

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (R.R.)

Introduction

This collection of twelve texts, which we have entitled : 'Reflections and Recommendations', was first published in 1876. Where have they come from?

They are to be found in a manuscript of forty-one pages in the archives of the Sisters of Providence in Rouen and probably date from the beginning of the 18th century. They are not hand-written by N. Barré, neither are they a copy of a text written by him. They have been put together by someone familiar with his thinking.

In the national archives in Paris there is an index of all the books of the Minim library in Paris. Unfortunately many of these books or manuscripts got lost or destroyed in the course of history - among them was a work entitled : 'The spiritual exercises of N. Barré'. If we had had this, it would undoubtedly have thrown more light on this collection of 'Reflections and Recommendations'. The full title given to this work by the editor as it appears in the manuscripts is : 'Ways of attaining the highest state of perfection, taken from reflections and recommendations of N. Barré, religious Minim and founder of the Sisters of the Holy Infant Jesus, known as Providence, in 1666 in Rouen, Epée Street. He died in 1686.'

This title indicates clearly that these texts convey N. Barré's thinking. We also notice a similarity with the other documents which we have, especially the 'Maxims for all people', 'Maxims for Spiritual Direction' and the Letters. In fact these twelve texts appear to be a development of 'Maxims for all people'. They could have arisen from talks N. Barré gave to explain the maxims more fully. It is possible that someone would have taken notes at a later stage, keeping to a conversational style and using less Latin quotations.

There are many references to the Fathers of the Church and spiritual writers of the Middle Ages which is in keeping with the cultural context of N. Barré's theology. Maybe it was the Minim whom N. Barré directed who was the notetaker! (cf R.R. 2, 10)

Some errors in the manuscript would seem to indicate that whoever put it together afterwards did not always understand the words used. To keep the sense we have had to correct some words and give some explanations in a number of places. Some of the references in Latin were also incorrectly quoted - maybe the editor did not understand Latin. A critical study of these texts was done by Fr. Grenet (+ 1973) who was a Rouen priest and professor at the Catholic University of Paris. This study served as a basis for our work in presenting these texts.

Content

This collection of texts is obviously intended for those desiring to reach the 'highest state of perfection' which is deep union with God and great holiness. They have not been written exclusively for the members of the Institute but for anyone who has already advanced somewhat in his or her spiritual journey.

There is a similar theme going through all of them : to die to ourselves so that God may live in us. In the original manuscript some texts had a title, others had not. To facilitate reference we have given titles to the latter and have bracketed them to indicate that they were not in the original.

RR1 Ways of attaining the highest state of perfection;

To let go of everything and of oneself in order to find God and belong only to Him; to serve one's neighbour, being aware of one's own unworthiness.

RR2 Some thoughts on confidence and humility left by a Minim religious to whom N. Barré had given spiritual direction.

RR3 Inner Peace and how to attain it, with regard to God, ourselves and others.

RR4 (Dying to Adam so as to live in Jesus)

RR5 True conversion

Humility and self-emptying so as to be filled with the life of God

RR6 The great happiness resulting from obedience

Its wonderful effects and the means of attaining it;

RR7 Other reflections and thoughts

To want God, search for Him and accept to let go of self

RR8 (Death and Life, Descending and Ascending)

or how to live according to the Gospel : 'it is no longer I who live but Jesus in me.'

RR9 The Eucharist

The Eucharist completes the mystery of the Incarnation in enabling all people to share in the divinity of Christ

RR10 (Advice on the spiritual life)

RR11 Dependence on Grace

God's gifts are intended to draw us closer to Him rather than make us more attached to His gifts

RR12 Conclusion

WAYS OF ATTAINING THE HIGHEST STATE OF PERFECTION (R.R. 1)

The Kingdom of God is God within us, Jesus is within us; God alone and Jesus alone through our self-emptying and dying to self (1). This is the precious stone for which we must be prepared to sell everything i.e. to forget ourselves completely. This is the treasure hidden in a field i.e. in our heart and within ourselves; this is what we have to discover. The merchant who finds it is captivated by it for the rest of his life, he no longer thinks of himself. He is not concerned about anything else. He gives up everything, leaves all behind, he exchanges everything for this precious stone (2). Having taken this treasure from the field, he forgets about the field, he no longer wants it, it goes out of his mind. Originally he wanted this field only so that he could dig it up, plough deeply into it and extract the treasure.

Let us imitate this merchant. Let us seek this precious stone. When we know how to forget ourselves totally, we will find it. The conclusion to be drawn from all this is that it is essential to leave the first state, i.e. attachment to self, in order to enter the second state, i.e. attachment to God. The ego that exists must, as it were, be cast aside and destroyed (3).

Having tried hard to arrive at this disposition (4), and using their faculties of reason and will, they should put into practice what is noblest and best in all that they do and on all occasions.

Do all for God. Even then they cannot say they have reached perfection, God alone is perfect. When He will have taken over, the ego will be no more, all created things will cease (5). This means they will see only God in everything : from their point of view they will no longer see themselves but God alone. They will claim nothing nor attribute anything to themselves - neither life, being, wisdom, goodness, pleasure, success, goods, reputation, honours, riches, love of neighbour, grace or salvation - all belongs to God alone (6).

All animals turn their two eyes in the same direction. The only exception is the dove whose eyes turn in two different directions. This led David to say he would meditate like the dove (7), with one eye turned towards heaven and the other towards earth : towards heaven in order to behold, praise and adore the infinite greatness of God; towards earth, that is, towards ourselves who are but earth in order to get to know our poverty, experience shame, reproach, dismay and loathing at our nothingness - die to our human nature as well as our sinfulness.

St. Francis de Sales says that we cannot reach our inner depths without being able to look at God's greatness and our own lowliness at the same time (8). Such a person must be able to say with St. Paul : 'It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me' (9). This can be said truthfully since both eyes are turned towards God and firmly fixed on Him - earthly things can no longer cause one to turn aside from Him. One is so totally detached from all created things - focussed on God alone - that both eyes become as one constantly turned towards Him (10).

The hundredfold promised in the Gospel (11) means the graces and blessings of joy and peace with which one is filled in this life - without however being free of suffering and affliction while in this blessed state. Thus joy and suffering could be experienced at one and the same time. This is not possible from a natural point of view - it cannot be effected by human nature, human wisdom or any of God's creatures. It is the result of God's action when one has turned aside from everything - everything created as well as oneself - so as to belong to God alone.

We must therefore die to everything and to self in order to enter this blessed state of life on earth, which is to go towards Jesus. Elisha asked Elijah for 'a double share of your spirit' (12); this state of blessedness is possible but to reach it we have to live an interior life. Thus we will be able to recognise without any doubt those who are enlightened by grace; their thoughts and deeds will manifest a strong conviction that all creatures, including themselves, are nothing and that God alone is all. Richard of St. Victor (13) says he would go so far as to allege that just one drop of these heavenly consolations which they experience does more for them than all the pleasures of the world. The latter can satisfy the heart but one drop of interior sweetness which the Holy Spirit pours into the soul delights it beyond measure so that it becomes drunk in the Lord. Such people should abandon themselves totally to the goodness and the way of God and have great confidence in Him. This confidence will lead to zeal, fervour and perseverance in the silence of God so as to possess Him.

To arrive at this the soul must be to God what the hand is to the human person (14). To think or to act otherwise would make us more wretched than ever. Lack of faith and love leads us to be complacent about our faults and to reject all that is not to our taste. If only God could be the one to satisfy all our tastes and desires. From this we can easily see the abyss of our poverty, causing us to feel great shame and humiliation. We are like St. Peter and the other apostles who at one time declared publicly that they were with Jesus and at another time denied and abandoned Him. They were to make reparation for their failings : how often we fail to imitate them which is another source of shame for us (15).

Jesus went down to the underworld before going up to heaven; the Christian must do likewise. We must follow Jesus-Christ in order to be saved (16). How can this be done? through humility, annihilation and dying to self.

God must become flesh in us, Jesus must become incarnate in us, in our lowly state (17); so that we may lead the life He led, suffer, die and go down to the underworld, rise and ascend to heaven. Thus Job was able to say he was experiencing hell while still alive, having done all the demanding penance which God in His loving goodness, asked of him. (This does not refer to the hell to which one could go after death but to the abolition of the ego through the efforts made to conquer evil before entering into heaven). Such people find all their delight in God and God finds His delight, peace and happiness in them because He knows that they suffer in order to please Him. The happiness that God finds in them belongs to the nature of the Godhead : it is incomprehensible and inexpressible just as He is (18).

N. Barré says that those who have a deep spirit of humility are quite surprised when God sometimes floods them with His tender love; they think there must be some mistake to be the object of such honour. They never cease to think of their own wretched state and so are in hell and in heaven at the same time. N. Barré also says that we should recognise this state of being in hell as that of our unworthiness and of our indifference in facing up to our worthless state. This however is the state we should seek to reach, descending to it continually and if we come out of it we must return again, following the example of Jesus who took our iniquities upon Himself and remained in that state : this constant state of inner sorrow is due to our sins. Let us experience this grief and sorrow which, according to St. Paul, is of God and for our salvation (19).

Between these two states of hell and heaven, there is another. We ought to be in the state of hell out of justice so that we may be chastised, punished, suffer torment and be sacrificed as Jesus was for us.

In the heavenly state we are captivated by the Eternal Father, saying : 'to You Father be glory'.

The in-between state is associated with the love of the Holy Spirit, through the love which we show to our neighbour. These three states may be summed up in three words : justice, elevation, application (20).

Jesus is present in the first of these states transporting and supporting us; He goes below us, lower than us because He bore our sins and crimes (21) however great they were, as well as those of the most infamous sinners - all together. He is then lower than all, laden with all our sins.

Thus our souls are in a state of hell, weighed down by our sins. We look on ourselves as damned and justly so. We feel estranged from God and wonder if we will be pardoned. But we know we are supported by Jesus who has made Himself lower than us, upholding us with all our sinfulness. However the Holy Spirit who is pure love makes use of the graces we receive in this state for the good of the Church which He watches over with loving care, and through the Church for the salvation of our neighbour (22).

God shows such people that the graces they are receiving abundantly belong to Jesus and that their neighbour on earth has a right to them. Moved by the Holy Spirit, they act in union with Jesus to whom they attribute all : whatever light they receive they do not see it as theirs. Whatever is good belongs to Jesus; whatever is defective belongs to them as well as the sins of others which they take on out of charity (23) and under whose weight they struggle (24). On the other hand because of the hope which they have they sometimes want to go straight to heaven (25) being drawn by the Heavenly Father. While consenting to justice even if it were to last for eternity, they would still hope to be carried up to heaven and seek there what their soul longs for. Surprised and delighted to catch a glimpse of the divinity, they think they have been mistaken for someone else - nevertheless they adore the divine attributes, venerate Mary and the angels and saints.

The soul is continually passing through three movements. For part of the time, it stays in its nothingness as being its rightful place. It spends another time in the exercise of charity towards the neighbour and at another time allows itself to be carried towards heaven by faith and hope. Sometimes it experiences all three simultaneously, like three candelabra that give light at the same time and yet are distinct.

A greater example is Jesus who was in His eternal light, in the depths of our sinfulness and carrying out the work of our salvation.

A very telling proof is found in the Transfiguration. Jesus appeared as the brightness of light (26) without leaving aside the aspect of hell in the afflictions and crimes He bore for us - He spoke of His passion to Moses and Elijah and of the sufferings He was to undergo for us. At the same time He was exercising charity towards His disciples whom He had brought with Him to encourage and sanctify them.

As Christians we should be transfigured in the same way : always experiencing shame and disgust for ourselves and what cuts us off from God, while at the same time we are receiving the light of grace in abundance. We should constantly use all (27) for the salvation of our neighbour. We must keep our eyes on the scruffiness and contemptibility of our feet always beneath us and raise our heads towards heaven, seeing with the eyes of the soul, remembering our heart comes between the two (28) - all this for the sake of our neighbour.

The important point is to aim always towards this hell as it were, to stay there as in a dwelling place and remain firm there in spite of what may lure us out. In the face of attack we try hard to retain this stance by a lot of effort, exercises of piety, charity and deep yearning.

We must not leave this dwelling place except when going to a lower one. Humility indicates that there are different degrees of lowliness and self-effacement - there is no limit. There is no end to this wretched state. You can find mud and scum as the prophet says (29) and still go further into the stench and corruption of sin.

When sinners are converted, having been touched by the gentleness and tenderness of grace, God keeps His eyes away from their previous sins. He puts them in a bag, as it were, and as they advance He increases and multiplies His graces for them; when He lets them see their former sins passing before their eyes, they see how appalling and awful they are and deserving of hell. As well as that they see their inclination towards sin, like the wall of a well sloping towards its centre. They are sure they could fall at any moment if God, in His great goodness, did not hold them back and save them from experiencing such a depth of unworthiness.

These concepts of unworthiness and contempt of self have no bounds. Souls plunged into this state would die on this earth if God were to reveal their real state to them. It is then that they cry out their 'De profundis' (30), according to St. Bernard. What the Gospel says about hell (31) can be applied to this state for the soul on earth.

How many inner and overwhelming sufferings bring tears to the eyes! They should be allowed to flow, with the help of deep sighs of the heart, so that they may reach heaven through our eyes. The prophet says that it is this abundance of tears, brought about by our sense of shame and abhorrence of sin, that becomes a spring of water to purify us.

David, when in this state, felt as if he were in a deep well; he saw himself thrust into this hole, closed in on all sides, with no hope of getting out apart from a small narrow opening at the top. He couldn't get up there but he could send up his cries of lament and maybe eventually attract his servants' attention. He was in a continuous state of agony, trembling as if

facing death and hell (32). However this was also a source of sanctification for him. He began to find pleasure in it and accepting it willingly, he did not wish it to be otherwise, since he knew it was God's will for him. His obedience enabled him to be joyful about it, knowing that the Lord had chosen it for him in His mercy.

Arriving at this state and living it out fully is the philosopher's stone (33) in the spiritual life, with which you can do what you like.

Thereby self will is destroyed as well as self love. We take on the life of Jesus who alone lives in us - the life of God which is that of perfection. All that is good in us refers back to God, to whom all glory is due, while we attribute to ourselves what is evil. In this state however we experience the ineffable love of God and rejoice in His peace.

St. Paul experienced this state of suffering while being tempted about hell to which he saw himself confined. He was tempted by fear of rejection by God; he was troubled by many inner anxieties, as well as being weighed down by external difficulties.

At the same time he was raised up to heaven and the revelations he had were unlimited. But he also endured much suffering - and never failed to work for the salvation of his neighbour (34).

Those who faithfully imitate Jesus must be the same. Can Jesus go down to the underworld and not be followed there? No, those who want to follow Him to the Cross are prepared to say : 'In life or in death, in the tomb or into that infernal state' - they want to follow Him everywhere.

Nowhere else will adoration be deeper than in such souls, because of their exterior self- abasement and annihilation, their inner extreme and self-effacement. Indeed, those in this state should see themselves as perpetual galley-slaves (36), laden with chains, the greatest sinners and those most likely to be damned because of their sins and the extent to which they are cut off from God. They regard other sinners as less guilty and more likely to obtain divine mercy (37). We can never condemn ourselves enough in all that we do and all we are. We are always immersed in a considerable amount of sinfulness. If we exercise justice on ourselves (38), we will escape the justice of God because He will not make us pay the bill twice. God cannot be against those who acknowledge their guilt and whose first thought and word is : 'through my fault'. They want to share this with everyone, they see only sin in themselves, they see nothing good in themselves and so they are always ready to say : 'it is my fault'. These are good people (39), so if they think like this - judging and condemning themselves, what, asks St. Peter, must the sinners do ? (40).

NOTES

- (1) MAP 103, 64, 72
- (2) Mt. 13 : 45-46
- (3) MAP 30
- (4) It is God who acts, we can only prepare ourselves to be open
- (5) Mt. 5 : 48; Rev. 21 : 1; 1Cor. 15 : 28
- (6) MAP 78
- (7) Ps 55
- (8) MAP 8
- (9) Gal. 2 : 20
- (10) MAP 75; R.R. 10, 11
- (11) MK 10 : 30
- (12) 2Kgs. 2 : 9
- (13) An Augustinian monk in the St. Victor Abbey in Paris in the 12th century
- (14) This is an image taken from St. Thomas.
- (15) Jn 11 : 16; 13 : 37; Lk. 22 : 57
- (16) 2Tim. 2 : 11...; MAP 70, 73, 103, 155, 156, 161
- (17) MAP 69; R.R. 4, 9

- (18) MAP 101, 102
- (19) Rom. 7 : 24
- (20) Justice : descent into the underworld with Jesus;
elevation : being drawn by the Father up to heaven:
application : love of one's neighbour under the action of the Spirit. MAP 8, 153; MD 39, 40
This paragraph is the beginning of a long dissertation on trinitarian spirituality.
- (21) vision of St. Teresa of Avila in her autobiography, Chapter 32
- (22) MAP 143
- (23) this signifies a sense of the Mystical Body and an awareness of the sin of the world
- (24) MAP 38-34, 39, 121, 197, 200-209
- (25) Phil. 1 : 21...
- (26) Mk 9 : 2-8
- (27) that is, we should use the humiliation of our weakness and the graces received
- (28) Allusion is being made here to the human figure : end = feet; middle = heart; top = head
- (29) Jer. 38. 6; Ps 38
- (30) Ps 129
- (31) Mt 13 : 42; Mk 9 : 43-48
- (32) Ps 40; Ps 69 : 3-4; 15-16
- (33) this is a legendary stone that is supposed to change all metals into gold
- (34) 2 Cor. 12 : 1-10
- (35) Lk 22 : 62
- (36) at this time in history those convicted for serious crimes were condemned to work as slaves at the oar of a galley - a long low built ship propelled by oars and belonging to the king.
- (37) MAP 205
- (38) if we work on our own conversion
- (39) MAP 196, 197
- (40) 1Pet. 4 : 17-18

SOME THOUGHTS ON CONFIDENCE AND HUMILITY (RR 2)

(left by A Minim religious to whom N. Barré had given spiritual direction)

Here is what this Minim says : Having read and to some extent understood the deep spiritual truths contained therein and which Father explained to me, I objected saying that this work was a waste of time for me since I could never arrive at this state, explain it or live it - having never experienced the state of desolation (1) which was supposed to precede it. Not only did I not see myself disposed for it but I regarded it as utterly impossible.

My director, N. Barré, replied that what God wanted was to help me understand it and give me some feeling and desire for it; others could put it into practice. My part would be to meditate on it, be more aware of it and appreciate more and more the maxims, rules and evidences of this unique and essential truth, put my whole soul, all my natural resources and talents into supporting, strengthening, defending, penetrating and explaining it for the benefit of others. Those others, more than myself, could be given this grace(2), understand it, put it into practice and subsequently experience God's deep love and gifts of His Spirit. He stressed the importance of following these holy and lofty practices, so that

- a) I could aspire towards this goal no matter how far distant it may seem,
- b) I might be enlightened, overwhelmed, feel ashamed and embarrassed on seeing the difference between my perception and practice and all the graces the Lord grants to those whom He calls to such a holy state (3).

I asked him to advise me on the way I should follow, in case he were to die and I would not be able to find another director with the same high level of enlightenment and knowledge. I asked him to write out my spiritual journey and seal it so as to pass it on to my next director.

N. Barré replied that my guiding rule until my death should be that unique principle set out in a given book and its

appendices (4). He said it would be of no use for him to write as I requested, since the next director might not follow the same principle and could even have very different ideas. Hence passing on my spiritual journal would not be helpful.

But then am I to follow this principle on my own? How could I avoid being deluded by the devil who has so often deceived me already? Could this principle guide me in all the unexpected events that could occur in this state of life for me?

His reply : you must not act alone nor aspire to reach lofty heights - always consider yourself unworthy. But should it come about independent of you, accept it; neither by interior nor exterior action are you to encourage it or go against it; keep yourself in an attitude of indifference⁽⁵⁾. Abandon yourself to what God wants, which you will only get to know through events and situations arising from one thing or another, and which will be discussed, examined and agreed upon with your director. You will pay special attention to the advice given by M. de Grainville and M. and Mme de Touvens who will guide you⁽⁶⁾, especially along the lines outlined already⁽⁷⁾, when, having prayed about it, all three will have come to the same opinion unhesitatingly. On another occasion, he had told me that when asked to move to another place and leave behind a situation where there was more to be gained for the glory of God and the salvation of others, it is better to accept willingly, thus putting 'thy will be done' before 'holy be your name' or 'your kingdom come' ⁽⁸⁾.

NOTES

- (1) Desolation : the state described in R.R. 1 i.e. a deep consciousness of one's sinfulness and nothingness
- (2) MD 11
- (3) That is to perfection and holiness
- (4) Research so far has not revealed what book is being referred to here
- (5) "Principle and Foundation" of the Spiritual Exercises by Ignatius of Loyola.
- (6) It is not possible to read clearly the word used in the manuscript here
- (7) It is not clear what is really being referred to
- (8) There is a reference here to N.Barré's transfer from Rouen to Paris in 1672. At that time he had to leave the project of the schools in Rouen and move to Paris where he had been appointed superior and assistant provincial. It is really not a question of giving priority to some phrases of the 'Our Father', but an invitation to obey the will of God rather than focusing too much on our perception of the Kingdom and the way of working in it.

INNER PEACE AND HOW TO ATTAIN IT (RR 3)

'Everybody complains about not having any peace, everyone wants it and no one finds it, because no one looks for it where it is really to be found.' (1)

The following are some indications on how to find it. We must begin by finding out what puts an obstacle in the way of our peace. Firstly, it is not surprising that it is rarely found: since we are often focusing on getting worldly recognition. This is a great mistake. Job tells us that the world is misleading (2) and St. Augustine adds that the world is the servant of the evil one (3). The servant becomes like the master. Many people long for peace and still they behave in a manner entirely contrary to the Spirit of God. They want things to happen for them in the way they want. This is false since their motives are not pure.

We must not then seek for peace in externals or in worldly terms even if this may seem to lead to peace. It must find its home in our inner life and be with us in times of suffering and opposition referred to earlier (4). This will come about, without fail, if we are living with conviction the one principle already repeated so often, namely 'God is all and the creature nothing.

We would then be able to say that God is our all - for Him alone we live. This is our only way of attaining true peace.

In his preaching, N. Barré talks about three ways of arriving at this peace (5) :

with regard to God :

- a) bring everything to Him
- b) rely on Him for everything, as being our one support
- c) conform with Him in everything, desire only what He wills and nothing more

with regard to ourselves :

- a) take the focus off self
- b) do not give into oneself, treat oneself as a donkey as St. Gregory says, work, endure and be content with what is necessary to live
- c) marvel at escaping hell which one deserves

with regard to others :

- a) respect and love them as if they were superior to us
- b) minister to them
- c) be firmly convinced that we cannot lay claim to anything because of our nothingness and unworthiness. We do not even deserve to be looked down upon by others or even to be thought of by them except in this way.

The obstacle to our peace is the "Adam" still living in us with all his disobedience. Let us go back to our principle; we must kill this "Adam" with his disobedience and put Jesus in his place with His complete obedience. This theme will be developed later.

NOTES

- (1) cf Confessions of St. Augustine Vol. 1, 9 : 27, 38
- (2) Job 21 : 34
- (3) St. Augustine's commentary on the Letter of St John
- (4) cf RR 1
- (5) We find the same theme developed here as in R.R. 1
 - give oneself over to God (Father)
 - die to oneself (with Jesus)
 - service of the other (inspired by the Spirit)

DYING TO ADAM SO AS TO LIVE IN JESUS (1) (R.R.4)

As all are dead in Adam, so all are brought to life in Jesus (2). It can also be said that what is dead in Adam becomes obedience in Jesus. It follows that whatever is alive in Adam - disobedience - is dead in Jesus. This should be the case for us (3).

This amazing and indescribable obedience of Jesus is a model for us and one which we should aim to live out if we wish to follow Jesus and belong to Him. It was this Saviour who said : 'I have given you an example' (4). He is speaking to us here : this was not said only for the apostles and disciples. St. Thomas says this refers not only to the washing of the feet but to everything (5).

We should be dying of shame and of sorrow at the thought of having lived our whole life in opposition, rebellion and disobedience towards God - not only at present but continually. What is worse, we find ourselves caught in this and seem to be so far from getting ourselves out of it in the future. Let us long and yearn deeply for a second incarnation to take place within us, without which we could never reach this state (6).

Let us trust in God and abandon ourselves to Him alone for He is Spirit. He appears to be moved by and to respond to the pleas of the poor, the weak, the powerless and the destitute (7). Let us continue to cry out and to plead until our prayer is heard - it is the only way.

Let us not give up, whatever the apparent rejection or refusal or when things seem impossible or whatever difficulties arise. God hides Himself and withdraws only to bring about a more perfect result (8).

Let us believe what St. Anselm says (9) : 'O salutary absence, which is for our good...' We have no grounds for complaint if we attain the above result only at the end of our life, even if we are actually dying or even if we live to the age of one hundred, having been praying for it since the age of reason. All the saints of the Old Testament were asking for it over a period of a thousand years. They prayed for it in a far more meritorious way than we do and they deserved it more than us. Yet we see how long it took. Let us redouble our efforts to pray and plead. This is our one task, it will be well worth our while as it will lead to the result (8) we seek, that is God. Let us not grumble at our pitiable state or cast the blame on Adam for it because we are worse than he was. He was still the wisest of men. There is not one of us who would not have sinned like him or even worse, if we had been in the earthly paradise. God put the fate of all people in his hands; people get worse and worse and children are worse than their parents.

We have piled sin upon sin and exploited God on our behalf. Our sin is greater than that of the evil one who has been damned for one unpardonable sin (10). Let us consider how often we have damned ourselves; by God's grace we can still be forgiven, since, through Jesus, we have reason to hope. Let us not put the blame on God, but let us adore. He is the judge and at the same time, the one judged (11); we would lose our case and lose ourselves too.

Let us place the guilt at our own door; let us feel shame, disgust and abhorrence with ourselves. The only way and the only means of getting even with Adam is to put him to death within us. Let us treat him as he treated Jesus, the second Adam. Seeing Jesus clothed, he despoiled him so as to put Him to death. He wanted to kill him so that he himself could be preserved - because it was Adam (12), and the evil one through him, who was at work in the Jews against Jesus. They cried out : 'take Him away from us!' Let us also cry out against Adam : 'away with him! Let him be crucified!'. Adam makes himself God for us, he takes the place of God.

Nature's spirit makes excuses as Pilate did. 'What, am I to kill your king?' Adam reigns in all our affections and whatever pertains to nature. Let us respond courageously, putting to death Adam, the tyrant king, who only crushes us. Let us give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God what belongs to God (13).

Adam's children must put him to death as the people took up arms, seized Jesus and put Him to death. Jesus died and rose again in order to live in us. Adam lives in us; he must be put to death. There are no half measures if one wants to belong to Jesus. In order to live more fully, we must seek to know thoroughly and undermine the part of our being that has been enslaved by sin (14).

This theme will be taken up later.

NOTES

- (1) This section had no title in the original manuscript
- (2) . 15 : 22; Rom 5 : 12
- (3) turning away from all forms of disobedience signified by the sin of Adam, and entering fully into the obedience of Jesus
- (4) Jn 13 : 15
- (5) cf Summa of St. Thomas Aquinas : life of Jesus
- (6) The state of total obedience to the will of the Father cf end of section on "Christ" in the General Introduction.
- (7) Ex. 3 : 7-8
- (8) this second incarnation of Jesus in us, so that God may be All for us - the only source of our peace
- (9) St. Anselm was a Benedictine theologian and Bishop of Canterbury in the 11th century
- (10) This is an image used by Ignatius in the Spiritual Exercises (N.50). It is an image used to draw sinners to conversion and to an awareness of God's

compassion. It is a way of saying that every human person, in a sinful state, has the potential to reject God totally and choose self instead. In spite of this God never ceases to forgive.

(11) He is judge because He is God. He is the one judged because He has taken on our human condition and all our sins.

(12) Adam is the symbol of sinful humanity

(13) Mt. 22 : 21

(14) Rom. 6 : 6

TRUE CONVERSION (R.R.5)

The purpose of making so many renunciations, as at Baptism, is to put to death the sinful part of us (1). Let us then be obedient until death, following the example of Jesus (2); through our fidelity and deep prayer of entreaty (3), we will receive the gift of obedience, such that the Adam will be put to death - thus putting an end to disobedience, selfishness and all leanings towards sin, which is part of the human condition. We can be sure that this obedience will truly be life-giving. Such obedience which brings about the death of self and all that is associated with self, is the fruit of humility, since it engenders such self-emptying, leading us down to the depths of nothingness.

N. Barré says that this humble obedience or obedient humility is of more value than physical penance, because we are not turned in on ourselves and are not boasting of what we do, we do not even consider it to be of any worth.

He says we should be like a piece of lead, of no particular shape, which can be beaten out and formed into a vessel capable of containing something. The more it is beaten out the finer it becomes, almost like a leaf, and the bigger it gets, consequently the more it will be able to hold.

The same should be true for us if we want to create in ourselves the capacity to receive, so that we may be filled with the Divine. To keep this treasure safe, it must be buried deep in the ground (4). We must cover it with a layer of earth, close up all openings even those from the top (5). Those in this state do not see or seek anything. They are no longer affected by inferiority, sorrow, poverty or any of the misfortunes of the world (6). These situations are of no consequence for them because of their state of nothingness. They are totally united with God alone and desire only to please Him. This degree of union and reverence (7) does not originate in themselves but comes from God alone (8).

Alchemists say that there is a liquid substance capable of transforming lead; in the same way love can transform the soul into God.

NOTES

(1) This is a reference to the baptismal ceremony

(2) Phil. 2 : 8

(3) Rom. 8 : 26

(4) The ground represents the soul in its state of nothingness before God

(5) An image which represents a total turning away from self

(6) they are no longer affected by what would formerly have been sources of trials and difficulties for them. It does not mean indifference to the troubles of others

(7) an attitude which seeks to do whatever will give pleasure to the other

(8) Letter 30

THE GREAT HAPPINESS WHICH RESULTS FROM OBEDIENCE (RR6)

The wonderful effects and the means of attaining it

We have to lose ourselves, deny ourselves, conquer ourselves in order to reach this divine life of Jesus. We must direct our steps towards Him through the struggle of dying to self - never believing that we have arrived at this death to self, always aiming towards it, always considering ourselves to be far from it, totally unworthy and incapable of sharing this divine life in Jesus. We have to make a real effort to reach this goal; always thinking we are still far from it and do not deserve it (1). Sharing in this divine life entails a lot of suffering and renunciation, great afflictions and many trials from God... (2). In this way we will arrive at humility and love and through the latter to God.

How regrettable it is then for those who do not experience suffering, contempt or humiliation and who, on the contrary, are rich and live in comfort, honoured and esteemed in their profession, cherished and loved by relatives and friends and endowed with many talents recognised by the world(3)

People are not aware of this misfortune, cannot even imagine it because of a blindness which makes them oblivious of the true good (4).

'My God will I ever know the truth? and through whom, if not through You?. Since I am unworthy of this way of suffering, contempt and humiliation, grant me, Lord Jesus, to make the most of the small occasions that life may present; let me welcome them gladly and use them well; let me accept the smallest difficulties as precious fruits for me.'

NOTES

- (1) MAP 195 - 196
- (2) This reflects N. Barré's own experience. cf Letter 54
- (3) To be read in the light of Lk. 6 : 20-25 , Mt 5:14, FM 10
- (4) RC: 13-16

OTHER REFLECTIONS AND THOUGHTS (RR 7)

The acceptance of the cross in one's life is essential in order to lose oneself and die to self (1). Such was the case in the life of Jesus because the same is true for human nature and the ways of the world as we shall see, since they are enemies of Jesus (2).

Afflictions are destined for the children of God! His servants serve Him by means of pious actions and other exercises (3). Not only can we be deceived and cut off from God by our lack of sense of what is good, our natural tendencies and our perverted inclinations but also by our intellect which leads us astray, blinds us (4), and induces us to evolve our own particular life style - which we do not want to change because it resonates with human nature. Our intellect can deceive us into believing that the dictates of human nature are right and good.

The greatest intellectuals are often the most mistaken (5) and they mislead others who know no better and who were originally attracted to the cross. Each one of us could say that we are neither inclined towards nor prepared for this state of perfection, that we don't even feel called to it nor could we ever reach it. Everyone finds different ways of making excuses of this nature(6).

Here is the answer : we must long for God and thirst for Him and His love. We must dispose ourselves and prepare to go to Him and devote all our attention and zeal to the continuous effort of seeking and finding Him in simplicity. It is thus that the wise and prudent of this world act in order to acquire temporal benefits. They keep thinking about it, apply themselves

to it, work at it, plot all sorts of schemes and pull all the strings that could advance their plans. They set out, prepare themselves and leave nothing undone until their aim is accomplished.

Let us follow the example of the apprentices who are learning a trade.

NOTES

- (1) cf MAP 64, 65, 72, 73, 162-170
- (2) there are also rather exacting regulations to be followed in living according to the dictates of human nature and the ways of the world
- (3) cf MAP 204, 205; Letter 14
For N. Barré, entering into the mystery of the Cross and the self-emptying of Christ is a sign of a high degree of spirituality
- (4) MAP 146, RE 10
- (5) MAP 145
- (6) Jn 4: 10

DEATH AND LIFE (RR8)

descending and ascending (1)

The practice recommended in this chapter is of the utmost importance to those who are not yet ready to give up everything. These put off the search for perfection either through lack of determination or through losing heart or through being incorrectly advised. They mistakenly think that if they cannot follow the evangelical counsels to the letter, then they do not have to live according to their spirit either or make any effort to die to self.

If you cannot give up what you have, let go of yourselves and then all is left behind; when you renounce yourself interiorly, you also renounce what is outside of yourself without even realising it. It is self which is the support and basis of everything. We must take away this basis and put Jesus there instead - this is the only foundation stone on which to build a lasting edifice (2).

We will then no longer focus on ourselves. Adam will no longer be there. Jesus will have replaced him. The whole edifice, spiritual and temporal, those gifts of grace and nature, of mind and of body will no longer seem to belong to us. While we still have them, we will see them as belonging to Jesus rather than to ourselves. If we still see something of value in them we must convince ourselves that is it only a seeming good, in us and for us, since all belongs to Jesus (3).

But you will say : 'Are those who shed tears like those who do not? Are they not aware that they are crying?' (4). Those who shed tears should not regard them as an expression of their own repentance (5).

They must not attribute anything to themselves or take credit for themselves. They should consider themselves as hardened sinners; far removed from repentance; apt to commit a thousand sins against God if God did not stop them (6).

All the while Jesus is putting tears in their hearts and making them flow from their eyes. When He wishes, Jesus bestows on them feelings of repentance - their tears and repentance are those of Jesus (7), which they experience because Jesus so wishes.

Those in this state never think that they do or suffer enough. They think they are neither doing nor suffering anything. It is Jesus who is suffering in them. This is the highest form of suffering possible. It is the suffering of shame and of forgetfulness (8) - the highest degree of perfection.

'I thirst', said Jesus on the cross (9).

Jesus the Holy one was thirsty, but it was a thirst for suffering. He had already suffered a lot, limitless suffering. All that remained was to swallow a little vinegar and gall; his sufferings subsided slightly but his thirst will only end with his life. He died with this thirst still on Him. From then on, He no longer thinks about having suffered, as for example, when He was with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (10). Only three days had elapsed and He seems to have forgotten it all. Everyone was astonished and afraid, seeing the sun and the stars darkened, the earth quaking and all nature in a kind of upheaval (11). St. Denis the Areopagite (12) was led to remark that all nature was suffering or about to perish and that Jesus was the only one who paid no heed to it. The disciples tell Him about it and He takes no notice. He answers by reproaching them : 'O hearts stubborn and slow to believe' (13) and He seems to tell them that what He suffered was nothing since it had to be so.

Jesus was the first to put into practice what He had proposed to his apostles : when you have done all and suffered all, overlook and forget it all saying, 'We are unprofitable servants' (14). Thus it was with the great apostle, that chosen vessel, chosen by Jesus (15).

When you have endured numerous torments and crosses, afterwards you will say it is nothing and you will forget it all, so that you can go on suffering and forgetting it all again. Thus you continue in this state of wretchedness and suffering (16). What a miracle of incomparable patience which can only come from the principle set forth by our author (17) - it was not he who suffered and died but Jesus in him. It is Jesus who suffers and dies in us, taking our place to suffer and bring about our death so that we can live with Him. Thus death and life, the low and the high, the descending and ascending, all go on together. A very deep valley makes a very high mountain (18). It is in the valley of the greatest misfortunes and tears that God is pleased to bring the soul to the heights - heights that reach even the infinity of his greatness.

Experience shows that one can see the stars shining more brightly from the bottom of a well than in full daylight from the ground above.

God gives His divine grace to the humble and increases this grace according as they descend to a more lowly state.

Where does He look for those to whom He wants to give a place of honour among the angels and principalities? He seeks them not only in the lowliness of poverty but lower still in the stench of poverty. This was how He acted in regard to His divine Son, his apostles and his dearest friends. They were regarded as the refuse of the world and the Gospel speaks of His repugnance for all that is contrary (19).

The greater the conceit and pride the more God withdraws. He finds his delight in lowliness and nothingness and not in greatness.

The Creator's only objective is nothingness, that is, total death to self (20). Thus He created the world and decreed our eternity. That is why the Church sings about the dead : 'from the gates of hell, deliver their souls, O Lord.' These words do not apply to the damned, because there is no hope of redemption for them. They apply only to those referred to above (21). Those who have not reached this spiritual state, but who nevertheless die in the state of grace, will experience it in Purgatory because a tainted nothingness cannot enter Paradise. All stain of Adam must be removed (22). All arrogance (23) has to be punished. Self has to be eliminated by repentance and replaced by Jesus. Then only can it be said : 'enter into joy' (24). This leads us to conclude that Purgatory is either a continuation or a beginning of this state in another life for those who had not arrived at it in this life.

It is true that while on earth it is possible to reach a state of purification that leads directly to Paradise and simply pass through Purgatory. The state of purification should be the same as that resulting from Purgatory, only in a different proportion. That is why people often say of someone that he or she is doing purgatory on earth.

From this we see that it is not enough just to be good, to be crushed by fire and purified of all that is earthly (25). We have to go further and eliminate all traces of self through an experience of nothingness and lowliness in a situation where purification can be total and complete.

This parable obviously applies to the Christian who experiences being thrashed (26):

- a) by God on all sides being deprived of any consolations referred to in spiritual writings, as well as being beset by a thousand other afflictions;
- b) by the angels because they are ministers of God's will - their charity urges them on to lead us to greater purification;
- c) by the demons who rage and attack trying to bring to perdition what is best and most pleasing to God. The devil's presumption leads him to think he will succeed but his folly brings about his own failure because he deceives the mind but not the wisdom of the person (27).
- d) by other human beings because they oppose whatever may lead to perfection. This is true not only for the wicked but for a number of those considered to be good. What most distressed St. Teresa was the opposition she got from good people (28) and from others out of zeal for God.
- e) But more than all these the soul is 'thrashed' by itself, this is its inner harvest (29).

Such people have to struggle against their imagination and unruly desires, against the will of the flesh, against those passions that vie with one another. Everything is in turmoil yet they see clearly that this is their harvest. They see themselves plunged into opposition towards God, hardened by their sins, which causes them unceasing torment. But if they glance at their Saviour dying on the cross for love of them, they will feel their hope renewed.

Whatever the interior suffering may be, it will not be apparent on the outside. They will appear untroubled and will carry out their duties wisely and promptly. Not only will God bless them with abundant graces but He will guide and lead them and act through them.

Mary Magdalen and her companions, having gone down and lowered themselves into the tomb, found heavenly lights and saw the angels there (30). We can learn from them. They had prepared everything well and had taken perfumes. According to St. Gregory the Great (31) these perfumes represent the many virtues they had acquired. They had an ardent love for Jesus but for the crucified Jesus. Their minds were filled with His death, crucifixion and degradation rather than with the splendour of His glory. They did everything with the greatest care but they had no trust in themselves, in their strength because they began to say to one another : 'Who will roll back the stone for us?' Who will remove the obstacle that prevents us from descending into the tomb with Jesus? According to St. John Climacus (32) this was a sincere acknowledgement of their own weakness and powerlessness.

In their great love for Jesus they did not think of taking this precaution; they poured out their hearts to Him and trusted in Him. Who took away the stone? It was either Jesus or an angel whom He asked to do it. It is He who teaches us to descend, to descend to the depths of humility, the holy women did indeed reach this depth and saw the angels there...

NOTES

- (1) This title was not in the original
- (2) 1Pet. 2 : 6-7
- (3) MAP 39
- (4) in other words, we cannot deny what is obviously a part of us
- (5) the gift of tears is a gift from God - a deep feeling of sorrow for one's sins
- (6) the more people are aware of the holiness of God the more they become aware of their own sinfulness and of the Gospel truth : 'Without Me, you can do nothing.' (Jn. 15 : 5)
- (7) Jesus takes our sins upon Him, 2Cor. 5 : 21
- (8) forgetfulness of self and of past trials. cf Phil. 3 : 12-14
- (9) Jn 19 : 28
- (10) Lk. 24 : 13-35
- (11) earth and nature are personified here
- (12) this St. Denis was a theologian of the 5th century - not to be confused with Denis, who was a disciple of Paul, mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles
- (13) Lk. 24 : 25
- (14) Lk. 17 : 10
- (15) 2Cor. 4 : 7-18; 12 : 9
- (16) Lk. 4
- (17) St. Paul - the great apostle, Gal. 2 : 20; 2Tim. 2 : 11-13
- (18) an image of the paschal mystery
- (19) Lk. 6 : 24-26; Lam 3: 45; 1Cor 4: 12-13.
- (20) in dying to self we enter into nothingness from which God created everything and from which He can re-create. Gen. 1 : 1; 2Mac. 7 : 28
- (21) those in a state of nothingness, empty of self who have 'descended into hell'
- (22) cf R.R.4 for images of Adam and Christ
- (23) pretence to take the place of God. cf Gen 3 : 5
- (24) Mt. 25 : 21
- (25) Mt. 13 : 33; Jn 12: 24
- (26) thrashed like the grain that is being separated from the straw
- (27) the devil may deceive the mind of someone but when that person is filled with the wisdom of God, there is no room for deception
- (28) cf St. Teresa of Avila's autobiography
- (29) the soul is 'thrashed' by the suffering and difficulties arising from faults and infidelities
- (30) Mk. 16 : 1-5
- (31) cf homily 21 and 22 of Gregory the Great
- (32) cf John Climacus's work 'L'Echelle Sainte' (The holy ladder) NU 25 on humility

CONFERENCE ON THE EUCHARIST (RR 9)

to help receive Holy Communion worthily

As the living Father sent me and as I live by the Father, in the same way whoever eats Me will live by Me. These words are found in Jn 6:57. The life of the one who receives Holy Communion must also be that of Jesus. It is Jesus Himself who affirms this. We must live the life of Jesus. To say we must live the life of Jesus and receive Him worthily in Holy Communion is one and the same thing. Receiving Holy Communion is in itself an excellent preparation for communion with Jesus (1). We must go on taking Jesus as our food in Holy Communion until such time as we, so to speak, become His food. This means until such time as He takes possession of us, makes His home in us, wipes out our old self and puts Himself in its place by destroying all self-centredness and arrogance. In this way He becomes incarnated in us (2).

Here lies the real aim of the Eucharist : to complete in us the Mystery of the Incarnation, the purpose of which is to enable all people to share in the divinity of Christ (3).

He took on our flesh - 'the Word became flesh' (4). He became a human person with flesh and bones like us, subject to

all kinds of weakness like us so that the life of God could be strengthened in us.

Each of the sacraments bestows grace, but the Eucharist even more so. The more often we receive Holy Communion worthily, the more this work of grace (5) is strengthened and brought to completion in us and becomes a pledge of glory for us.

When everything has been got ready to give shape to matter it will take on the particular form for which it has been prepared (6). This is well illustrated in the case of firewood. Damp wood must be sawed, dried out and then put into the fire. It burns and in the process it loses its substance of wood and is changed into fire.

Similarly with Holy Communion, we must prepare for it in this way - by drying out the dampness, renewing our faith, hope, good works and burning love. We must keep on receiving Holy Communion until all is in readiness (to give form to the matter). Jesus who is the true mould (form) for our lives will so dwell in us that He will change us into Himself.

The drop of water used in the sacred mystery is even more significant and derives from the mystery itself. This drop of water originally came from a spring, a river. Separated from this source it mixes so thoroughly with the wine as to be atomised and, according to St. Thomas, it actually becomes wine before the consecration. Thus it loses its substance completely and becomes the blood of Jesus.

All that the drop of water goes through should show us how to prepare ourselves to benefit fully from this sacrament : to be changed into the divine life. However good we may be, we will not reach this goal if we do not go through a process of self-emptying and get rid of all self-centredness. People may be very good and still remain on the human level. The grace of Jesus will be with them, but Jesus will not be living in them, neither will they be living the life of Jesus in the way that Jesus lives the life of His Father.

The text of Jn 6 : 57, already quoted, helps to throw light on this - it has depth of meaning and is expressed quite simply.

With Him, From Him, In Him, Through Him.

We receive Him and live through Him out of love, in order to please and adore Him and to give him every possible mark of our affection and zeal.

'*With Him*' drives out self and so the soul is drawn to Him out of love. But '*in Him*' supposes the Lord is present - when we receive Holy Communion, '*with Him*' becomes '*in Him*'. As we adore Him we become more aware of our nothingness. The soul who is '*with Him*' is always in His presence, because He is always with us and wants us to be with Him (7). This union is invisible and incomprehensible but very real.

'*From Him*' : we must remember that Jesus is the source of all this grace. All grace, no matter of what nature, emanates and flows from Him as a living spring (8). It is from this source that we draw all that is good and perfect.

'*In Him*' is even more profound because we enter into Him through His sacred wounded side (9).

St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure and other contemplatives affirm that people are just like atoms that can easily enter into the heart of Jesus through the open wound. They can penetrate deeply and, like the dove (10), find shelter there from all harm.

To be completely one with Him, to live only in Him is our ultimate goal. He is our life, therefore it is He who acts and who accomplishes everything (11).

'*Through Him*' is the crown of all perfection because through the Word all things came to be (12). It sums up the whole and perfect life of Jesus. To reach this level, we must really want it, give it all our attention, reflect well on it and be motivated by love and zeal.

St. Thomas' sister asked him what she should do to become a saint. He replied that it was sufficient to really want it (13).

Fidelity and practice will bring about much peace and consolation. Finally there is the cross with its anguish and hope.

NOTES

- (1) In 17th century theology a lot of emphasis was given to God's greatness and holiness - to such an extent that a great fear of offending Him evolved as well as feelings of unworthiness which prevented many people from receiving Holy Communion. This was one of the errors of Jansenism which N. Barré spoke out against. cf S.R. 2 : 5, 7;
L. 10, 11
- (2) MAP 64-69; MD 13
- (3) The communion of humanity with God becomes a reality in Christ through the Incarnation. Jesus Christ who shared our human condition (Heb. 2 : 12) even in its weakness, enabled us to share in the divine life (1Pet. 1 : 4)
- (4) Jn 1 : 14
- (5) This refers not only to God's gift of Himself but to the fruit of this gift
- (6) The distinction between matter and form is taken from Thomas Aquinas who in turn got the idea from Aristotle. The form relates to appearances while the matter refers to substance.
- (7) Lk. 26 : 27
- (8) Jn 1 : 16; L. 32
- (9) Jn 20 : 25-27
- (10) Sg. 2 : 14; 5 : 2. The image of a dove is often used in the Old Testament to illustrate a search for God and for love
- (11) Phil. 2 : 13
- (12) Jn 1 : 3; MAP 167-169
- (13) cf L.12

ADVICE FOR THE SPIRITUAL LIFE (1) (RR 10)

The religious (2) who sought advice from N. Barré asked him what was the conclusion to all he had read (3) and what he should do to put into practice all those great truths and reflections that he had got him to go through. How should he apply them to his life.

He replied that the real conclusion lay in what I myself thought about these truths and what they taught me about myself. He said I should be absorbed and fully caught up by these truths, imprisoned by them as it were, overcome by them, even to the point of losing my own life - totally lost in these admirable truths which were poured into my mind, absorbing everything before them so as to lead me straight to God (4).

I should live out my Christian life in this state, morally and socially as well as in everything that relates to my duty, profession and administration of goods - in general in all that I have to do and in all that is to happen to me. I would need great fidelity and a deep mystical life. One should follow the other if my life is in harmony with the truths to be lived out, letting go of myself and being alert in God (5).

I should act as if all depended on me and rely totally on grace - as if all depended on God without me (6); allowing His thoughts to become mine and out of respect for Him to make a total offering of myself; above all dying to self; carrying out the business of my profession through love and charity, in obedience to God's decrees, as if Jesus Himself were acting (7); recalling that it is God who gives the mind and the intelligence for temporal matters as well as for the spiritual ones. God told Moses (8) to choose those of most admirable spirit whom He would point out to him for the work of adorning the tabernacle - and He would double their gifts for this work. Indeed, they did marvels.

I begged N. Barré to tell me what I should ask of God so as to advance in this way of Christian perfection. He replied that nothing more was necessary except that His holy will would be done for me and His holy designs carried out (9), so that I

would become either small and lowly or very great as He would wish. The only thing that matters is that His will be accomplished in me, as it is in Heaven where everyone is happy and contented and where there is no jealousy.

The small finger is not anxious to be anything else but the small finger, it is enough for it to belong to the hand. The least of the blessed in heaven feels no jealousy towards St. Peter or the other saints in glory. There is but one spirit, one heart, one will and hence one desire and inclination in the greatest and holiest of communities. Amen.

N. Barré states that true purity of heart is to be found only in this state which consists of :

- a) being detached, with no trace of self or what is related to one's lower nature;
- b) ensuring that all is for God alone and not for oneself - everything is directed towards this aim;
- c) seeing all as coming from Him and through Him - this is the principle (10).

Many work on safeguarding themselves from all creatures and aim at eradicating self but their objective is their own perfection and their life in eternity. We must let go of all self-interest so that nothing be for oneself, but for God alone. God alone must be the motive for this purity of heart which should be accompanied by purity of intention.

When we get strong feelings of being rejected and of damnation being inevitable, we must keep on serving God and seek to belong to Him for the whole of our life, following the example of St. Francis de Sales (11). Furthermore, God alone must be the sole reason for this self-emptying - its sole foundation and support. It is a total eradication of all self-centredness, not only so that there will be no created element to tarnish the heart but also so that no thought will be given to self or for oneself. There is a total forgetfulness of self and above all nothing comes from oneself.

People in this state are aware only of their sinfulness and the eternal punishment they deserve. They abandon their whole being to God and lay no claim to love. If they become aware of being loved they say that it is not for them, nor has it anything to do with them. This love belongs to God in which He finds His delight. It is God who is loving Himself in such a heart and similarly with regard to every other grace.

To reach this point and remain in this state they must always ensure that they remain in a spirit of deep poverty and utter lowliness; a spirit of extreme poverty in all its aspects :

- a) they see what poor and miserable creatures they are and reflect on it;
- b) they acknowledge their weakness and helplessness before God, as advocated by St. John Climacus (12);
- c) being totally convinced of their helplessness and inability to do anything good by themselves will lead them to an experience of deep poverty.

Temptations on all sides, distress, a sense of being abandoned by God are all means of sanctification for them. Thus they can enter into their sinful nothingness and shame and are willing to withdraw from God. It is at this stage that God is pleased, as it were, to take them by the hand, raise them up to Himself and keep them there (13). But if He lets them go again, they will fall into the depths of wretchedness. He lifts them up again when He wants and when it is in accordance with His will.

Imagine a poor leper covered with sores, to whom a king gives his royal garments to cover the terrible sores - he does this just to cover them over, leaving the face, which is healthy, uncovered. But what is underneath is unsightly - hidden by the royal garments.

This wretched man, knowing what is underneath, does not want to be seen with these beautiful garments. He tells the king in his shame that he is ruining his garments, filling them with stench, and begs him to take them off, to let him go his

way and not have him dressed up like that. He says he is deceiving everyone as no one sees his foulness. It is seen only by the king and himself. However the king wants him to remain always as he is.

This outcast, when in this state, looks well on the outside but he is not at all happy with himself. He sees and feels his foulness, his wounds, his ugliness and the stench under the garments which he is infecting and ruining.

The cloak of this royal state which he is wearing does not bring him any consolation or pleasure. He knows that this cloak does not belong to him, it only increases his pain (14). This is the situation for the person clothed in Jesus and His graces.

In this case, two extremes are to be avoided. The first is presumption, self-complacency, self-esteem, attributing something to oneself in an arrogant kind of way (15), since everything belongs to God, comes from Him and depends on Him.

In a situation where we depend entirely and supremely on God as the source of everything, the other extreme to be avoided is cowardice, laziness and indifference. Thus if we rely on God for everything, it can happen that we choose to do nothing at all and little by little laziness takes over and a desire to seek the easy way. This would be a false tranquillity and would be harmful for the soul (16).

We must always act as if we were the doers (17), while being convinced however that it is God who does everything; bringing together the two extremes of grace and free will (18) as has been said above.

Nothing illustrates so well the dependence of our human nature and free will on grace, as the parable of the vine (19). Does the branch of the vine that is farthest from the trunk draw life from itself? What kind of life does it have? Is it a life belonging to itself? Is the life of the branch the same as that of the vine? Yes, it is the same vine and the branch belongs to it. It has nothing of its own, since it gets its life from the vine. If it is broken or cut off it ceases to live or to be a vine branch.

Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. We do not have, neither could we have, any life apart from that of Jesus. He alone is the life. We have nothing of ourselves - all belongs to Jesus, to God - our natural, moral and supernatural being.

He shows us that He is all when He says in the Gospel that He is the truth and the life (20). That means that the life we now have is the same life we had before we were born (21), that we receive our being from God, the life of God (22).

This life of God, the being we have received from God exists in our human and sinful nothingness. The children of God take no credit for the light which they have. They remain in darkness and nothingness and God's light shines in them. The deeper the darkness and emptiness, the greater the divine light.

To live in this state of luminous darkness we have to be children of God, like Jesus and not children of the flesh (23). It means following the paths described above, paths that Jesus followed in the same state of lowliness. In this way likenesses of Him will be formed (24).

As David realised his double sin, he experienced perfectly this double state of darkness and light.

The same is true for Job in his extreme afflictions and the complete justice with which God seemed to act towards him;

similarly with Tobias in his blindness, Peter in his sin, Thomas, Paul, Mary Magdalen and so many other saints.

It is this infinite light of God which constitutes paradise; God's being in everything. The saints and the blessed are like God; seeing themselves as being what the others are - what God is and nothing else. They see themselves as Peter, John, all the angels, Michael, the Blessed Virgin, Jesus, God; being one with all. They are overcome with supreme joy and happiness. Each one's happiness is the happiness of all and of God. Thus the just one enters into the joy of the Lord(25); this is the only joy that is. This being of God, infinite light, He who alone is holy, casts unending rays throughout paradise. Grace is only like a shadow of the glory of the saints on earth. The greatest saints on earth have but a little shadow of these brilliant rays of heaven(26). Human nature and all that is of the earth is as nothing. Sinners and the evil ones are less than nothing, worse than nothing.

In the Old Testament all that is said of the Promised Land is figurative. In the New Testament Jesus and His grace are a reality imperceptible to the senses. Heaven is the uncovering and the experience of this amazing and limitless reality(27).

On earth we should be all things to all, for and through Jesus(28); to all: because we should be like Jesus. This, in a way, is an imitation of what happens in heaven where each of the blessed is what the other is; completely in and through God, all to all and with all in Him.

N. Barré when giving Holy Communion to someone one day and saying the words: "Lord I am not worthy..." applied these words literally and thought to himself: "I must be the person into whom Jesus is about to enter since I say the word "under my roof". This made a deep impression on him: "Yes I am he and he is me". This is true for everyone else including sinners - in such a way that he could say: "it is I who curse in the one who curses and so on for other sins.

He saw himself as the sinner in all the sins committed. This must have been the case for Jesus throughout His life. He took all our sins upon himself. He was made into sin and identified with our sin(29). If Jesus was like that so should we, not only because of the example He gave us but because we belong to His mystical Body. We share one life with Him as well as all our activities of mind and body. Like Him we should, out of love, look on ourselves as sinners in all the sins of mankind(30). Consequently we do penance, bear the pain, continually cry out from our affliction because sin is being committed all the time(31).

We know that our neighbour is another self (32) for whom we weep as for ourselves, believing that this person's sin is ours. This we do throughout our lives until such time as God separates the good from the bad which is common to all of us(33). Thus we become one with all our neighbours on earth, so as to become one with the saved, with all in heaven and with all the saints. This exercise will lead to great charity; towards one's neighbour, to penance, shame and death to self since we share the sin of others as well as our own - all the good belongs to our neighbour and to God, not to us. Since all that is good is of God, our good words and thoughts belong to God.

Our good actions are God's doing and likewise all our good works, undertakings and situations in which we find ourselves, whether natural or supernatural.

Thus we attribute what is evil to ourselves. We must be like a clear window which lets the light shine through and holds back the wind, rain, hail, dust, heat of the sun and mud. In the same way we must let the light of God's grace pass through us, give all the credit to God. We must humble ourselves and empty ourselves, holding on to nothing except what truly belongs to us e.g. our sin, temptations, imperfections and troubles.

There are four main factors to be considered here:

- (i) stop seeking out people so as to seek only God

(ii) self-denial

(iii) adoration of God

(iv) burning love for one's neighbour.

We must remember that all of these spring from divine love. When love is present in the heart, it wants the place for itself alone. It seeks to drive out all else - all things worldly and vain - cutting off everything. It is like an inner voice constantly urging us on to let go of all that would lead us astray. The light of this divine love makes us more aware of our unworthiness, leads to shame and true humility. We become more aware of how far away we are from the state of perfections and find ourselves saying: "Lord I am not worthy (34); Lord be merciful to me, prepare me yourself for this great action, for the sacrifice which you are asking of me".

This is the kind of love which more easily draws God into the soul ; the highest form of love. Our great reverence for God and disregard for ourselves leads us away from a self-seeking love.

Infantile love is just the opposite. It pursues what it wants, is totally absorbed by it, expresses itself with many words and a lot of affection (35). Such is the way with people whose love for God is imperfect. All they do is to make acts of love; more words than expression of the heart. They run to God, speak familiarly with Him, fill their thoughts and imagination with love and find their satisfaction in this way. Thus they play on their own self-love.

On the contrary, love expressed by great souls has none of this exterior behaviour. Being aware of their own unworthiness, their prayer of entreaty leads them more into their own nothingness, shame, lowliness and silence. Through this kind of love they see themselves as in great need and quite unworthy of infinite greatness. This is the basis for true adoration of God; adoration in spirit and in truth, where one is aware of one's nothingness - believes it, sees it, experiences it, where God is all (36).

God is in search of souls such as these, who adore in this way and not in their own self-centred way; who have no other aim or desire and for whom this is the sole aim of their devotion and spiritual life; who let go of all else for this one aim and who do not want to do anything else (37).

Now although it is a good thing to fill one's mind with God and to desire to love Him alone, it is not the whole of the Gospel. Jesus was not satisfied with this. He emptied Himself, suffered, died to Himself in His own death. He worked miracles, preached, taught, talked with and cured people. There was no limit to what He did for His neighbour whom He saw as another self, He went on working to the end.

If it is good to withdraw from people and think about God, it is also necessary to let go of self in order to enter into the spirit of adoration, desired by God. In this way one will grow in the deep and ardent love which comes from the exercise of charity towards one's neighbour. The latter is regarded as one and the same as 'I' in such a way that if I experience divine love, I show the same to my neighbour and let go of all that pertains to my fallen nature.

The philosophers claim that no one, except one who has attained perfection, can produce an image of oneself. Similarly we cannot kindle love in the other if we do not have it ourselves. We try to identify with the spiritual and temporal needs of our neighbour, with whom we are ready to weep and whose different needs we bring before the Lord.

When in the state of adoration, we receive extraordinary and abundant graces even if we do not deserve them, like the evil ones. We are deserving of hell like the latter and even more so (38) we are in the pit with them (39). The pit however is blocked up for them but not for us. They have been damned, but those for whom the pit is open can still receive mercy.

Thus God puts grace and sin together. In uniting Himself closely with the sinner, He goes further than He did in the case of Jesus, since Jesus was always just and sinless.

A sinner united in this way with God, receiving His light and grace is like the burning bush where God spoke to Moses (40).

The greatness and the glory of God were in the bush which was on fire, without being burned or destroyed. The astonishing brightness of God was all that could be seen even though it was only a bush of brambles and thorns, open to rain and wind, mud and mire and maybe full of snakes. It would be a fine sight to see this bush taking some of the glory for itself as well as attributing to itself some of the lights and divine graces within it.

NOTES

- (1) This title was not in the original
- (2) Perhaps the religious referred to in RR2
- (3) cf R.R.2
- (4) This whole sentence emphasises the divine action which calls for a letting go of all selfishness and self-sufficiency
- (5) The meaning of this sentence is obscure in the French, hence this is an interpretation
- (6) This idea has been taken from Fr. Nadal who was Ignatius's secretary
- (7) Theme developed by Pascal
- (8) Ex. 31 : 1-6
- (9) Mt. 6 : 10
- (10) We are dependent on God to lead us to search more deeply for Him
- (11) The following note is in the margin of the original : the tribulations which St. Francis de Sales experienced regarding his faith and personal salvation
- (12) St. John Climacus' work : 'Echelle Sainte†» (The holy ladder) Ch. 25 : 3
- (13) L. 31
- (14) The fact of deceiving people increases his pain
- (15) Attributing to oneself what does not really belong and deriving a sense of pride from it.
- (16) This is a warning against any form of Quietism which would be a false mysticism
- (17) R.R.2
- (18) There were very lively discussions on grace and free will at the time. St. Thomas Aquinas used the image of the two ends of a chain
- (19) Jn 15 : 1-8
- (20) Jn 14 : 6
- (21) Jer. 31 : 3
- (22) Acts 17 : 28
- (23) Jn 1 : 12-13; 1Jn. 3 : 1; Ex. 13 : 22
- (24) PM 6
- (25) Mt. 25 : 21-23
- (26) Col. 2 : 17; Heb. 8 : 6
- (27) 1Cor. 13 : 12
- (28) 1Cor. 9 : 22
- (29) Is. 53 : 4-5; 2Cor. 5 : 21
- (30) Through love we are, like Jesus, in solidarity with all sinners
- (31) 2 Cor. 5 : 2; Rom. 8 : 23
- (32) Lv. 19 : 18; Mt. 22 : 37-40
- (33) Mt. 13 : 30; 25 : 31
- (34) Mt. 8 : 8
- (35) Here he speaks of childishness. cf MAP 228, 229 . In other texts N. Barré speaks of the importance of childlikeness e.g. MD 54; S.R. 1 : 2. (36) Jn. 4 : 23-24; MAP 233
- (37) There is a hint of Quietism and its danger here
- (38) R.R.4; MAP 37
- (39) We also find this image in St. Teresa of Avila's autobiography, Ch. 32
- (40) Ex. 2

DEPENDENCE ON GRACE (RR 11)

We should live in a state of complete dependence on grace, and however great the gifts and effects it produces we should always focus on God who is its source.

We should not behave as if it belonged to us and still less want to keep it as if it were our own possession, something we really wanted, took pleasure in and took for granted. It does not belong to us and was not given to us for this purpose but to draw us and unite us to its source.

However it is clear that God confers on us His glory and His grace so that we may give them back to Him and leave them with Him as their source. He has no problem conferring these on us except when we use them as if they belonged to us. He also gives us some enjoyment in them even if they do not belong to us and even though we do not merit them through anything that we do.

When God works a miracle we should not spend time thinking about it or get caught up in working out how it could have happened and never give a thought to the God who worked it. Rather we should leave the miracles aside and draw closer to God, their source. Thus no matter how many graces the Lord bestows on us, let us not linger on these favours through self-complacency, satisfaction, desire or pride. Let us keep our eyes fixed on God and do only what pleases Him. Let us allow the waters to flow off into the streams and rivers without following them and remain close to the spring, the source of the water.

The fact is we tend to go back and back over the way grace is at work within us mainly through its visible effects; we try very hard to recall the experience and take pleasure in it because of our insatiable self-love. Thus we continually misuse the graces we receive by holding on to them and claiming them as our own.

Let us seek the reign of Jesus in us; let Jesus reign within us. Let us take possession of Him alone - our Lord and Master - as well as His gifts and graces which always accompany Him. They are as inseparable from Him as light is from the sun. If we want to have the sun we do not have to seek light as well. Scripture says that when we have wisdom in our hearts we also have all that is good (1).

This eternal wisdom is ours, uncreated and incarnate (2). Let us then set our hearts on nothing else but the desire and love of this wisdom, never turning away, so as to be filled with its gifts.

St. Augustine was saddened when he saw the followers of Jesus seeking and desiring the gifts of the Father more than the Father Himself. Jacob experienced this kind of surprise when he agreed to let go and receive a blessing (3). The wife in love with her one husband has no thought of any other good but him and tells him very emphatically that she will never leave him (4). St. Augustine also said that it is better to love the giver rather than the gift and to have greater appreciation for the one who offers the gift than for the gift itself.

In order to put this into practice as fully as possible we should, in justice, rejoice in what is ours and leave to Jesus all the graces and all the good that is His. The more we rejoice in what is ours the more we enter into our sinfulness and the depths of our nothingness.

Let us look at, reflect on and experience our sinfulness, our continual resistance and opposition to God; our frightening

inclination towards evil - as great as the pull of gravity on a millstone falling through the air; our desire and longing for what is sinful. Even during the times when God fills us with extra favours, we should recognise the pleasure we would take in committing sin if God in His goodness did not hold us back. In a word, we should be aware of our human weakness, ignorance, our continual abuse of God's grace and the fact that we deserve to be condemned to the underworld. We will then be ready to put into practice what has been referred to above, provided we are strongly convinced about it and that it is rooted deeply in our hearts.

The great shame and confusion we experience when we see the way God continually pours out His gifts on such a pitiful creature, the deep feeling of our own unworthiness and the immense distress arising from what we regard as sinful in the sight of God; all of this leads us to let go of the self-satisfaction we experience when we receive God's grace and draw us closer to Him through faith and adoration, enduring love and trustful abandonment. Thus we do not appropriate to ourselves what belongs to God but rather the evil which is rightfully ours.

NOTES

- (1) Wis. 7 : 11
- (2) Jesus is the eternal wisdom of God incarnate
- (3) Gen. 32 : 23-32
- (4) Sg. 3 : 4

CONCLUSION (RR 12)

and consequences of advice given to the person for whom I put all these instructions in writing.

They are intended to be of help to those whom God in His mercy calls to a high state of perfection (1).

N. Barré urged me to control my passions, inclinations, affections, thoughts and desires; in addition, to overcome them and continually reduce their power by working on them as God wants and in order to please Him. He will reveal to us day by day the faults, imperfections and reality of our inner life and of our total self - at the sight of which we will be ashamed and horrified.

We should take care lest this should arise from a desire to overcome self-centredness, pretension or the attributing of success to oneself rather than a desire to rely totally on God and His grace at work in us. This is where the difference lies between Stoics (2) and Christians.

The former are motivated by self-love and false belief in themselves in their efforts to keep themselves in control. Stoics should be perfect according to natural law. Christians, on the other hand, are totally dependent on grace and divine action.

Take time to reflect on the mystical life from two points of view : intelligence and experience (3). Both are a very great grace, the latter is a very special gift of God.

The first should be developed with the help of reading, meditation and reflection. We must allow all this to fill our thoughts and soak into our minds so that our hearts may be fully penetrated by them. We should dwell on them during Mass, Communion and all Church services, believing that all the thoughts they give rise to are expressions of God's grace and generosity.

As to our good deeds, we should remember that it is God who deigns to act through us. We should believe firmly that it is

His will that these actions take place through us. We should feel great shame that He does all this in spite of our state which could be compared to that of mud, slime and sheer dregs. This is the way God wants it.

We should never omit any good that we can do or endure - always remembering to do so out of a sense of lowliness and self-emptying.

God does not want us to love Him only, we must also love our neighbour. We should intensify our efforts to work at this.

Our neighbour has a body and soul just as a candle has wax and a wick. The candle must be lit and allowed to burn. That is why it has wax which we try to preserve.

In a similar way we exercise charity towards our neighbour, who is a person capable of giving glory to God. This is the way God wishes it and we have to work at it.

He will not bring about our salvation without our co-operation. He also wants us to work with Him for the salvation of our neighbour. In His goodness, He wants to work through us so that we can give Him whatever support we are capable of. We should always act with the intention of promoting our neighbour's salvation, especially that of the soul - by ourselves or with the help of another, so that the love of God may burn brightly in his or her heart - a heart which will burn before Him and for Him. This is what is known as lighting a candle for God. Amen.

NOTES

- (1) This title is similar to that used at the beginning of this document. It is obviously intended for those called to a deep and mystical union with God.
- (2) Stoicism is a Greek school of philosophy dating from 308 B.C. which is based on the belief that all things are governed by an unchanging natural law and on indifference to the external world including one's emotions and passions.
- (3) A life of union with God is at one and the same time an enlightenment of our understanding of the mystery and an experience of His presence and action.