

Between Time and Eternity

JOHN OF THE ANGELS ON *The Conquest of the Divine Kingdom*

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*“You will also know that the spirit is in this world
midway between time and eternity,
and if you elect to walk with exterior things and are converted to time,
that is, if you become temporal by loving temporal things,
you will, without doubt, forget eternity.”*

JUAN DE LOS ANGELES was born Juan Martínez in Oropesa, near Avila, in the year 1536, some twenty-one years after the birth of Avila's most famous personage, Saint Teresa of Jesus. The conspiracy of silence which enveloped John of the Angels after his death in 1609 has removed any certainty from statements concerning the time and place of his birth and from those concerning his early years. But circumstantial evidence points strongly to the Avilan beginnings.

It appears that Juan Martinez entered the University of Alcalá at the age of seventeen to study Greek and Hebrew and to perfect his knowledge of Latin. After the University, he joined the Franciscan Order, probably in the Province of San Gabriel, and by 1562 we find him professed as one of the Discalced Franciscans under the name of “de los Angeles.” The following ten years were spent under the severe disciplines of monastic life, although he was permitted to further his studies by visits to masters, including Friar Luis de Leon at Salamanca. By 1572 he was delivering his first addresses as a Professor of the Order and preacher in the Royal Court in Madrid, having been named Confessor to the Royal discalced the previous year. By his mid-thirties, Fray Juan de los Angeles

was already a power in that world which was to count Saint John of the Cross, Saint Teresa of Avila and Luis of Leon as contemporary products of the Spanish mystical genius.

Shortly after the founding of a new Franciscan monastery in the city of Zamora in 1578, John of the Angels was sent as Official Predicator or Preacher. It was in the quiet of this monastery that he composed his first writings—a series of devotional poems; and he seems to have at least begun here his first published work: *Triunfos del Amor de Dios* (*Triumphs of the Love of God*). In spite of favourable notices this work did not become popular and it remained for another study to establish him as a major writer of his period.

This latter work is associated with his life in Seville. He was sent in 1589 to found a house in this bustling city on the Guadalquivir river, then a major port for the trade of the Indies and a place which so reeked of wealth and fleshpots that Saint Teresa was appalled by the atmosphere. But Fray Juan was much taken by the walled gardens, the orange blossoms, the fishing fleets anchored beside tall galleons returned from Mexico and Panama. He entered his duties as Provincial Commisary of the Province with great skill and energy. Soon the new foundation was completed and he was invited to speak in the major pulpits of Seville. But such was his eloquence and popularity that in time he aroused the envy and jealousies of the established clergy there and he found himself the object of ill-will, slander and petty persecutions. For the next three years he continued his Seville assignment, bringing to a successful conclusion the development of the Church of San Diego de Sevilla. During this time, he began work on his *Diálogos de la Conquista del Espiritual y Secreto Reino de Dios*. A selection from this work has been chosen for the present English translation.

Not long after the celebrations marking the completion of San Diego de Sevilla, John of the Angels left the Andalusian capital—probably late in 1592 or early the following year. The violent arguments which had marked his stay involved not only other Franciscan groups but his own discalced brothers and concerned principally matters of jurisdiction and precedence. It was the sort of bitter experience shared by Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross in Andalusia. The Franciscan father fled Seville to the comparative peace of Portugal where he was welcomed by the friars there and by the Archduke of Austria, then governor of the territory. He now had opportunity to complete the Dialogues. Some time during 1593, he returned to Madrid and received approval of his new work by his superiors. It was another two years, however, before the

book could be published because Juan de los Angeles was immediately called upon to make visits of inspection to five provinces as distant as Valencia. Most of this visitation was upon foot and under the most difficult and fatiguing circumstances that left no time to attend to matters of writing or publication. By 1595 he was again in Madrid where he saw to the printing of the Dialogues. They were dedicated to Cardinal Alberto, Archduke of Austria, who had welcomed him so cordially to Portugal after his tribulations in Seville.

The new publication was accepted by the public and, in contrast to his earlier *Triunfos*, sold so well that all the early editions were quickly exhausted. If Juan de los Angeles had written nothing but the Dialogues, his position among sixteenth century religious writers would have been assured.

Three more years of administrative responsibility in Madrid and Guadalajara ended when he was appointed to the office of General Visitor. Ironically, we find him by the middle of the year 1598 again in Seville. But this time those who had caused him such grief six years before were now bound to render him respect and obedience and to accept him as judge and arbitrator in questions involving the Provinces of Andalusia. Those same brothers who had quarrelled over jurisdiction of the house established by Fray Juan on his first visit, now accepted an agreement which he forwarded to the Pope. Other disputes between the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of Seville were also resolved. After a period of rest in the convent of San Bernardino, during which he worked on his *Comentarios sobre el Cantar de los Cantares* (*Commentaries on the Song of Songs*), he left for Rome on matters concerning the Order in the spring of 1599. He then travelled throughout Italy and France, returning to Madrid in 1600.

He resumed charge of his Franciscan house in that city and devoted himself to revising his *Triunfos* for republication. This consisted largely in condensing and clarifying the earlier work and the result was that three editions were made within a few years and it was translated into French. The revision was brought out under the title *Lucha Espiritual y Amorosa entre Dios y el Alma* (*Spiritual Battle between God and the Soul*).

In the next two years, events occurred which, though they brought the highest honors and responsibilities to Juan de los Angeles, were to prove disastrous to his personal life and peace of mind in the last years. In June of 1601 he was elected Minister, Preceptor, Definitor and Guardian of his Province, with his residence in Madrid. The notice refers to him as "a man of great note, of fine

letters and prudence.”¹ He quickly set about the work of his new office, traveling constantly throughout the large area under his administration, and adjudicating disputes, particularly those involving the secular and regular clergy. Then, early in the year 1602, he was given special honours. He received appointment as Confessor to the Royal Discalced of Madrid with a special commission to attend the Princess, Sister Margarita de la Cruz. At the same time, Empress Maria of Austria made him Preicator of her royal chapel. For all his abilities, the combination of offices placed an impossible burden upon his time and energy. He found it necessary to make a choice of responsibilities. Pressed with obedience by his superiors not to offend the Royal Family, he renounced his office as Provincial Head.

His clerical brothers were outraged and left the following record in the official Chronicles of the Province: “The Provincial Friar Juan de los Angeles, did not carry out nor even begin to complete his three-year term of office because the most serene Empress, sister of the King, Don Felipe II, made him her Preicator and the Most Reverend General Friar Francisco de Sosa instituted him as Confessor to the discalced ladies of the Royal and very religious convent of Madrid. He had more liking for preaching and confessing than for walking on long journeys. He renounced his Provincial office after a year and a half.”² A later biographer defends him, however, in these terms: “Had he not given repeated proof of sacrifice in the many journeys he had made?... Great men, such as captivate and are admired by those of noble heart, awaken jealousy and envy in timid souls... Although they did not resort to imprisoning him, as with Friar Luis de Leon... it was not insignificant the injury they did him by painting him an unworthy when he was so very virtuous... Were not too many honours heaped upon this one Friar, leaving other prelates and men neglected in their convents? The envious then tried to break this great cedar tree, stripping from it even the foliage. And since they could not compete with him for earthly honours, they contested those of heaven so that his virtue might be clouded with slurs of imperfection and none would kneel before his image nor venerate him as a saint. And in part they realized their objective... With a conspiracy of silence they concealed all that could have exalted him, concealing with such a mask that none could know him nor honor him for his virtues.”³

1 Quoted in Sala’s Introduction to the 1912 Madrid edition of *Diálogos de la Conquista del Espiritual y Secreto Reino de Dios* . xxix).

2 Ibid (p. xxxi).

3 Ibid (p. xxxii).

Fray Juan de los Angeles remained with the Royal Discalced and the Empress in his declining years, devoting himself to the completion of some of his finest mystical studies. To the Empress he dedicated his *Tratado Utilísimo de Consideraciones Espirituales sobre el Cantar de los Cantares de Salomón* (*Most Useful Treatise on Spiritual Considerations concerning the Song of Songs of Solomon*). Although the work dealt only with the first two sections of the Song of Songs, it was a long text. After two years of sale in Spain it was brought out in a French edition and held in great esteem in Europe. He also wrote a series of essays to complete the full text of his *Manual de Vida Perfecta* (*Manual of the Perfect Life*), which forms the second part of his *Conquista*. In his last days he was working on a *Treatise on the Mass*, *Tratado sobre la Misa*, editing *Vergel del Anima Religiosa* (*Orchard of Religious Enthusiasm*) and revising works which the Royal Board wished to print.

We are told that, despite his Royal patronage, Fray Juan led no life of ease. While he was confessor to many of the aristocracy of Madrid, he devoted himself tirelessly to the poor and his door was always open to the most humble peasant at all hours. He continued to accept, even in his last illness, much of the hard work and obedience of the monastic life. His last writing, *Libro de la Pasión de Jesús* (*Book of the Passion of Jesus*) was written for a father of the Franciscan Order. Only the first of its four parts was printed, the remainder being lost. He died in the house of the Royal Discalced in December of 1609, beloved of all whom he had served, but somehow never forgiven by his contemporary religious.

What can be said of his place in history? Though he was rejected in his day, the 18th century Franciscans considered him a most venerable man and proposed setting in motion the machinery of beatification in Rome. The Spanish critic Pablo Rouselot hails Juan de los Angeles as the psychologist and moralist of the Spanish mystics. Menéndez y Pelayo in the nineteenth century wrote, "I confess that he is one of my favorite authors: it is not possible to read him without loving him and without being pulled along by his marvellous sweetness, as angelical as his name."⁴ The Franciscan scholar, Mir, in his foreword to the *Dialogues* described Fray Juan as "one of the most illustrious theologians of his age... He exhibits all the greatness and sublimity of... the mystic doctrine of the Franciscan school."⁵

4 Ibid (p. liv).

5 Ibid (p. lv).

Considering the high estimates of his life and work, how can we account for the obscurity which has enveloped the man since his death? Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross were themselves involved in the most bitter disputes and knew the humiliation of rejection and persecution. Saint Teresa, at least, was also on familiar terms with royalty and nobility. Was it that John of the Angels exhibited no miracles? One of his biographers, however, refers to his “miraculous deeds.”⁶ Was it that he was not tested and refined by the type of hellish suffering endured by the Carmelite saints? Yet we are told of his arduous journeys, his severe illness, his tireless devotion to the poor. Or was it that the Franciscan order did not suffer the terrible and dramatic upheaval that characterized the Carmelite reform in sixteenth century Spain, bringing both disgrace and fame to the leaders? Juan de los Angeles had no advocate after death like P. Crisóstomo who spent his last years praising and preserving the name of that same John of the Cross whom he had so cruelly persecuted in life. Nor was Fray Juan asked under penalty of obedience to write his “Life” as happened with Saint Teresa of Avila.

Whether Juan de los Angeles remains an unheralded saint or simply another distinguished member of his order, his place in the literature of Spanish mysticism is assured. The noted scholar and authority on the religious writings of sixteenth century Spain, Allison Peers, says, “In him, better than in any of his contemporaries, may be studied the psychology of mysticism.”⁷

Fray Juan is thoroughly conversant with the various currents of mystical thought of his day, including, of course, the lives and writings of his distinguished countrymen, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and Luis de Leon. He discusses fluently the works of the Flemish Ruysbroeck, the German Tauler and others.⁸ In common with these mystics, he stresses contemplative disciplines leading to Divine Union.

It may seem to modern readers that he devalues love and service to the world and mankind by his advocacy of the interior life. Such argument might well seem to him to be beside the point. Service to mankind is, he would hold, an inevitable and natural expression of the virtue of Charity which he so stresses. But Charity is not to be found in that heart or mind bound by or obsessed with

6 Ibid (e.g. p. xlv).

7 *The Mystics of Spain* (p. 19).

8 Angel González Palencia, in his prologue to the 1946 Madrid edition of *Diálogos de la Conquista del Reino de Dios* has a detailed analysis of German and other influences upon the thought of Juan de los Angeles (pp. 24-30).

creatures, as creatures. Only when fellow creatures are recognized as not different from oneself (because they share the same Divine presence) is it possible to serve them truly and without hypocrisy. And as John of the Angels sees it, this recognition comes only through Divine grace working in the heart which has been emptied of all contrary concerns and competing loyalties. “In order that God may dwell in a soul He asks that it first be emptied of the love of all creatures, including itself.” His conclusion on works: “It is not possible for me to be essentially and genuinely good and yet for God not to be pleased and proud of my works... nor, if I were of bad and leprous interior could my works avoid being themselves leprous and therefore not pleasing to God.”⁹ Thus it seems clear that, although his enemies denounced him for choosing to serve as Confessor to the Royal convent of Madrid in preference to the administrative activities of the Provincial office, Fray Juan does not reject the active life—which would indeed be contrary to the tradition of his own Order. He insists rather that all works be offered to God and judged not by their apparent outer qualities but rather, whether large or small, by their inner motivation. He holds that without a continuous inner awareness of divine imperatives, the actions of the natural man are soon conformed to the ends of the Devil.

The Conquest of the Divine Kingdom is possibly the best single source for the theology of Juan de los Angeles. And the message and the content of the ten dialogues of the treatise are summarized in the first. Of it the author says, “I advise the religious and devout reader that in this one dialogue is the sum of all mystic theology and that it will serve as the fountain of everlasting life and the true road to perfect union with the Divine.”¹⁰

9 *Diálogos* 1:2.

10 *Diálogos* 1:6. Text: The scriptural citations in parentheses are precisely as given in Sala’s 1912 edition of the 1595 original text. Citations which follow the parentheses are those of the translators, indicating more precise references to the King James version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated. Other notes, identifying personages, etc. are by the translators.

**Concerning the interior or centred life of the soul or
Kingdom of God. On the harmony of Man and the true
understanding of the commandment of love.**

(A dialogue between friar and master, beginning with the friar alone
inside the monastery. The conversation later moves to the walled garden.)

Friar: If the desire to be perfect were perfection, I would be perfect in every kind of virtue—for I spend all my life in good intentions and desires. In the secular state my desires and intentions were to enter into the religious life where God might be served and my soul might benefit. His Majesty heard them, in his infinite mercy, as he usually hears the desires of his poor, and made me one of them in the clergy. And although I confess to be, up to the present, lacking in works, I am not lacking in those earlier desires, and other new ones—and the foremost of all is to be inwardly that which I appear to be on the outside. I am ashamed and confounded greatly that the world should judge me to be perfect and holy, when in the eyes of God there is more in me to be pitied than to be envied. Indeed, how many persons have desired the same thing in the same manner as I, but surprised by sudden and unexpected death, now burn and will burn forever in hell? And why shouldn't one who, like myself, with his hands clasped piously to his breast, consumes and ends his life in mere desiring, fear the same end? In truth I must be that unfortunate type of soul of whom Solomon spoke, "The lazy man wants but does not achieve."¹¹ I say unfortunate, because from wanting and not having is formed and solidified a desire which, far from causing to happen that which is desired, invites the penalty of the indifferent, which is to have God belch them from his stomach and expel them as vomit.¹² This is the state that the Saints refer to as "insensibility"—in which neither the consideration of heaven delights, nor that of hell frightens, where neither beneficences inspire, nor wounds pain... But, God of my soul, what do I see? Is it by chance my Master who comes here? It is he without doubt. I am not sorry, although I would be just as glad, had he not heard me.

Master: God save you, Friar Desirous.

Friar: Your health be equally enduring.

¹¹ (Eccles. 4; Prov. 13), Ecclesiastes 4:5; Proverbs 13:4. Although some of John of the Angels' quotes are paraphrases of his sources, the translators, here and in the rest of the text, have indicated them all with quotation marks for the sake of clarity.

¹² (Apoc. 3). Apocalypse 3:16.

Master: What soliloquies are these which you have been carrying on with yourself, all alone, this afternoon? It pleases me to see you so desirous of your spiritual improvement, and to realize that it is not by accident, but by divine inspiration and the command of heaven that you were given the name, “Friar Desirous.” Indeed, upon careful consideration, we see that a great part of good health is in desiring it. The holy Prophet said, “My soul desired to obtain your judgments at all times.”¹³ The Angel called Daniel a “man of desires.”¹⁴ Ejaculatory prayers, which, as the Saints say, penetrate the heavens, also are desires. The church celebrates those desires, which the Virgin, swollen with God, had of seeing Him already born into the world and in her arms. We celebrate these on the day of the “O”, and all the prayers in those seven Antiphons, before the birth of the Lord, signify the desires which the Holy Fathers had that God would send the Desired One to the people.¹⁵ If this is true, as it is, why are you so disconsolate, since your desires are so many and so good?

Friar: Because those saintly desires grow within me along with countless imperfections. A thousand good intentions are accompanied by innumerable faults. No sooner has a healthy thought burst forth in my soul, than conversation and association with friends cast it aside. And following the course of the insensible ones (who are numerous) I recognize myself as a man of religion only in my robe, for in other respects I am a man of the times. The profession that I have adopted is very rigid, and I am very lax;¹⁶ it announces me as dead to the world, yet I live only for the world; it denies me and prohibits all that is flesh and blood, yet I am a carnal man given over to sin; it commands me to be poor, yet I flee from poverty; and finally, all my good desires disappear in flower, and at each step I find myself caught up in bad deeds.

13 (Psal. 118). Psalm 119: 20.

14 (Dan. 7). The Vulgate has *vir desideriorum* in Dan. 10:11 and 19. The Douay version has “man of desires”, the King James version has “a man greatly beloved”, the Jerusalem Bible has “a man specially chosen”. Modern Spanish versions of the Vulgate have “muy agradable (a Dios)”. Juan de los Angeles’ point is that the Bible speaks of a man’s desires for the spiritual vision. If he is correct, later translations have missed the point.

15 The Seven “O”s or great antiphons are responses sung during Advent at vespers from 17 December to 23 December.

16 (Rom. 7). Romans 7:14.

Master: Do not continue with this conversation, for it appears that today you are overcome by melancholy. Let us go out a while, if you like, into the garden.

Friar: We leave at an opportune time. Do you perhaps have something you wish to discuss privately with me?

Master: Yes I have, and I want your complete attention; because that which I wish to explain does not permit divided attention, nor a man distracted and beside himself.

Friar: You have always spoken to me with honesty and without flattery, but you never cautioned me as you do now.

Master: You have probably never heard from my mouth that which I wish to say to you today.

Friar: It seems that you come as one sent by God in response to my desire, which has been to find someone who might speak to my heart and teach me things that are substantial, interior, and spiritual; for that which is commonly discussed in these clays, even among great men of saintly repute, is for the greater part exterior and of very little satisfaction to the soul.

Master: We are of the same thought, except that I am more concerned with the barbaric talk that prevails in the world on the subject of virtue than you, who were born yesterday. If you examine the matter carefully, every effort is devoted to forming the exterior man and to fulfilling the wishes of those who are so formed. He who remembers the interior and divine man is rarely found. Those who waste their time in wrong efforts should realize that the completed interior man, without any effort composes and orders the exterior man, and not the other way around. I have read that Plato made this prayer regularly to God: *Amice Deus, da mihi, ut intus pulcher efficiar; et quae exterius sunt, intimis sint amica*; which is to say, "Friend God, make me appear beautiful to you in the interior, and make my exterior correspond and be in harmony with my interior."¹⁷

17 The passage referred to is apparently from the end of Plato's *Phaedrus*, which in Jowett's translation (279) reads: "Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who haunt this place, give me beauty in the inward soul; and may the outward and inward man be at one..."

Friar: That truly is a most devout prayer and more fitting for a Christian than for a philosopher.

Master: What the holy prophet says of the soul as the wife of Christ in the 45th Psalm also applies here directly and is of even greater authority. The prophet, having described with elegant metaphors the beauties and virtues of the celestial husband, of his admirable disposition and dignity, turns to the wife and says: “That which the husband has by nature, the wife has, in the same greatness, by grace, but in her it is hidden, there within, where only the eyes of God see it and approve; although not so hidden that it fails to give some outward signs.”¹⁸ In the Song of Songs, it is written that the wife, who is described as dark-skinned and slovenly, while not denying her slovenliness and dark skin, confesses that with her walks the beauty of the wife of Christ.¹⁹ “I am”, she says, “like the tents of Cedar and the curtains of Solomon, on the outside black and lacking brilliance (through exposure to the sun and the buffeting of the seasons), but in the secret and interior parts filled with great riches and soft and precious fragrance.” This interior should in all ways be good, as Saint Paul says.²⁰ Essentially we should seem fragrant to God.

Thus there are men who are wanton, sensual and profane yet wherever they go they leave the soft odour and fragrance of amber and musk in which they seem to be embalmed. But if you happen to examine them closely they are vile in their persons. Just so, you will find many whose sole business is to give a good odor of virtue and holiness to men, while forgetting that principally they owe this to God. These men teach themselves to bow the head, compose the hands, to be modest and lower the eyes, incline the shoulders, speak evenly and in a devoted tone, measure their steps, and hang the rosary with its skull from the waist, and other things of this kind. They do not try to develop the interior man nor to mortify the passions, nor walk within themselves in the truly virtuous life. How little Saint Paul cared if the outward man became corrupt and was slovenly!²¹ He knew very well that from this very corruption and discomposure

18 (Psal. 44). Psalms 45:13.

19 (Cant. 1). Song of Solomon 1:15.

20 (II Cor. 2). II Cor. 2:15.

21 (II Cor. 4). II Cor. 4:16–18.

came the reformation and adornment of the inward man. They who really try to be perfect, imitate nature, which, not forgetting to form the exterior parts of the animal, attends first to the formation of the heart. False saints, like fraudulent works of art, are of such nature that they are not concerned with the interior substance but only with that which can be seen: the emaciated face, weeping where they can be seen, sighing in Church and making gestures (a thing loathed by God), and confessing and taking Holy Communion often because of pride and even because of the temporal benefit that is found in these exercises.

II

Friar: Then is it not good to do these things which you denounce?

Master: I do not condemn the good exterior example, nor the works in which are sought only the glory of God and edification of one's fellow man: because God wanted works to be such that men should see them and that they should glorify the Father who is in Heaven.²² What I criticize is the detaining of oneself in these things and giving all one's attention to them, not because they are for the glory of God, but rather because they are symbols of holiness. At times such works are so full of self interest that His Majesty would be better honoured if we should abandon them for he is not honoured by our doing them. In Amos, these fearful words are written: "Loathsome and detestable I consider your celebrations. Those perfumes and incense that you offer to me in your assemblies offend me and serve as stench to my nostrils. Do not bother to burn animals nor make other offerings to me, for I do not care to see them nor turn my eyes to them; I absolve you of the vows you have made for me that you might remain in my memory, because they do not please me. Clear away this confusion of voices and the notes of your violins, for you torment me with them."²³ These are the admonitions of God our Lord, who reproves all the services made in his church if they do not hold life, if they lack the essential thing, which is the spirit and truth

22 (Math. 5). Mathew 5: 16.

23 (Amos 5). Amos 5: 23 Douay: "Take away from me the tumult of thy songs: and I will not hear the canticles of thy harp." King James Version: "Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols." Jerusalem; "Let me have no more of the din of your chanting, no more of your strumming on harps." Modern Spanish version of Vulgate: "Lejos de mi vuestros tumultuosos himnos; yo no escucharé las canciones al son de vuestra lira."

with which he wishes to be served and adored.²⁴ Saint Caesarius recounts that, while musicians sang in a church with great talent and harmony, a saint present at that time saw a demon high up in the main chapel, who, with the left hand, held an open sack and with the right was catching the voices and putting them in it until he had filled it. When the service was finished, the musicians (as they were accustomed) began among themselves to praise their motet and the organ music. “How beautiful was the cornet!” said one; another, “How well so-and-so sang; what rich trills he made with his throat!” etc. The servant of God, who heard the conversation, approached them and said: “You have sung very well, for the sack is full.” Surprised at this, and having learned why he said it, they were very confused and ashamed at how much they were bragging.²⁵

Friar: Was there nothing else in which to capture such soft voices than a sack?

Master: No, because the most harmonious voices in the world, if they are without spirit, are as straw in God’s eyes; and so he commanded that they be put in a sack as straw is collected for beasts.²⁶ And I want you to know that the same thing which happened with those voices will be true for all corporal exercises if they lack the life which God bids that they have.

Friar: And what is that life?

Master: Listen, not to me, but to the divine contemplative Ruysbroeck whose carefully chosen words are these: “We must not so much attend to that which we do as to that which we truthfully are; because if we were good inwardly, in the intimacy of our souls, so would our works be good, and if in our most intimate interior we were just and right, so would our actions be just and right. Many attribute sanctity to doing; but they are not correct. If it can be explained in the following way, sanctity consists only in being, because no matter how saintly our works appear, they do not sanctify in themselves but only in as much as we are saintly and our works come from a holy interior or centre. So much only are

24 (loan. 4). St. John 4: 24.

25 “Cesario” refers to Caesarius of Heisterbach (1180-1240) a Cistercian monk of Cologne, who published a collection of stories, titled *Dialogus Miraculorum*, a work widely read during the Middle Ages.

26 (Isai. 58).

they holy, and no more. Therefore the holy centre sanctifies all that we do, be it eating, drinking, sleeping, praying, talking, macerating the flesh with fasting and other similar things which in themselves are not wrong, but good and natural. And he has the most saintly interior and centre who has the greatest love of God in his soul, and his works are more highly esteemed when the glory of God is more purely seen in them. Therefore, we should work with all care to make this intimate centre good and noble and to make our actions originate in it; because, without any doubt, in it is constituted the essence and blessedness of man. Those works which are virtuous are so only because of originating there, since the good spirit exalted through the love of God in turn exalts and perfects our works and makes them pleasing to His Majesty.”²⁷

These are the views of Ruysbroeck, who, in my judgement, wanted to say that God does not look at the quantity of our works nor does he care if they are grand, but that what God heeds is the spirit from which they come. This spirit gives them their quality and character and uplifts them in the extent to which the spirit itself is uplifted and elevated by the love of God and no more. Thus in the measure that this intimate part of our spirit is greater and more saintly, and that which we do cones forth essentially and with true concern from it, so much and no more is the deed agreeable and acceptable to God. This is what the divine Scripture signified when it said: “God looked at Abel and at his gifts, being first pleased with the person who made the sacrifice, and the sacrifice was accepted in accordance with the degree of acceptance of him who offered it.”²⁸ And that which was true of Abel is the same with all men of the world, whose works (in as much as they are a part of them) are accepted or not by God according to the degree to which they themselves are or are not accepted by the same God. In my soul divine love is planted, which is its life and that of all that I do. Therefore it is not possible for me to be essentially or genuinely good and yet for God not to be pleased and proud of my works, however few they may be, if, as has been said, these works carry as their end and goal, purely and without any consideration for my own benefit or comfort, His glory and honour. Nor, if I were of bad and leprous interior could my works avoid being themselves leprous and, there-

27 Jan Van Ruysbroeck (1293-1381) the Flemish mystic, was well known in Spain, where his works had been translated and published in 1552. The passages quoted here are from chapter IV of *The Book of the Twelve Virtues*.

28 (Genes. 3). Gen. 4:4.

fore, not pleasing to God. For it is written: “The gifts of evil men are not accepted by his Highness.”²⁹

III

Friar: What is this that you call the intimate part of the soul, which according to what Ruysbroeck has said should be the principal thing in us and to which we should always aspire?

Master: My answer to you is that until you have found within yourself that centre or intimate part you will not have known what the interior or essential life is, which is indeed what I desire you to know and experience; since afterwards there is no necessity of rules or documents in the spiritual life. All cease at that point; and the soul once there, God takes one’s hand and teaches one himself, which is the greatest blessing which can come to you in this life. As the Prophet said: “Blessed is he whom you, Lord, teach and to whom you give an understanding of your law.”³⁰

Friar: But, in the end, you have still left me with my ignorance.

Master: For the time being, yes. My intention in this bit of conversation is only to inspire you to walk within yourself and towards an essentially good life—one not built upon toothpicks, nor tied to the eyes of men, but regulated according to the consent of God and guided by his interior voice. Saint Gregory says: “He who does not hide and withdraw from exterior things, never penetrates the interior ones.”³¹ And he says moreover, that it is necessary to hide oneself in order to hear, and to hide oneself after having heard; because the soul which is separated from visible things perceives and contemplates invisible ones. Filled with the invisible, it scorns completely the visible and hears secretly the whisperings

29 (Eccl. 34). Ecclesiasticus 35: 12, Douay: “The most High approveth not the gifts of the wicked.” Modern Spanish version of Vulgate: “El Altísimo no acepta los dones de los impíos.”

30 (Psal. 93). Psalm 94:12.

31 Saint Gregory the Great (540–604), Pope from 590 to 604, established the papal system that prevailed through the Middle Ages. He wrote prolifically and his Dialogues appeared in several Spanish editions in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

of the divine word, because it knows softly and secretly the occult ways of its inspiration. All of which cannot be done by him who is not accustomed to living within himself in this divine and essential centre of his spirit, which properly speaking is the Kingdom of God, where He dwells in all His magnificence.³² And if I do not deceive myself, by this Kingdom is understood that which Christ says according to Saint Luke: “My kingdom is within you.”³³ And this was compared by Saint Matthew to the hidden treasure, which was hidden again by the one who found it, who after selling all his possessions, bought the field where it was hidden in order to dig in it in more privacy and in order to enjoy it more freely.³⁴

Friar: How can it be truthfully said that he hid the treasure, if it was already hidden?

Master: You know very little if you do not know this. It is clear that for the fortunate one who found the treasure, it had been hidden from him as from all, but after being found it was known to him and remained secret to the rest. And it is said that he hid it in order to conserve it, and that he renounced all he had in order to enjoy it.³⁵ This great good holds so much joy and consolation for him who finds it that putting aside with ease all those things that appear to give satisfaction in this world, he enters into solitude to mine and withdraw the gold which alone can enrich souls and liberate them from all misery and want. Oh, how few come upon this treasure which is so hidden! But this does not disturb me, for in the end it is a result of grace and no one by his natural efforts can attain it. Nor are you likely to find, even among many, anyone who can be persuaded that there is so much good within us. The holy Blois, Ruysbroeck, Tauler and others say that this centre of the soul is more fundamental and of greater measure than any of the three faculties or superior forces in it, because it is the origin and beginning of them all.³⁶ In itself, it is simple, essential and unchanging. It has no

32 (Rom. 14). Vulgate, Ps. 144:12: “*Gloria magnificentiae regni tui.*” Douay: “The glory of the magnificence of thy kingdom.”

33 (Luc. 17). Luke 17:21.

34 (Math. 13). Matthew 13:44.

35 cf. St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, II, 16: 13.

36 Francois Louis de Blois (Franciscus Ludovicus Blosius) (1506-1566) was a Benedictine whose works were widely translated and read in 16th century Europe. His *Institutio Spiritualis*, a book of spiritual instruction, was especially well known. Jan Van Ruysbroeck (see above note 17) expresses this thought in his *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage* (Ch. II). John Tauler (1300-1361), the Dominican

multiplicity, only unity. But within it are those faculties of understanding, memory and will.

Friar: You seem to be close to telling me what I desire so much to know.

Master: You would reasonably have expected that, by what has been said. Since we have arrived at that point (advising you first that it is the highest point that there is in spiritual life and is what you must keep in mind in order to go forward) you should know that the interior part of the soul is the simplest essence of it, stamped with the image of God, and called by some saints the center, by others the intimate, by others the apex of the spirit, by others the intellect. Saint Augustine called it the sum. More modern men call it the depth because it is the most interior and secret part, where there are no images of created things, but (as has been said) only the presence of the Creator. Here there is absolute tranquillity and absolute silence, because no representation of a created thing ever reaches to this center, and according to Augustine we are thereby godly or divine, or so conformed to God that wisdom considers us gods.³⁷ This bare interior plain, without figures, is elevated over all created things, and over all the feelings and forces of the spirit. It transcends time and place, and here the soul remains in a perpetual union and bond with God, its source. When this intimate part (which the eternal and non-created light continually illuminates and makes clear) is manifested and revealed to man, it it greatly inspires him and makes him compassionate. This was said of him who found the treasure, who as a result of the ecstatic joy which he received sold all his possessions and bought the land. Oh noble and divine temple, from which God never leaves, where the holy Trinity dwells and one enjoys eternity! One single perfect conversion to God in this intimate place is of greater importance than many other exercises, whether interior or exterior, and it can restore ten or more lost years. Here bubbles forth a fountain of live water which leaps toward eternal life.³⁸ It is of such virtue and efficacy and of such great softness, that it easily banishes all the bitterness of

of Strasbourg, deals with the same subject in his *Spiritual Conferences* (Ch. IV).

37 Juan de Los Angeles may refer here to the Confessions, especially VIII-XXV on "Memory." Vulgate: Ps. 81:6 "*Ego dixi dii estis, et filii excelsi omnes.*" Douay: "I have said: You are gods, and all of you the sons of the most High." John 10:34. "Jesus answered them: Is it not written in your law: I said you are gods?" "Wisdom" is a common word used for "Holy Scripture" in the Slav and Greek rites.

38 (Ioan. 4). St. John 4:14. Following Teresa, Fray Juan uses the water image.

vice and conquers and surmounts all the rebellion, contradiction and pangs of the vicious and ill-inclined nature. Because, after this water of life is drunk, it flows through all the regions of the body and the spirit, and gives and communicates to them a marvellous purity and fecundity.

IV

Friar: That is truly a great thing, and a man ought not to relax nor cease praying until God permits him to drink at least one swallow of such water.

Master: If you were to drink even a single drop you would no longer thirst after vain things, nor transitory creatures, for your thirst would then be only for God and his love, in which the more you grow, the more you profit by divine union. The more thoroughly united and profoundly committed to God you are, the more clearly you will know him, and thus known, he must inevitably be loved with greater ardour. That is the goal of our works and exercises. There all are ordered and all end. If you lack this love, all your labours (although they may surpass those that have been suffered and are being suffered by all the men of the world and the devils) are vain and fruitless, as you will find lengthily written in our *Triunfos*.³⁹ Finally, you will have only as much sanctity as you have charity, and no more. And if it seems to you that I place too much stress on this, hear the great Augustinian father, who says that if you wish to fulfil with perfection all that is explicitly or implicitly contained in the divine Scriptures, keep in your soul true charity, for it is the object of the Law and of the prophets. The apostle says to his pupil Timothy: “The goal of the precept is pure charity, of good conscience and sincere faith.”⁴⁰ In which words, although there is much to be noted, I only want you to see for the present that “precept” does not mean special or sole commandment, but all that which is commanded and ordained in the law, which, being as it is, directs itself to the maintenance and development of charity. It is the keystone of the spiritual structure, and if it is endangered, all which rests on it is endangered. With this you will understand that difficult place in the writings of St. James: “Whoever offends in one point of the law, is offending in all.”⁴¹

39 Fray Juan's *Triunfos del Amor de Dios* (1589).

40 (I Tim. 1). I Tim. 1:5.

41 (Iacob. 2). James 2:10.

Friar: I have never understood how this could be possible; Why must the adulterer be indicted or punished as a murderer? Or the thief as an adulterer?

Master: The declaration of the apostle, superficially understood, may not seem to be true, but if we apply what has already been said of charity, what the apostle says is found to be important and reasonable. If all other precepts are dependent upon this virtue of charity or selfless love extended to God and to one's fellow man., it clearly follows that, by not observing it, one is untrue to all the virtues. Conversely, if a person is lacking in any virtue, charity is itself diminished. In a circle you will see this very clearly, for all the lines which are formed from the center to the circumference communicate with the center, where they meet and unite. Could one possibly touch this center without touching all the lines?

Friar: It does not seem so.

Master: Very well. The truth is, that the center of the Law and the prophets is selfless love, and all other precepts, as I have said, are precepts within this charity. They end in it and proceed from it. Therefore if one violates it and injury is done to it, all receive injury and whenever any of the others is violated, charity is offended and all are offended in it, being all one in it, like the lines in the center. Although each one, considered in itself, seems different from the others on the circumference, as the precepts of not to steal, not to kill, not to commit adultery, not to swear, and so forth, seem different, the lines are not different in the center nor are the precepts different within. Thus Saint James is finally understood, and for good reason you are left with a concern for charity.

Friar: Indeed very much! And also with a great desire to know how one may love God with perfection, so that one might achieve that which the Saints have achieved so quickly by this means.

Master: The way is taught by the most divine Lord, who asks only that, in return for all that we and other creatures owe him, we give love. He says to love Him

with all your heart, with all your soul, all your mind, all your power and all your virtue.⁴²

Friar: This use of words with such subtle meanings confuses me greatly. In order to really understand this imperative, I need someone to throw light upon such terms as heart, soul, mind, power and virtue.

Master: I would very much like to excuse myself from answering, because it is a matter of considerable difficulty and requires a higher knowledge of spiritual matters than I possess. So you will have to be content with my telling you what I happen to know, which is simply what the Saints say and what philosophy teaches us.

Friar: No more could be asked of you.

Master: Observe, then, that as a foundation of religious doctrine, it is held that in each man there are actually three men: the animal, the rational and the divine. In each of these there is a power which perceives and another power which fears or desires that which is perceived—depending upon whether it seems damaging or beneficial. The “animal-man” acts and perceives by the five exterior senses sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch and all that which is perceived by these senses is transmitted to the brain. Then, by certain images and fantasies this man views things there, organizes them and retains them in his memory. Accompanying this sensitive power is another natural power of appetite, with which this man desires these exterior things (riches, friends, pleasures and other delights of this kind) and flees from adverse things which are contrary to him. This appetite is called animal or sensual, and is the affective force that moves solely through the activity of the senses. Whoever lives according to this man, lives according to sensuality—not very different from the way the brutes live. In this aspect we are without nobility and are subject to corruption and death.

The second man, who is said to be rational, has a certain power, which is called reason, whose function it is to weigh all things and to see which is good and which is bad, which is true and which is false. This power draws conclu-

42 (Deut. 6). Deut. 6:5.

sions from premises, and draws insensible things from things which are felt. It is a power that in its operation does not use any corporal organ, as the preceding one does. It involves free will, which moves toward embracing and doing all that reason dictates and teaches. Others call it rational affect or the appetite of reason. He who exercises this power makes himself rich with wisdom and virtues, which grow according to the amount he desires them. The more of them he attains, the greater is his desire to fully possess them. This life in itself is imperfect, because something is always lacking which is above human reason. It is in the end defective, because outside of God there is nothing which can satisfy the hunger of the rational animal.

The third man is characterized by supreme and pure intelligence. This is the cognitive force of the spirit which immediately receives a certain natural light from God, by which the truth of religious principles is recognized, once the terms are known. To this pure intelligence corresponds a soft, agreeable and pure love of the spirit which immediately receives an inclination towards the supreme good. Those who utilize this amorous power and obtain a familiarity with God are lifted so high at times that, hushing for a time their understanding, they forget themselves and all things together and are engulfed by God and transformed in Him. Ruysbroeck called the life of this third man divine life, because in this life God is carefully contemplated and the soul is united with Him through love, and he enjoys and tastes as much as there is of this sweetness. He melts and renews himself continually in Him, and this is the road of rapture and elevation above all our powers to a state where God himself rules us. The soul undergoes this transformation and is lit with a divine light, as is the air with the rays of the sun, or as iron by the heat of the flame.⁴³

Also I want you to know that the spirit (*ánima*) of man is called such principally because it enlivens and animates the body, and in those forces of the spirit, known as understanding, memory and will, shines the image of the Holy Trinity.⁴⁴ According to the superior man, or pure intelligence, the soul is the spirit or intimate part, or consciousness, or depth, endowed with such nobility that there are no words to describe it. This intimate sanctuary of the consciousness cannot be filled or satisfied by any created thing, but only by the Creator with all His immensity and greatness. Here He has His peaceful abode, as in heaven itself.

43 This theme is developed in Ruysbroeck's, *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*, Book II.

44 The Spanish for "spirit" is *ánima*. The meaning is thus clear because the spirit "animates" the body.

Nor is it necessary that we look for Him outside of ourselves when we wish to converse with Him. To the degree that we do not banish Him through sin, He is inseparably there, in this, His sanctuary, prepared to hear us and to show us mercy—although at times He is so hidden as to appear to be absent. For which reason we must here commit to Him all the efforts of our soul with strict attention and reverence. From this spirit, or intimate part, or center, or apex of the spirit proceed all its forces, just as rays proceed from the sun. And these forces return to their center and source through dedicated charity and sincere concern for God. Blessed is the man who knows how to arrive at this center by perfect resignation, because one hour of such effort is worth more, in gaining pardon from sins and obtaining of grace, than many years of other efforts, no matter how lofty and acceptable. God works in the soul so converted, such profound things that it itself does not understand them. But with those who dull these precious faculties and interior powers, He has no intercourse nor communication. And this is the greatest misery which the rational creature can suffer.

V

Friar: Frankly, I am amazed and beside myself to hear what you say. I never realized that there are within us such great riches nor that there exists such a wonderful and satisfying center.

Master: You will find very few who know this, because most are given to external things, without attempting to enter into themselves to seek this treasure and converse with that Lord who says: “My kingdom is within you.”

Friar: It seems that with what has been said I should now readily understand the commandment of love, which has always been so obscure to me. If you were willing to explain it, I should be greatly consoled.

Master: To love God with all your heart is to love him with all your will and desire, in such a way that you want nothing which is opposed to God, outside of God, or above God. I mean to say that, having removed all creatures from your heart, you must offer it wholly to the Creator, in order that He only and He alone may possess it. To love God with all your soul is to love Him with all the animal-man, having in control all the five senses, and keeping them removed

from all indulgences which could offend the divine eyes. You must use the senses not to sin nor to please yourself, but rather to honor and glorify your Lord. To love God with all your mind is to persevere in true faith with sound understanding, trusting in God without reservation or false views. Or, in accordance with the doctrine that I have given you, to love God with all your mind is to enter into yourself, always intent on Him, with a pure and sincere love, undiluted by any other love which is alien or adulterous, for it is certain that no other but God can really fill our soul.

Finally you must love with all your might. All the strength in you, interior and exterior, must be employed and consumed according to His highest approbation, without any contemplation of self-interest. You may be sure that you will in due course receive the glory and other gifts and mercies that God customarily gives to His friends. In a word, I want you to know that the various aspects of this commandment clearly demonstrate that God our Lord wants you all for Himself, without there remaining in you any room for other created things which could make war with or contradict His will. It is necessary that you rid yourself of all such things in order that God can dwell in you as in His temple, for it is not possible that He make His dwelling place within you while your corrupted self remains. Have you never seen a great Prince take lodging, entering in a village along the road, in the house of a rustic labourer?

Friar: Indeed I have seen it.

Master: Well, then, just as the laborer welcomes the Prince into his poor little house by emptying it of all his valuables, without leaving a thing, large or small (because the Prince carries with him all the furnishings and adornment worthy of his person) so, in order that God may dwell in a soul He asks that it first be emptied of the love of all creatures including itself. The Ecclesiasticus says: "Write wisdom in your heart in the time of emptiness and note well that he whose heart is least occupied with the world is the one most filled with wisdom".⁴⁵ The wisdom that knows and nourishes the soul is received to the degree

45 (Eccl. 38). Ecclesiasticus 38 has not got this text. Ecclesiasticus 38: 25 says: "The wisdom of a scribe cometh by his time of leisure: and he that is less in action shall receive wisdom." Modern Spanish version of Vulgate: "La sabiduria la adquiere el letrado en el tiempo que está libre de negocios; y el que tiene pocas ocupaciones: ése la adquirirá." Jerusalem Bible: "Leisure is what gives the scribe the opportunity to acquire wisdom; the man with few business affairs grows wise."

that our hearts are vacant and are emptied, not only of the love of creatures, but also of the acts of interior and exterior feelings. Once these are put aside and silenced, the pure soul flies to its Creator and undergoes at this time the transformation wrought by the Holy Spirit, which works great marvels in the soul which is thus pure and empty. Before this divine Spirit in the beginning of the world came walking on the waters and made them fertile and produced so many lives, it is said that the earth was vacant, which is to tell us (speaking to the interior man) that the region of our hearts must be cleared of all creatures so that it can better receive the coming of Him who fills it wholly, who is God.⁴⁶

How emptied was the heart of him who, speaking of charity and imperfect knowledge, said to the people of Corinth: “When that which is perfect is come, you must do away with that which is partial and small. When I was small, I spoke and understood as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”⁴⁷ Everything is small and childish which is not God, and the knowledge that one has by means of creatures, is as darkness compared to that light which God infuses in the soul cleared and free of them. In truth, whoever plays with these transitory things in his mind and gives them a place in his heart, is a child. In order to grow up he must push them aside and free himself for the Creator alone.

The Prophet Jeremiah (and holy King David in agreement with him) says that before God, as in prayer, we must pour out our hearts like water—meaning that nothing should remain within them, neither thought, nor affection for creatures, so that we may find ourselves alone with His Majesty.⁴⁸ In the 138th Psalm it is written: “The night is the illumination for my delights.” To my view, what those words mean in the spiritual sense is that by freeing ourselves of our present concern for creatures (for these are darkness, as I said in the 15th chapter of the *Triunfos*) we find the delights and subtle pleasures of the contemplative soul, whose will at this time is activated and working or receiving great gifts and riches from its celestial Husband. God, in order to symbolize this freeing of the heart, commanded in his ancient law that the altar where the perpetual flame of sacrifice burned be hollow and empty.⁴⁹ In order that this be understood, He makes transpire that which occurs in the Holy Sacrament of the altar, when at

46 (Genes. 1). Gen. 1:2.

47 (II Cor. 13). 1 Cor. 13:10–11.

48 (Psalm. 21). Psalms 22:14. Douay: “I am poured out like water.” Jerusalem “I am like water draining away.”

49 (Exod. 39). Exodus 38:7.

the voice of the priest the bread abandons its own substance and the body of Christ succeeds it, leaving only the outward signs of bread. After the consecration, in the substantial sense, it is the body of Christ, and in the accidental sense only is it bread. I mean to say that there is no substance there of bread, even though all the outward signs are there, and for that reason it is called transubstantiation. Therefore, He wishes that, at His call, by which he converts us to Himself, all creatures, including ourselves, should depart from our hearts leaving this dwelling free and vacant for Him. Even so did that divine Apostle who in carnal flesh dared to say: "I live, yet Christ, not I, lives in me."⁵⁰ This is to say that, in the spiritual sense, the accidental part of me is man, but the substantial is of God. This is how God wants us to be for Him: accidentally men and substantially gods, ruled by His spirit and in accordance with His will. This excludes all things which are possessed and excludes all misplaced loves, because, as a Prophet has said: "The cavity of our heart is narrow and there is not room for two in it; the canopy of this love is small and cannot cover more than one".⁵¹

Friar: It seems that you are saying that the just cease to be men and become gods in essence, just as by virtue of the words of the consecration the bread ceases to be bread and becomes the body of Christ.

Master: I do not quite say this. I am speaking of transformations of love, all of which are accidents. I say that in loving God I don't cease to be what I am in respect to essence, but only accidentally. I am saying that the soul transformed in God by love lives more for God than for itself, because it desires and follows not what the exterior man asks, but that which God ordains. Therefore since this soul dwells more where it loves God than where it gives life to the body, it follows that it is more a part of God which it loves than it is of itself. And in this sense you can say that the just are accidentally men and substantially gods, for they are ruled and live by the Divine Spirit. It is like molten steel which continues to be steel although dressed with the qualities of fire, appearing more fire than steel in essence—although truthfully it is not fire except by participation, as the just are gods only by participation in the Divine.

50 (Galat. 2). Gal. 2:20.

51 Juan de los Angeles here identifies the prophet as Isaiah.

Friar: This certainly is an admirable doctrine, father, except that two things sit badly with me. First, the idea that I can live without myself, as you say the Apostle lived. Second, the idea that the rational spirit being only one, should have such different faculties and carry out such varied tasks as though it were many spirits.

Master: Your points are well taken. The spirit is one in respect to its essence and substance; and according to the doctrine of Duns Scotus and other men of Paris, there is no real distinction between the spirit and its powers.⁵² Saint Thomas, however, says that there is a real distinction between the spirit and its powers, which considered in their diverse respects, are sometimes called accidents, and sometimes considered as virtually the natural properties of the same spirit.

Friar: Let us, if you do not mind, leave these differences for the schools to argue about and say with Isidore that the powers are aspects of the spirit, that they are the same with it, and that due to the diversity of tasks with which the spirit is occupied, it has diverse names.⁵³

Master: This is how it seemed to Duns Scotus, and following him now, let us say that the spirit is one, since everyone has it, but that there are in it diverse faculties or virtues, which the Lord gave it as instruments for work, except that with their little use they are confused in us and are not in that state of readiness which is required for such high exercises as these. So it is necessary to first cleanse and dress oneself carefully. By which I want you to know, Desirous son, that in order to perfectly convert yourself to God, understanding and reason must serve as tutors to the bestial and sensual man, removing him from all the profane likes and delights, of thoughts and words as well as actions, in order that in this way you can achieve perfect mortification and negation of yourself. You thereby bring this man to such a point that from then on he does not labor

52 Duns Scotus: (Oxon., II, d. 16... "*essentia animae indistincta re et ratione, est principium plurium actionum sine diversitate reali potentiarum... anima continet potentias suas unitive, quanquam formaliter sine distinctae.*" In other words, he says that the soul is one single indivisible power, having intelligence and will. There is no real distinction, but a formal distinction, between the soul and its powers.

53 (Isid. lib. II Etim, c. 1). Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636), the last of the Latin Fathers, was a man of phenomenal learning, best known for his encyclopaedic *Etymologiae*. The reference here is to book 11, chapter 1.

because of exterior feelings nor spend himself for creatures, but rather in accordance with that which sound reason dictates and understands to be the will of God. This mortification of the natural self will be very annoying and difficult for you at first, but in the eyes of God will be very well accepted and will give off a fragrance like the softest aroma, the most exotic incense. Keep your understanding free of perplexing doubts, let it be, as I have said, founded in Catholic faith, in accord with and completely responsive to the holy church.

Offer your will to God with perfect abnegation, cleared and free from desire, affection or inclination towards any of the creatures of the world. And keep, so far as possible through divine grace, your memory empty and vacant of images and forms of all that which is not God. See to it that these mundane concerns are purged and made submissive to your spiritual center, where God dwells and is present. There you can adore and revere and embrace Him with the firm ties of intimate love. Take care that in the same way that you are led to see and know the material sun by its rays, so also by these very mundane concerns you are led and carried to understanding, and from understanding to the secret of the spirit, and from there finally to God. You will also realize that our spirit is in this world midway between time and eternity; and if it elects to walk with exterior things and is converted to time, that is, if it is made temporal by loving temporal things, it will without doubt forget eternity. Then all that which is divine will be diminished in it and will pass it by and leave it far behind. Just as things seem smaller than they really are when viewed from a distance (and the farther away the smaller, and with even more distance are not even recognizable) so the divine things which are far from our heart come to be judged as small by those who do not know how to contemplate eternity. And because our flesh wars with our spirit, it is exasperating for the spirit to have as would-be friends in its earthly or natural place, all these temporal and worldly things when the spirit doesn't even have its kingdom here. It is in exile, for its true friends are in heaven. Therefore it is necessary to arm ourselves against the flesh and conquer it with strict penitence in order that it does not brazenly return and rise against the spirit. Do you want, then, to conceive in your soul a singular devotion and ardor against yourself? Just imagine that you are now dead, for in a brief while, like it or not, you must die, and consider at the same time that your soul is parted from your body and joined with eternity. You will then see how little you care about those injuries and wounds that might happen to your body on earth and how little you care about that which occurs in the world. Also, remember how heedless the martyrs were of their bodies, even before they were parted

from their souls, having merely thought that shortly they would have to leave them.

VI

Friar: I am very gratified with what you have said, both in regard to the supreme commandment of divine love and in regard to the purification of the forces of the spirit. The only thing which I need now to know is that which you seem to have deliberately omitted, and that is the first thing I asked concerning the living and not living of Saint Paul—a thing which has always been difficult for me, because it seems impossible for one man to exemplify at one time, the words: “I live and I do not live.”

Master: I was given a good opportunity to explain this passage of the Apostle when in my *Triunfos* I spoke of the transformation or death or mortification of love. Since I said so much there, I was ignoring your question. However, since you do not excuse me from answering, I shall try to relieve your doubts. Saint Dionysius cites this passage.⁵⁴ Because what he had said appeared difficult to his pupil, as it has appeared to you, he purposely set to work to clarify it. Among other notable things worthy of his exalted understanding, he says that divine love causes ecstasy, which is to say, it takes those who love out of themselves and does not let them belong to themselves, but rather to the loved thing. Because the love of the Apostle for Christ was so great that he was not his own nor did he live for himself, but completely for Christ, he dared to say that he lived and did not live, and that his life was Christ. This is as if he had more clearly said: “I am made God by love or love has transformed me in Christ, and I am a Christ of love.” Two things presuppose this ecstatic love of Saint Paul, which must be considered in whomever suffers this ecstasy as he did: the first is the natural being of whom it is said, “I live”; the second is the being of grace, who says, “I do not live, because Christ lives in me.” The corrupted natural being wanes in this condition, while that of grace grows so that the spirit feels Christ within itself more than it feels itself. So, concerning the first life, he lives as if he were not living, because he heeds only the second life and says he lives in it.

⁵⁴ Dionysius the Areopagite, converted by Saint Paul according to Acts 17:34, was the first Bishop of Athens. Various philosophical writings by an author of Neoplatonist views in the fifth or sixth century were attributed to Dionysius, hence the designation “pseudo-Dionysius.”

And how much more justification has a man for praising himself more because Christ lives in him than because he himself lives! Oh, if you allowed Christ to work in you how it would inflame your will, how your understanding would sharpen and how your memory would come alive in order that, not you within yourself, but He in you would live and you would be truly another Christ through love. Like Saint Paul, you would have the power to convert many souls to his service as he did! This is that union so desired and so sought by Christ himself, who after the supper, when close to Death, speaking with so many truths, with his Father, says: “My Father, I have given to my disciples, for their participation in my union, the glory which you gave me, so that they may be one as you and I are—I in them and you in me, that they be consummated in one and that the world may know you sent me and that you loved them as you loved me.”⁵⁵

Friar: That is certainly a superb flight!

Master: It is a flight no less than that of the proud eagle, that makes us gods in God and christs in Christ and sons in the Son, in order that what the Prophet said may be verified: “I said, Gods you are and sons of the Majesty all.”⁵⁶ Here is where the practice arose of calling Christ the vine and ourselves the shoots, to better signify this close union that he desired between Him and us.⁵⁷ Also he called himself leaven because the dough after seasoning is a whole with it and, as they say, a part of its nature.⁵⁸ Oh, absent and vain heart! gather yourself a bit into yourself, or better said, into your Christ, who is no other than yourself, and finally understand that from here forward you have nothing more to desire than to be man-god in Christ, diminishing yourself, in order that you may glorify yourself with the Apostle saying: “I am living, and I am not living. Christ lives in me.” Because with this you will have understood what it is to be substantially Christ and accidentally man, I want to say what it means to have Christ living more in us than we ourselves and how one carries out that strict commandment of love required of the heart, spirit, mind and all interior and exterior forces.

55 (Ioan. 17). St. John 17:22-23.

56 (Psa. 81) Psalms 82:6.

57 (Ioan. 5). St. John 15:5.

58 (Math. 13). Matthew 13:33.

What I have said will be enough for today, advising you in conclusion that the greatest loss to the soul comes from not keeping open the entrance to its intimate interior, where God is, and where no desire exists for any creatures. Therefore, whomsoever by his great negligence and carelessness loses this openness, loses in one hour more of the spiritual and interior gifts than he could earn if in this time he were to learn all the Scriptures. This is because all of them were ordered and written so that with their help we might be a complete and pure sacrifice for God our Lord. Therefore, I ask as emphatically as I can that, freeing yourself from all distraction, you dwell within yourself and withdraw all your efforts and feelings so far as divine grace permits, from useless exterior actions. Retire to the secret interior, and closing the door of your heart against the vain images and fantasies that distract the spirit, dwell alone with your Lord God, who built His holy temple within you. He who, without the hindrance of creatures, that is, with purity and simplicity, draws near to God, becomes one with Him and is superior to all the images and forms of creatures. And since grace flows abundantly from this interior into a man and augments the forces and powers of his spirit, all of these labor by means of it with happiness and enthusiasm. Here is where you must offer all to God and abandon yourself, living completely in Him, flowing like melted liquid in Him, and adoring Him in spirit and truth. In order that you may conserve this interior in intercourse and celestial conversation with your God, see that this flow is neither of words nor of works through the exterior sensations, for the more words and works, the more there will be distractions and accidents. I advise you that here, more than in any other exercise, is our health and spiritual well-being. Believe me, if you constantly dwell in your interior, you will lose yourself. Then you must restrain the natural man so that it is not distracted and does not wander this way and that. It is certain that a single idle conversation will distract you and many such will impede the peace of your soul. You are also warned that, although by the grace of God all sins are now beaten down and dead in you, the inclination and cause persevere always with you and with these tendencies you have to war continuously during your mortal life.

Friar: And what if I should not feel God within me?

Master: Then work with all your power until you find Him again, exiling from yourself all which would or could be an impediment. Choose death before doing

anything against the will of God or consenting to a sin, however minor it might be, and do not trouble yourself in pleasing any creature outside of God. Be content with the good part of Mary, without making persistent complaints, like Martha, for this is not usually done except by those of little spirit or good in their souls. I beg you one and many times, do not go outside of that sacred dwelling place within you, for it could be that you will pay for one hour of absence with many years of frustration and even with the possibility of never more re-entering yourself. Devote yourself without interruption to interior solitude, and, speaking in secret, say to yourself: "He whom I seek is not comprehensible by feeling nor by intelligence, but pure souls may embrace and receive Him. This I profess and seek, and whatever might come to me, be it prosperity or adversity, I must suffer it and rise above it and continue my way. Our father friar Pedro de Alcántara recollected himself with only these words: "Return, my soul, to your rest (which is the interior center) for there your bountiful God awaits you."⁵⁹ He said that with this verse his soul, as if ashamed and dismayed by wandering at random, withdrew within itself and awaited the approach of its Husband. Do keep your heart free of verbiage, for very few words are enough for this seclusion and many are likely to impede it. Therefore, be silent, repose and submit. Trust in God, and do your part with good will. Believe me that very shortly you will be marvellously enlightened with knowledge of the most perfect paths of interior life. And this is enough for you to know how to walk within yourself, which is what I most wish you to glean from talking with me.

Friar: Blessed be God for giving me such a true and sincere master. I do not intend to depart from this teaching in the slightest, nor to tire myself in reading other books. I only ask humbly that you do not conceal from me those paths and roads which you say are in the interior life.

Master: I, son, am very weary and you must reflect well upon what you have heard. The night invites us to be silent, and it is right that we respect it.

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59 (Psal. 144). Psalms 116:7. Saint Peter of Alcantara (1499-1562) like Juan de Jos Angeles, a member of the Discalced reform of the Franciscan order, wrote only one work which has survived, *Treatise of Prayer and Meditation*.

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