

that last, which he refused. At least he had found some intuition, however limited, of a great, unique and ultimate love. One poem in the final group appears to summarize his conclusions: all earthly loves, he asserts, are vain, void, treacherous—*yet*, at the behest of Jesus, for what in them participates of the Divine Spark, they are bidden form a choir, marshal into a procession, to sing in dolorous unison, and to the glory of the Divine Sufferings, '*L'hymne qui te sied à présent*'.



SELECTIONS FROM PERE LALLEMANT:

II. PERFECTION

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A. Seeking God

TRULY to seek God implies that we consider him above all as the first principle of both nature and grace, then as the conserver of all being, and thirdly as the sovereign master who governs every creature and arranges everything by his providence. Hence we should consider all events, even the smallest, as manifestations of God's will and pleasure.

Seeking God means willing nothing and desiring nothing except what he wills and arranges by his providence. We should consider as it were two acts in God in our regard: one by which he wills to give us certain graces to lead us to a certain degree of glory if we are faithful to him, and the other by which he does not will to give us more grace or raise us to a higher degree of glory than this. Few people have enough courage and fidelity to fulfil God's purpose, and reach by their co-operation that degree of grace and glory which God desires. We should have so much esteem, submission and love for the manifestations of God's will, judgement and providence that we desire neither more grace nor more glory than he is pleased to give us, even if we could have as much as we liked; we should confine ourselves to these limits of his through the infinite respect we owe to the dispositions of divine providence.

One excellent way to seek God is to have in everything no other end except God's glory.

This principle teaches us to seek to know nothing in our studies except what tends to the greater service of God. The devil knows incomparably more than we do, but we can surpass him by referring our knowledge to God's greater glory which he cannot do.

The same principle can be applied to all our activities and to everything in general. We should be so detached from ourselves, from our interests, tastes, our particular inclinations and plans that we should be ready to renounce them all for the sake of God's service, and for the sake of what helps us to seek and find him; nothing is desirable for itself save only God, and everything else is desirable only in relation to him. Hence seeking what does not lead us to God and applying ourselves and pleasing ourselves in it is only error and illusion.

When we break this rule and prefer what is agreeable to ourselves to what is most for God's glory, we act like a king who exchanges his kingdom for a glass of water. It is the greatest folly in the world because everything which is apart from God's interest is only lies and vanity. Hence every day we are very wasteful, because we lose as much glory for ourselves as we should have obtained for God when it was in our power to do so.

But acting in everything for God's greater glory is the most noble end imaginable. All that God could give to the highest Seraphim without this is less than this, and he could not raise a creature to a higher end, even if it were a thousand times more perfect by nature than the highest Seraphim.

Let us then seek God in everything, let us make everything a weapon for his greater glory: consolations and dryness, even sins and imperfections. Everything helps those who know how to seek God and find him in all the events of their lives.

Another way of seeking God is difficult to understand unless it is practised. This means seeking not only his will and his glory, not only his gifts, graces, consolations and the taste for the devout life, but seeking God himself, resting in him alone and delighting only in him. If on the other hand we are attached to his graces and to sensible sweetness, we are exposed to great danger and will never attain the end to which we claim to be going. But when we seek God alone we are above all creatures, we consider even

royal power and all earthly glory and the whole world and every thing which is not God as nothing.

Our greatest care and our continual pursuit should be to seek God in this way, and we should not go beyond it for our neighbour's service except by way of trial. We should be like hounds which are still kept partly on the leash. When we come to possess God we shall be able to give our zeal greater liberty, and then we shall do more in a day than we did before in ten years.

When a soul is attached only to God, when it seeks him alone, delights and rests in him alone, nothing can make it suffer any more. Thus although the saints were persecuted by men and attacked by devils, they laughed at all this. They felt these blows outwardly; inwardly they were at peace.

We shall remain unhappy until we reach that state. A body without a soul, even if adorned with a thousand precious stones is only a corpse full of corruption. Similarly a soul with every desirable advantage except God will not escape unhappiness.

When creatures tempt us by their attractions, the best way to protect ourself from surprise is to withdraw at once into God, to sigh for him and relish him by holy thoughts rather than to stop and fight and argue against the allurements of temptation, which is both more perplexing and more dangerous. We should act in the same way at the first touch of suffering, disappointment and adversity.

We must pursue the quest for God; our end is to be filled by him. We will attain this when our sins have been completely cleansed away. Meanwhile we must tend towards God and make use of all creatures as means to this end without giving our hearts to them.

It is most distressing that we can find such satisfaction in creatures which we should refuse and despise. We greatly esteem, for instance, an attractive obedience: we are eager to acquire it and when we have won it we are happy. A nothing is able to satisfy us as if God were not our true happiness. We should not even fix our eyes or attach our hearts to God's supernatural gifts. We must seek him alone, rest only in him. Everything apart from him is nothing. *God is my portion for ever.*¹

¹ Psalm lxxii, 26.

B. We must give ourselves to God completely.

In the pursuit of perfection it is a great advantage to serve God with a free soul and a full heart which makes no reserves. If we compare the life of a fervent religious with that of a tepid one and count up their good days and their bad ones, we shall find that the tepid religious has more bad times than the fervent one.

Consider two religious: one gives himself to God from the beginning and decides to spare nothing for his sanctification, the other only advances by small steps and is courageous enough to surmount only half his difficulties. Compare their whole lives (and not only parts of them) and you will find that the tepid one suffers more than the fervent one. As David, king and prophet, said of the relaxed who do not give themselves generously to God: *There is only affliction and unhappiness in their ways; they do not know the way of peace.*²

We spend long years and often our whole lives bargaining whether we will give ourselves entirely to God. We cannot resolve to make the complete sacrifice: we reserve for ourselves many attachments and plans, desires, hopes and pretensions of which we are unable to strip ourselves and thus pass into that perfect nakedness of the spirit which disposes us to be possessed entirely by God. Our enemy holds us by very many chains to prevent us advancing in perfection; when we come to die, we shall recognize his deceit and realize that we have allowed ourselves to be occupied with trifles, like children.

For whole years together we fight against God and resist the movements of his grace which urge us both to leave our trifles by renouncing those vain amusements which hold us back, and to give ourselves to him without reserve. But encumbered as we are by our self-love and blinded by our ignorance, we are held back by false fears and do not dare to take the plunge; through fear of being unhappy we remain unhappy always, instead of giving ourselves entirely to God who wants to possess us only in order to deliver us from our distress.

Once and for all then we must renounce all our interests and all that gives us satisfaction, all our plans and all our desires, and depend henceforth only on God's good pleasure, resigning ourselves completely into his hands.

² Psalm xiii, 3.

C. How artifice and deceit separate us from God.

*The Holy Spirit, who is master of wisdom, shuns deceit, says the wise man.*³ We shall never advance unless we walk in sincerity before God and men. Men are full of inexhaustible falsehood. We disguise ourselves ceaselessly both to ourselves and others, and we are most unwilling to admit it. We should never use excuses nor palliate anything; such duplicity and artifices of self-love separate us far from God.

A cunning soul which makes use of diplomacy and stratagems in contacts with its neighbour can hardly form a plan or a thought which is sinless, for its whole intention is to deceive others. Such conduct is a continual lie. It is always opposed to God and seems to deny implicitly his providence over human hearts.

We should never use cunning or stratagems when dealing with our superiors about the use to be made of our services, or about anything else on any occasion whatever; for this is all prudence of the flesh, condemned by our Lord. *The prudence of the flesh is death; the wisdom of the Spirit is life and peace.*⁴

³ Wisdom i, 5.

⁴ Romans viii, 6.