

## KNOWLEDGE OF OUR END

PÈRE LALLEMANT

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### Introductory Note

Louis Lallemant, born in 1587, was educated by the Jesuits, and entered the Society of Jesus at the age of eighteen. After his tertianship he taught philosophy for three years, mathematics for four, and theology (in two periods) for five. From 1622 till 1625 he was novice-master and from 1628 till 1630 master of the tertianship. From 1631 till 1633 he was prefect of higher studies at Bourges and in 1634 rector of the same college. He had long suffered from ill-health, and he died there in 1635, aged only forty-seven, greatly esteemed for his holiness and his excellent spiritual influence.

He was described by a contemporary as being 'of tall stature and majestic bearing; he had a wide, benign forehead and chestnut coloured hair, but was beginning to grow bald. His face was oval and of good proportions, his complexion swarthy . . . His eyes were full of an attractive kindness, and they revealed both his sureness of judgment and his perfect equanimity. . . . You could find no-one physically better made than him, no-one more exteriorly devout and recollected, no-one more composed in all his movements.'

Père Lallemant died without publishing his spiritual teaching, but it was to become as widely appreciated as that of P. Baltasar Alvarez, representing the mystical aspirations of the Order to which they both belonged. The *Doctrine Spirituelle* was not published until 1694 when it was edited and arranged from the notes of Lallemant's disciples, P. Rigoleuc and P. Surin, by P. Champion, S.J. Much of the work consists of tertianship teaching; the special purpose of the conferences and the quality of the audience should not be forgotten by the reader. These explain the simple style and elements of the outlook such as occasional exaggeration and a general stressing of the moral rather than the intellectual aspects; from time to time too elements of the then prevailing rigorism are apparent. Nevertheless Bremond described the work as 'one of the three or four principal books of modern religious literature', and declared that 'as a grammar of mysticism and an initiation into the contemplative life no other work should be preferred to it.' (Cf. *Histoire littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France*, V, 64.)

*These extracts are translated from A. Pottier's edition of La Vie et la Doctrine Spirituelle du P. Louis Lallemand (Paris, 1924).*

I—*Only God can make us happy.*

There is a void in our hearts which creatures alone cannot fill; it can be filled only by God who is our beginning and our end. The possession of God fills this void and makes us happy; the privation of God leaves us in emptiness and makes us unhappy.

Before God fills this void he sets us on the path of faith under these conditions: if we always consider him as our last end, if we use creatures with moderation and relate our use of them to his service, and if we contribute faithfully to the glory he wills to derive from all creatures, he will give himself to us, fill our emptiness and make us happy. But if we are unfaithful to him, he will leave us in emptiness; because this is unsatisfied, it will bring us supreme misery.

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Creatures try to take the place of the last end; we ourselves are the first to wish to be our own last end. A creature says to us: 'Come to me and I will fill you.' We believe this, but it is a lie. Then more creatures come, one after the other, making the same promise; they deceive us in the same way, and will do so all our lives. From all sides creatures call to us and promise to fill us; all these promises are nothing but lies, but we are always ready to let ourselves be deceived. It is as if the whole sea-bed were empty, and someone tried to fill it with a handful of water. Hence we are never content: when we are attached to creatures, they separate us far from God and cast us into a sea of difficulties, trouble and unhappiness. These qualities are as inseparable from creatures as joy, peace and happiness are inseparable from God.

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We are like people who have so much distaste for food that they taste one dish and then leave it, touch another at once and leave that too; and in the end they are pleased with none. And we too throw ourselves on all kinds of objects but can be satisfied with none of them, for God alone is the sovereign good who can make us truly happy. We deceive ourselves when we say: 'if I were in such and such a place and had this or that occupation, I would be happy. So and so is happy because he has got all he

wants.' All this is futile. If you were Pope, you would not be happy. Let us seek God and seek him alone; only he can satisfy all our desires.

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In old times the devil disguised himself as God and was represented to pagans by idols as the author and end of all that is in the world. Creatures do something similar. They disguise themselves as God and make us believe that they will please us by satisfying our desires. But in reality all they give us only increases our emptiness further. We do not feel this at present; in the next life we will feel it most acutely, when the soul, separated from its body, has an almost infinite desire to be filled by God. If this desire is frustrated of fulfilment, we must undergo suffering which is almost infinite.

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On our death-bed we will realise how disastrously we have let ourselves be deceived and bewitched by creatures. We shall be astonished at how we have consented to lose great and precious realities in exchange for others that are trivial and unworthy. The punishment for this foolish conduct will be the temporary deprivation of the vision of God, without which nothing can satisfy the soul. The desire to see and possess him is quite inconceivable; so too is the suffering caused by this desire if it is left unsatisfied.

That is why we must decide to renounce generously all the plans we make for ourselves, all merely human points of view, all desires and expectations for what satisfies our self-esteem, and, in general, everything which can be an obstacle to God's glory. This is what Scripture calls walking before God, having an upright heart, walking in truth and seeking God with all one's heart. Without this renunciation we shall never be content.

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Why do we attach ourselves to creatures as we do? They are so limited and so empty of any permanent good that all the pleasure and happiness we promise ourselves from them is vain and imaginary; it only increases our hunger instead of satisfying it, because our appetite, being infinite, can only be satisfied by the possession of the sovereign good. Moreover creatures do not live long but soon leave us, or else we have to leave them. As for other men, why do we not realize that they love themselves only,

and seek in everything nothing but their own interests? They carefully keep for themselves the little wealth, credit and authority which they have; even when they are rich in all these things, they act no differently. All that they do not do purely for the love of God they do for self-esteem, and in all their work for others they never forget themselves. They are favourable, loyal and friendly to us only for their own advantage; what trust can we have in their favour and friendship?

*II—Our happiness depends on our complete subjection to God, who alone should reign in our hearts.*

Our true greatness consists in our subjection to God. We depend on him in three ways. First, it is only by him that we can exist at all. Secondly, it is only from him that we can have the means to attain him. Thirdly, we cannot possess our *end* and sovereign good except from him. In this matter the ancient philosophers were in error: for they sought happiness in themselves and in human things.

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Only God has sovereign rights over our hearts. Neither the State nor even the Church extend their rule as far as this: what takes place in our hearts is no concern of theirs.<sup>1</sup> God alone is king of the human heart, the heart is his kingdom, and there he sets up the throne of his grace. His glory consists in this interior rule. Our perfection and happiness consist in the subjection of our hearts to this dominion of God. The more our hearts are subject to him, the more perfect and happy we shall be.

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God works more assiduously at the supernatural government of a heart where he reigns than at the natural government of the whole universe and the civil government of States. God cares only for souls: provided he sees them subject to his power and possessed by him, he is content. Moreover only God can content our hearts; our emptiness can be filled by him alone.

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God delights to commune with the heart of man. Here he finds a resting-place, and, conversely, God alone is the centre of men's hearts, which should rest only in him, and beat only for

<sup>1</sup> When Lallemand wrote, this opinion was quite tenable, but nowadays it is certain that the Church can order certain interior actions.

him. The interior life is a truly happy life, for it makes God alone live in our hearts, it makes our hearts live in God alone and delight only in him. Happy is the life of a soul where God reigns, and which he possesses entirely! It is a life separated from the world and hidden in God, a life of love and holy liberty, a life which enables the soul to find in the kingdom of God its joy and its peace, its glory, its true pleasure and its permanent greatness. These are the goods and riches which the world can neither give nor take away.

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We imagine that someone given to recollection and the interior life leads a sad and unhappy life. The reality is quite the contrary. Happiness, even on earth, consists in possessing God: the more we renounce ourselves to be united to him, the more we cease to be miserable and become truly happy. But the devil takes advantage of our ignorance and weakness to cast us into continual errors and anxieties. We must escape from these to make ourselves capable of the sovereign happiness of this life, which consists in seeing God and enjoying the gift of his holy presence, without which even the highest of the Seraphim would be unhappy. A soul which contemplated God unceasingly and held itself always ready to accomplish his will, would be truly happy.



## EXTRACTS

PÈRE M. D. CHENU, O.P., in an article translated in *CROSS CURRENTS* (Vol. 7, No. 2, Broadway, New York) points out that after all sorts of other theologies, such as the theology of war, of business, of history, have been worked out since the Reformation, it is only now in our own day that anyone has given thought to 'the theology of work'. And in the article he sets the object of human labour in perspective for true theologians to consider.

*Man and the Universe*: work is located at their junction, as well as at the junction of spirit and matter. Man is master of the universe: the place of God, the vocation of man, according to the formulas revealed in *Genesis*. This should be seen not as an initial pre-historic