song of Song].

-For Origen, then, the knowledge of self and God are closely linked and though he does not elaborate the relationship in the manner St. Bernard will in his own commentary in Sermon 34 - 38, it seems plausible that the St. Bernard's decision to treat these two forms of knowledge and their relationship was inspired by Origen's own interpretive association of the two. St. Bernard readily embraces and develops Origen's insistence that the faithful soul must also seek to know itself in its affections or dispositions.

-For Origen, this search takes the form of a rigorous, penetrating self-examination

of conscience. The soul must ask itself "whether its affections are good or not, whether its intentions are upright or not," and if it sees that its intentions are upright, it must also ask itself "whether it has the same concern for all of the virtues, as much in thought as in action, or only for those that are necessary and easily cultivated." The faithful soul should likewise ask itself "whether it is capable of making progress, of growing in the understanding of things and in the cultivation of the virtues, or if it is standing still and resting in the progress it has already made" [cf Origen's commentary on the Song of Song].

-After posing these and many other questions for this self-examination of conscience, Origen concludes that, if they are diligent, his readers themselves will be able to find "innumerable similar ways in which the soul might judge its self-knowledge, contemplate the beauty it has received by its creation in the image of God, and determine how it may renew and restore that beauty" [cf Origen's commentary on the Song of Song].

-St. Bernard's account of self-knowledge is plainly indebted to Origen's insistence on the soul's need for this continual recourse to self-examination

and self-judgment. For St. Bernard, as for Origen, the soul must, no matter what its stage in the spiritual life, continually examine and evaluate its own dispositions, whether they are sinful or virtuous, and by this self examination, continually seek new ways in which it may advance in the divine likeness it has lost through sin.

-If we turn to Pope St. Gregory the Great's own *Exposition* of the Canticle, we find that his exegesis of Song of Song 1:7 is imbued with the spirit of Origen. Considering the verse first as Christ's admonition to the individual soul, St. Gregory teaches that "Above everything else, the soul should be concerned to know itself," a phrase St. Bernard will echo in his own commentary. For St. Gregory, if the soul takes care to know itself, it will "recognize that it is created in the image of God" and should not, therefore, "follow the likeness of beasts" in giving itself over to self-indulgence and the desire for the passing pleasures of this world [cf exposition of Song of Song 44 SCh 314:134].

-Here St. Gregory adduces Ps 48:13, "Man, when he was set in honor, did not understand; he is compared to senseless beasts and made like them," a verse Bernard will likewise invoke to explain how self-neglect and self-deception led to the fall of humanity's first parents.

-it is worthwhile to note that in their respective commentaries on Sg 1:7, both Origen and St. Gregory concern themselves exclusively with the case of faithful souls, of the elect, of those who have already passed beyond their first conversion and have therefore already begun the journey to God by their restoration in the lost divine likeness.

-Accordingly, when St. Bernard maintains that the role of self-knowledge in the spiritual life does not cease at conversion, but continues through the soul's graced renewal in the divine likeness, he is simply following the patristic tradition he inherits.

-However, St. Bernard goes beyond Origen and Gregory's expositions to discuss the various forms of self-knowledge, or self-deception, the soul experiences at various other stages in its spiritual journey, including its experience prior to conversion and its experience of its first conversion itself.

-Moreover, St. Bernard's patristic sources would not, of course, be complete without a look at his use of Augustine, the Western Father who most permeates his theology and spirituality.

-Fr. Michael Casey has observed St. Augustine's influence on St. Bernard's thought was "vast and diffuse," often making it difficult to trace direct links between the two [cf *Athirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, 47]. It is perhaps for this reason that a systematic study of St. Augustine's influence on St. Bernard has not been undertaken, though some efforts have been made to trace Bernard's use of Augustine on particular theological topics.

-As regards St. Bernard's indebtedness to St. Augustine on the subject of self-knowledge, we can derive some initial indications from two remarks of St. Augustine's that St. Bernard explicitly quotes and makes essential principles of his doctrine. The first is St. Augustine's definition of pride as the love of one's own superiority – a definition St. Bernard deploys to great effect in his *On the Steps of Humility and Pride*.

-Even a cursory glance at the surrounding context makes it immediately clear that St. Bernard is greatly indebted to St. Augustine's discussion here, both in his *Steps* and in his doctrine of self-knowledge more broadly, in ways that extend far beyond the simple use of St. Augustine's definition of pride.

-Here St. Augustine invokes Sirach 10:13, "Pride is the beginning of all sin (*initium omnis peccati superbia*)," and, just as Bernard later will, interprets this verse to mean that pride is the origin of all sins, both that first sin of Adam and Eve and all the subsequent, personal sins of their descendants. Here too, St. Augustine teaches that pride, understood as excessive self-love and the love of one's own superiority, so swelled like a tumor in the hearts of humanity's first parents that they succumbed to self-deception.

-Satan would not, St. Augustine explains, have attempted to tempt Adam to disobedience unless "there had first existed in that man's soul a certain self-exaltation (*elatio*)" by which he entertained "a false and presumptuous opinion of himself." More precisely, St. Augustine continues, this false self understanding born of excessive self-love consisted in Adam's belief that he could by his own strength, and without any help from God, exalt himself to a share in God's divinity.

-For this reason, Augustine explains, God has allowed the story of Adam's proud self-exaltation and subsequent humbling to be included in Scripture as a lesson to the proud in every age: "Throughout the divine Scripture, with constant care, humility is so highly commended to us, that we might not presume on our own power as if we had no need of God's assistance."

-For St. Bernard even monks removed from the world are by no means immune to pride. In the monastic enclosure, where holiness is cherished above all else, the monk is tempted to fall in love with the thought of his own moral and spiritual superiority over others, and to embrace the self-deception that he is holier than everyone else.

-Thus it is especially interesting to find that St. Bernard may also have drawn the definition of pride as *love of one's own excellence* from St. Augustine's Sermon 354, which concerns that form of pride to which vowed religious are most especially prone. In this sermon, St. Augustine teaches that those who have vowed themselves to chastity have assumed a noble place among the members of Christ's one body; but they must be vigilant, he warns, not to fall victim to pride, to the belief that they are superior to the Church's married members. In this case, Augustine explains, their pride will rob their chastity of its merit: "I dare say," he concludes, "that those who are leading the married life, if they hold fast to their humility, are better than those who are chaste but proud."

-Like St. Benedict, St. Augustine here invokes the paradoxical spiritual dynamics disclosed in Christ's saying, "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11; 18:14). Those who have embraced the vocation to vowed religious life must resist the temptation to the false ascent of pride and contempt of their supposed inferiors, and instead humble themselves to consider the truth of their own weakness and to learn charity for all Christ's members, regardless of their calling.

-St. Augustine writes: "Why do you seek the highest place by your craving for the heights, when you can reach those heights by holding fast to humility?"⁵⁹ Those who would be true members of Christ's body must imitate the humility and love of their Head, who humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death (Phil 2:8): "Your leader is humble, but you would be proud? The Head is humble, but the members would be proud?"

-It's interesting that Bernard makes St. Augustine's teaching in this sermon the very foundation of his account of the twelve steps of pride: the monk's descent of these steps, even to the point of contempt of God, begins with his growing love of his own superiority which, when left unchecked by humble self-judgment, deludes him into the belief that he is holier and more virtuous than any one else in his community. St. Bernard also follows St. Augustine in teaching that it is only by contemplation of and conformation to the example of the humble and loving Incarnate Word that the soul will be brought to true self-knowledge and learn the salutary way of its ascent to God.

-Considered more broadly, St. Augustine's foundational conception in the *City of God*, that of the two cities, the city of those who live by pride and self-will and the city of those who live by humility and love, will provide the basic framework for St. Bernard's entire spiritual theology.

-Though St. Bernard does not typically invoke St. Augustine's image of the two "cities," he does essentially see human beings as faced with two fundamentally opposed ways of life. By the false ascent of pride and self-will, one will grow progressively unlike Christ in his humility and love, and so descend into restless misery amidst a region of unlikeness.

-By the salutary descent of humility and charity, however, one will be progressively restored in the lost divine likeness Christ reveals in his saving mysteries, and so ascend to the happiness of the Divine Bridegroom's eternal embrace.

-The second Augustinian phrase that St. Bernard explicitly quotes and makes his own is St. Augustine's prayer in the *Soliloquies*, "O God, let me know myself, let me know you."

-The themes of self-knowledge, the knowledge of God, and their relation were ones St. Augustine explored in great depth throughout his life, perhaps most notably in his *De Trinitate*. There Augustine teaches that the soul is most fully aware of itself as an image of God when it directs its powers of memory, intellect, and will, the Trinitarian image within itself, to the knowledge, love, and worship of its Creator.

-Though we might expect St. Bernard to follow up St. Augustine's thinking in this regard, it is his more speculatively-minded friend and fellow Cistercian William of Saint Thierry who makes St. Augustine's teaching in the *De Trinitate* a centerpiece of his spiritual theology. With his more practical frame of mind, Bernard, like his other Cistercian contemporary, St. Aelred of Rievaulx, appears to take a greater interest in Augustine's teaching on the knowledge of self and God in the *Confessions*, and, in particular, *Confessions* Book X (According to his hagiographer Walter Daniel, Aelred asked that there be brought to his deathbed his glossed Psalter, the *Confessions* of Augustine, and the text of the Gospel of John).

-It is interesting to notice that in the Confession of St. Augustine, "The knowledge of self and God in their relation is one of the main themes, even the main theme itself. For, in St. Augustine's view, *confession* is always and simultaneously the humble acknowledgment of one's own

sinfulness before God and the praise of God's mercy in forgiving and healing the soul from sin.

-Thus, in Book I, as he prepares to confess his past life before God and his readers, St. Augustine pleads before God, "Though I am but dust and ashes, allow me to speak in the presence of your mercy, for, behold, it is to your mercy that I speak, and not to some person who might mock me."

-In Book X, having told the story of his past life through in the light of God's continuous mercy towards him, St. Augustine confesses "not what I was, but what I am now." So he begins Book X with a prayer very similar to that he offered in the *Soliloquies*, "Let me know you, O you who know me. Let me know you even as I am known by you." He recognizes that if he is to know himself truly, he must learn to see himself as God sees him.

-Contemplating himself as God sees him, St. Augustine confesses that by God's gracious mercy, he has begun to be renewed in holiness. Yet, he also realizes that he still remains weak, and begs God to complete the work of grace he has begun in him, "Have mercy on me," he prays, "according to your great mercy, for the sake of your name. Do not abandon the work you have begun in me, but bring all my imperfection to perfection."

-Much like Origen in his *Commentary* on the Cantic, St. Augustine here subjects himself to a rigorous self-examination of conscience. The framework of this self-judgment is the threefold temptation of 1 John 2:16: the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and worldly pride. On each point, St. Augustine recognizes that by God's mercy he has made progress against these temptations, but still has much more progress to make.

-He is, he confesses, still tempted by images of his past sexual gratifications, still curious for gossip and pleasant sights, and still drawn by the desire for human praise which might corroborate his lingering wish for his own superiority. Honestly acknowledging the various ways in which he is still beset by sin and weakness, he turns to God again, to seek his mercy, and to pray that God will continue to recreate him in his love: "I am needy and poor, but I am better when I recognize this with secret sighs of lament and seek your mercy until you renew all that is imperfect in me and perfect me in your peace."

-In the end, recognizing how far he still remains from God, Augustine can only cling to Christ, the humble and loving Mediator between himself and God, and feed on his Eucharistic flesh and blood, that he might be

gradually healed by Christ and conformed to him, imperfectly in this life, but perfectly in eternity.

-It's gratifying to know that from the tenth book of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, St. Bernard derives the very foundation of his teaching concerning the role of self-knowledge in the spiritual life. For St. Bernard, if the soul is to return to the God from whom it has wandered by sin, it must first be recalled to itself by God himself, and then compelled to know itself in the humbling truth of its own sinfulness, to see it itself through the undeceived and undeceiving eyes of Truth himself.

-Humbling though this self-judgment will be, it is the beginning of the soul's return to God because it moves the soul to expose its former, proud self-deception as false, to see itself in the full measure of its weakness and vanity, and to seek God's merciful healing. Passing from the true knowledge of self to the true knowledge of God, the soul which seeks God's mercy finds it revealed in Christ, and recognizes God at work within it, conforming it to Christ's own humility and love.

-When the soul undertakes this way of restoration in the lost divine likeness, it must not abandon the pursuit of true self-knowledge, but continue to examine itself according to the threefold temptation of 1 John 2:16 that structures St. Bernard's thought as much as St. Augustine's. The soul must consider itself continually, recognizing the recently restored divine likeness within itself as the Work of God's gracious mercy, but also acknowledging its own persistent weakness, and seeking God's continued healing.

THE SCOPE OF BERNARD'S THEOLOGY OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

-Since the pioneering work of Étienne Gilson, scholars of St. Bernard's spiritual theology have consistently and unanimously acknowledged the significant, and indeed essential, role that self-knowledge assumes in St. Bernard's account of the soul's journey to God. When they have addressed the theme of self-knowledge in St. Bernard's thought, they primarily, if not exclusively, focused attention on the role true self-knowledge plays in St. Bernard's account of the soul's first conversion and the initial stages of the spiritual itinerary.

-On this reading, St. Bernard is taken to mean by self-knowledge, the fallen soul's recognition of itself as an image of God disfigured by sin. And, St. Bernard is taken to regard this humbling self-knowledge as essential to the soul's journey to God because he believes that it is only in the light of this genuine self-awareness that the soul is moved to humble itself before God and to seek its restoration in the lost divine likeness from God's hands. For Bernard, then, the soul does not begin to seek God until it first seeks his

healing for its sad disfigurement, but it does not seek God's healing for its sad disfigurement until it first humbly recognizes and confesses that sad disfigurement within its very depths.

-So far as it goes, this analysis St. Bernard's theology of self-knowledge is just and reflects a prominent theme in St. Bernard's spiritual teaching. Though St. Bernard offers in his writings many and varied schematizations of the soul's journey to God by its progressive restoration in the lost divine likeness, he consistently maintains that the soul's return to its Creator, however it may be charted, originates in this humbling but salutary self awareness.

-Thus in his earliest spiritual treatise, *On the Steps of Humility and Pride* (1125), Bernard describes the fallen soul's recognition of its own miserable plight as the "first step of Truth," the first and indispensable rung in the three-step ladder of the soul's ascent to Truth himself. And again, at the very end of his life, in his *On Consideration* (1151), St. Bernard can be found once more extolling the virtues of this self-knowledge, exhorting his former novice, Pope Bl. Eugene III, "Let your consideration begin with yourself and end with yourself. Wherever it wanders, call it back to yourself with the fruit of your salvation. You must be first and last in your own consideration."

-Prior to its first conversion, St. Bernard believes, the soul does possess a certain self knowledge, but only a false self-knowledge, or better a self-deception, born of pride. Inflated with conceit, this soul, which is in truth so unlike God, deceives itself into believing that it is not, in fact, a disfigured image of God, but somehow like him, and therefore not in need of his healing grace. This self-deception, which assumes different forms according to the measure of the soul's pride, effectively blinds the soul to the sad truth of its sinful self-disfigurement and so prevents the soul from seeking the divine healing it so desperately requires.

-Once we understand St. Bernard's teaching on this self-deception and its persuasive power, we will better able to see precisely why he insists so frequently and forcefully on the need for that humbling self knowledge which is so essential to his doctrine. For if, as St. Bernard believes, the proud soul suffers not simply from self-ignorance, but also from self deception, it will only be through an honest, unflinching self-examination and self judgment that the soul will be able to expose its prior self-delusions as false and face the true, and painful, reality of its own self-disfigurement.

-As this humbling self-awareness unmask the soul's former self-deception, it also moves the soul to turn to God, to seek his mercy, forgiveness, and healing for its disfigurement.

-As the soul experiences this transforming grace of God within itself, it begins to know itself in a new way, not now as a self-defaced image of God, but as an image being progressively likened to Christ. The soul now knows itself to be assuming gradually the contours of Christ's own Bride, radiant with her Bridegroom's own beauty. Though this soul, as Bride, knows that her beauty remains imperfect in this life, her new self-knowledge inspires her audacious confidence that when her beauty is made perfect in glory, she will at last forget herself entirely and pass over into her Bridegroom for all eternity.

-In sermons thirty-four to thirty-eight of the Song of Songs, composed sometime between 1139 and 1143, St. Bernard comments on the Bridegroom's words to his Bride: "If you do not know yourself, most beautiful among women, go forth, and follow after the flocks of your companions, and feed your kids beside the shepherd's tents" (Song of Songs 1:7).

-In the tradition of Origen, St. Bernard here associates this verse with the maxim "know thyself" and treats the Bridegroom's words as a rebuke directed to his Bride for her want of self-knowledge.

-These sermons have often been cited or alluded to by scholars as evidence of the importance Bernard attaches to humbling self-knowledge in the foundational stages of the spiritual life and they provide ample witness to this aspect of St. Bernard's teaching. For example, in a celebrated passage from Sermon 36, the central of these five sermons, St. Bernard writes: "I wish, therefore, before all else, that the soul should know itself, for this is what both usefulness and order require. Order since what we are is our first concern, and usefulness because such knowledge does not puff us up, but humbles us, and is a certain foundation on which to build. For unless it is founded on the firm foundation of humility, the spiritual building cannot stand."

SC 34-38: The Bride's Journey of Likeness and Vision

-The Bride's journey of likeness and vision begins in this life, but reaches its perfection only in the next when she will be perfectly likened to her Spouse and at last behold him face to face. St. Bernard writes: "The one who grows brighter draws nearer, but to be perfectly bright is to have arrived. For those who have arrived in his presence, to see him as he is

nothing other than to be as he is and not to be put to shame by any unlikeness. But this, as I have said, is for the next life."

-In her present exile, then, the Bride who longs to see her Bridegroom as he is must first be enlightened by the Sun of Justice that she might grow ever more like him in his brightness according to Paul's words, "We with unveiled face, gazing on the glory of God are transformed into that same image, from brightness to brightness, as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18). The Bride must remember, however, that this process of illumination and likening to the Word is only accomplished gradually. She must not rashly aspire to the beatific vision of her Bridegroom before she is perfectly conformed to him, but humbly submit herself to the transforming missions of the Word and his Spirit, who will liken her to her Incarnate Bridegroom's humility and charity respectively.

-St. Bernard's explication of the Bride's journey to the beatific vision by her growing likeness to her Bridegroom allows him to explain the meaning of her Bridegroom's rebuke. When with the harsh words of a master he says "If you do not know yourself, most beautiful among women, go forth," he rebukes not her desire for the beatific vision, but her presumption in judging herself already worthy to see him as he is. Speaking in the excess of her longing, the Bride has neglected that she still remains on her earthly pilgrimage and still possesses an earthly body and is therefore as yet incapable of gazing on the inaccessible brightness of her Spouse. So her Bridegroom "recalls her to herself, reveals her ignorance, and reproves her presumption."

-His words to his Beloved are indeed terrifying, but they are not spoken in anger. Rather, the Bridegroom's purpose is to purify his Bride's heart by holy fear that she might become worthy of that vision of God reserved for the pure of heart (Mt 5:8).

-In the conclusion to SC 38, St. Bernard reprises his doctrine of likeness and vision, now describing the Bride's likeness to her Bridegroom as her "beauty." When in his rebuke the Bridegroom calls his Bride "most beautiful among women," the qualification "among women" suggests that her beauty is not yet complete and is intended to help his Spouse "know what is lacking to her" (Ps 38:5). The Bride is indeed beautiful inasmuch as she leads the spiritual life, inasmuch as she "walks according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh" (Rom 8:1).

-Yet, in this life, she remains beautiful only in part, only among, or by comparison with, worldly and carnal souls who have not yet embraced life in the Spirit. Beautiful among the carnal and the worldly, she is not yet

beautiful among the blessed angels in glory on account of her still mortal and perishing body. As long as she falls short of the "perfection of beauty" the angels now enjoy, she must know herself still unworthy of the perfect vision of her Bridegroom for which she longs.

-“For if you knew yourself fully,” says the Bridegroom to the bride, “you would know that weighed down by a corruptible body you can in no way lift your eyes and fix them on my radiance, on which angels long to look. There will come a day when I will reveal myself to you and your beauty will be complete as my beauty is complete; then you will be made so like me that you will see me as I am. Then you will hear me say to you, ‘You are completely beautiful, my love, and there is no flaw in you’” (Sg 4:7).

-“But for now, although you are already like me in part, you are nevertheless unlike me in part, and so you must be content to know me only in part.” Here, then, is Bernard’s most elementary schema of the spiritual journey, its origins, its progress, and its goal. It is the Bride’s journey from her present self-ignorance to her eschatological self-knowledge, from her ignorance of her incomplete beauty in this life to her knowledge of herself, attested by her Bridegroom, as perfectly beautiful, perfectly conformed to the perfect beauty of her divine Spouse.

-This pilgrimage from self ignorance to self-knowledge will proceed by way of the bride’s gradual beautification in the Spirit, her progressive likening to the beauty of her incarnate, crucified, and glorified Bridegroom’s humility and charity. When her spiritual journey of beautification reaches its eschatological completion, she will know herself to be perfectly beautiful as her Bridegroom is perfectly beautiful and see her perfectly beautiful Bridegroom as he is. Conformed to and perfectly imitating her Spouse’s humility, charity, and beauty, she will find her perfect happiness in their eternal embrace of reciprocal knowledge, love, and vision.

-In the context of this spiritual journey of growing beauty and vision, the Bridegroom’s rebuke is intended to restrain his Bride’s presumption lest through self ignorance she prematurely judge herself capable of seeing Him face to face. At the root of the Bride’s presumption and self-ignorance is her *curiosity*, her inquisitive desire to know the things beyond her and to see her Bridegroom as He is. Her Bridegroom does not fault this desire in itself; He has created her for and called her to just this knowledge and vision. Yet, He also warns her that her desire to contemplate heavenly realities may distract her from the contemplation of herself, her present condition, and her need for growth in Christ’s own humility, charity, and beauty.

-For St. Bernard, the lesson to be drawn from the Bridegroom's salutary rebuke is that the only way to the beatific vision of Christ is Christ's own way of humility: "The one who strives towards the heights must have a humble knowledge of himself. Otherwise, when he is raised above himself, he will fall beneath himself, unless he is firmly grounded in himself by true humility." The Bridegroom Himself teaches just this when he says in the Gospel, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk 14:11).

-In Christ's words, St. Bernard discerns the most elemental dynamics of the spiritual life: paradoxically, those who would ascend to the heavenly heights of likeness, vision, and a share in the divine life must first descend by voluntary self-humbling in accord with the divine will. Conversely, those who contrary to the divine will presumptuously aspire to the heavenly heights will descend beneath themselves into a region of unlikeness, blindness, and spiritual death.

-Essential to these spiritual dynamics is the question of self-knowledge. If the Bride should know herself, she will rightly judge herself as yet unworthy of the heavenly heights and therefore embrace the descending way of voluntary self-humbling that ascends to glory and life. If, however, the Bride should fail to know herself, she will falsely judge herself already worthy of these heavenly heights and therefore embrace the ascending way of willful self-exaltation that descends to ruin and death. In the subsequent sermon, SC 35, St. Bernard will identify Christ and Adam as the respective exemplary figures of these opposed and inverted patterns of ascent and descent.

Adam's Self-Deception

-Before he can speak specifically to the case of the individual soul, however, Bernard momentarily step back to consider the panoramic view of salvation history which in several important respects determines or shapes the journey of any individual soul. More precisely, he addresses the exemplary figures of Adam and Christ.

-The soul which would set out on the journey of likeness to vision is, in the first place, a descendent of Adam and therefore shares in his ancestor's original sin and its consequences. If this soul would successfully undertake and complete this journey from his fallen condition to the promised beatific vision, moreover, it can do so only in and through the redemptive work of the second Adam, Christ the Incarnate Word. Before turning to the exemplary figures of Adam and Christ, Bernard devotes the opening of SC 35 to a meditation on the second part of the Bridegroom's rebuke,

“go forth and follow after the flocks of your companions, and feed your kids beside the shepherds’ tents” (Sg 1:7). The Bridegroom’s words are plainly a warning intended to recall his Bride to true self-knowledge, but what is the significance of this warning and why should it compel her to return to herself?

-The Bride, St. Bernard explains, has been taught by her Beloved and received from Him the grace “to enter into herself and to seek the presence of God in her inmost depths, to seek His face always, “for God is spirit and those who seek Him ought to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh.” She has learned from her experience of contemplation that she is a rational and spiritual creature capable of withdrawing her attention from the sensible world and into her heart where she may seek her Bridegroom’s presence and in seeking Him find, even in this life, some measure of rest for her ardent longing.

-Having once experienced the sweetness and peace that accompanies this recollection and contemplation, St. Bernard continues, she fears nothing more than to have to abandon this interior rest and “go forth once more to the enticements, or rather the vexing demands, of the flesh and the insatiable curiosity of her bodily senses.” For the Bride knows by experience that the sensible, created goods her senses seek and her flesh desires can never satisfy her deepest yearnings. However appealing they may appear to her eyes and other senses, and despite whatever immediate though ephemeral gratification they may afford her flesh, they are not her Beloved and so only stoke rather than satisfy her burning love for him.

-Yet, St. Bernard suggests, this is precisely the meaning of the Bridegroom’s warning: if the Bride neglects to know herself, if she presumptuously aspires to spiritual heights before she is worthy of them, she will be compelled to abandon the inner sanctuary of her heart, go forth after her restless, wandering senses among the world of created things, and there strive to find some small consolation for her deepest yearnings in the satisfaction of her sinful, fleshly desires.

-By a “shameful exchange of desires,” the Bride who once was eager “to feed her exiled and pilgrim soul on holy meditations and heavenly goods, to seek the good-pleasure of God and the mysteries of his holy will, and to penetrate the heavens by her devotion” will now, abandoned by grace, have to “enslave herself to the shameful servitude of her body, obey her flesh, satisfy her stomach and palate, and beg throughout the whole world, whose form is passing away, to find some little consolation for her ever ravenous curiosity.”

-In other words, the Bride who does not know herself will have to exchange the spiritual life for life in the flesh and labor in vain to slake her burning thirst for her Beloved by the immediate gratification of sinful desires for all that is not him. Her life in the flesh will therefore be a life of misery as well as sin, for all the worldly things her flesh and senses crave - sensual pleasures, riches, knowledge, power, and prestige - fall short of the One her soul loves.

-St. Bernard's sorrowful reflection on the Bride's "shameful exchange" evokes Adam's own fall from the spirit to the flesh. At the moment of his creation, Adam was a noble and beautiful creature, a living witness to his Creator's gracious love. Placed in a paradise of pleasure, knowing nothing of suffering nor want, and set over all the works of God's hands, he "excelled them all on account of the divine likeness with which he was sealed and shared the fellowship of the angelic hosts."

-St. Bernard's reference to Adam's being sealed with the divine likeness recalls the doctrine of humanity's creation in the image and likeness of God.

-Here, as in his other treatments of the theme, human beings' creation in the image of God, refers to our inborn and ineffaceable similarity to and Capacity for the eternal and consubstantial Image of God, the Word.

-This similarity to and capacity for the Word is seen to consist in that special nobility or excellence of human beings which raises us above beasts and enables us to share in the fellowship of the angels, namely their rationality and freedom. Through this rationality and freedom, we human beings are capable of knowing, loving, and adhering to the Word in whose image we were made.

-Human beings will realize this capacity to the extent that we become like the Word through our growing conformity to the humility and charity Christ exemplifies in His incarnate, crucified, and glorified life. To the extent that we human beings imitate and participate in the Word's humility and love, we become like the Word and so begin to know, love, and adhere to the Word, to see Him as He is, and to share in His own divine life.

-Had Adam voluntarily submitted himself to the will of his Creator by that humility and charity later revealed in Christ, he would have, by grace, been elevated to the perfection of divine likeness and thereby granted a share in the beatific vision now afforded to the angels. In his first sin,

however, Adam proudly despised his Creator's gracious love, scorned subjection to the divine will, and preferred his own will to the will of God.

-Refusing to receive the fullness of the divine life and likeness as a gift, he aspired to seize a kind of parody, a poor imitation, of this divine likeness and life by exalting his own will over the divine will so that, like God, his will might be raised above all and subject to none. By this perverse imitation of God, this presumptuous assertion of his own autonomy, Adam claimed his own will for himself and aspired to find his fulfillment in himself alone.

-By this brazen assertion of his self-will, the inverse of that charity which conforms to the divine will in all things, Adam aspired to become a god on his own. In consequence, by God's just punishment, he was reduced to the level of a beast: "He exchanged the glory of God for the likeness of an ox that eats grass" (Ps 105:20).

-According to the Bridegroom's warning to the Bride, the one who aspired to divine heights above himself fell beneath himself, the one who exalted himself was humbled. Created to share in the divine likeness and life, he has acquired the likeness and life of a foolish beast, with his reason darkened by ignorance, his will enslaved to concupiscence, and his body subject to suffering and death. Expelled from paradise and the fellowship of the angels, he must now go forth like a beast, obedient to the curiosity of his promiscuous senses and subject to the will of his sinful fleshly desires.

-The cause of Adam's brazen assertion of self-will was his pride, and the root of his pride was his defective self-knowledge, or, more precisely, his self-deception on account of his excessive self-love: Placed in honor, he was so delighted with his exalted state that he did not understand that he was clay, and soon experienced in himself what one of his captive sons wisely and truly said so much later: "If anyone thinks that he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Gal 6:3). Alas for that miserable man that there was no one present then who could have said to him: "Dust and ashes, why are you proud?" (Si 10:19).

-When God formed him as a noble and excellent creature, raised above all others by his rationality and freedom, Adam grew so enamored of his singular excellence that he forgot that he was but a creature, an image created to be conformed to his Exemplar through humble and loving subjection to his Creator. Seduced by the love of his own excellence to such a degree that he saw nothing of his own created finitude and dependence, Adam deceived himself into believing that he was something more than a creature, that he too, like his Creator, possessed his freedom from himself and was therefore subject to no law

but that of his own will.

-Yet, by the inescapable law of God, the creature who sought to usurp the likeness of God for himself has been reduced to the likeness of a beast. St. Bernard writes: "From then on, the excellent creature was reduced to the flock, the likeness of God was changed into the likeness of a beast, and the fellowship of the angels was exchanged for the society of animals. See how much you ought to flee this ignorance which has brought so many thousands of evils upon our entire race!"

-As St. Bernard's lament suggests, the consequences of Adam's ignorance are not limited to himself, but extend to and condition the lives of all his sons and daughters in the flesh. By our generation from Adam, all human beings have assumed the likeness of beasts: our reason is darkened by ignorance, our wills enslaved to concupiscence, and our bodies subject to suffering and death.

-Sadder still, Adam and his descendants have fallen not merely to the level of equality with the beasts, but even lower. As St. Bernard notes, the Bridegroom warns his Bride that if she does not know herself, she must go forth not with the flocks of her companions or to the flocks of her companions, but *after* the flocks of her companions.

-However, though we fallen human beings now live like beasts, we are still rational and free creatures. Though by our own sins and our participation in the sin of Adam, we have not ceased to be in the image of God, but find this image covered over or trapped beneath our alien likeness to irrational beasts.

-We are still the image of God, but an image disfigured by sin. Still capable of knowing ourselves and our Creator in truth, our minds are blinded by ignorance and compelled to wander after our curious senses. We are still free and capable of loving our Creator, we find our wills voluntarily and yet inescapably enslaved to the service of our fleshly lusts.

-Our enduring rationality and freedom not only explains why we fallen human beings are guilty of sin and deserving of damnation, but also why we experience our lives as ones of ceaseless misery. Since we remain the image of God, we can only find our rest in knowing, loving, and adhering to the Word in whose image we were made.

-Yet since we are now inescapably subject to ignorance of God and the love of our own flesh, we cannot return to the God in whom alone we will

find their rest. Rather, we must wander about the world of created things, as through a region of unlikeness, and try in vain to find our rest in so many created and dissatisfying substitutes such as: sensual pleasures, human knowledge, earthly riches, worldly power and prestige.

-If we fallen human beings could somehow be made to see plainly the stark and bitter truth of our own misery, we might be moved to turn to our Creator in humility to seek his healing and deliverance. Yet, since we share in Adam's inescapable self-ignorance, we prefer ceaselessly to recapitulate his primordial way of self-deception, pride, and self-will, a way that leads only to further misery, death, and eternal condemnation.

Christ as the Teacher of Self-Knowledge

-Though St. Bernard devotes most of SC 35 to the nature and consequences of Adam's sin and lack of self-knowledge, he is careful to balance this account of humanity's fall and fallen condition with a meditation on the redemptive work of Christ.

-With his characteristic concern for the intersection of Christology and anthropology, St. Bernard takes care to suggest how the manner of Christ's redemptive work is suitably adapted to the manner of humanity's fall and fallen condition.

-In keeping with the patristic tradition, Bernard understands God's redemptive work in Christ as his free decision to deliver fallen human beings from their sin and to offer them a share in his own divine life, the very offer Adam refused in his pride. Given the nature of humanity's sin and fallen condition, however, God is, in a sense, required to address several specific needs of fallen human beings if he is to accomplish his saving intention.

-In the first place, St. Bernard believes, God must meet fallen human beings where we are by rendering himself accessible and attractive to human beings in our fallen state. As Bernard has shown, we human beings have exchanged the likeness of God for the likeness of beasts. That is, we have voluntarily enslaved ourselves to our fleshly desires for sensible goods and live only for the immediate, though ephemeral satisfaction of those desires.

-Consequently, if God, who is perfectly spiritual, is to recall the hearts of fallen human beings to Himself, He must first allure us to Himself by

assuming a fleshly, sensible form, that we might first cling to His flesh and then ascend to the contemplation of Him in His divinity.

-Second, in our fallen condition, Adam's descendants, in imitation of our forebear, are inclined to pride and self-will, inclined to ignore the truth of our being creatures, and driven to seize our own sort of divinity through the autonomous assertion of our own wills above the will of our Creator.

-Consequently, if God is to recall us to our originally intended participation in His own divine life and blessedness, He must instruct our proud and willful hearts in the opposed and salutary ways of humility and charity.

-Third, supposing God were indeed able to recall us, His fallen creatures, to our true end, the loving contemplation of Himself, and to show us the way to this end, the way of humility and love, we fallen human beings would still remain voluntarily enslaved to sin and subject to death and therefore still incapable of ourselves of embracing the way of humility and charity to the promise of eternal life.

-Consequently, if God's saving plan is to be accomplished, He must not only reveal to us our goal and our way to that goal, but also free us from our slavery to sin and infuse into our hearts His gifts of grace, humility, and charity.

-In his brief narration of the Word's Incarnation in SC 35, St. Bernard appears explicitly concerned to address the first of these three needs of fallen humanity, but implicitly speaks to the second and third as well. In their fall, he suggests, human beings have "exchanged the glory of God for the likeness of an ox that eats grass" (Ps 105:20).

-We have exchanged the desire for God for the desire for the "grass" of sensible, created realities. Consequently, the Word, by his own gracious will has "become like grass," or taken flesh, that we might be drawn to and feed on His sacred humanity.

-St. Bernard writes: So the bread of angels has become like grass laid in a manger, set before us as beasts. Indeed the Word was made flesh (Jn 1:14); and, according to the Prophet, all flesh is as grass (Is 40:6). Yet, this grass does not wither, nor does its bloom fade, for the Spirit of the Lord has rested upon him. For, as the Prophet also says, grass withers and its bloom fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever (Is 40:8). If, therefore, the Word is grass, and the Word remains forever, this grass too remains forever. How else could it bring eternal life, if it did not remain forever?

-Since fallen human beings now sense and desire only what is fleshly, the Word has taken flesh, even the tender and sweet flesh of an infant lying in a manger, that He might lure the hearts of fallen human beings away from the sensible, fleshly goods we crave to His own sweet and sensible humanity.

-His purpose, however, in winning our *amor carnalis*, carnal love, is not that we might remain in this condition, but that we might be drawn to the still sweeter taste of His divinity by an *amor spiritualis*, spiritual love. Christ accomplishes this reeducation of the heart by the two principal stages of His incarnate life: by the descent of His Incarnation, Nativity, and Passion, He attracts fallen hearts to His flesh; by His Resurrection and Ascension in glorified flesh, together with the gift of His Spirit at Pentecost, He draws hearts in love with His flesh to the love of His divinity present within.

-In a similar fashion, by His humble and compassionate condescension in the

Mystery of His nativity, and in each of the saving mysteries of His earthly life, the Word made- flesh also offers fallen humanity the most perfect model, or, as St. Bernard is fond of saying, the perfect "form," of humility and love.¹¹²

-By imitating and therefore being conformed to this perfect form, we fallen human beings once attracted to Christ's flesh may learn the ways of humility and charity that reverse Adam's pride and self-will and so be renewed in the lost divine likeness shown forth in the Incarnate Word.

-Yet, as the Eucharistic undertones of the above quoted passage imply, Christ's redeeming work goes beyond that of a mere moral exemplar. For in offering Himself to us fallen human beings in His Eucharistic flesh and blood, the grass that bestows eternal life, Christ allows us to participate in His own humility and love and, still more basically, to share in the forgiveness of sins He won for us in His Paschal Mystery.

-As Bernard writes in his letter-treatise *Against the Errors of Peter Abelard*, "I want to follow the humble Jesus with all my strength; I long to embrace with the arms of my love the one who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:20), but I must also eat the Paschal Lamb. For unless I eat his flesh and drink his blood, I have no life in me (Jn 6:56, 33)."

-Given St. Bernard's focus on self-knowledge, it is not surprising to find that the chief lesson he derives from the mystery of Christ's Nativity is the fallen soul's need for a humbling knowledge of our own fallen weakness.

-By graciously condescending to assume our human condition, Christ has, in effect, compelled us fallen human beings to ponder our own need for His redemption. Presenting Himself as a humble infant laid in a manger, He has compelled us fallen souls to figure ourselves as beasts before His crib.

-Yet, by this very same condescension, the Word also reveals the joyous and consoling truth about God: the God who created human beings to see Him as He is and to share in His own divine life lovingly wills to raise His fallen creatures from our self-imposed slavery to sin and to elevate us to our originally intended end in Himself. If humanity's fall from the spirit to the flesh consisted in our ignorance of ourselves and God, our return to Him, the spiritual life, will conversely consist in our growing knowledge of ourselves and God.

The Ways of Self-Knowledge and Self-Deception

-If SC 35 establishes Adam and Christ as the opposed and inverted models of

Human sin and redemption, SC 36-38.2 considers how individual souls recapitulate these models through our respective ignorance and knowledge of ourselves and God.

-In SC 37, St. Bernard offers a concise sketch of his teaching on these two paradigmatic ways which should be counted among the most succinct summaries of his entire spiritual theology: Just as the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom (Si 1:16), so pride is the beginning of all sin (Si 10:15); and just as the love of God is the perfection of wisdom, so despair is the consummation of all malice. And as the fear of God arises in us from knowledge of ourselves, and love of God from knowledge of God, so, conversely, pride arises from ignorance of ourselves, and despair from ignorance of God.

-Thus St. Bernard resolves his spiritual theology into two opposed and inverted ways of life, the way of wisdom and the way of malice. The crucial question concerning these two ways is that of self-knowledge. If the soul comes to know itself in truth, it embarks on the way of wisdom, the way of progressive likening to the humility and charity of the Incarnate Word, that leads to the vision of the Word as He is and a share in God's own divine life of knowledge and love.

-Conversely, if the soul neglects to know itself, it sets out on the way of sin and malice, Adam's primordial way of pride and self-will, that leads to unlikeness, blindness, misery, and eternal death. In SC 36-38.2, Bernard unfolds each of these two ways in greater detail, demonstrating their inner spiritual logic and progression.

-Bernard's comprehensive teaching on self-knowledge begins not with the humble self-knowledge requisite for and integral to conversion, but with the lack of self-knowledge that breeds the self-deception of pride: "Ignorance of yourself breeds pride when you are deceived and deceiving thoughts lie to you, convincing you that you are better than you truly are. For this is pride, this is the beginning of every sin, when you are greater in your own eyes than you are in God's, than you are in Truth."

-When we fallen human beings neglect to know ourselves, to confront honestly the bitter truth of our weakness and sin, this void of self-knowledge is swiftly and subtly filled by far more pleasant thoughts of our own excellence. These deceived and deceiving thoughts may take many forms such as: fallen human beings may delight in the thought of our superior knowledge, power, wealth, prestige, or, in the case of monks, our superior holiness, whether real or imagined.

-Whatever their particular object, each of these delightful thoughts contribute to our self-deception as they blind us to the disquieting reality of our own finitude and frailty and enable us to construct for ourselves a false but gratifying identity as the wisest, the wealthiest, the most powerful, the most prestigious, or the holiest among our fellows.

-These various species of human pride are, for St. Bernard, nothing more than so

many reiterations of the pride of Adam. Delighted with the thought of his superiority over all other creatures on account of his rationality and freedom, Adam neglected the truth of his own finitude, and so fashioned for himself the identity of a god who possessed his excellence from himself and therefore owed his nobility to no one other than himself. Adam's pride, however, is not the first instance of this sin, but itself a reiteration of the pride of Lucifer who "did not stand in the truth but was a liar from the beginning, for he was greater in his own thoughts than he was in Truth."

-Fashioned by God with unrivaled splendor and glory, Satan grew so pleased with his own beauty that he forgot the truth of his creation and aspired to rivalry with the Son of God, imaging himself an equal to the Most High with a kingdom of creatures to match that of his maker. In each of these primordial sins of pride, as in every subsequent sin of pride, lack of self-knowledge enabled self-deception, self-deception led to rash assertion of self-will, and rash assertion of self-will led to ruin.

-What, then, are the dynamics of pride and how does it emerge specifically in the monastic context to which Bernard writes? For the

abbot, all forms of human pride begin with one's curiosity about others and one's subsequent, self-serving comparisons with one's fellows.

-The monk will tend to direct his attention to his brothers, scrutinize their conduct, and identify their inevitable failings as fallen human beings. This curiosity about the spiritual lives of others has, for St. Bernard, two immediate and spiritually dangerous consequences. First, when the monk directs his sensitive and mental attention elsewhere, he soon begins to neglect himself, to overlook his own failings, weakness, and sinful tendencies. In the absence of such sustained, critical self-inquiry, he grows ever more susceptible to that love of his own excellence which led to Adam's fall.

-These negative judgments about his brothers coupled with his lack of honest self-scrutiny serve to feed his nascent self-love: the monk sees himself as holy, holier than his brothers, holier than everyone else. Mindful of this tendency, and doubtless well familiar with it through his long experience as an abbot, St. Bernard sternly warns his monks: *I do not want you to compare yourself, O man, to others - to your superiors, to your inferiors, to some, or even to one. For how do you know, O man, whether this one whom you perhaps judge the vilest and most wretched of all, whose life you scorn and spurn as more sinful and wicked not only than your own, for you believe that you are a just and holy man, but even more sinful and wicked than that of all other sinful men; how do you know, I ask, whether he will not in the future, by the work of the Most High, become greater than both you and others if he is not already so before God?*

-Sense perceptions are a precarious basis for evaluation of the spiritual lives of others and, by diverting attention from oneself, they tend only to confirm the pleasant thought of one's moral superiority. Far better, St. Bernard suggests, to follow the counsel of Christ, who teaches not to take the places of honor at table lest we be demoted to a lower place, but to take the lowest place of all, preferring ourselves to no one, that we may in time be called to take up a more prominent place (Lk 14:10).

-St. Bernard's invocation of Christ's parable is not without rhetorical effect. Though he does not mention it, his monastic readers will immediately recall how this parable ends, with Christ's words, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk 14:11). The monk who succumbs to self-deception and proudly imagines himself superior to his brothers will, in time, be humbled by God.

-For St. Bernard, the monk's descent into despair will occur through his ignorance of God. Suppose a proud and self-deceived monk finds himself compelled to face the bitter truth of his sin and weakness and, displeased with what he sees, decides to abandon his sinful ways and reform his life. Confronted with the stark reality of his inescapable bondage to the self-imposed shackles of his own sin, he will be required to seek his deliverance from the hands of God.

-Yet, if he does not know God, he may be inclined to imagine that God lacks mercy, and therefore will not save him, or else lacks justice, and therefore will not punish him for his sins. As his lack of self-knowledge led him to construct a false image of himself, his ignorance of God will lead him to construct a false image of his Creator: "So iniquity deceives itself, fashioning for itself an idol that does not resemble God."

-Fashioning for himself a god without mercy, the monk despairs of salvation and immerses himself in the delights of his flesh, hoping to at least find some gratification in this life before suffering eternal punishment in the next. Or else, fashioning for himself a god without justice, he imagines himself exempt from divine judgment and therefore carelessly indulges the whims of his own will. In one case, ignorance of God breeds despair; in the other, the brazen assertion of self-will; and in both, contempt of the truly just and merciful God who wills to save his fallen creatures from their sin through their conformity to his own divine will.

-Through ignorance of himself and God, then, the monk recapitulates Adam's way of pride and self-will, hence grows unlike the humble and loving Christ, and so descends with Adam into that bestial existence that leads only to misery, despair, and condemnation. If, therefore, the monk is to be converted to Christ, likened to his humility and love, and thereby begin his ascent with Christ to the beatific vision, he will do so by discovering the truth about himself and God.

-As St. Bernard pointed out, life in Christ, the properly spiritual life opposed to the bestial life of the flesh, depends on this two-fold knowledge: The sum total of our spiritual life consists in these two things: when we consider ourselves we are troubled and saddened to our salvation, but when we consider God we are revived and consoled with the joy of the Holy Spirit. From the knowledge of ourselves we conceive fear and humility, but from the knowledge of God hope and love.

-Granted their indispensable centrality to the spiritual life, the knowledge of oneself and God must, for Bernard, be sought before all other forms of knowledge. This does not mean that these other forms of learning should

be disparaged, however. Bernard is well aware of that the study of the liberal arts, for example, confers many benefits on the Church, enabling scholars to instruct the simple in the doctrine of the faith and to refute the faith's more subtle opponents. *Given that this sermon, and the sermon set SC 34-38, was composed between 1139 and 1145, in the very midst of Bernard's campaign against Abelard, it seems very likely that he has Abelard here in mind.*

-St. Bernard's concern is not with the nature of human knowledge as such, but with the order, manner, and ends of study. Without the knowledge of oneself and God, the study of all other forms of knowledge, even the study of theology itself, is, at best, irrelevant to one's own salvation or, at worst, an inducement to idle curiosity, vainglory, and pride.¹²⁴

-For St. Bernard, it was with reference to this theological knowledge sought apart from humble self-knowledge that Paul wrote, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Cor 8:1). Beyond the knowledge that brings pride, there is another, more fundamental and truly edifying knowledge, the knowledge that makes one weep over his or her fallen misery and cry out to God for his liberating mercy.

-St. Bernard writes: You see that there are different kinds of knowledge, since one puffs us up while the other makes us weep. I would like to know which of these seems to you more useful or necessary for your salvation, the knowledge that inflates or the knowledge that saddens? I have no doubt you will prefer the latter, for pride but simulates health while sadness seeks it. Those who seek salvation draw close to it, for those who ask will receive. As Paul tells us, God heals the brokenhearted and detests the proud, for "he resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jm 4:6). SC 36.2 (II, 5-6)

For Bernard, a monk may diligently search the Scriptures to learn how the holy man should live, but if he does not simultaneously appropriate this knowledge to himself, judging himself in light of what he reads, his knowledge of the spiritual life will, paradoxically, only inflate his ego and nourish his vanity. Only if he reads together the book of Scripture and the book of his own experience, comparing the latter to the former, will he be moved to recognize his own sinfulness and humbly seek God's forgiveness, grace, and sanctification. SC 3.1 (I, 14).

-It is for this reason that Bernard insists that "above all else the soul should know itself." SC 36.5 (II, 6-7)

-At the very beginning of the spiritual life, before seeking any other kind of knowledge, the monk must consciously endeavor to know himself in the full and bitter truth of his sin and weakness, for this humbling self-knowledge alone banishes self-ignorance and pride, the beginning of every sin, and lays that firm foundation of humility on which alone the edifice of the spiritual life may be raised.

-By this earnest self-scrutiny, the monk will at last expose his proud self-deception and shatter the painstakingly constructed façade of his own superior righteousness and wisdom. If this self-consideration is to be effective, however, the monk must renounce all distracting curiosity about, and self-serving comparisons with, the spiritual lives of his brethren. He must return to his heart and find himself in the Truth: "He must not deceive himself, nor succumb to any guile in his heart, but set himself squarely before his own face and refuse to turn away." SC 36.5 (II, 7)

-Through this unflinching self-examination, St. Bernard suggests, the monk is truly compelled to see himself in the Truth because he is compelled to see himself in the eyes of Christ, to compare himself not now to his unreliable perceptions of his brothers' relative virtue or vice, but to the manifest and incontrovertible humility and charity of the Incarnate Word.

-Contemplating himself in the mirror of Christ's humility and love, he sees reflected in relief the full measure of his pride and self-will. Beholding his own face in the face of the infant Jesus, he must acknowledge that he is not, as he supposed, holy and like to Christ, but like a beast before Christ's manger, subject to his curiosity and obedient to his sinful flesh: "Seeing himself in the clear light of Truth, will he not find himself in a region of unlikeness and groaning from the depth of a misery he can no longer dissemble, for he is truly miserable, cry out with the Prophet, 'In your Truth you have humbled me' (Ps 118:75)?" SC 36.5 (II, 7)

-Having once imagined himself to be like Christ, the monk now must see that he is in truth like Adam, a descendent of Adam, and justly subject to the miserable consequences of Adam's primordial sin. In one of the most striking accounts of this self-discovery to be found in his entire *corpus*, St. Bernard asks: *How can he not but be humbled by this true self-knowledge when he perceives himself to be burdened by sin, weighed down by his mortal body, entangled in earthly cares, stained with the impurity of his fleshly desires; when he sees that he is blind, bent over, and powerless, entwined in many errors, exposed to a thousand dangers, trembling before a thousand fears, anxious over a thousand difficulties, vexed by a*

thousand suspicions, troubled by a thousand needs; when he sees himself as one driven to vice and incapable of virtue? SC 36.5 (II, 7)

-Thus the monk discovers and confesses the humbling truth that he is a fallen, disfigured image of God, voluntarily enslaved to sin, subject to suffering, and condemned to eternal death.

-Bitter though it may be, however, this knowledge of ourselves as a disfigured image is truly salutary for it moves us to turn to God and to seek his healing. We know that we are an image disfigured by our sin, and this is the source of our humility, but we likewise see that we remain an image of God, and this grounds our hope that our Creator may still will to restore us in the likeness of the Incarnate Word: "Pierced by the thorns of his misery," St. Bernard says, "will he not be converted in his sorrow? Let him be converted, I say, to tears, converted to contrition and sighs, and cry out in his humility, 'Cleanse my soul, for I have sinned against you'" (Ps 40:5). SC 36.5 (II, 7)

-When, the monk humbled by true self-knowledge approaches God in contrition and seeks his healing, his self-knowledge will lead to the true knowledge of God, as he finds in God "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor 1:3).

-As so often in his sermons, St. Bernard illustrates this point by referring to his own experience, as he said: "As long as I look at myself, my eye is consumed with bitterness. Yet when I lift my eye to the aid of divine mercy, this joyous vision of God soon tempers my bitter vision of myself." SC 36.6 (II, 7)

-Inviting his monks to share in his experience, St. Bernard assures them that if they turn to God in humility, they will come to know Him as "kind and compassionately listening to our prayers, as one truly generous and merciful, as victorious over sin, as one whose nature is goodness, who wills to spare and to save." SC 36.6 (II, 7-8)

-The monk who formerly wept to know himself as a disfigured image of God will now rejoice to know his Creator as the God who himself is love (1 Jn 4:8). Yet, the very occasion for our newfound knowledge of God's mercy and love will be our newfound knowledge of ourselves, no longer as an image disfigured by sin, but as an image being renewed in the lost divine likeness by God's grace: In this way, our self-knowledge will be a step to the knowledge of God; He will become visible to us as His image is being renewed in us, as we, with unveiled face, gazing with confidence

on the glory of the Lord are transformed into that same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor 3:18). SC 36.6 (II, 8)

-For St. Bernard, then, the monk will come to know the love of God as he comes to know himself as one being lovingly renewed by God in God's own divine likeness. The monk who once trembled to see his unlikeness to Christ in the mirror of Christ's Incarnation, and therefore humbled himself before Christ, now comes to see the mercy of Christ in and through his own progressive likening to Christ's humility and charity.

-With his reason already conformed to Christ's humility by his honest self-judgment, he now experiences his will as being gradually liberated from sin and conformed to Christ's own charity by Christ's gift of the Spirit.

-Humbling himself before the humble Incarnate Word and responding with love to the Incarnate Word who first loved him, the monk comes to know himself anew as a living likeness to the humble and loving Christ and, by the principle of knowledge through resemblance, comes to know Christ in knowing himself.

-If St. Bernard's theology of self-knowledge begins prior to conversion with a consideration of the self-deception intrinsic to the region of unlikeness, it likewise extends beyond conversion to embrace the soul's newfound knowledge of itself as an image being renewed in the lost divine likeness.

-In SC 37, St. Bernard takes a closer look at the soul's journey of renewal in the divine likeness through its deepening knowledge of itself and God. Here, the basic counters of this spiritual life are indicated by the prophet Hosea in his injunction, "Sow for yourselves righteousness, and reap the hope of eternal life" (Hos 10:12). In associating Hos 10:12 with Sg 1:7, Bernard likely follows Origen.

-When at his conversion the monk is compelled to face the bitter truth of his being a disfigured image of God, he will sow the seeds of righteousness by humbling himself to embrace the monastic disciplines of contrition, penance, good works, and ceaseless prayer. Though he sows these seeds in sorrow in this life, he will reap their fruits in joy in the next as he carries home the precious sheaves of his forgiveness, sanctification, and eternal life with God.

-In the beatific vision of the Word as he is, the monk's bitter knowledge of himself at conversion will give way to the joyous knowledge of the God who has willed to redeem him, sanctify him, and offer him a share in his

own divine life of knowledge and love. For St. Bernard, the Psalmist foretells this vision when he writes, "They wept as they went forth, sowing their seeds, but they will return with exaltation, carrying their sheaves" (Ps 125:6-7).

-Should we grow disheartened at such a distant prospect of consolation and joy, St. Bernard assures his monks and us with the promise that we may, even now, reap with joy the first fruits of the Spirit. Hosea enjoins us to reap the "hope of eternal life" and the hope of eternal happiness is not without happiness itself.

-For when by the grace of the Spirit we grow in holiness in this life, this growth in holiness grounds our confidence in the forgiveness of our sins, affords us ever growing hope of eternal life, and enables us to savor even now something of the joy we will know perfectly in the beatific vision to come.

-We will discover this confidence, hope, and joy through our developing knowledge of ourselves as being renewed and sanctified in the Spirit, as St. Bernard says: "Those of you who now experience the Spirit at work within you know what the Spirit says, for his voice never contradicts his work. You therefore understand what the Spirit says, for what you hear from without you experience within." SC 37.3 (II, 10-11)

-Though the monk knows that his journey of likeness and vision will reach its fulfillment only in the glory of the life to come, he recognizes the Spirit's redeeming and sanctifying work in his soul as a sure sign that God will indeed complete in him the saving work he has already begun.

-In particular, the Spirit's gift of God's own divine charity fills the monk with an ever growing trust that God has called him to become his adopted son, conformed to the humility and love of his only-begotten Son, the Incarnate Word.

-This two-fold knowledge of God's loving will to renew his fallen human creatures and of oneself as being renewed in God's love is more precious than any other kind of knowledge for it alone inspires hope, and even confidence, of salvation: If we have attained this two-fold knowledge, any further knowledge we attain will not puff us up, for any worldly profit or honor this new knowledge may afford us will fall far short of the hope we will conceive from this two-fold knowledge and the deeply-rooted joy in our souls this hope will engender.

-This hope does not deceive us because the charity of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rm 5:5). This hope does not deceive us because this charity fills us with confidence. For through this charity the Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirits that we are sons of God (Rm 8:16). SC 37.5 (II, 11)

-The monk who once deceived himself into falsely believing that he was holier than his brothers and then came to know that he was in truth a disfigured image of God now knows, without any fear of self-deception, through the inward work and witness of the Spirit, that he is indeed a son of God, being renewed in the likeness of the Word and destined to enjoy the fullness of that likeness in eternity.

ON Self-Renunciation

"Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?' (Mt. 16: 24-26)

-The monk is the man who longs to see God because God himself calls him to his vision. But the monk is also the man who recognized that he cannot meet God except in the embrace of the cross with its shedding of blood. If we failed to recognize this fact, our desire would lack all reality. We would fail to understand what we really are, we who are called to such high destiny.

-It is only by denying our love of self that we can show love for God and come, through Christ Jesus, to an all absorbing love for the Father who made us. Only when we renounce our own will in order to collaborate with others in the kingdom of God can we survive in the battle against vices, evil thoughts, and fleeting human day dreams.

-To do another's will instead of our own lead not only to a denial of our own life, but even makes us dead to the entire world. Should we look for crosses? Rather, we have to take those that come to us unexpectedly in our day to day life.

-If it happens that we had our habit changed for a shabbier one, we feel some annoyance in the inferior part of our soul, this is not sin, if with our reason we cheerfully accept it for the love of God; and the same with all the other feeling which arise within us.

-If I am told that someone has spoken ill of me, or that I am being opposed in some way, in an instant anger flames up, and every vein swells as the hot blood mounts; but if amidst of this I turn to God, making an act of charity for the person who has offended me, there is no sin. Even if thousand kinds of thoughts should rise up against this person, and not for the space of one day but of several, provided that from time to time I disavow them, there is nothing wrong at all, for it is not in my power to check these feelings. Feelings are part of me, but I am not my own feelings.

-Happy indeed is the monk who has no other will than that of the community, and who each day takes as he requires, from the common

stock. This is how we should understand that sacred saying of Our Lord: "Be not solicitous for tomorrow"; it refers not so much to food & clothing as to spiritual exercises.

-For if we are asked: "What shall you do tomorrow?" We should answer: "I do not know; today, I shall do such a thing, which is commanded; tomorrow, I do not know what I shall do, because I cannot tell what will be commanded." He who acts in this way will never feel vexation or anxiety, for where there is a true indifference there can be no trouble or sadness.

-There is nothing easier than to lay down the principle: we must renounce ourselves and give up our own will, but when it comes to practice the difficulty begins. This is why we must consider carefully what renunciation really is and all the things which follow from it.

-We must renounce one point of our will, now another, until we are stripped of it, and this is done in three gradations: the first is an affection for the despoiling of ourselves because of its excellence; the second is the resolution which follow our affection, for we soon resolve to embrace a good which we love; the third is the actual practice, which is the most difficult.

-The goods of which we must despoil ourselves are of three kinds: external goods, bodily goods, and the goods of the soul. External goods are all the things we left behind us on entering the monastery: houses, possessions, families, friends, and so on. The way to divest ourselves of these is to yield them all up into the hands of Our Lord, and then to ask Him to give us just such affections as He wishes us to feel for them; for we must not live without affection, or love every one equally and in an indifferent manner; we must love each individual in his degree, for charity puts the affections in their right order.

-The second division of goods are those which relate to the body such as beauty, health, and similar things, which must be renounced; for this reason we no longer feel the need to go to a mirror to see if we are handsome or not, nor care anymore for health than sickness, at least as far as our higher nature is concerned, for nature always feel & sometimes cries out, particularly when we are not perfect. We must, then, be as contented in sickness as in health and take remedies or food just as it is needed.

-The goods of the soul are those consolations and sweetness which are to be found in the spiritual life; these goods are indeed very good. "Why, then," you will say, "must we give them up" It must be done all the same!

We must yield them all up into the hands of Our Lord, to dispose of them as He pleases, and serve Him without them as with them, because we are not after of the consolations of God but the God of consolations. In other words, we are after not so much of the gifts, but of the giver. The giver is more important than the gifts.

-There is another kind of goods, neither interior nor exterior, neither of the body nor of the heart: imaginary goods, which depend on the opinion of others; they are called honor, esteem, & reputation. Now, we need to strip ourselves entirely of these; desiring no other honor than the honor of our Congregation, which consists in seeking in all things the glory of God; no other esteem or reputation than that of our community, which is to give edification in all things.

-Here we must remark that the satisfaction which we feel in meeting with those whom we love, and the signs of affection which we show on seeing them, are not at all contrary to this virtue of renunciation, provided that they are not excessive, and that our hearts do not run after absent friends.

-If I am desirous to see someone about a useful matter, the success of which would redound to the glory of God, if his intention of coming is thwarted, and I feel rather pained about it, and am somewhat eager in removing the obstacles in the way of his coming, I am doing nothing contrary to the virtue of detachment, provided always that I do not lose my quiet of mind.

-Thus we see that virtue is not so terrible a thing as people imagine. Many fall into an error here: they form false ideals in their mind, and think that the way to heaven is extraordinarily difficult. Whereas, David tells Our Lord that His Law is most sweet, and while the wicked proclaim it to be hard & difficult, David declared that it is sweeter than honey. The Rule of St. Benedict tells us that it is bound to be narrow at the outset, but as we progress in the monastic way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts will expand with the inexpressible sweetness of love.

-We need to say the same of our vocation, esteeming it not only as good & excellent, but also sweet, pleasing, & desirable; if we do this, we shall take great delight in observing all that it includes.

-It is true that we can never attain to perfection while we have an affection for any imperfection, however small it may be, even nothing more than the harboring of idle thought.

-If once we give our mind liberty to stay and dwell upon a useless thing, it will begin to think upon harmful things, for he who is dishonest in little things is likely to be dishonest in bigger things; we must therefore cut short the evil as soon as we see it, however small it may be, and dash it against the rock while it is still young, as St. Benedict tells us.

-We need also to examine in good faith whether it is true, as it sometimes seems to us, that in our affections we are really detached. We can easily find out whether we are attached to a thing or not, when are deprived of the power of doing what we had proposed to do; for if we have no clinging to it, we will be just as contented to abstain from doing it as to have done it; but if, on the contrary, we are disturbed at not being able to do it, that is a sign that we have set our affection upon it.

-Another example is that when we lost our pen or any object, or even our friend. If our heart is so disturbed about it, then it is a sign that we are still attached to that thing or to that person.

-In fact, if we approach monastic life from the external side and the detail of its practice only, it is certainly the detachment, the stripping of self which cannot fail to strike us primarily. The monk is one who renounces, who renounces himself.

-However, the monk does not renounce himself, nor does he renounce anything, for the mere sake of renouncing. That is, our renunciation implies no condemnation. All that moves us is a preference. We choose it freely. No one forces us to become a monk. We freely accept the demands that the monastic life entail. This is our freedom.

-In this consists the distinctive characteristic of all Christian asceticism. If this characteristic is lacking, there is no ascetic practice, from the most elementary to the most heroic, that can be qualified as Christian.

-We do not condemn the creatures we renounced, since it is for our Creator that we renounced them, that is, for Him who has made them and made them in such a way that they are all an image or at least a vestige of Himself. Thus we do not abandon them because we think them bad. On the contrary, we abandon them because we know they are very good, but we learned to discover in this very goodness the image or vestige of perfect Goodness, which is God.

-It should be noted how closely the Christian idea of asceticism is linked to the idea of sacrifice, so much so that it is ultimately indistinguishable from it. Now to detach oneself from bad or harmful objects has never been to

make a sacrifice. The worth of the sacrifice, on the contrary, is obviously to be measured by the intrinsic value of what it sacrifices.

-There would be no genuine monastic renunciation unless it is preceded and as it were sustained by an effective esteem of creation.

-We strive to be detached from all simply that we may be held back by nothing in our flight, in our course toward our ultimate goal which is the vision of God. This is, of course, why we will detach ourselves particularly, perhaps from what we recognize as most valuable. For it is precisely that which would be most liable to hinder us, to immobilize us, whereas what we are aiming at is liberation from all fetters. Our sole aim is to plunge, to fall ceaselessly and, above all, unfettered, into the abyss of infinity, which is God.

-Thus let us also lay aside every weight, encumbrance, and sin which cling so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race set before us, looking to Our Lord Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

On Superior Ad Nutum

From a working Paper prepared by the Law Commission, Rome 2004 & Working Document Requested by the Central Commissions Scourmont 2004, Commentary by Dom Joseph Delargy, Abbot of Mt. St. Bernard

-Questions that came up at the Central Commissions at Scourmont in June of last year, 2004 were: Why are communities unable to elect a Superior? Why do we have difficulty in electing abbots/abbesses? Is there a lack of faith in the role? Why do we need more and more Superior's ad nutum? Are people prepared for leadership? Is the problem that of recruitment or formation?

-The fact is that there has been the tendency in the Order to resort to superior ad nutum too frequently and for durations that are too long. The longest at this time that exceeds more than 3 years are Port-du-Salut in France and Guimaras. For this reason our case is brought up in the agenda in this coming General Chapter, as our Constitution says: "If the welfare of the community requires it the Father Immediate, after consulting the conventual chapter and with the consent of the Abbot General, may postpone and election. Having consulted the brothers, he may nominate a superior ad nutum. If this exceptional form of government is to be prolonged beyond three years, the Father Immediate is again to consult the community and to submit the matter to the judgment of the General Chapter" (St. 39.2B).

-It is a common experience of any abbot or abbess of a reasonably sized community to be approached by a Father Immediate asking if one of their monks or nuns could go to be superior of a community that is without an abbot or abbess for one reason or another. Sometimes a monk or nun can just be elected to another community without any consultation.

-This raises serious questions and forces one to ask if this is what St. Stephen Harding really meant and had in mind when he said that any monk could be elected to any monastery.

-When St. Stephen composed the *Charter of Charity* the Order was still quite localized and the majority of the senior monks in all monasteries would still have been Citeaux or Clairvaux monks. In that environment it seems natural to have certain fluidity in the choice of superiors. Nowadays, with the Order spread throughout the world, is it time to reassess this practice?

-More importantly, though, St. Stephen said any monk could be elected abbot to any monastery in order that there would be openness to the actions of the Holy Spirit in their choice of superior rather than that they would have a solution to a problem. If a community decides the best person to lead them at this moment of time is a monk of another house of the Order, it is a positive thing, a response to grace. On the other hand if a community decides that they don't want to elect anyone of their own community, or there isn't anyone suitable, and so they see if there is someone elsewhere, it is a negative thing, a response to a problem.

-If a monk from one community is elected superior of another monastery, should he not consult his abbot before accepting the election? At the moment he does not have to do so. It does not seem right that a monk can accept election in another community when his own abbot is not even aware that this election was a possibility.

-But a community has a right to elect as its superior any monk of the Order, in accordance with C. 39, ST. 39.3.B, which says: "Any brother who has made profession in the Order can be elected abbot, including the abbot of a daughter-house if this is necessary, but not the abbot of any other monastery."

-A community has a right to elect their superior. So, why should it be denied that right? To take away a community's right to manage its economy or the formation of its own members would be considered a grave matter. It is also a grave matter to prevent a community from electing its superior (from the Central Commissions, Scourmont, Belgium, June 10-18, 2004).

-Some communities seem more comfortable with a superior *ad nutum* than with having an election, because the members have not been adequately formed to accept each other and to discover the potential within the community.

-The problem seems to be pastoral rather than juridical. We need to look more at educating people and communities, and elaborating at a spiritual level what authority is.

-Even the figure of the superior *ad nutum* has difficulties. The fact that there has been a tendency in the Order to resort to it too frequently and for durations that are too long. The mentality was established in the Order which thought that the length of the mandate of the superior *ad nutum* was three years. That risks going against the tradition which desires that the superiors of the communities be elected by the community.

-Over a recent three-year period there were 51 changes in superior. Of these 29 resulted in a straight election and 22 resulted in a superior ad nutum being appointed. Many of these superior ad nutum would go on to be elected abbot or abbess one year later but it does mean initially 43% of changes resulted in a superior ad nutum being appointed.

-Even though the superior ad nutum is a major superior, he is still ad nutum, that is, he is revocable at any moment.

-It's also been questioned if a superior ad nutum should be permitted to be a Father Immediate just because he is a major superior, because this would contribute to strengthening, at least psychologically, that this form of superior is "normal" encouraging the prolongation of his mandate.

-To say that a named superior has "ordinary power," is a canonical term that signifies that virtue of the law itself the power is attached to a given "office" (cf. can 131), and it is that of a "major superior," if he is the superior of an autonomous community (can. 613 § 2). That is not saying that it is a usual and normal form of exercising the office of superior in the Order. This form remains exceptional and remains dependent on the ad nutum according to our Constitutions.

-Another complexity of the figure of superior ad nutum, especially if he is also Father Immediate is that: If he appoints another superior ad nutum in a daughter house, does this superior remain in authority when the one who appointed him is no longer the superior? Yes, because it is joined to an "ordinary" power. That is to say that it is attached to the function that it exercises (cf. can 131) and not to the person who is named (that would be a "delegated power). This power remains only during the time that the function lasts (can 142-143). It does not cease if the Father Immediate (whether he is an abbot or himself a superior ad nutum) ceases to be in charge.

Proposals for Resolving the Problems

1. Concerning a too frequent recourse to the figure of the superior ad nutum and prolonging the mandate

-In the degree that the tendency mentioned above results from the difficulty to find superiors, the remedy is beyond the frame of the law. It touches the formation given in the monasteries, the difficulties in attracting new vocations, the number of houses in the Order, etc.

-There is the situation where the recourse to naming a superior ad nutum is evident. For example, when, according to Const. 39.5, the number of ballots has to be limited because the process of electing is not moving

forward. Or when the person being thought of to be abbot lives in another community and is not known. Other situations can be thought of. But it is to go against the tradition to appoint one to be a superior ad nutum simply to test a candidate who is a member of the community before electing him.

-We are using it more and more as a "novitiate" for future abbots, or as a "trial marriage." Is the Order slowly moving toward a preference for appointing superiors rather than electing them? St. Benedict had no problem with the concept of an appointed abbot but it seems ironic that in this day and age when many in the Church are fighting for the right to have a say in the choice of bishops, etc. many communities in our Order seem to be renouncing their right and duty to elect an abbot or abbess. Maybe we are happy with this trend but we need to be clear about it. Either we have to say we are happy with this trend and let it continue or else we have to say we are not happy with this trend and think ways to reverse it.

-All elections demand in part an act of faith, which is part of the reality of electing. The exercise of an office changes the person the same is true regarding the "grace of state" which supports the person in office but does not supply for all human abilities that are lacking. But a person can also be formed once he is elected. In this perspective, the initiative taken by the Abbot General in 2003-2004 to have the formation sessions for new superiors is a creative help.

-Furthermore every election is "for a time" that is to say for the time when the expected service can be correctly accomplished (even if the election is for a six year term). If it is shown that the one elected does not have the strength to fulfill the service, he offers resignation.

-To the degree that one wants the system of the superior ad nutum not be unduly prolonged, the law can offer solutions. What is now possible is without doubt not adequate. In effect: On account of the fact that the control by the General Chapter is requested only after three years, undoubtedly the mentality was established that the normal duration of the superior ad nutum is for three years.

-In reality, it can be prolonged for a longer time before the Chapter would have to intervene. For example a person was named superior November 8, 2002. The General Chapter of October 2005 does not have to examine the case of this monastery since the time of the superior has not yet gone beyond three years. This situation would not be examined until 2008, in so far as there is a General Chapter that year, which is six years later.

Proposed Solution:

-That the Fathers Immediates are consciously aware that the appointment of a superior goes contrary to a traditional right of the community and that they do not resort to this except in a case of real necessity.

-That the last phrase of the ST 39.2.B be replaced by what follows: "At the time when the General Chapter is in session, a special attention is given, in the study of the reports, to the communities who are in such the exceptional regime of having an ad nutum superior."

Concerning the Implications of Being a Major Superior

-The time that the abbatial office is vacant cannot last more than three months. Beyond that time, there should be an election or the appointment of a superior according to the procedure given in ST. 39.2.B.

-During the vacancy of the abbatial office; for the monks, "The Father Immediate assumes the responsibility for all things"; for the nuns, "The governance of the monastery is assumed by the prioress" (C. 39.1). For such a brief times (which cannot last longer than three months), it is not necessary to name a superior ad nutum. If the Father Immediate cannot remain at the monastery, it is sufficient to give the claustral prior the care of the day to day administration during his absence.

-If the election cannot be held within the three months that signifies that the right of the community to elect its superior is suspended. That can happen only for serious reasons, in the judgment of the Father Immediate after consultation of the Conventual Chapter and with the consent of the Abbot General (cf. ST. 39.2.B). In that case the Father Immediate ought to appoint a superior ad nutum. But this form of government of a superior, coming from being named and not from an election, is exceptional. If it lasts longer than three years at the time the General Chapter meets, the Father Immediate, after having previously consulted the Community, submits the situation to the General Chapter.

-While the right of the community to elect its superior is suspended, the right to have at its head a major superior continues and there is no reason not to respect the right, since, canonically, a superior of an autonomous house, even one named ad nutum is a major superior (can. 613).

-The nature is a named superior in our Order is to be ad nutum. That is to say revocable at any moment. But whether revocable or not, it is joined to an "ordinary" power. That is to say that it is attached to the function that it exercises (cf. can 131) and not to the person who is named (that would

be a “delegated power). This power remains only during the time that the function lasts (can 142-143). It does not cease if the Father Immediate (whether he is an abbot or himself a superior ad nutum) ceases to be in charge. This answer the question: if the superior himself is ad nutum and he appoints a superior ad nutum in a daughter house, does this superior remain in authority when the one who appointed him is no longer the superior?

What does the Order conclude from the number of Superior ad Nutum being appointed? Some hypothetical answers would be:

- We are unique among all Orders in not having sufficient people to assume the role of leadership.
- It is purely a vocational thing. If we had more people joining we wouldn't have this problem.
- Being Abbot is too hard today for the average candidate to our life.
- Communities nowadays have lost faith in the role of Abbot and prefer a superior who can be changed.
- There is fundamental misunderstanding in the role of abbot in our communities today.
- Superiors are not ensuring that people are being formed for positions of responsibility and leadership.

-The following are some proposals that could help address the problem of the difficulty of finding superiors.

1. At each visitation one of the things the visitor should look at is future leadership – what is being done to form future leaders in this community.
2. There needs to be a thorough examination of this phenomenon of communities not electing abbots or abbesses. The Abbot General's council could study the question and maybe Dom Bernardo could write a circular letter on the subject.
3. It should be made harder for communities not to elect an abbot or abbess – it should be stressed that superior ad nutum is an exceptional form of leadership. We should all learn to be happier to 'choose from our own poverty.'
4. While religious today are very clear about the type of leadership they do not want they are not very clear about the type of leadership they do want. People can articulate the type of leader they don't want (maybe in reaction to a leadership style of the past that was disciplinarian, controlling, dominating, etc.) but they cannot articulate so easily what type of leadership they want. We don't know what we want. This could be why communities find it so difficult to elect an abbot or abbess.

Conclusion

-There will always be times when it is necessary for a community to have a superior ad nutum or times when it is right and desirable that a community elect someone from outside their community. But is it not time to seriously examine the use we are making of this freedom?

On The Tools For Good Works

First of all, love the Lord with your whole heart, your whole soul and all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. Then the following: You are not to kill, not to commit adultery; you are not to steal, nor to covet; you are not to bear false witness. You must honor everyone, and never do to others what you do not want done to yourself. Renounce yourself in order to follow Christ; discipline your body; do not pamper your body, but love fasting.

-We learn to love God by ordering the ordinary movements of our affection. They should not be suppressed, but rather be brought under discipline in order to lead them to their ultimate goal. Thus, our whole work of asceticism is directed to channeling natural energies rather than eliminating them.

-Created in God's image we have the capacity to recognize and reciprocate love; our human affections initiate us into love and encourage us to make it our goal, as St. Paul would say: "Make love your aim, and desire spiritual gifts."

-Christ sent in our nature can become the object of these affections, so that by loving him we can progressively be put into contact with the reality of God and simultaneously be ourselves transformed into his likeness.

-When we love God we are changed by that love into a fully alive human being, totally involved in the act of loving the only One for whom love can be unlimited. In this way we attain self-transcendence: we go beyond the limits imposed when our will is directed to inferior objects.

-St. Bernard does not believe it possible to suppress with impunity the indestructible force of sensual love. On the other hand, it would be illusory to believe that even with the help of grace we could quickly succeed in changing carnal love into spiritual love. It does not happen overnight. So, what is to be done? Well, we have to present to carnal love an object which proportionate to it and more delightful than any creature. That's why St. Bernard said that "our affection for Our Lord Jesus should be both tender and intimate, to oppose the sweet enticements of sensual life. Sweetness conquers sweetness as one nail drives out another." Here is the advantage of attaching one's sensual love to the humanity of Christ.

-God loved us first that we might love him, not because he needed our love, but because we could not be what he created us to be except by loving him.

-Love is not merely the chemistry which draws two persons together. Love is the very being of God. It is the source of divine vitality. When we experience love we are experiencing the reality of God, since God alone is the source of all love, both human and divine.

-To be able to love God is an indication that we human beings are truly made in God's image, because love requires an equality between lovers; and love between the Creator & the creature is possible only on the assumption that the human person has the capacity to be raised by God to a state of equality, for love makes the lover equal to the object of his love. What God is by nature we will be by grace.

-Charity, because it is at once all-demanding and all-embracing, comes first. It is the only thing in the world that admits no limits. As such, it is the virtue on which the specifically monastic virtues will have to be built. The measure of loving God is to love Him without measure, as St. Bernard would put it.

-Love of our neighbor is the test of our love of God, because how can we love God whom we do not see if we do not love our neighbor whom we see? How can we prove our love to Christ if we do not act with gentleness and charity towards those who annoy us? Human love is an instrument we can use to explore the mystery of divine love.

-We should not take our measure from the weakest among our brothers rather we need to broaden ourselves into the commandment of love. If we take our measure from our weakest brother, we will fall into the measure of arrogance; but brooding ourselves into the measure of love; we will reach the height of humility.

-We should not ask love from our brother, for if we ask and he does not respond we will be troubled. Instead, we have to show our love for our brother and we will be at rest, and so we will bring him to love.

-The weakening of love towards our brothers comes from dwelling on suspicious thoughts and trusting in our own heart, and not wanting to suffer what divine providence arranges for us.

-To the degree that we enter into the things of the Spirit, we desire to come near to God; and in proportion to our progress in the things of the

Spirit, we do in fact come close to God and our neighbor. The closer we are to God, the closer we become to one another; and the closer we are to one another, the closer we become to God. Now consider in the same context the question of separation; for when we stand away from God and turn to external things, it is clear that the more we recede and become distant from God, the more we become distant from one another. See! This is the very nature of love. The more we are turned away from God and do not love God, the greater the distance that separates us from our neighbor. If we were to love God more, we should be closer to God, and through love of Him we should be more united in love to our neighbor; and the more we are united to our neighbor, the more we are united to God.

-If he that speaks evil of his brother, & judges his brother, speak evil of the law and judges the law, and if the law of Christ is love, will not the slanderer fall away from the love of Christ, and will he not become himself the cause of his own eternal torment by not wearing the garment of charity when he entered the banquet hall?

-If the qualities of love are to suffer long and be kind, it is clear that the monk who is irritable and bears malice is a stranger to love. A stranger to love is a stranger to God, for God is love.

-If we wish not to fall away from love of God, we should not let our brother go to sleep vexed against us, nor go to sleep ourselves vexed against him, but we should go...first to be reconciled to our brother, and then come back with a clear conscience and offer to Christ our gift of love in diligent prayer.

-We have to strive as much as we can to love every one, if we cannot do so yet, at least we should not hate anyone. But we will not be able to do even this unless we scorn all earthly things.

We who are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves should of course do so not for one day, but for our whole life.

-Love gives us a concrete experience of God that tells us more about Him than all the most sublime speculations of the theologians could ever do.

-As St. John the Evangelist grew older & became unable to preach, his sermons were shortened to one line: "My dear children, love one another." When he was asked why he said the same thing over & over again, he answered, "Because it is the precepts of the Lord, and if you comply with it you do enough."

-For most monks it is not the principle that is in doubt; it is the performance. But it must be the performance that proves the principle or else the understanding of our vocation is wasted. Unless the impulse that moves us to give ourselves to God in religion is continued in day-to-day practice, it would have been better to have received no impulse at all.

-Vocation, like Our Lord Himself, is something which is set for the rise and fall of many in Israel. Thus if the routines of prayer, work, reading, eating, sleeping, singing which make up our way of life are to have any supernatural meaning at all, there must be a swelling desire for union with God which is the end of our whole undertaking. It is to ensure, or at least to promote, this desire that St. Benedict drew up the instruments or tools of good works.

Then the following: You are not to kill, not commit adultery; you are not to steal, nor to covet; you are not to bear false witness. You must honor everyone, and never do to others what you do not want done to yourself. Renounce yourself in order to follow Christ; discipline your body; do not pamper your body, but love fasting.

-Even when expressed in terms of prohibition they are truly tools-exhortations, that is, not merely warning, deterrents, threats. They suppose a monastic body which is striving to build itself up to its full stature of perfection, into the fullness of the measure of the stature of Christ. Elimination of defects is brought about in exercising, or at least aiming at, "good works," that is, overcoming evil with good.

-It is superficial to think that St. Benedict's idea was to present a society which would be free from the grosser obstacles to Christian perfection, because so long as we live in this present world we have to face lots of trials and obstacles before we can attain to our final destination.

-Freedom from cancer and consumption does not mean that a body is healthy. Freedom from divorce does not mean that a marriage is healthy. A body may be free from major diseases, yet unhealthy and devitalized. So also a monastery, or any religious communities.

-Health is a condition in which a thing is most fully itself and most abounding in vitality. As in a human body and natural family, so in human soul and a supernatural family: we need to strive to study the good proposed and at the same time provide as far as possible the conditions in which our monastic family, and each members, from the postulants to the eldest member of the community may be most fully itself and most abounding in vitality.

-Each one of us has a role to play in revitalizing our community. It is not the work of the superior alone or the novice master or the junior master, but of each monk, because it's the community itself that is the primary formator of those who join our community. How we live and how we interact with one another can contribute in the formation or deformation of the new comers.

-St. Benedict, having outlined the nature of the community which he wants his monastery to be, gives the means which the perfection of that community is to be attained. The monk who lives up the implications of these tolls of good works has found himself, has found Christ.

-What St. Benedict clearly wants is that his seventy-two injunctions should represent the doctrine taught: each one, as he says at the end of the list, is a tool in the workshop.

-Divine worship must call upon all of our human powers. Heart, soul, strength: each dedicated to God when our affections have been surrendered, directed toward God alone but to be used in relation to creatures, if God should demand this expression as part of love's service and sacrifice, then, and only then, has detachment begun in the will.

-When our soul, rejecting superficial impressions of God, stretches out to God in sincerity and truth ("I will seek him whom my soul loves"), then is God loved for Himself alone and not for His gifts. Lastly, God is loved with all our soul's strength when his love is made the object of our every power and appetite: "I held him, and I will not let him go."

-In the Gospel of St. Matthew, Our Lord said: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kill shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire."

-If we feel rancor against our brother or anyone else, we have to pray for him; and by prayer separating distress from the memory of the wrong he has done to us, we will arrest the movement of passion; and by feeling of friendliness & affection we will eventually banish this passion from our soul.

-Anger is a dislike being hatched from the memory of offenses we received, a desire to hurt the people who have hurt us. It is best to deny admittance even to just & reasonable anger, however slight, for once

admitted it is hard to drive it out; entering like a small shoot it soon grows into a branch.

-It is impossible for us to be angry with anyone unless our heart is first lifted up against that person, unless we despise him and considers ourselves superior to him.

-If we do not control our tongue when we are angry, we will no control our passion either. It is better to eat meat & drink wine than to eat the flesh of our brother through slander.

-It is true that it is wrong to lose one's temper, but it can be wrong also not to be angry. The anger, to be a just anger must be all the time under the control of reason, and therefore it is easy for us to sin by excess, to allow the anger to get out of hand; on the other hand, to fail to be angered by such things as blasphemous insults to God or diabolical cruelty to men is to sin by defect, for it argues either a very unworthy weakness and lack of spirit or else the sort of tolerance which is in fact a complete lack of principle or moral sense.

You must honor everyone, and never do to others what you do not want done to yourself. Renounce yourself in order to follow Christ; discipline your body; do not pamper your body, but love fasting.

-Nothing is so damaging to community life as an aptitude for superiority. Brother can isolate himself from brother, each looking down as from a great height. Both may know in their hearts that they have maneuvered themselves into false positions, but neither one will come down. They come to exaggerate each other's faults, partly in an effort to cover up their own, and partly to justify their conduct, and this inevitably leads to harsh condemnations expressed to others in the house.

-St. Benedict did well to group these three instruments together. No envy, no overt criticism, no despising a neighbor. After gentleness toward one's brother, the next thing is sternness towards oneself. The desert Fathers had the reputation of being strict with themselves but lenient to others.

-“To honor all people” and “not to covet” come so familiarly and obviously that they tend to be taken as they are. In the same way we assume that we in the monastery do not bear false witness. Yet do we never in fact envy the chances, the advancements & the rewards of our fellow monks? Do we really honor all in the community? Are we never guilty of accusing others unjustly? Should not a monk aim at being habitually unenvious, refusing to be jealous of a brother's achievement, or

promotion? Should we not be prepared to drop every form of backbiting? Should we not “honor” which means actively strive to reverence, the members of our community?

-St. Benedict is providing for a social unit, for a congregation of human beings, and he knows that half of the miseries that exist in the social order are to be traced to covetousness, jealousy, envy, rash judgment, and a want of respect for the dignity of the human person. Probably more than half the vocational failures, let alone minor upsets resulting from misquotation of the brother's indiscreet remarks, from unwise comparison of merit, from low views of the brother's motives, spring from a neglect of these apparently elementary tools of good works.

-We are like gardeners provided with garden tools to accomplish work. We used different kinds of tools to facilitate the work. We could not rely solely on our bare hands because it would be too much for us. But with the tools we can easily uproot the weeds. So, too, the tools of good works are meant to facilitate the uprooting of our vices so that virtue will grow. This would be too much for our natural human strength alone, so we need some tools. This does not mean that we will not experience bodily pain after the work. We still experienced it, but once our body got used to it, it becomes a little easier than before.

-Everything seems hard at first to someone coming suddenly from darkness into light, from leisure to labor. But when we have got away from our former habits we will soon get used to the labor. Practice soon makes perfect, what seemed difficult at first presently becomes quite easy.

-Our human nature must be bent and trained till it is worthy as a rational power, to cooperate habitually with supernatural grace. Our body, with its animal instinct needs to be in subjection to our spirit.

-For us monks to pamper our body, to delight in creature comforts which are just not worldly enough to be sinful, to take elaborate precautions against having to fast, is the kind of monastic anomaly which brings the whole idea of the religious life into disrepute.

-Mortification, voluntary and physical, is the astringent necessary to the health of our soul. Without the antitoxic quality of corporal penance, we risk infection from the world: the poison of sin is not kept out of the cloister either by the boundary which we drew up for our enclosure or by the general resolve to take every day trials in one's stride. For the avoidance of the evils which threatens the religious life, and by this is meant not only

sin but every form of dangerous worldliness, there has to be a combination of love and stern self-renunciation.

-While self-love can never be dethroned by penances, at least its tyranny can be checked. The reason why self-love must remain a continued menace to advancement in the love of God is that in fallen nature it is integral to the essential human desire for happiness. The desire for happiness is not evil but a good. However, mixed up with every instinct of self-gratification, is a selfishness which is the last enemy to our perfection, and therefore to happiness itself.

-Though grace is needed to curb self-will effectively, the compunction which shows itself in voluntary penance, and which is itself an effect of grace, acts both as a sure discipline and as a goodwill offering which most surely invites the mobilization of the forces of grace.

-The way to grace is through penance, and the way to penance is through grace. We cannot come to Christ unless we are drawn by grace, and the grace of being drawn nearer to Christ shows itself in compunction of Heart and desire for amendment. It is prayer and sacrifice that constitute all my strength, as St. Therese would put it.

-St. Benedict is careful in the wording of his axiom "It is *in order to follow Christ* that the monk denies himself. Self denial without Christ is idle. Indeed not only would it be a waste of time and energy but it might be a form of vanity. For a monk to indulge a taste for affliction, in the name of affliction alone, would be no better than to indulge any other taste. Pain for the sake of pain is no good at all; it is an evil.

-As monks we know that it is solely in virtue of Christ's sufferings that there is any value attaching to our penance. From the infinite store of merit laid at our disposal by the Passion of Christ, we draw the graces which make our own mortifications worthwhile.

-To follow St. Benedict's mind in the whole matter of renunciation, we have to desire the recommendations which he puts forward. To love fasting is not to enjoy it; it is to see its point and to want to benefit by its exercise. Fasting, like silence and enclosure, is part of the monastic imposition. Our fasting is in the form of eating only at meal time. We don't eat in between meals unless we have a sickness that requires that we have to take something in between meals. This is undertaken with the knowledge of the infirmarian and the superior. Water is always available in between meals. We can also fast in terms of speech. If we have the habit of talking too much, we can limit it, or in refraining to speak evil against a brother. "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such is good

for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear," as St. Paul would put it.

To relieve the poor...to visit the sick...to console the sorrowing. To keep aloof from worldly actions. To prefer nothing to the love of Christ. Not to gratify anger. Not to harbor a desire for revenge...to utter truth from heart and mouth...to do no wrong to anyone, yes, to bear patiently the wrong done to oneself.

-When we are really willing to deny ourselves we will find ourselves increasingly concerned about the destitute, the sick, the sorrowing. In the ordinary way it will not fall to the lot of the individual monks to see the needs of the indigent – this being the duty of particular brothers – but when the occasion presents itself we should be ready to render what we can so as to help the person in want.

-In the work of consoling the sorrowing we are on more intimate ground. Not everyone has the gift, and it requires considerable tact & prudence. But nevertheless, compassion remains a duty.

-It must surely be the experience of everyone in a community that at one time or another a fellow religious comes to us for sympathy. It may be that he comes only to find a listener, and not to get advice or positive help. If this would be the case, then we must be ready at a moment's notice, and at inconvenience, to console.

-The desert fathers were rough men, schooled in austerity, but they valued the virtue of compassion. They have the reputation of being strict to themselves but merciful & understanding to others.

-In holding aloof ourselves from worldly actions we are fulfilling the program outlined for us in the Prologue and demanded of us by our vow of *conversion of manners*. The sincerity of a person's conversion is proved & measured by the genuineness of his renunciation of the world. If there has been no true conversion, there can be no real purification of the soul. Conversion of manners demands eradication of vice & planting virtue, renunciation not only of worldly things but of worldly behavior, transformation of the monk into another man that he may be able to say:

"I live not I but Christ lives in me." By our vow of conversion of manners we are always persons in formation.

-It is painful to mention that many pretend to renounce the world yet change not their manner of living but only their habit, say John Cassian.

-If we religious did seriously desire the way of perfection, we would have strive with all our energy to attain it and not to dissipate, to waste, this energy by doing things that are harmful to our monastic vocation: we should strip ourselves not only of our attachments to material possessions but still more of our former affections, cares and anxieties.

-When St. Benedict speaks of worldly actions he is forbidding us other things beside mundane affectations and mannerism: he is telling us to cultivate a different outlook altogether from the world's - to make spiritual judgment, and so to rise above actions which are of the world.

-If we are truly religious seekers we must go apart, break our addiction of the world and live in another way. Only then can we be fully in the world but no longer trapped by it.

-“We are in the world, but we are not of the world,” as St. John would put it. “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is 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. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abide forever.”

-It is not the world that is harmful but the cares of this world; it is not riches that is harmful but the love for riches. The blame, then, should not be on created things but on the corrupted will. It is possible to be rich and not be deceived by riches, to be in this world and not to be oppressed by its cares.

-Worldly thoughts & the cares of life have the same effect on the understanding as a veil draped over the eyes, for the understanding is the eye of the soul. So long as we leave them there we cannot see. Our souls cannot truly serve God if we are too much involved in the distractions & pleasures of this world, because if our senses are constantly bombarded with worldly things, our soul becomes confused & deceived; thus easily falling into error in the discernment of what is good & what is evil.

-The monastic concept of the world is that all things created are good provided it enables us to orientate ourselves to God. The new way of

seeing the world is that all that happens to us in our daily life reveal the mystery of God's love for us.

-“Let the time that is past suffice for doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, & carousing....”as St. Paul would put it. We have only few moments of our life on earth and they are too precious to be squandered in worldly passions.

-The principle of preferring nothing to the love of Christ is a favorite one with St. Benedict: it comes again in chapter 72 and is implicit in a number of passages relating to obedience, the virtue of the monk who holds nothing dearer than Christ.

-If we habitually bring our decisions to the bar of Christ's love, judging every issue as affecting His love for us and our love for Him, we will eventually arrive at the delicacy of feeling for Christ's interest which in effect amounts to constant recollection.

-The immediate casting of evil thoughts is a sure sign of love of God; for not the entrance of evil in our thoughts is the sin but the friendly converse with them because if we have no fondness for them, then why do we entertain them?

-The only way by which we can participate in the divine, in eternity, is to practice in this mortal life the lesson Christ had taught and lived, the difficult law of love – to prefer nothing to the love of Christ.

-The maxims which immediately follow in the list are concerned with keeping the peace in community life. But it should be noted that they aim at keeping also in our individual soul: *not to gratify (to afford pleasure to) anger. Not to harbor a desire for revenge...to utter truth from heart and mouth...to do no wrong to any one, yes, to bear patiently wrong done to oneself.*

-Anger is a dislike hatched from the memory of offenses received, a desire to hurt the people who have hurt us.

-The thoughts “about anger” rise in each of us. We often adjust to bouts of anger in ourselves and in others. John Cassian recognized that in order to live the spiritual life, we need to reduce our angry impulses, refrain from acting out our anger, and strive to resist even the thoughts of anger.

-According to the desert fathers & mothers, anger is a learned behavior and can be unlearned. This Christian teaching says we act rightly and justly, never out of angry feelings.

-In the context of original sin, anger is a consequence of the cumulative sin we have inherited. If we heap our own anger upon others, the cycle continues. However, the grace given to each baptized Christian reverses this tendency. In the spiritual life, through grace, we are able to root out anger from our hearts.

-We may not be able to help feeling resentful, but if we are not to break out into acts of revenge we must refuse to dwell on our resentment. "Be angry but do not sin. Let not the sun go down on your anger," as St. Paul would put it. The cherished hurts of a sensitive nature are as harmful to the spiritual life as the explosion of the more rustic nature.

-And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and slander be put away from you, with all malice...."

-Magnanimity is a condition both of corporate harmony and personal serenity. If the monk is to be a man who keeps aloof from worldly actions, he must also be a man who keeps aloof from bearing malice. If Christian perfection asks of us "to bear patiently wrong done to us," monastic perfection asks no less.

Not to be proud. Not given to wine. Not a glutton.

-Pride is the most deadly of all capital sins because it tries to conquer the perfect. The description John Cassian paints of a person full of pride is classic: We see a monk strutting, talking loudly, laughing raucously, tapping his fingers on the table while another is speaking, carrying his body haughtily, with no recollection of the inner life, since his thoughts, actions and passions are all justifiable. No one can tell him anything. Conversion is impossible at this stage. He knows better than anyone else. Discernment is out of the picture.

-There are two kinds of pride. 1st, is spiritual pride. Spiritual pride is that which is turned toward God. It is the sin of the proficient, of a being which has advanced to great stages of enlightenment but who ultimately turns toward the self and away from God, in radical defiance. The other kind of pride, carnal pride, is more common. It is described as a smaller measure of self-will defiance. Beginners are afflicted with the thought of carnal pride.

-*About spiritual pride:* the thought of pride that is turned toward God is more serious than common offense such as indifference, ingratitude, or

lukewarmness. The symptoms of this end stage show themselves in hatred of God.

-*About carnal pride*: the second kind of pride afflicts each one of us. Carnal pride gives us thoughts of exaggerated self-importance. We simply live for ourselves. We grasp things greedily without consideration of how much is enough, and what other people might need. One of the disadvantages of having many friends is that they will give us gifts from time to time. And our tragedy is that it's hard to refuse them. We keep on piling things which we really don't need. We will be like the former first lady of our country who has 3,000 pairs of shoes. Ours is only in a lesser scale, and if had been given the opportunity might have equal hers too. The spirit that is moving us & her is the same. It has been said that nothing is enough for a person of whom enough is too little.

-Since the humble person is more able to control his animal nature, the next points to be dealt with are the physical appetites. St. Benedict comes out strongly against the drinking of wine in monasteries, but he does not absolutely forbid it. Here, in the instruments of good works, he limits himself to the general principle of moderation. The same temperance is to be shown in eating.

-Fasting is a good practice to adopt as we start serious work in the spiritual life. Most people think of fasting as eating nothing for long periods of time. However, John Cassian's teaching on fasting is that we should simply put food and our thoughts about food into proper balance, eating only at meals and not in between.

-Eating too little or eating too much is equally harmful. Extremes are indicators of thoughts & desires being out of control. The value of moderation is that extremes do not become another thought and eventually more intrusive than the original thought about food. If I am a compulsive eater, I have no thought in my consciousness other than food.

-This compulsive thinking leads to compulsive action. There is no distance between the thought, the desire, and the action. This is reversed by fasting. My thinking patterns are checked by my fasting practice that is, eating only at the appointed time, eating what is served in the refectory and not desiring an inappropriate quality of food.

-Gluttony is the pattern of eating indiscriminately with no thought of how this food is feeding my spiritual life. One practice that might be helpful to check the impulse of gluttony is to remind ourselves silently before eating

the food, like: "I eat this food not for the satisfaction of my appetite but for the nourishment of my body.

-The motive in St. Benedict is the glory of God. We can give glory to God only where there is the right relation between the inward & the outward; only, in other words, where there is integrity of life. The true life of the monk is the life dedicated to the service of God's glory, and in this there is no room for physical excess.

Not slothful. Not a murmurer. Not a detractor. To put one's hope in God. To attribute any good that one sees in oneself to God and not to oneself. But to recognize and always impute to oneself the evil that one does.

-Sloth is an evil which from the earliest years of monasticism has come in for its measure of attack, exposure, ridicule, and punishment. Sloth has its by-product which are much to be avoided as the vice itself. Bitterness, murmuring, contempt for the rules, refusal to help out in an emergency, the numberless furtive (secret underhanded procedure) infidelities which the idle monk indulges in imply so as to escape the hideous burden of extended free time – these are only some of the Dead Sea fruits of sloth.

-In the *Paradise of the Fathers*, we read of an old monk who was asked what a religious man should do that he might live. "Now the old man used to plait palm leaves into mats, and he never lifted up his head from the work of his hands but occupied himself at all times therewith. And the old man answered and said to him that asked the question: 'Behold what thou see.'

-There is an incident from the same source which tells of the brother who was idle in prayer as he was out of it, and who needed to be exorcised before he was put right.

-The other term for sloth is Acedia. It begins with an experience of vague uneasiness with spiritual things, a distaste of thinking spiritual things. Scriptures, reading about the saints, rituals, and pious companions seem repulsive.

-Cassian's teaching on acedia identifies it as a secondary though rather than just "a thought," because it is a thought about thought: Why am I doing all this? Why should I do this hard work on the spiritual journey? The psalmist refers to this thought as the "noonday devil...fear of the terrors of the night, the arrow that flies in the day time, the plague that stalks in the dark, the scourge that wreaks havoc in broad daylight" (Ps. 90:6). A constant refrain is heard in the head, "What's the use of it?" This period is

dangerous, since all known world is at risk: we leave monastic profession, priestly commitments, perhaps just when they are becoming beneficial to the soul.

-Acedia makes a monk lazy and sluggish about all manner of work. He imagines there is no other course except to visit either guests or other monks, or to sleep at all times day and night (Inst. X.3). This affliction makes the monk useless for every spiritual work. He no longer goes to common prayer, and no longer prays in his cell. He cannot stay in his cell nor do lectio. It causes some monks to walk in a disorderly way and start meddling in other people's lives.

-*Not a murmurer.* The vice of smoldering discontent is one to which St. Benedict will return in another chapter. Murmuring is a spreading disease; a community can suffer its spirit to be wrecked by the presence of a minority of active grumblers. To see faults and remain uncensorious is virtuous; to look for faults and talk about them is vicious. There is nobody so disedifying in religious community as the soured, querulous, self-pitying monk or nun. This particular kind of acid seeps through the cloister and can be a cause of sad disillusionment to new comers.

-Ultimately the reason why religious people murmur is that they are lacking in trust. If they were to put their whole hope in God as the tools following those about murmuring and detracting tells them to do, they would be proof against the disappointments which give them grounds for complaint. The soul that can say: *in you O Lord I hope, do not confound me*, has a little to fear from the temptation to malicious criticism.

-To give credit to God for whatever good we see in ourselves, and to take the blame for whatever evil, is in the last analysis only common sense. But these things are not always easy to do, so they are counted as virtue.

-There is nothing of our own of which we can boast: all has been lent: we owe everything to the Source and Author of all good. "What have you that you did not receive," as St. Paul would put it. Shame at having offended God is something which we can call our own; and this, if it is not to lead to discouragement, must be turned to the service of contrition.

To fear the day of judgment. To be in dread of hell. To desire with all spiritual longing everlasting life. To keep death daily before one's eyes. To keep guard at all times over the actions of one's life. To know for certain that God sees one everywhere.

-Though we may confidently count upon the promises made to those who leave the world at the call of grace to enter religion, we may not rule out the possibility of damnation. The judgment and its consequences may not be dismissed out of hand. Sin and its consequences still have their bearing upon our calculations.

-Our dread of punishment need not be morbid to be true. It need not be imaginative or particularly forced. But it should be there – to be drawn upon when loftier motives for right action fail. The course to be followed is suggested by the sequence of St. Benedict's instruments: the monk should cultivate an ardent desire for everlasting life. But it must be a spiritual desire, not the purely natural desire to escape from the afflictions of this life.

-There's a story of an old man, stooped by age and hard work. He was gathering sticks in the forest. As he walked painfully along, he thought of his troubles and began to feel sorry about himself. With a hopeless gesture he threw his bundle of sticks upon the ground and groaned, "Life is too hard. I cannot bear it any longer. If only Death would come and take me! Even as the words were out of his mouth, Death in the form of skeleton in a black robe, stood before him. "I heard you call me, sir," he said, "What can I do for you? The old man took one look and replied, "Could you please help me to put this bundle of sticks back on my shoulder again?"

-Death, kept daily before our eyes, must be awaited for in patience. Too repugnant to some, the thought of death is to others too inviting, e.g. St. Paul. There must be calmness in the consideration of death or the implied graces are wasted. Detachment from its superficial aspects is in this, as in so much else in the spiritual life, an essential condition: we must want death as God wills it for us, and when God wills it.

-To those who "desire with all spiritual longing everlasting life," and who look forward to death as the means towards the fulfillment of that desire, will instinctively "keep guard over the actions of their lives." "Let me know the shortness of my life that I may gain wisdom of heart," the psalmist said. To the man who lives in terms of eternity it requires no great effort to put temporal affairs in perspective: his actions are not preserved from the defects of irresponsibility, impulse, passion, but on the positive side are seen to take on a supernatural significance. The spiritually minded man can so "watch over his actions" – because in fact he is watching God – as to direct them in praise towards Him who is at once their inspiration and their end.

-This is what we mean when we say that God is in our works, and that our works are performed in Him. Since God rewards only His own work, and since works performed apart from God are work of self, it is vital that the actions of one's life be canalized as guarded. Our works are material only to the degree that we allow them to be so; there is nothing to prevent them from being spiritual.

-When St. Benedict says that we must keep guard over our actions he is directing them towards their proper object, namely God. We watch over our actions because God is watching over our actions – because God is drawing them towards Himself and making them His. Our actions are valuable only in so far as they are His.

-Nothing done by man alone has any value. To leave God out is man's greatest folly, greatest sin. "Without Me you can do nothing," Our Lord said. God looks for His own activity in every work of ours. "My Father is working still and I am working." It is for us therefore to guard our works from ourselves, so that they may be wholly His. Let us give Christ a chance to work with us and in us.

-The knowledge that God observes our actions should be the greatest incentive to recollection. "The exercise which in itself is worth all else is the continual remembrance of God...so that no day nor hour shall not find the servant of God engaged in this work, in the endeavoring to make progress or in the enjoyment of divine consolations," says St. Bernard.

-The habit of recollection is not arrived at by force but by grace. Grace, however, demands deliberate and constant cooperation, because we have free will. And though force may not promote recollection, careful management of our time does. We are expected to organize ourselves, to make use of our opportunities, to choose out the devices and devotions which help us, and make serious efforts to avoid whatever is found to distract us away from our Goal, which is God himself. "All the days of your life," said Tobias to his son, "have God in mind."

-Certainly the psalmist drew profit from the thoughts of God's comprehensive presence. If at first he is corrected by the fear which God's presence inspires, he is all the more comforted by the security which he finds in it. "Whither shall I flee from your face? If I dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall your hand lead me...And I said: perhaps darkness shall cover me, and night shall be my light in my pleasures. But darkness shall not be dark to you." Two verses later he is saying: You have protected me from my mother's womb; I will praise you, for you are fearfully magnified." And in the psalm following: "You have

overshadowed my head in the day of battle, O Lord the strength of my salvation."

-The theme that we are never out of God's sight is returned to by St. Benedict when he makes it an incentive to attention at the Divine Office. The vigilance of God should be the means of stirring our vigilance.

To dash down at the feet of Christ one's evil thought the instant that they come into the heart. To lay them open to one's spiritual father. To keep one's mouth from evil and wicked words. Not to love much speaking. Not to love much or excessive laughter.

-Of these instruments, the first two are to be taken together, instant rejection of evil thoughts, to be followed by admission to a "spiritual father." No sooner does the presence of evil disclose itself in our soul than Christ is called upon for help. Christ's help is again sought through the medium of one who represents Him.

-The practice of making manifestation of conscience is a familiar one with the ancients. In the lives of the desert fathers there are frequent references to monks unburdening themselves to their fellow monks – sometimes to obtain absolution but sometimes merely to obtain relief.

-The love of "much and excessive laughter" can be considered here, because though the matter of noisy behavior comes up later (again in the same chapter of silence) it will then be used as an illustration rather than as the main theme.

-All leaders and founders of religious Orders seem to be agreed that lightness of heart is a good thing, and that there should be an exchange of unserious matter between the brethren. Then what does St. Benedict mean? If his words do not forbid jokes, what do they forbid?

-The best way to answer these questions is to distinguish between different kinds of laughter, between different kinds of jokes. Probably what St. Benedict is trying to prevent is the kind of attitude which is interested only in entertaining others or in being entertained by others. Those in whom the comedian-mentality is allowed to grow will give rise, either in themselves or in others, to the wrong sort of laughter and to the wrong sort of joke.

-The gaiety expressed in a monastery should never reach the point at which a detached lay spectator would feel it was becoming worldly. When monastic hilarity strikes a note which is common to the club or the bar, it qualifies for St. Benedict's stricture "excessive."

-What St. Benedict, in the company of other saints whether monastics or not, is interested in is developing an appreciation of true joy. The soul who has learned the meaning of peace, of happiness in God, of joy in the service of religion, does not want to laugh excessively. Such a soul may feel as amused as any, may see jokes, may perfectly ready to take his share in keeping the conversation from becoming too solemn, but he does not surrender himself to the luxury of immoderate laughter. He sees in uncontrolled amusement an indulgence which is on a level with any other indulgence, and he would rather not indulge himself.

-Thus to sum up this matter of laughter in the Rule, we can note the following principles. While joy is good, finding its origin in the unalterable happiness of God, it is also one of the passions. The human passions, if they are to reflect the pro-passions of Christ, must be subject to discipline, to be regulated.

To listen willingly to holy reading. To apply oneself frequently to prayer. Daily to confess in prayer one's past sins with tears and sighs to God...

-Whether St. Benedict has in mind public or private reading, he clearly means it to be closely linked with the exercise of prayer which is mentioned next in the order of instruments. Spiritual reading is not an end in itself, but is something more than a means of avoiding the waste of time.

-That St. Benedict himself read widely and seriously is seen from the easy way in which quotations slide into the text. So natural are his own words dovetailed into Biblical passages that it is not at once easy to recognize the difference.

-*Lectio Divina* is meant to encounter God through the instrumentality of the Divine Word. It allows the word of God to touch and awaken our heart, as the letter to the Hebrews says: "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edge sword...discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. It is meant to let the word of God spread through our blood into every fiber of our being by assimilating & interiorizing its meaning. This is one of the reasons why silence is important even while working allow the word of God to surface in our consciousness.

-Our sacred reading is a lifetime task that steadily builds the foundation necessary of the Contemplative life. The statutes of the Carthusian Order say: "They are mistaken who think that they can easily attain to interior union with God, while previously having neglected the study of the word of God, or later abandoned it altogether."

-St. Benedict's principle was to allow as much time as possible for sacred reading after the daily manual labor was completed, because "idleness is the enemy of the soul." Therefore the brethren should be occupied at certain times in manual labor and at other specified times in sacred reading.

-Before the 5th century there were no periods set aside in the monastic schedule for meditative prayer. The common way of communing with God was sacred reading; this was the monastic method of meditation. The monk or nun sit with the text of Scripture and begin to read attentively until a word or a phrase or scene struck the imagination or the heart.

-Scripture is the preferred material for monastic sacred reading, but since God communicates in various ways, the context of sacred reading is flexible enough to extend far beyond the books of the Bible.

-Other materials that can be used are: writings of the saints, works of spiritual master (both living & dead), biographies of the saints, or other devotional literature. Sacred reading can be extended beyond the written word to the reading of God's great book of nature and the events of history, & the book of our own experience.

-Although St. Bernard urged his monks to study the written word of God, but he also loved to walk in the forests & fields, sensing the vastness of God's presence. Even man-made objects of beauty may provide the book where one reads of God. For instance, in the middle ages the illiterate could understand the message of illuminated manuscripts, sculptured capitals on the pillar of the church & cloister, and stained glass windows that were called "the Bible of the poor."

-God also speaks in the events of our daily lives. We can look back at the course of our own lives and read there the records of God's wise & loving activity. Here unfolds the deepest meaning of *Lectio* as a reading, the reading of our own life history as ongoing dialogue of grace and conversion of life toward the mystery of God.

-When we have learned to read God's word in the book of our everyday lives, then we are aware of a continuity & wholeness integrating all that we do in the course of the day.

-Only when the word of God rings in the ear of our heart can we hear that voice resounding everywhere we turn.

To apply oneself frequently to prayer. Constant prayer & study of Divine Scriptures has a tremendous power to open the inner eyes of our heart to see the Lord of hosts.

-In the midst of sickness, the best of prayer may be made; and it is a mistake to think that it can only be made in solitude & silence, says St. Teresa of Avila.

-Prayer is like a window opening our activities and thoughts to another influence than simply our own minds and feeling, opening to God. Part of a genuinely Christian approach to life will include this constant, frequent consultation of God about the events, activities, challenges, difficulties, & problems of our daily life. We Christians believe that we are not alone; prayer shows that we truly understand that we are not alone, that God is present and available to influence what we do and think.

-Without prayer we in effect are saying that we can take care of everything by ourselves and do not need guidance or help from God. Not every matter we bring before God will necessarily require that we spend the night praying over it, but why should not God be involved in every detail of our life by opening our life to Him in prayer? Besides using our minds, the advice of friends, why not let God have a say about what matters to us?

-There is no genuine change in us or willingness to receive what God can do without the quiet practice of prayer. A willingness to speak to God in our own terms and language and so develop a unique relationship between God and ourselves is an essential element of practical religion. If we allow God to come close to us through the practice of regular, personal prayer, the conditions are ripe for God to do something in us. God who is total goodness will eventually give us what is best.

-Those who pray regularly are going to be praying that God work what is best in them, that they become the kind of people God wants. Prayer is not separable from our trust & faith in God. We know God loves us and is out for the best for all creation. When we pray, we are expressing that trust.

-Prayer is a transfiguration. To be thus transfigured is the greatest possible miracle that we can obtain. "We all, beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." We are transformed...if we allow God time to act in our lives. He alone can perform that miracle which is far more startling than to change water into wine. To change us is the greatest possible

fulfillment of our prayer. If prayer doesn't change us there must be something wrong in our prayer or in the way we pray, because we are what we pray. Prayer is the sum of our relationship with God.

-We have private & liturgical prayer. Both are necessary to our way of life. Liturgical prayer is also a medium/means in which we encounter the Word of God as we did in sacred reading. Thus the atmosphere of our life is geared toward the encounter of the living God.

-The power of the liturgy to transform and to lead us to God depends on our ability in grace to immerse ourselves in the mystery of Christ, which is the objective content of the liturgy. Thus we are encouraged by the Church to participate fully, consciously, & actively in our liturgical prayer and not just as mere spectators.

-Our liturgical prayer should be seen in continuity with all our daily activities, not as something separate from the rest of our day or as a sacred moment stolen from profane time and unconnected with the practical business living.

-As we come together to pray and worship we bring with us concerns we carry throughout the day and we lay them before the Lord. Our concern is the adoration of God more than our own subjective experience of worshiping in a beautiful & reverent liturgical service.

-Prayer rises out of reading as song rises out of music. Reading is the most appropriate prelude to prayer. To the degree that "faith is from hearing," prayer is from reading.

-The word of God is communicated to us by reading, and is in turn referred back to God again in prayer. In other words, when we read God speaks to us and when we pray we speak to God.

-Grace works through hearing and reading. Thus our soul is molded by what we heard and learned. Just as reading promotes prayer, so prayer develops the habit of compunction.

-*Daily to confess in prayer one's past sins with tears to God.* Thomas Merton defines compunction as "a grace by which God draws us to Himself, causing us sorrow for what we have done, aversion from what we are, and fear of what we may yet become." In other words, to confess in prayer our sins with sighs and tears implies heartfelt regret for personal failure, acknowledgment of guilt, and sincere desire to begin again in the service of love.

-The point about compunction is that it does not stop short at remorse. It is not just a sad flat lake. It is more like a spring. Compunction causes the whole being to rise up to God in hope and love. The psalms are full of this true contrition which transforms the soul's attitude from helplessness and despair to complete confidence in the power of grace. Psalm 50 is a good example of this: "Have mercy on me, God in your kindness; in your compassion blot out my offence. My offences truly I know them; my sin is always before me. Oh wash me more and more from my guilt and cleanse me from my sin. Against you, you alone have I sinned; what is evil in your sight I have done. From my sins turn away your face and blot out all my guilt."

-In his Lenten sermons St. Bernard reminds us that compunction is a source of strength. It frees us from our own supports & superficialities, and concentrates our effort in the right direction. When we begin to recognize our weakness, we become strong. Power is made perfect in infirmity. Compunction shows us not only what sinners we are, but what fools we are.

-Those creature satisfactions which lured us into sin are exposed for what they are. We are now in a position to detach ourselves from the. Lacking a more or less habitual compunction we are always more or less at the mercy of the creature's attraction. The absence of compunction is a sign of tepidity.

-Compunction is a dual sensitivity. It places before us both the reality of our sinful condition and the urgency of our desire to be possessed totally by God. It is an active disgust at our low-level living, knowing that we are made for something better and that nothing less than God can bring us what our nature craves.

-It is precisely the comparison between what we are and what we could be which constitutes the triggering cause of the experience of compunction. It is a gift of divine love which is aimed at bringing us to salvation. It causes in us salutary pain & for which keeps us from forgetting the possibility of eternal death, and thus serves as a check on carnal desire, a remedy for depravity, and destroys any lack of seriousness or concern with trivialities

-Compunction is also related to spiritual desire. Sometimes those who remember that they have done things which are wrong are pierced with pain at the recollection and become afire with love for God.

-Contrition in the heart, confession on the lips, complete humility in all one does, this is fruitful penitence.

-Even if we perform all the great endeavors of our way of life, but have not acquired a grieving heart, they are all counterfeit & corrupt. We are truly penitent when we deplore those sins we have committed.

-In any return to God, confession must be made to three different persons:

1. A man must make confession to himself. Take a good look at ourselves.
2. A man must make confession to those whom he has wronged. The human barriers have to be removed before the divine barriers can be removed. There can be no forgiveness without humiliation.
3. A man must make confession to God. The end of pride is the beginning of forgiveness.

The beginning of our righteousness is the confessions of our sins.

-Abba Sarmatas said: "I prefer a sinful man who knows he has sinned and repents, to a man who has not sinned and considers himself to be righteous.

-There's a story of a soldier who asked Abba Mios if God accept repentance. After the old man had taught him many things he said: "Tell me, my dear, if your cloak is torn, do you throw it away? He replied, 'No, I mend it and use it again.' The old man said to him, 'If you are so careful about your cloak, will not God be equally careful about his creatures?'"

Not to fulfill the desire of the flesh; to hate one's own will. To obey in all things the commands of the abbot, even though he himself (which God forbid) should act otherwise....Not to wish to be called holy before one is so, but first to be holy that one may be truly so called.

-Again we find deliberate planning in the sequence of the instruments: from compunction St. Benedict leads on the detachment, denial of self-will, obedience. The assumption is that true sorrow for sin delivers us from self-will, subjects us to ready obedience. Untrue sorrow, on the other hand, enslaves us further to self-will by making us bitter, exasperated with ourselves, unwilling to make the effort. Untrue sorrow is ultimately the enemy of obedience.

-Strictly speaking one cannot "hate one's own will," but one can hate having it. One can suspect its motives, veto its unreasonable demands, employs every variety of discipline in the work of its education. Self-will is the root of all religious imperfection. The primary discipline is obedience.

-Whether or not the superior happens to live up to his office, the duty of the monk remains the same. If the superior's lead is a good one, so much the better. But in the final analysis it is what he tells to do that matters. An artist may be a good or bad man in private life; it is what he does with his brush in the studio that concerns his followers in the art-school.

Not to wish to be called holy before one is so, but first to be holy that one may be truly so called.

-The desire to be thought holy is human and wrong, but it is also so instinctive to the would-be saint that it can hardly be detached from the desire for sanctity itself. But if our soul is trained to focus its desire beyond even personal holiness to God Himself, then there is less room for these reflex considerations. Where there is self-constructed norm of sanctity, there is inevitably a tendency to check up on results. It is on results, that is to say, on the externals, that others are expected to pass their favorable judgments.

-What St. Benedict is trying to prevent is the attitude of mind which says: "You see what my practices are; you see the sort of holiness I am aiming at; you see the kind of life I have chosen to live. Well then?

-Holiness is a mystery. It always eludes us. The moment we think we have it we'd better start from the scratch; the moment we want to walk tall we better get down on our knees; and the minute we think we are without sin, we've just committed the biggest one.

-St. Therese writes that a humble recognition of our own sinfulness, and an acceptance of God's mercy, is the beginning of all growth in holiness. Sanctity is an interior disposition which makes us humble & little in God's arm, conscious of our weakness & trusting even to audacity/ boldness in the goodness of God Our Father.

-In the language of St. Paul, sanctification begins with accepting Christ in faith as Savior and turning away from sin: "One believes with the heart and so is justified" (Rm. 10:10). But more than believing in the heart is required: "One confesses with the mouth and so is saved" (Rm. 10:10). This is not just lip service – saying, "Jesus is Lord"; we need to live integral lives consistent with the profession of faith. Only then we are sanctified.

-The process of sanctification must also continue and be completed in the life of each of us individually. By no means does this happen automatically. "Man is split within himself. As a result, all human life,

whether individual or collective, shows itself to be a dramatic struggle between good & evil.

-Sanctity for us religious consists in rising above such ordinary annoyances of community life. The secret of sanctity is to do ordinary things of life extraordinarily well for the glory of God and love of his people.

-A holy life is the most trustworthy argument for the truth. It has abundant power to stop the mouths of evil man. It needs no defender, it speaks for itself.

Live by God's commandments every day; treasure chastity. Respects the elders and love the young. Pray for you enemies out of love for Christ. If you have a dispute with someone, make peace with him before the sun goes down. And finally, never to despair in God's mercy.

-God does not command impossible things, but, in commanding He counsels us both to do what we can and seek for help for what we cannot do, and He helps us that we may be able to do it.

-God is hidden in His commandments. If we seek the Lord without obeying His commandments we will not find Him, because we will find Him only in proportion to fulfilling them.

-For our soul to taste spiritual joys, the mere overcoming of the passions is not enough, unless it also acquires virtues through keeping the commandments of God. What medicines are for a sick body, the commandments are for the passionate soul.

-The Law of the Gospel fulfills the commandments of the Old Law. The Lord's Sermon on the Mount, far from abolishing or devaluing the moral prescriptions of the Old Law, releases their hidden potential and has new demands arise from them; it reveals their entire divine and human truth. It does not add new external precepts, but proceeds to reform the heart, the root of human acts, where we chose between the pure and the impure, where faith, hope, and charity are formed, and with them the other virtues. The Gospel thus brings the Law to its fullness through imitation of the perfection of Our Heavenly Father, through forgiveness of enemies and prayer for our persecutors....

-The Law of the Gospel requires us to make the decisive choice between "the two ways" and to put into practice the words of Our Lord. It is summed up in the Golden Rule, "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." The entire Law

of the Gospel is contained in the "new commandment" to love one another as Christ has loved us.

-To the Lord's Sermon on the Mount it is fitting to add the moral catechesis of the apostolic teachings. These teachings hand on Our Lord's teaching with the authority of the apostles, particularly in the presentation of the virtues that flow from faith in Christ and are animated by charity, the principal gift of the Holy Spirit. "Let charity be genuine...Love one another with brotherly affection...Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality.

-The New Law is called a law of love because it makes us act out of the love infused by the Holy Spirit, rather than from fear; a law of grace, because it confers strength of grace to act, by means of faith and the sacraments; a law of freedom, because it sets us free from the ritual and juridical observances of the Old Law, inclines us to act spontaneously by the prompting of charity (only not to use our freedom as a pretext of doing evil) and, finally, allows us pass from the condition of a servant who "does not know what his master is doing" to that of a friend of Christ because he made known to us what he has heard from the Father. "All I have heard from the Father I have made known to you."

-The next instruments go over again the teaching contained in some of the earlier ones. They relate mostly to fraternal charity. In one of them, the sixty-third, mention is made for the first and last time in the Holy Rule of chastity. Chastity is so much part of the religious obligation that St. Benedict evidently felt no need to single it out for special attention.

-The demands that sex makes on us produces a lifetime of struggle, even for the highest saints (e.g. St. Benedict diving into a thorny bush & St. Francis of Assisi rolling naked on the snow). Rare are reports about those who are given the total gift of equanimity regarding sexual thoughts. Although through God's grace passions will subside and the mind will return to stillness, the desert tradition nonetheless describes a person's struggle for equanimity as initially very difficult.

-Is chastity attainable for us today? Or does this teaching belong to a bygone era? Celibacy is no other than conservation of energy. The person who did not waste his energy through unrestrained sensual pursuits, particularly sexual activity, could greatly enhance his memory and other mental faculties. The other benefits of celibacy were greater longevity and the ability to understand deeper meaning of Scriptures.

-The reason for monastic celibacy that makes the most compelling sense today is that the mind needs to be focused, without the complexities created by having and being responsible for a spouse. The focused mind meets God not only in heaven, but also in this life. The mind is stabilized through the sublimated sexual energies.

-The desert tradition also teaches us that to pray without ceasing one needs to totally dedicate oneself to prayer and to a lifestyle that supports the dominant work of the contemplative life: to pray always. If we are to learn Scriptures, we can have no other wife. If we desire to reach purity of heart (passionlessness), we must have only thoughts of God in our consciousness.

-Chastity helps me simply be before God, in total surrender. When I love God with my whole heart, soul, and body, chastity governs how I love. Chastity has to do with my soul.

-Another practice to control thoughts about sex is to say a short prayer inwardly instead of thinking about the thoughts. "O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me." The tradition of "praying without ceasing" is very beneficial for us who strive for chastity in our quest for union with God. The most often recited prayer, the Jesus Prayer, said continuously, comes from this impulse, almost becoming as natural as breathing: "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

-Meditation is an essential practice in the control of thoughts about sex. It is through meditation that we work on our unconscious motivations and compulsions, going deeper and deeper with steady practice. Note that the practice for chastity is not frigidity, nor fear of sex, but total dedication of all our energies to love God with our whole body, mind, and soul. Chastity is thinking pure thoughts. All thoughts are to be redirected to our heart's desire, which is to seek God.

-We should not imagine that we will overwhelm the demon of fornication by entering into an argument with him. Nature is on his side and he has the best of argument. So the man who decides to struggle against his flesh and to overcome it by his own efforts is fighting in vain. The truth is that unless the Lord overturns the house of the flesh and builds the house of the soul, the man wishing to overcome it has watched & fasted for nothing. What we can do, then, is to offer up to Our Lord the weakness of our nature. We have to admit, in all sincerity & humility, our incapacity and, without our knowing it, we will win for ourselves the gift of chastity.

Harbor neither hatred nor jealousy of anyone, and do nothing out of envy. Do not love quarreling; shun arrogance.

-Hatred is nothing but sentimental stupidity. Sinners hate sinners for their defects. Sinners hate the saints for their holiness. Holy people hate no one. So, the next time we hate someone, it could be because he is a sinner or because he is a saint. In either case, it is because we not a saint. Good people don't hate.

-Jealousy is like a green eyed monster. It sees things which are not there. When David returned from slaying the Philistines, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with timbrels, with songs of joy, and with instruments of music. And the women sang to one another as they made merry, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him; he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands; and what more can he have but the kingdom? And so he was jealous and suspicious of David from that day on. Anger is cruel and destructive, but is nothing compared to jealousy. A tranquil mind makes the body healthy, but jealousy is like a cancer.

-The chief priests and scribes handed over Our Lord to Pilate because they were jealous of him. In the Acts of the Apostles, we heard that the high priest rose up and all who were with him, that is, the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy they arrested the Apostles and put them in prison.

-I fed you with milk, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men?

-Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This wisdom is not such as comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, & devilish. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

-Tenth Commandment requires that envy be banished from the human heart. When the prophet Nathan wanted to spur King David to repentance, he told him the story about the poor man who has only one ewe lamb that he treated like his own daughter and the rich man who, despite the great number of his flock, envied the poor man and ended by stealing the lamb.

-Envy can lead to the worst crimes. "Through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it." Envy is a capital sin. It refers to the sadness at the sight of another's goods and the immoderate desire to acquire them for oneself, even unjustly. When it wishes grave harm to a neighbor it is mortal sin: St. Augustine saw envy as "the diabolical sin." "From envy are born hatred, detraction, calumny, joy caused by the misfortunes of a neighbor, and displeasure caused by his prosperity."

-Envy represents a form of sadness and therefore a refusal of charity; the baptized person should struggle against it by exercising good will. Envy often comes from pride; the baptized person should train oneself to live in humility. In the language of St. John Chrysostom: "Would you like to see God glorified by you? Then rejoice in your brother's progress and you will immediately give glory to God. Because his servant could conquer envy by rejoicing in the merits of others, God will be praised."

-The seventy-first instrument ("To make peace with an adversary before the setting of the sun") only adds the practical recommendation to the general doctrine of peace and reconciliation; the seventy-second ("never to despair in God's mercy") is the final rounding-off of St. Benedict's whole teaching on compunction, forgiveness, and hope.

-The implication in these last injunctions is the single principle of charity with its twofold application. It is as though St. Benedict were saying: "Nothing may be allowed to disturb the harmony either of the community or the individual soul. If animosities flare up, they must be stamped out the same day; if anyone feels he has completely failed in his vocation, he must know that he can still go on loving God and that God has not ceased to love him. A monk who has offended against all virtues spoken in the above list of instruments still has the mercy of God to draw upon."

-Having come to the end of his list, St. Benedict adds an epilogue which is of immense significance:

These, then, are the tools of the spiritual craft. When we used them without ceasing day and night and have returned them on judgment day, our wages will be the reward the Lord has promised: 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him.' The workshop we are to toil faithfully at all these tasks is the enclosure of the monastery and the stability in the community.

Trust in the Lord/in His Holy Name

"Yea, our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name."

-It is stimulating to notice the object of our hearts' gladness and the reason why it is so. Our Lord Himself gives us a hint of this when He says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Therefore, if we consider Our Lord as our most treasured treasure, then our heart will be naturally be glad in Him. This is brilliantly apparent in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary herself whose only treasure is her Son. No wonder she was full of sorrow, to the brim, when he only treasure was lost and how her heart was glad when she found Him again. Her Magnificat gives us a limpid glimpse of where the gladness of her heart is: "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

-Thus it is God who is the object of the gladness of her heart. We too, participate in this gladness when Our Lord becomes the object of our happiness, and to the extent of our capacity of this happiness we can humbly say: "My happiness lies in you alone....What have I in heaven but You, and apart from You I want nothing on earth."

-If we have had experienced human love, at least once in our lifetime, then we will comprehend, to the range of capability, the reason why when we have love for God our heart will be glad in Him, for it is an irrefutable evidence that gladness is the natural habitat of love. Even those young people who experienced puffy love will not blink their eyes to tell us how their heart is glad when they see the person they loved. Not only that, even the adulteress and the robbers are glad once they have the object of their love. The avaricious, too, and all who are engaged with vices are glad in what their heart loves.

-No wonder then that at the Vespers of life, once we reached the border between life and death, the only question that will be asked is: "What do you love?", or "Who do you love?", or where is your treasure?" An answer to any of this question will usher to one's eternal destiny, for each one will be appraised according to what one has done in the body.

-From what has been said above, we saw the object of our heart's gladness. Now, we will look at also at the reason why it was so. Even if our mind is not so perspicacious as the most sagacious person on earth, yet we can perceivably take notice that both the object and the reason of heart's gladness are so closely related, so intimate, that both came from

the same source. The reason itself is given when it says: "because we trust in his holy name."

-Trust is the apple of the eyes of love. When we truly love someone we spontaneously trust that person. Trust is so native to love, intrinsic to faith, and inherent to hope. Thus in hope Abraham believed against hope, because he trusts what God has promised that "he should become the father of many nations. He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."

-We are informed by the scholars of the Bible, they are unanimous in this, that in the Scripture "Name" is frequently used to designate the entire person, his individuality and his power. This is usually the case when the reference is to God. So, let us see the rationale why we have to "trust in his holy name." Let us hear the sweet murmuring sound of our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux as he utters the delectable redolence of this name: "When I name Jesus I set before me a man who is meek and humble of heart, kind, prudent, chaste, merciful, flawlessly upright and holy in the eyes of all; and this same man is the all-powerful God whose way of life heals me, whose support is my strength. All these re-echo for me at the hearing Jesus' name. Because he is man I strive to imitate him; because of his divine power I lean upon him." "Jesus to me is honey in the mouth, music in the ear, a song in the heart." We can absolutely add: Paradise in my life, and all in all to my whole being.

-We can never go wrong in trusting His name. He is the "I AM WHO AM" who revealed to Moses. No wonder that He unequivocally said "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me." He is the "I AM" the Good Shepherd; the "I AM" the Light of the world; the "I AM" the Way, the Truth, and the Life; "I AM" the door; the "I AM" the Bread of Life; the "I AM" the alpha and the Omega. Therefore, He can absolutely and unrestrictedly say "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, 'I AM.'"

-Of course, for the unbeliever and all who hate the Lord Jesus – the sound of His name and these "I AM's" is irritating to their ears, disgusting to their taste, blasphemous to their hearts, and abominable to their whole being; but to the saints and angels in heaven and to all who welcomed the Lord Jesus in their lives and believed in His Name, He is melodious to their ears, mellifluous to their taste, auspicious to their sight, sweet aroma to their smell, fortifying to their touch, and infinite ecstasy to their whole being.

Hence we have good and solid grounds to trust in His Holy Name, and also the rationale behind why our heart is glad in Him.

-“At Christmas we contemplate God made man, divine glory hidden beneath the poverty of a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger: the Creator of the Universe reduces to the helplessness of an infant. Once we accept the paradox, we discover the Truth that sets us free and the Love that transforms our lives. On Bethlehem night, the Redeemer becomes one of us, our companion along the precarious paths of history. Let us take the hand which he stretches out to us: It is the hand which seeks to take nothing from us, but only to give” (Pope Benedict XVI).

-There's still another “I Am” that we forgot to mention which is really important because without it we will be of all people most to be pitied, and that is, “I AM” the Resurrection and the Life. Can you imagine if Christ was not raised from the dead? Where will we be now? I will not even become a Christian and much more a Catholic and a priest-monk. You and I may not even exist as we are now, because our parents and great, great grandparents may not even met each other, and since they did, it is also possible that were pagans, and so in that case it is also possible we were pagans too. Well, if that was the case, we will be like a dead man walking; we are still in darkness and living in sin.

-If you can remember other “I Am” sayings of the Lord you can add it here, otherwise, just write it on the tablet of your heart and will be engraved there so that His Name and your name will become one – that will be your new identity. What God is by nature you will be by grace.

Vocation

"Hear, O daughter, consider, and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house; and the king will desire your beauty."

-Certainly, this counsel is for all people which represented by the daughter. This is an echo of the counsel addressed to Abraham when the Lord invited him to go from his country and his kindred and his father's house to the land that the Lord will show him. In other words, it is a calling to leave one's home and set off, with open heart, to a holy place where one can meet God.

-It is Abraham's response to this call, after his encounter with God, that marks the beginning of the whole history of salvation. God, so to speak, planted the incipient seed of religious vocation which blossoms thousands of years later when men and women from one generation to the next left their families, and some their homeland to consecrate their lives to God.

-The Desert Fathers and Mothers left the tumult and allurements of the world to seek purity of heart, for once the heart is purified the breathtaking pristine beauty of the soul begins to emerge. No wonder, then, that the king, no other than the Lord Jesus, will desire its beauty and will even go so far to make her His bride, saying: "And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord."

-The word "know" in this passage can be elucidated as referring to profound intimacy, that is, union of spirits which begets virtues that lead to eternal regeneration, just as Adam "knew" Eve and she begets a child.

-Thus the person who left home and family to consecrate one's life to God is unimaginably regarded as the bride of God. This is the difference between the people who do not enter religious life or the priesthood but still serve God. We can say that the people who serve God without joining religious life or the priesthood are having affair with God which, in all probability, is likely to beget virtues, but since they do not make public vows to consecrate their lives to God they would not be considered, in a technical term, bride of God because they married a man or woman to be their husband or wife. Whereas, the people who entered religious life or the priesthood took God as their spouse. This they do in a public

ceremony much in the same way as people who got married in the Church.

-Someone may ask, 'how about those people who do not enter religious life or the priesthood but make private promise to God to live chastely and in simplicity outside the cloister/convent?' In this case, they are cohabiting with God which, again, is likely to bear children, that is, virtues which the fruits of the soul just as the human children are the fruits of the womb.

-We mention somewhere that there is a healthy distraction in prayer and there is also a healthy or good cholesterol in our body. Hence, "having affair with God" or "cohabiting with God," that is, serving God and following His commandments, in a state of life one finds him/herself without joining the priesthood or religious life, is a healthy, good, and holy form of "affair" and "cohabitation."

-Our heavenly friend, St. Basil the Great – the pride of Cappadocia, pointed out that "whatever we give up for a good purpose is not lost but is merely deposited in a safer place. So when we give up father, mother, brothers and sisters, and relatives, we merely transfer them from our unsafe hands to the all protecting Hand of God."

-God's call makes itself heard in the depths of the heart. External signs are only indications of an interior vocation. Everyone has a vocation, and finding it truly is the single event that will cause more happiness in our lives than anything else. The vocation of every human being is to be deified by the Spirit of God, to become holy as God is holy, to become more and more conformed to the Lord Jesus, in order to give glory and honor to God. What God is by nature, we will be by grace. Life, therefore, is about vocation; it is about seeking and finding what God has created us for, and then doing it. It is through this process that God will transform us into "the best version of ourselves."

-Our other heavenly friend, St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi understood so well that every vocation to the cloister is eminently a vocation to the apostolate for souls. "God has not put us in this place for ourselves," she says, "but so that we may help others....Just as the Word constituted the apostles to be fishers of men, so also has He appointed His bride to capture souls. Jesus has thirst, thirst which demands that you offer His blood for the salvation of souls and that you beg mercy for sinners."

-No one is called to the life of prayer unless s/he has first prayed earnestly for the gift of so great a calling. The mere desire to pray for a vocation to

the priesthood or religious life may be a sign that God has already decreed a favorable answer to one's prayer. "Marriage" is a vocation, too, as well as "single blessedness." What each one has to do is to listen attentively to one's heart and find out what is best suited to her/him.

-Some people are best suited to marriage; some are best suited to priesthood, some to religious life, and others to single blessedness. Each one has to incline one's ear, forgetting one's people and one's father's house, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus Our Lord.

-The very fact of departing from our kindred and our father's house is already a victory; it is a break with all our customary mediocrity, a decision to set out on a path less travelled, carrying one's cross to follow Christ more closely, sharing in His suffering that we may also share in His glory; and once glorified, what would that beauty be?! Certainly, the king is ravished by its beauty, and people will seek its favor.

On Vocational Discernment

(Source: Dom Bernardo Olivera, abbot General of O.C.S.O.)
New Superior's meeting, Rome Sept.-Oct., 2004

Do not grant newcomers to the monastic life an easy entry, but, as the Apostle says, Test the spirits to see if they are from God. Therefore, if someone comes and keeps knocking at the door, and if at the end of four or five days he has shown himself patient in bearing his harsh treatment and difficulty of entry, and has persisted in his request, then he should be allowed to enter and stay in the guest quarters for a few days. After that, he should live in the novitiate, where the novices study, eat and sleep.

-The necessity of discernment imposes itself due to the dual condition of the Christian life. Above all, we should say that we are exposed to influences from various spirits (God and demons). Then we must admit that neither the content of our faith nor the journey towards Life is self-evident. Without discernment we cannot live a life that is authentically Christian, nor can we journey towards truth.

-Discernment means to separate, to sift through, to sort out, to distinguish. It's a gift which enables us to distinguish, to judge what attracts us towards God or draws us away from Him & His preferences for us.

-When Dom Bernardo speaks of spiritual discernment, he employs the term "spiritual" as an adjective that qualifies or indicates the quality of discernment. Our discernment will be spiritual in the measure that we are incorporated in Christ and in the inspiration of the Spirit. *No one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God....Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit...because they are spiritually discerned (1Cor. 2:11, 14). It is only through the transformation of our worldly mind into the new Christian mind, the mind of Christ himself, that we can discern what is the will of God, what is good, what is pleasing to him, what is perfect (cf. Rom.12:2).*

-On the other hand, in speaking of discernment of spirits, the expression "of spirits" refers to the immediate object of discernment as "discernment of spirits."

Nature of Discernment: What does it mean to discern

-To understand what it means to discern we need to keep in mind the main reality which St. Ignatius of Loyola helps us to express. He says, "I presuppose that there are three kinds of thoughts in my mind, namely:

one which is strictly my own, and arises wholly from my own free will; two other which come from without, the one from the good spirit, and the other from the evil one (Spiritual Exercises 32, Cassian, Conferences 1: 19-20).

-In practice, given that our main interest is to distinguish the orientation of the movements (thoughts, intentions, desires, intuitions, "spirits") which we experience, we can say that there are two types of movements: one good, directed towards the good, and another evil, directed towards what is evil (cf. St. Bernard, Occasional Sermons, 33). Note, that when we say "evil" or directed towards evil, we also refer to the lesser good or an apparent good.

-Above all, *discernment is an eminent charism that we must receive with gratitude and consolation because it is useful to the needs of the Church. However, it must not be asked in a rash way and one must not expect the fruits of this spiritual work with presumption* (cf. Lumen Gentium, 12).

-Discernment has to do with a supernatural and prophetic instinct which allows one to perceive intuitively the beginning and end of good or evil desires, thoughts, interior or exterior movements. It implies the possibility of subjective error due to the erroneous interpretations or wrong use of supernatural light (cf. St. Ignatius, Letter 51 written on July 1549 and Letter 75 written on June 5th, 1552, both addressed to St. Francis Borgia).

-Almost always when we speak of discernment we make reference to a common charism to receive or to acquire/gain. Or, as written in the new Ritual for the Penitential Service: *the discernment of spirits is the intimate knowledge of the work of God in the hearts of men, gift of the Holy Spirit and fruit of charity* (III, 10a, cf. Phil. 1:9-10). This charism allows us not only to detect the movements provoked by various causes, but also:

- 1) To sense or keep tract of the movements which agitate us.
- 2) To distinguish or interpret their good or evil direction according to their direction towards the good or towards evil.
- 3) To determine the right behavior which these movements call forth.

-For it is also an acquired gift through the exercise of charity, or prudence, and of experience in the application of the discernment of spirits. In other words, discernment is a prudent and contemplative judgment, directed towards action, towards our religious interiority as much as it is mediation and place of divine grace. Because of discernment, we participate in the Father's vision of reality, and we unite with his saving will, which directs hearts and the course of history himself in return for the free cooperation of humankind with the action of the Holy Spirit.

-As we can see, discernment is more a type of practical knowledge rather than being theoretical or speculative. We should say, then, that it is a knowledge in faith, ordained to operate through love and to incarnate in the present that which we still await in the fullness of time, the loving will of the Father.

-Given that discernment is always a charism, whether distinguished or common, and that it exists for the profit and good of the Church (cf. 1Cor. 12:7), the person who is marginal to this Church is an anomaly.

The Object of Discernment

-The aim or object of discernment is primarily the will of God in concrete circumstances. Most particularly, the object of discernment is the whole of the spiritual life, and of all of life from faith perspective: *Discern everything and hold fast to what is good* (1Thes. 5:19). We can also say that the goal or object of discernment is the same as that of spiritual accompaniment: growth in Christ through the Spirit.

-The practice of this gift and this art, through the course of history of Christian spirituality, teaches us that its immediate object consists in two categories of interior phenomena which each have diverse causes:

- 1) Interior lights and movements which direct and determine important options in life.
- 2) Spiritual consolations (positive movements) and desolations (negative movements) which produce either peace or spiritual combat.

-More generally, from another point of view, we would say that the object of discernment is also the habitual spirit or its spontaneous and permanent tendency. In fact, this discernment is something previous to the discernment of actual and passing movements. But it is also the consequence of discernment of these movements over a long period. We can say the same about discernment during growth crisis, about the life of prayer, or about the life of service.

-It seems opportune to site in this context the words of St. Francis de Sales, words full of good sense: *I would like to save you from a bothersome temptation which frequently plagues souls who are very desirous of following the divine will as scrupulously as possible. The enemy causes them to doubt that this or that is the will of God. For example, should they eat with a friend, or abstain; should they clothe themselves in grey or black; should they fast on Friday or on Saturday; should they amuse themselves or not; all of this causes them to lose a lot of time. While they stop to deliberate on what is best, they lose the opportunity to do many good things which would give more glory to God than this perplexity*

which causes them to choose between what is good or what is best....We don't usually weigh small coins but rather what is of more value....We do not diligently serve a master by wasting time to consider what we ought to do, but rather, to do what needs to be done. We need to place our attention on the importance of the action (Treatise on Loving God, Book II, 8:14).

-Finally, in this work of discernment the one who is accompanied by the interpreter and critic of his own situation. The accompanying/spiritual companion assists with his theoretical and practical knowledge, with his experience of spiritual things. The injunction: "No one is a proper judge of his own action" is always valid, even if the consent of the person's conscience has the last word. In any case, let us remember what St. Bernard says: "The one who has himself as sole master, becomes the disciple of a fool" (Letter 87, 7). And again: "Anyone who does not place his confidence in his master, places it in the seducer" (Song of Song 77, 6).

Criteria of Discernment: How to discern

-The aim of discernment is to unite with the will of the Father. But how is the divine will manifested? How do we recognize it? We should say, above all, that the will of God is manifested to us and can be known through various means, among others:

- 1) Through the **commandments and prohibitions**, given by God or through the Church and its legitimate authorities.
- 2) Through the use of **right reason** which is created by God, and a reflection of divine intelligence.
- 3) Through the **inspirations and consoling lights** which enlighten our understanding and motivate our will.

-The first manifestation requires obedience. The second requires the exercise of the virtue of prudence, and the third requires discernment of spirits.

-If God initiated all the movements in our souls, there would be nothing to discern. Discernment is a reality because the evil spirit and our own fallen nature can motivate and direct us towards evil, towards a lesser good or towards an apparent good.

-Our Lord Jesus, who alone has seen the Father and who is with Him in the Spirit, is the only one who knows his will. Consequently, He is the Absolute criteria for all discernment. Our attitude towards Christ allows us to discern the presence or absence of the Spirit of God.

-Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God, ever says: "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit (1Cor. 12:3).

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (Jn.16:13-15).

-The "Spirit", the "felt experience" and Christ Jesus' ways of acting are written in the New Testament. This is the reason that it is in him that we find the basic criteria to discern salvation or perdition. To follow Christ and conformed ourselves to Him can produce only good fruits, that is, the fruits of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is love. Joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control....If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25).

-The Holy Spirit is God's gift of love (Rom. 5:5). This is why the Spirit always begets love. Where there is no love, all loses its value, even the most prodigious of works. Love is always transparent with the Spirit of God.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or jealous or boastful or arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1Cor. 13:1-7).

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love (1Jn. 4:7-8).

-The criterion of love is the criteria of the Spirit. The sign with which we recognize the disciples of Christ is the love that they have for one another (Jn.13:35). And the same Spirit who inspires the individual person is the soul of the mystical Body of Christ which is the Church. Consequently, all that builds up and contributes to the unity of the Church, comes from the Holy Spirit (cf. 1Cor.14).

-The whole first letter of John is a treatise on spiritual discernment. We have only to read it to become convinced of this. St. John's criterion of discernment is simple. If we are sons of God, we must act like God. God is light, justice, and love manifested in Christ Jesus. Those who are born of God walk in light, justice and love as does Christ. Those who walk on another road are not sons of God but of the devil!

-Most simply, discernment is a process ending in a decision. In our context, it is a process of coming to an informed decision before God what I should do here and now: enter the monastery, or choose another avenue.

-A fuller definition would go like this: Discernment is the process I use to discover God's will for me in the circumstances of my life. It is a way of listening to the voice of God. Discernment is sorting through the movements of my heart and my intentions so I can know myself and make the choice that is best for me, which is the choice that God is calling me to.

-Discernment of a monastic vocation is always a two-way street, a process in dialogue with the superior, the formation team, and the whole community. The candidate is discerning whether or not he is called to this way of life and to this community; the community is discerning, based on its wisdom and its own self-knowledge, whether or not this candidate has the gifts of nature that would allow him realistically to grow, under grace, in this particular environment.

-Discernment, then, is a process fuelled by prayer and aided by dialogue. Neither on the part of the candidate nor that of the community can it be merely an impulse, an infatuation, or a conclusion to jump to. It is the process of carefully and maybe slowly arriving at a conclusion together, all the while with our feet firmly on the ground.

-The Blessed Virgin Mary is an example of this. She is called the Seat of Wisdom because of her discernment. "But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be."

Criteria Regarding Vocations

-In general, the situation regarding vocations in the monastic life corresponds to the same situation in the Church as a whole. According to this theory, we can establish the following categories:

Established Churches (Europe, USA-Canada, Australia): few vocations – run out of vocations.

Consolidated Churches (Latin America): some vocations, normal not outstanding.

Developing Churches (Africa, South-East Asia): many vocations

-It is precisely both this abundance and this lack of vocations which indicates the importance of using discernment in this regard. The famine of vocations can tempt us to take risks so that we will "try and see." The abundance can tempt us to forego the "screening" process. The situation in Latin America with its normal flow of vocations, allows us to treat the subject with peace and normalcy. In reality our basic problem seems to be that of perseverance, a theme that is very much linked to that of discernment.

-One of the presentations at the recent General Chapter was on the monks and nuns with seven years or less of solemn profession. This was given by Sr. Marie Paschale, the general secretary of formation. Following the last General Chapter Sr. Marie Paschale did a comprehensive consultation of the recently solemnly professed. In her synthesis of the replies to the consultation of recent solemnly professed she said that she "had noticed that the departures of several young monks and nuns had raised a more or less lively concern, solicitude and anxiety among the Chapter members." A great deal of Sr. Marie Paschale's presentation consisted of direct quotations from the recently professed and some of these had to do with discernment.

-One recently professed said: "In certain communities one is aware from the time of temporary profession that a person is not in the right place, but the community does not dare to speak out, but says, "It will work out; he still has a chance for conversion." Another said: "In meetings of the junior professed, you hear some surprising things, and you wonder about the seriousness of the discernment which has been made." And still another offered this opinion: "Personally, I do not know, but before the commitment of solemn profession, the superiors should be more attentive and not close their eyes. Some would probably leave before solemn profession if the demands of community life were really brought home to them. It happens that a person is kept because they think that without him, nothing would go on."

-Acknowledging the importance of formation, especially in new communities, Dom Bernardo added immediately, "a still more important question is that of vocational discernment." "In our days," he says, "it is indispensable to help discern the more or less unconscious and egocentric motivations that may hinder a true and free choice. Since this

kind of discernment is such a difficult art, the positive criteria or signs of a monastic vocation can be of great help."

-The irreducible essence of a vocation to be a monk, and the surest sign of that vocation, is the efficacious will to do it. Not a vague desire, not an effectual wish, but a firm and effective decision to embrace monastic life.

-In prospective candidate we look for that clear determination of will. He must have an ardent desire to grow in love for God and people. He must have a strong desire to become unified within himself and united with God and all creation in contemplative love.

-The aspirant to monastic life has got to be able to accept, love, and give himself to imperfect conditions and imperfect community. If a person simply cannot take orders, follow instructions, and keep rules, then he had better forget the monastic enterprise.

-And you cannot succeed in this way of life unless you can get along well with people, including eccentric people! Also necessary are the basic human personality strengths enabling the neophyte to develop as a person a fundamentally silent and solitary life-style. If a person cannot work at manual labor, if he cannot get dirty, if menial work is intolerable, then he may as well drop the idea of becoming a monk.

-At least average intelligence, a healthy sense of humor, and a passion for life are further characteristics of a vocation. Where there is at least a good beginning of these characteristics, there is the human material out of which a monk can be made.

General Criteria (based on Dom Bernardo's experience of the past few years)

-St. Benedict expresses it this way: *The concern must be whether the novice truly seeks God and whether he shows eagerness for the Work of God, for Obedience and for humiliation* (RB 58, 7). Note that St. Benedict recommends that we observe, that is to say, that the criteria of discernment which he offers us, requires only meticulous observation. This observation can be characterized as an observation that requires much attention. This meticulous attention has to do with its intensity and its length. What clear sightedness was not able to detect, time succeeded in doing. It is with time that hearts are revealed.

-The three-fold object of observation is: 1st, commitment to the life of prayer, 2nd, acceptance of another's will over my own preference, 3rd, and everything that reduces pride. St. Benedict is very concrete: the

search for God is manifested through seeking him, and in fighting pride and egotism because these prevent one from communing with God and with the brethren.

-Chapter 72 in the Rule on good zeal and ardent love offers us other criteria to verify this gift of life and our progress in the divine life. A novice who does not burn with an ardent zeal, at least from time to time (even if this zeal is indiscreet), runs the risk of becoming a mediocre Solemn Professed. And we can say the same thing for a simple professed. Popular wisdom would translate it in this way: "a new broom sweeps well while an old ass cannot trot."

-It is self evident that these general criteria are valuable not only for entrance into the monastic life and perseverance in this way, but also for the entrance of the monk and nun into eternal life.

Admission

-The discernment for admission into the monastic life is not easy. The difficulty is sometimes used to justify our many mistakes. The motivations that draw someone to enter the monastery are often numerous, both natural and supernatural.

-It is difficult to discern the action of Christ in the complexity of the felt attraction. It is easy to think that all attractions to a deep and perhaps permanent life of prayer indicate a vocation to the monastic life. But the failure of many persons who were consecrated in other forms of life caused us to question ourselves on this manner of thinking.

-The ancient wisdom of the Church, contained in the new Code of Canon Law reminds us that the consecrated life requires a special vocation. *Certain Christian faithful are specially called to this state by God so that they may enjoy a special gift in the life of the Church* (CIC 574, 2). To say "special" is the same as saying "rare" or infrequently. In fact, among the baptized, less than one in a thousand are called to this way of life. Even lesser are called to the monastic life. Perhaps we are not happy to hear this, but we should admit that monks and nuns are the *rara avis*, in the Church. They are rare bird.

-Consequently, it is important to seriously examine the possibility of a divine call to the monastery. In many cases, professional help will be necessary to discern the unconscious, more or less selfish, motives which prevent someone from making a relatively free choice. This truth faces us with a difficult question: whether or not to give a person, or all persons, the

opportunity of a psychological test at the beginning of the vocational process.

-A Cistercian vocation is a gift of God to a particular individual and to the Church. Hence the first of the Criteria in the discernment of this vocation must be a strong conviction within the person that God is calling him to this Cistercian community at this time.

-This conviction will greatly help the novice or junior professed to accept the sacrifices and sufferings intrinsic to a Cistercian vocation with happiness and with a reasonable degree of good health. On the other hand, if the brother is discontented with significant aspects of Cistercian life in this community or if he has repeated health problems requiring frequent exemptions from daily monastic life, the presence of a Cistercian vocation may be doubted.

-A whole-hearted commitment to prayer and work is central to our life. It is the primary task of the superior, novice master and dean of juniors to encourage, foster and evaluate this commitment. Prayer is fostered, above all, by fidelity to its two forms, namely, liturgical and personal prayer, and is evaluated in its fruits of humility and charity. A mature responsibility for the material upkeep and financial support of the abbey involves understanding of the place that work plays in the balance of the Cistercian day, an appreciation of the sacred nature of monastic labor, and a reverence for the material goods of the monastery.

-Since the vocation is also given to the Church as a whole, the superior, as the one who holds the place of Christ in the monastery, has the final responsibility for deciding, with the brother himself, if God is calling him to this life here. The superior is assisted in this process of discernment by the novice master, the dean of juniors, and the community.

-It presupposes that at the time of his entrance into the monastery the brother appeared to have the basic physical and psychological aptitudes for our life and a sound motivation.

-The focus of this discernment is to discover how the brother is progressing in the vocation. It is a review of his on-going adjustment to monastic life in general and, concretely, to our community. Thus at the time of simple profession the novice should have the skills and disposition necessary to enter more fully into the life of the community in both its communal and its contemplative dimensions. By the time of solemn profession the brother should have given solid signs that our life will be something connatural and joyful for him, not a burden too heavy for him to bear peacefully.

-The following more specific questions will be useful in determining this: How is he giving himself to the essential elements of Cistercian life, for example, Liturgical and personal prayer, lectio, work, obedience, separation from society, fraternal relations, sharing of goods and personal poverty, & asceticism?

-How is his experience of our life affecting him? **Physically**, is his general health remaining reasonably good? **Psychologically**, is he showing adequate emotional maturity to live and grow without undue strain? **Spiritually**, is he continuing to interiorize Christian and monastic values, with increasing discretion in living them concretely?

-Experience in the area of monastic vocational discernment has allowed us to establish some signs which show that the vocation comes from God. These signs or criteria are the following:

- 1) To sincerely desire to embrace the life of the community as a means to find God.
- 2) A humble docility, founded on faith, which allows one to learn how to live as a monk or nun.
- 3) The capacity to live in solitude without marginalizing oneself, as well as the capacity to live in solidarity without dependency.
- 4) Physical, mental and affective health to live this life in "a fruitful way."

-Another important criteria is the cenobitic life. It is especially with these helps that we can more easily ascertain the authenticity of an applicant's search for God. Let us not forget that St. Benedict wrote his Rule for *that strong kind of monks: the cenobites* (RB 1, 3).

-A sincere love for a concrete community, despite its weaknesses and failures, is a good place to begin. Likewise, another good sign is the "desire to learn" which is translated into a docility in following the given instructions. The one who has a know it all attitude will probably end up in.... Finally, relationships say a lot about a person's motivations.

-Concerning a person's psychological health, it is most often recommended that the person have a personality assessment with a competent professional. The necessary affective maturity for entrance would mean that a person is:

- 1) Emotionally stable
- 2) Can identify peacefully with his or her gender
- 3) Has the capacity to be receptive to others who are different
- 4) Open to a fruitfulness that goes beyond bodily or corporal fecundity/fertility.

-What does it mean to identify peacefully one's own gender? Dom Bernardo is leaving aside the situation of an erotic drive towards persons of the same gender. This phenomenon is common enough when passing from a family milieu to a community milieu. The sudden lack of family affectivity becomes channeled to persons in the community. This is a passing phenomenon, and even if it repeats itself from time to time, it has nothing to do with the homosexuality we are going to speak about. This orientation and reorientation of affection is usually more common among women, but this does not imply that it is not also present among men.

-Our problem can be approached in these terms: How do we discern the vocation of persons who present homosexual or lesbian tendencies? When we speak of discernment, we are already supposing that there are persons in this situation who can truly be called by the Lord to the monastic life. And that not only are they called, but they have given an affirmative response to this call to follow the Lord in our way of life.

-This subject often solicits some feelings of nervousness. Many men and women suffer deeply from their homosexuality and feel rejected on account of it. Persons who feel they have a homosexual orientation will live this out in a variety of ways. Some will live it out clandestinely with deep feelings of shame and rejection. Others have managed to accept their identity serenely and confidently. This sexual and gender integration is of primary importance, for homosexuals as well as heterosexuals.

-We can begin with one basic criterion: Those who have not managed to master homosexual tendencies will not be admitted to the religious life and the same should be said about those who have not managed to "master" their heterosexual attractions (Directives on Formation for those in Religious Institutes, 39). "Master" in this case implies not only an effort of the will, but also a freedom that has been gradually acquired with regard to this tendency so that it causes less and less problems in the person's life, and allows them to accomplish the duties of this state without excessive stress nor the monopolization of attention in a compulsive or permanent manner.

-If there is really a self mastery and a sincere attraction to the monastic life, the following must be in place:

1) A degree of maturity and the owning of one's proper gender. We should note that such maturity is harder to attain in a primarily masculine or feminine context.

2) To what extent has the father or mother image, which can often be negative or dominating, been clarified so that there can be a relationship with authority and obedience?

- 3) The Capacity to identify and order feelings of jealousy and the need for support in the affective domain so that one can live in peace and allow others to live in peace?
- 4) Motivation of the will to embrace celibacy as a life choice in milieu which is exclusively masculine (or feminine) and therefore, requires greater effort.
- 5) Capacity for encounters with young persons of another sex.

-One could think that this careful discernment reflects a homophobic or discriminating mentality. The truth is just the opposite. The person who has homosexual tendencies is, above and before all else, a human person. The respect that this person deserves implies that we offer help and expose with truth and charity the difficulties that he/she will meet with regards to relationships in community.

-A climate which denies or hides this situation really prevents the acknowledgment and integration of this tendency and causes repression, guilt and other pathologies. The homosexual condition, when helped, can be accepted and integrated. This requires an effort, just as does the integration of affectivity and sexuality in all heterosexual persons.

-In this context we should say a word on lesbianism, feminine homosexuality or the feminine sexual orientation toward another person of the same sex. Experience shows us that it is more socially acceptable than masculine homosexuality, perhaps because it is more oriented to affective rather than physical pursuits. This means that the vocational discernment has to be more attentive to the quality of relationship. Something could also be said about homophobia: heterosexual persons who do not have a well integrated openness to other persons, as well as the case of homosexual persons who deny their condition.

-In conclusion let us say that the Superior's decision in the admission of an applicant is determined through the process of discernment. No one has a right to be admitted and only a fool would try to impose their vocation on the community. To be excessively convinced of one's call and try to impose it is a sign that one is not called.

-Moreover, in keeping with our tradition, all applicants *shall not be granted an easy entrance, and let them be told all the hard and rugged ways by which the journey to God is made* (RB 58: 1, 8).

The Novitiate

-The criteria mentioned above for admission are also valid for admission to the novitiate. During this stage, the criterion should be applied to one

thing: **progress**. This progress should be verified concerning both human and the spiritual dimensions. Human growth should be integrated on the level of the intelligence, the will and the affective level.

-Spiritual progress, on the other hand, manifests itself in the interpersonal relationship with Our Lord Jesus. This is of primary importance. We need to remember that the aim of monastic life is nothing else than this communion with the Lord and with everything in Him. Our Constitution says that *it is only through the experience of personal love for the Lord Jesus that the specific gifts of the Cistercian vocation can flower. Only if the brothers prefer nothing whatever to Christ will they be happy to persevere in a life that is ordinary, obscure and laborious.* He alone brings us all to eternal life!

-If this two-fold progress can be verified, we will see that the novice is able to give himself/herself to Christ and to the community by means of temporary profession.

Temporary Profession

-Now we will have a look at the situation of the temporary professed preparing himself for solemn profession.

-Their progress, during the three years of profession, should be verified in relationship to prayer, work, ability to take correction, fraternal relationships and relationships with superiors, control of emotions and temperament, and human maturity. All that is required here is a sign of cooperation with the grace of the vocation that one has received.

-At the end of this period of temporary profession, the simple professed freely asks the Superior to make his solemn profession. The criteria which should be applied to this very important moment of monastic formation revolves around three qualities:

- 1) Openness to the community
- 2) Human maturity
- 3) Experience in the life of prayer

-Regarding openness to the community there is much to say: is he open or not? All the members of the community, having a good sense, can answer this question: Am I well integrated into the community?

-Human maturity is a complex reality. This is the reason why someone who is intellectually mature but immature affectively, is immature. However, someone who is affectively mature, even if less mature intellectually, is more mature than in the case above. That is to say, affective maturity is of

primary importance. Experience shows us that some degree of affective maturity is indispensable for inner freedom and to live in community.

-Affectivity is that human capacity which allows us to experience agreeable and disagreeable feelings and emotions, and includes emotional reactions which affect the body and the psyche. Persons who enjoy a certain affective maturity usually respond rather than react. This is the reason why:

- 1) They support themselves well. "If it does not happen today, it will happen tomorrow."
- 2) They have control of their inner urges and outer pressures. "In spite of everything else, there is freedom."
- 3) They adapt well to changes. "A peaceful and unified heart easily finds rest."
- 4) They are self affirming while at the same time keeping their importance in perspective. They know that they are not the only persons having these rights.
- 5) They know how to be flexible. They are blessed because they are not broken when they are bent. "Things that are ordinarily stiff will eventually break."
- 6) They are capable of giving and receiving their own selves and their time. They are available when you need them. They experience joy from receiving another and in self-giving.
- 7) They accept their faults without shame. "This is my biggest faults" and that suffices.
- 8) They are capable of renouncing for an important reason. "I let go of this because I prefer that."
- 9) They accept things in a healthy good humor. "Their sense of humor un-stresses them."

-It is more difficult to establish criteria to verify progress in the spiritual life, and more concretely, in the deepening of the life of prayer. In any case, in all our communities, there are brothers or sisters to whom we can apply these words: *All those precepts which formerly he had not observed without fear, he will now begin to keep by reason of that love, without any effort, as though naturally and by habit. No longer will his motive be the fear of hell, but rather the love of Christ, good habit and delight in virtues which the Lord will deign to show forth by the Holy Spirit, in His servant now cleansed from vice and sin* (RB 7, 68-69).

-So what do we see in these monks who are purified of their vices and sins? Their union and friendship with the Lord shows us that their spiritual and monastic behavior:

- a) Flows rather than being laborious. It comes from the heart rather than from external influences.
- b) Is open rather than closed. He exposes himself to the Spirit and tries not to clip the Spirit's wings.
- c) Is self evaluative rather than trying to justify itself. He prays through his own discernment and accepted the discernment of others over himself.
- d) Takes risks rather than looking for assurances. With confidence he moves and dance with life.
- e) Is unified more than diversified. A lot can be reduced to little, and the little to a single thing.
- f) It is more active than private. He commits himself and then forgets himself.
- g) It is humble more than it is dogmatic. He has many questions and only few answers.

-Religious and psychological maturity usually goes hand in hand. Maturity comes as a person integrates all the aspects of his personality. Persons who are really balanced and humanly sound, have better possibilities to live a monastic experience that is deep and whole. It is true, as it is in all of human life, that there are exceptions. But the exception does not define the rule. However, nothing is impossible with God.