

How To Make The Best Use Of Treatise On The Love Of God

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The translators had at first thought of writing suggestions on How to Make the Best Use of the present volume. Then they remembered that Fr. Francis Moget MSFS, the last French missionary of St. Francis de Sales in India had published a *Guide to the study of St. Francis de Sales' The Love of God* in 1994. We found it very good. So we are reproducing the text. The Translators.

Francis de Sales began writing the *Treatise on the Love of God* in 1606 and completed it in 1616. It was first printed in 1616. His purpose was essentially pastoral. He wished to encourage and help people to practise the first Commandment, the essential Commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and mind." His book was meant for all Christians, desirous to know who they are and the purpose and meaning of their life.

Francis makes use of the experience we have of human natural love to introduce us into the mystery of God's love. He draws on his rich pastoral experience as priest and bishop, and on the experience of devout Christians whom he met, especially of the first Nuns of the Visitation, St. Jane Frances de Chantal and others who were following his spiritual guidance. "I thought of telling in a simple manner the story of the birth, progress and decline of the love of God in a soul. I wish to express how this love of God works in us, its excellence and the spiritual advantages we may draw from it."

Francis doesn't try to explain the mystery of God- He first describes what we are able to understand, illustrates it with texts from the Bible, from the life and teaching of Our Lord Jesus Christ. He shows its roots in the most familiar human experiences, conjugal love, maternal love, friendship. He uses examples from our daily life. from the sun, the trees, animals, flowers

Practical advice : It might be better to read it in parts first, chapter by chapter as personal letters from the saint. **We could read at first the Book Five**, then go to Books One, Two, Three and Four. We may start reading any chapter, or choose first those which attract us according to our need. Let us keep before our eyes this simple prayer; "My God, I love you with all my heart..." and go on reading one chapter at a time. The study and practice of the *Treatise on the Love of God* will help us to deepen our God-experience, which is at the core of our religious life.

Some preliminary Notes :

I. The meaning of Love, according to St Francis de Sales : Francis de Sales tries to accomplish two things :

a) to tie up the love of God with our human experience of love, to persuade one that it is in his/her nature to love God, according to the ways and laws of other human loves.

b) to present this love of God as attractive and fulfilling, filling the soul with joy.

Francis invites us to be aware that 'love is the soul of our life'. To love is the law of our being. One who doesn't love is half-dead. We must love someone or something, at least ourselves. The quality of our life depends on the quality of our love.

There are great differences between various human loves. " I love my father, my mother, my friend...,! love my job, music, literature, I love cake..-" The meaning of the word "love" is defined by the object of our love- Francis will speak of the various aspects of love, gratifying love, benevolent love, friendship, up to the highest which is charity-love for God. Trying to be more precise, he speaks of Love-dependence, of Love-belonging. I depend on God, I belong to God, like the baby partridge which recognizes its mother. (Book I, chapter 16)

This belonging to God is not opposed to other human loves, but it rules over them.

II. How can God and man live this relationship of Love : Love is a relationship of belonging, of attachment, of mutual dependence between two beings.

1. Who is God ? He is the Infinite God, pure Act and pure Spirit, the God of the old Testament, the God of Our Lord Jesus Christ. This God, inaccessible, "the beyond everything", "the all other", reveals himself as Essential Goodness, "a single and unique perfection". (Book 11,1)

All existing beings are a manifestation of God's goodness, the whole creation, human person made as the image of God, redemption offered to humans, the whole action of Providence, and especially the Incarnation of Jesus, the Son of God.

2. Who is a human person ? A human being is composed of mind, soul and body, The three steps or levels of our human reason, knowledge from senses, science and faith, are crowned by the apex of the soul, in which the human spirit, through the will, can be directly united to God.

The comparison of the Temple of Solomon. Book I. chapter 12, explains these three steps and the apex. The Sanctuary, the apex of the soul, is the highest point of the human spirit, by which we can reach God, through Faith, Hope and Charity.

Though St. Francis de sales speaks of the steps or levels of human reason, in reality it concerns the whole human person. Knowledge of these four different grades of reason is very necessary for understanding all treatises on spiritual realities (Book 1. 12).

III. Love leads to union : The mystery of Union.

Union of the three Divine Persons in the Trinity, of the Word of God and the Humanity of Jesus, of the Blessed with God, of the believer with the Living Christ.. "Be one as my Father and I are one". It's always the Holy Spirit who is the artisan of this unity.

Francis links this mystery to familiar realities, the union of the magnet with iron, the union of hearts expressed by the human kiss, the union of the mother with her child.

This spiritual union which our heart longs for cannot be achieved in our human life. We can make a beginning, but perfect love will be realized only in eternal life. (Book III.6)

IV. The two main exercises of Divine Love : Gratifying and Benevolent love.

By gratifying love, we rejoice in God's goodness, and as it were make this goodness our own. "O God, you are my God"(V.1) Joy of our union with the Trinity. "Gratifying love makes us possess God by drawing into us, the perfections of God. It makes us possessed by God. binding ourselves to him." (V.3)

Benevolence means wishing all possible goods to the Beloved. But God is absolute perfection, without need. What can we wish for Him?

1. Unable to "increase" God in Himself, we desire to increase Him in us. i.e. to increase the delight and joy we find in His goodness. "My soul glorifies the Lord'."
2. Another aspect is" to desire that his name be blessed, praised, honoured and adored more and more'

Praise of God, Glory be to the Father... St. Francis of Assisi and the Canticle of creatures. The Apostolate to make God known, loved and obeyed.

V. Exercise of the Love of God : Affective love, through Prayer, Books V.VI.VII; Effective love. doing God's will. Books VIII. IX.X; Growth towards the pure Love of God.

BOOK I : BASIC PRINCIPLES

In order to make us understand the true nature of love, Francis de Sales analyzes and explains the nature of the human mind and especially the relations of human will with the other faculties. This teaching is not peculiar to St Francis. It is an application of the psychological theories prevalent at the end of the 16th Century, much influenced by *The Spiritual Combat* of Fr Scupoli and the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas.

1. Beauty is attractive. Beauty results from order and harmony. The beauty of the human being comes from the harmony and order existing in man, under the rule of the will over feelings, passions and faculties. Supreme beauty of God, is the source of all perfection.
2. Control of the will over our senses, over intellect and memory. Difficulty of control over sensitive faculties, especially imagination.
3. Control of intellect, memory....through authority. This control meets with resistance from the sense appetite. Concupiscence or sense appetite has 12 movements or passions, all based on love. Love is attracted by good. i.e what is attractive and fitting to human nature.

Love determines the activity of emotions and passions. They are good or bad. according to the quality of the love from which they proceed.

The will is led by love. Yet. it can rule over love and make it do its bidding. The will loves by deliberate choice.

4 The will has as many emotions as the sense appetite has passions. Conflict of instinct versus reason. Natural emotions rising from natural attraction, reasonable emotions founded on perception from human reason, Christian emotions, rising from truths of faith and the teaching of Jesus, supernatural emotions, poured into the soul by God's grace.

5. The spiritual faculties of man are controlled by the will. The love of God is the last of the emotions to arise, yet, it becomes the master of all. Comparison of Esau and Jacob.

6. Description of love.
 - a) the will is aware of a good shown by the intellect.
 - b) It experiences pleasure and gratification.
 - c) It begins to move towards the good to get it.
 - d) It finds means to get it and achieves union, 'to become one with it.'

Example : 1, I see a mango on a tree- 2. It is beautiful, attractive. 3. I decide to get it, climb the tree or get a stick. 4. I get the mango and enjoy eating it.

"Love is the movement and progression of the heart towards good". The first cause of love is the attraction of the lover towards the beloved, due to likeness or complementarity. e.g. The teacher and the student. The doctor and the sick person.

7. Love seeks union.
 - The kiss symbol of love. Love unites.
 - The perfect union that love seeks is spiritual.
 - Various ways of loving : sensitively, emotionally, spiritually .
 - The two ecstasies of the Philosophers. Lust versus love.
8. The two parts of the soul : Each human soul has several operational levels.

The first is a kind of instinctive affinity. Natural like and dislike. The second is sensitive appetite, instinctive knowledge of what is suitable or not for us, according to past experiences. The third is rational knowledge. We are led to seek the good, as we know and judge to be such by acts of reason.

1. The inferior part of the soul, when we draw conclusions from knowledge and experience provided by the senses.
2. The superior part, where reason is enlightened by two kinds of light
 - a) the natural light of reason, human wisdom, scientific knowledge
 - b) supernatural light.

Theologians and Christians : reasoning from the revealed Word of God, the teaching of Christ.

Those enlightened directly by God's grace.

BOOK II : CHARITY COMES TO LIFE

In the Book II, St Francis describes the birth of charity, which, being supernatural, must be created in the soul as a new quality. After 2 introductory chapters, he gives the history of the action of God in granting this gift, chapters 3 to 12, and the reaction of man in accepting this gift.

God is absolute perfection, a single perfection, supreme in its uniqueness, a single act by which He is God. His activity towards us is God's Providence, which reaches out to everything, rules over all things. God's supernatural Providence.

God's supernatural Providence, to lead angels and men to salvation. Hence the Incarnation, The state of Redemption is better than the state of innocence.

Chapter 8 :

God wants our love. The first Commandment." Thou shall love the Lord thy God..." God sends us his inspirations to encourage our heart to love Him. leaving us free to accept or reject them. Our responsibility

Inspiration, the initial grace attracting us towards the essential goodness which is God, This first attraction is developed through faith and hope. The love we experience through the virtue of hope is still imperfect. It is made perfect through penance and contrition- Carried by God's grace and love, we are led to charity, a wonderful gift our hearts must be ready to receive.

In Chapter 12 : Since we are endowed with free will, we may either accept or refuse God's inspirations. If we accept them, our action begins to be mixed up with God's action. This is how a soul gifted with the use of reason is led from infidelity to faith and charity.

Inspiration is sent by love, even before the actual reception of the sacrament. Then comes the production of penance or repentance. Realizing that sin is an obstacle on our way to God, the soul is led to penance.

The various types of repentance : People have different motives to regret their wrong doings.

1. A merely human repentance. When people regret their wrong doings for motives that have nothing to do with God, because they realize they harmed themselves or others, or because they are ashamed. e.g. Alexander killing his friend Clitus.
2. A religious repentance, belonging merely to the natural order. Chapter 18. When people are sorry for their sins because of their natural knowledge that their sins are an offence to God. e.g. Epictetus.

3. A supernatural interior repentance, which is good, but insufficient. Chap.19. Repentance in the soul's self-interest, for the sake of its inner beauty, its dignity, or its present or eternal happiness.

4. A perfect repentance, i.e. sorrow for sin because we have offended the sovereign goodness of God. Chap. 20. This is not yet Charity, because charity is movement towards union, while repentance is a movement away from sin. But it is a beginning of charity, because the object of repentance is union with God. Chapter 21 : St Francis reminds us that all this has been done by the loving action of God's grace which, after awakening our soul, inspiring us to pray, has brought us through faith and hope to penitence and perfect love. Chapter 21 describes charity.

THE FINE POINT OF THE SOUL : Francis often speaks of the fine point of the soul, by which he means the highest point of our soul, which directs everything, the final decision of our intellect and will. In the superior part of the soul are found :

1. The light of faith, by which we know and accept the truth.
2. Hope, by which we are sure of the promises of God and accept them.
3. The sweetness of Holy Charity, by which we give assent to the union of our spirit with God

This supreme point of the soul is the special dwelling of Faith, Hope and Charity, the final decision of our will. " Provided this fine point is always directed and turned towards God, we must not be worried by anything."

BOOK III : THE WAY TO PERFECT CHARITY

Book III treats of the progress and perseverance of the soul in God's love during our earthly life and the perfection of love in Heaven.

1. One of the principles of spiritual life is that we cannot stand still. "No Parking!" Either we go forward or backward. There is no such thing as attaining a certain level and keeping to it. "Away with you, then" says St. Bernard, the only way out is to go forward."

2. When we are in the state of grace, which is the normal state of a Christian, all our actions are rewarded by God, who helps us by his-grace to grow in love-" Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven". Our good actions, even if not perfect, call down God's grace. God takes into account even the least of our efforts." The two mites of the poor widow ". Hence we should use all opportunities to do actions pleasing to God. Encouraging doctrine that goads us to fervour.

3. God's grace is always ready to help us. He gives remorse to souls who have fallen into sin, calls them back to progress and activity. " Charity gives each one of us the inclination, and, I believe, the strength we need to do those things that are essential to win our salvation." But to do extraordinary things, we need a special grace. e.g. St. Teresa, St. Francis Xavier. Inspiration is not enough. We need to collaborate with God's grace, e.g. The rich young man, St Catherine of Sienna.

4. God leads us by the hand, as a mother her child. The great gift of Perseverance is due to this constant care. Perseverance is the most desirable gift we can hope for in this life. A gift, therefore let us ask for it, using the means God has provided for us: prayer, almsgiving, the Sacraments, spiritual reading.... " Heavenly grace never fails our will, as long as our will doesn't fail our power."

5. The crown of our perseverance is a happy death. Glory is given to us because of merits, which are the result in sequence of Charity - penance - obedience to vocation - vocation - inspiration – our Redemption. Everything is rooted in the Cross" in the pierced side of our Saviour who died on Calvary, to make it all possible."

6. Perfect union with God, for which our hearts crave, cannot be achieved in this life, but only in Heaven, where" the bond between our hearts and their supreme source will be indissoluble for ever."

7. Life on earth is very different from life in Heaven. Comparison of a sea voyage, and of a royal palace. Yet. saints on earth attained such a degree of love during their lifetime that their love was greater than the love of many blessed in Heaven, e.g. St. John, St. Paul....Comparison of a red-hot poker and a lighted lamp.

8. The special love of Our lady, greater than the love of the highest angels. A Christian should love his body, as the living likeness of the Word made flesh, a body made holy by baptism and all sacraments.

Chapters 9 to 15 : UNION OF THE SAINTS WITH GOD IN HEAVEN : The Joy of Heaven will be beyond our wildest dreams. The more we long for union with God on earth, the closer will be our union in Heaven. Union with God achieved in the vision of the Blessed Trinity, of the Word of God, of the Holy Spirit. Contemplation of the Infinite Beauty- Comparison of the stag entering water, of the baby clinging to its mother's breast.

BOOK IV : DECLINE AND DEATH OF CHARITY

The Drama of Sin and Grace : God sends us his inspirations and graces. He wishes to attract our heart. He doesn't compel it. Our freedom remains. We have to make a personal choice. Sin is always possible.

1. During our human life, we can lose God's love". Our souls, in this life, are never so filled with God's love that temptation cannot drain it off." Comparison of two barrels, of coral. The choice is ours-

2. " Venial sin weakens charity. It's a sickness of the soul, Repeated acts create a habit, e.g. the athlete Milo of Croton. Influence of habits on our life.

3. Temptations can seduce us and turn us away from God, We prefer a creature to God. It's the death of charity Yet, faith and hope are left behind, " preserving in our souls the character and title of Christian received through Baptism.'

4. Charity increases gradually in a soul, but dies in an instant. Contempt for God is the essence of mortal sin. A single mortal sin breaks the link uniting the soul to God. The essence of Charity, the determination to put God's will before everything else, must remain intact. Charity is Queen, It cannot exist unless it reigns.

5. We cannot blame God if we lose charity Our will is responsible. 'God never deserts souls once they have won his approval, unless they first desert Him". Sinners are the sole architects of their own perdition.

6. Our love for God is God's gift, entirely due to his generosity. Our only share was to accept the gift. Honour and glory is due to God. We cannot boast of our goodness." What have you which you have not received?"

7. Understanding and Acceptation of the ways of Divine Providence. There are inequalities in states of life, in natural and supernatural gifts. Can we question God's wisdom and goodness? God's ways are beyond our understanding. It's an idle occupation to try to find the reasons why God allows this or decrees that. We have only one thing to do : to trust in the wisdom and love of God and bow in submission to the ways of Providence. One thing really matters, to be found in God's friendship when the day of our death comes. Chapters 7 and 8.

8. Imperfect love remains after death of Charity. Chapters 9,10, 11.

a) Charity builds up a habit of doing good. When it leaves the soul, this habit remains and we continue to do good actions for some time. Comparison of the Well in Paris (several echoes)

b) This habit is a kind of natural love which may look like Charity for some time, but is very different as it has no supernatural strength and is very imperfect.

c) This imperfect love is good, since it is a product of Charity It can still produce virtuous actions. However, it is dangerous, as it puts on the mask of true Charity and pulls us into a make-believe holiness. It makes us feel secure because of some outward appearance of goodness, leaving thus the field free to more temptations and sins.

d) How to recognize this imperfect love.

- If there is any matter in which we are ready to commit a mortal sin, it is a sure sign.
- If we are confident of being faithful to God, then it is true love, but we must be humble and trust in God's help.
- We must build up confidence.

BOOK V : GRATIFYING AND BENEVOLENT LOVE

Love in action : The two main exercises of God's love are made by benevolent and gratifying love. These are two complementary aspects of love.

Gratifying love = loving delight
Benevolent love = love of benevolence

Delight = tranquil pleasure, satisfaction and joy we find in whatever is good and attractive.

Benevolence = Well-wishing, desire to do good, to render whatever service we can to the one we love.

Compliant love = Obedient love, ready to comply with all the wishes of the beloved, and first of all with what He commands,

Submissive love = A love that goes beyond the Commandments, is ready to accept all the desires of the beloved. The acceptance of the will of good pleasure or permissive will of God.

The love of God for us is first benevolent love and then gratifying love. Our love for God is first gratifying love leading to benevolent love. "Love is the movement or outpouring of the heart towards what seems good, because it is satisfying. Satisfaction is the chief motive cause of love."

Faith reveals to us, by the contemplation of the mysteries of the divine realities, the infinite goodness of our Creator and Saviour. When we realize the endless perfection that is God, we cannot avoid a feeling of satisfaction in our will. Hence we use our freedom and our will-power to urge our heart to give an answer of love, in acts of assent and Joy. This is the basic asceticism of love. It implies a continuous and deep meditation on the divine mysteries, increasing this satisfaction by repeated acts of love. The satisfaction a musician finds in music is not acquired in another way.

Is not this satisfaction a kind of imperfection ? For love should make us go towards the beloved, and gratifying love seems to make us turn towards ourselves. No, because " we find infinitely greater pleasure in the divine pleasure than in our own. It is this love that gives such contentment to the saints when they can recount the perfections of their beloved."

This satisfaction the saint finds in God places him in the service of God. Possessing God, we are possessed by Him. This love brings us profit and transforms us.

The example of St Paul who became identified with Christ." Love's larceny, there you have it; a gentle and noble thing. Love colours the lover with the beloved's perfections ... (Chapter 1)

Benevolence is the foundation of true love. It consists in wishing the good of the beloved. Born out of gratifying love, it is " a persistent welcome to the satisfaction we find in Him. (Chapter 6)

" We cannot actually desire anything for God- His excellence is so perfect, his perfections so infinite that they exceed anything we could ever wish for or imagine,"

But we may desire that His good (His love and knowledge) may grow in us and in the world.

This is the prayer that rises from the heart of Jesus" Hallowed be your name. Your Kingdom come. Your will be done , ..." Benevolent Love leads us to praise God in prayer and Holy Liturgy. It is the soul of the Apostolate, the reason why missionaries go to preach God's Kingdom.

This desire to praise and "magnify" God will make us attentive to the divine perfections. This praise will reach its plenitude, its fulfillment in Heaven to which we are attracted by the desire to love and to praise God perfectly. (Chapters 8 to 12)

BOOK VI : Practice Of Love In Prayer

Gratifying love is practised in Prayer. Books 6 and 7 treat of union with God through affection, i.e. by prayer.

We express our love for God in two ways, affectively and effectively.

1 **Affectively**, that is by becoming fond of God, finding our joy in Him, disposing our heart to be obedient to Him, united with Him through affection.

2. **Effectively**, that is serving God in obedience to His Will, giving Him joy in our service, through faithfulness to His commandments and the practice of all virtues.

We love God affectively mainly by prayer. Prayer is a conversation between the soul and God, a dialogue that can be expressed in various ways.

1st Degree of Prayer: Meditation (Chapter 2) : Meditation is thinking about God and all that relates to Him, in order to acquire love. Its intention and purpose is to discover motives for loving God, for practising virtue. Comparison of the doves and bees.

2nd Degree of Prayer: Contemplation (Chapter 3) : Contemplation is a simple, loving, permanent attention to the things of God.

There are three main differences between Meditation and Contemplation.

1. **Meditation** is seeking God's love. We meditate to awaken love, longing to gain God's love. **Contemplation** is enjoying God's love. We contemplate because we love. We are delighted at the sight of God's goodness and beauty and remain quietly in the vision of that love.

2. **Meditation** is a reflection in great detail, point by point, on these things which are capable of touching our heart. Comparison of smelling different flowers, one by one.

Contemplation is a single concentrated look at what we love. Comparison of smelling perfume made of different flowers. The prayer of the saints. St Bruno "Oh Goodness !" St Augustine "Oh loving kindness, ever ancient and ever new !"

St Francis Assisi "Oh God, you are my God and my all!"

3. **Meditation** is nearly always difficult, tiring, demanding a great deal of thought, going from consideration to consideration, seeking God, arousing affections, ie, good movements of the will. **Contemplation** is easy, made with interior joy, secure and delighted in the experience of having found God. Comparison of Jacob, working seven years more for Rachel and he longed for the possession of her and finally he fully possessed her—contemplation.

The effects of Contemplation

1. State of loving recollection. Ch. 7
2. Stillness of the recollected soul, Prayer of quiet. Ch. 8
3. Ways of reaching the Prayer of Quiet. Ch. 9
4. Degrees of tranquillity. Ch. 10 and 11
5. Contemplation leads to a melting of the soul, which flows into God. The soul is absorbed in God. Ch.12
6. Love wounds the heart. Ch. 13 and 14
7. The wounded heart pines away with love. Ch. 15

All these successive stages lead to a deeper union with God.

BOOK VII : Union With God In Prayer

Francis de Sales does not speak here of the habitual union with God, existing through the state of grace, but of the special union obtained through fervour and actual acts of love. Comparison of the mother feeding her child at her breast. The mother helps the child to cling to her. Thus the soul is aware of God's action and cooperates with it, either by frequent acts of love, or by a continuous movement of the heart towards God.

Love is a virtue that makes us perfectly united to God, our supreme Good. The awareness of God's presence leads to a deeper love. Chapter 1

Different degrees of union. Ch.2

1. Union caused entirely by God's grace. We are carried into it.
2. Aware of God's attraction, we cooperate with it.
3. We take the first steps to achieve union with God, conscious of our efforts, not aware of God's initial action in us.
4. After our first efforts, God works in our souls, draws us to himself.
5. Union is achieved unconsciously. We are not aware of our efforts, nor of God's initial action in us.
6. Union is achieved by the will alone.
7. Union is achieved by all the soul's faculties, gathering round the will to help it to achieve union. The example of St. Martial, embraced by Our Lord. Eg. of St Simeon, taking the Child Jesus into his arms.

Note : The special part played by Holy Eucharist in drawing the soul to union with God.

Ch. 3, 4, 5. The supreme degree of Union: RAPTURE. Rapture, also called Ecstasy, because it takes us out of ourselves, holds us above and beyond self, to make us one with God. We must distinguish between Sensual Ecstasy and Spiritual Ecstasy.

Spiritual Ecstasy

1. Of intellect, leads to enlightenment, through wonder & admiration.
2. Of will, leads to fervour, through devotion.
3. Of activity, leads to good works, through the practice of good works.

Signs of true Ecstasy. Ch. 6 and 7 : It moves the will more than the intellect. If you are filled with wonder but not with fervour, be careful, the ecstasy may not be genuine.

It is proved by holiness of life. Ecstasy of activity, of life, we may call it the heroic practice of virtue. Proofs : Love the life of the soul - **Ch. 7**. The example of St. Paul's life. **Ch. 8**

Effect of Ecstatic Love : The death of the lover

1. Those who die in charity, in God's love - **Ch.9** It's a wonderful grace to die in sanctifying grace, habitual charity or in acts of love. Eg. of the saints.

2. Those who die out of love of God, because of that love. All the martyrs, also the martyrs of God's love. Effect of intense love on the body of the saints. The stigmata. St Francis of Assisi.

Those who die of love. Death caused directly by love.

Mother Teresa of Avila. **Ch. 11**

The Knight on Mount Olivet. **Ch. 12**

Our Lady **Ch. 13 and 14**

BOOK VIII : Compliant Love (Love Of Conformity)

Gratifying Love produces Benevolent Love which leads us to Compliant Love. Its object is the glory of God, the triumph of his will. "Your will be done on earth...". It leads us to total and unconditional submission to the Divine Will, which is and contains all goodness. "If you love me, observe my Commandments....."

I. Gratifying love tends to transform us into the likeness of God. "Love either finds people alike or makes them so." (St. Jerome) True love leads to a genuine desire to please the beloved. **Ch. 1**

II. Gratifying love leads to Benevolent love. "We realize that God's will is perfect...so we desire it to be the supreme rule and law of all things. Benevolent love causes us to leave our hearts in God's hands, to be moulded to His Will, fashioned to His liking." **Ch. 2**

III Our will complies with God's declared will :

1. In the whole of his declared will. God revealed His will to us. But He created us free, we have the power to say "No" to Him. He doesn't compel us, but He desires our obedience and gives us His help to obey. Respect for God's words in the Gospel. **Ch. 3**

2. In his plan for our salvation. It is the will of God that we should be saved. We must want to be saved, and welcome the means of salvation God intends us to take. Acceptation of God's plan in all its details. The importance of taking practical resolutions. **Ch. 4**

3. In obeying his Commandments. First, we should contemplate the beauty and goodness of the Commandments. These commandments are difficult to keep at times, like a bitter medicine. Love makes us accept everything and renders everything pleasant, because it pleases the Beloved. Comparison of the man in Paris. **Ch. 5**

4. Obeying God's will as declared in the Counsels.

a) The value of the Counsels. A Counsel is not an order, but an invitation to a closer love. "A counsel is given for the sake of the person it is directed to, as an aid to perfection". They are not meant for all in the same manner. Circumstances will determine their practice. "Charity is the rule and measure of their practice." **Ch. 6**

b) The love of the Commandments leads to the love of the Counsels. A true Christian goes further than mere obedience, wishes to be identified with God's will. Christians = God's will in them. Example of the Primitive Church. **Ch. 7**

c) It's sinful to show contempt for the Counsels. Seeking for holiness is our duty. Failure to practise the Counsels because we are unable to do so is not sinful, but refusal to progress towards holiness is a sin. Eg. of St. Bernard and the sluggard. To refuse to go forward is to fall back. Contempt for the Counsels means contempt for God. **Ch. 8**

d) We must love all the counsels and practise those we can. Those who love God appreciate all the Counsels and admire those who practise them. However, not all can practise all the counsels perfectly. They must practise what they can. There are various stages of perfection. Eg. of St Bernard of Menthon and several saints. **Ch. 9**

IV. Our will complies with God's Inspirations : An inspiration is a divine influence, a thought sent to us by God.

a) Various kinds of inspirations. "Inspiration is a ray of grace bringing light and warmth to our hearts. Light to show us what is good, warmth to give us energy to go after it. Eg. of St. Anthony of Egypt, St. Augustine. St. Pachomius. Example of St. Francis de Sales in Paris. The two students hearing the bell for Matins. Eg. of Rebecca and the camels of Eliezer. Chapter 10

b) Proofs of the genuineness of Inspirations.

1. Perseverance in our vocation. **Ch. 11**

2. Peace of soul. **Ch. 12**

3. Obedience to the Church and to Superiors. **Ch. 13**

c) A short practical way of knowing God's will. **Ch. 14**

BOOK IX : Submissive Love

Union Of The Human Will With The Permissive Will Of God : Love of Benevolence leads to a complete submission of our will to the will of God, to a full acceptance of whatever happens to us.

Nothing happens except by God's will, by a positive or permissive will which no one can obstruct. These events, when they occur, make us realize that God has willed and planned them. The acceptance of God's permissive will is the highest form of love. Pure love aims at loving God for himself and gives the whole heart.

In our obedience to God's Commandments, Counsels and Inspirations, there is a personal and somewhat selfish element, at least in the motive we have. It's a rational acceptance, because they are good. But, in the permissive will of God, we are faced with irrational, absurd, even cruel events, in human trials which cannot be explained, and to which we have to submit in the obscure night of Faith.

This will of God presides over the evolution of Creation. This adventure of Creation, through human sufferings and trials, leads to the Eternal Destiny: Heaven for the just, Hell for the sinners. An awful mystery where our reason has nowhere to hold. We are confronted with the Absurd (Existentialism). How can we love God's will in suffering and death ? The example of the Surgeon. He operates and cuts my flesh. He makes me suffer, but it is to save me, to bring me back to health.

I must then love God, only because it is his Will, without any mixture of personal interest. This is the purest of loves: the love of Jesus in his Agony. The love of St Paul for the Cross of Jesus Christ, in which he glories and on which he is crucified with his Saviour.

The Beatitudes: Blessed are those who weep! Strange paradox where we must not only kiss the hand which strikes us, but praise and glorify it, like the patient praises the hand of the surgeon who saves his life. The trial is not only felt in the flesh but in the mind and heart. "My soul is sad up to death," (Matt. 26:36). We can only say yes through the fine point of the soul. The agony of Christ is the tryst of the purest love. (Pascal)

This perfect love leads to Holy Indifference or Disinterestedness. "Resignation prefers God's will to all other things, but it loves many other things besides God's will. Indifference is above resignation, for it loves nothing except the will of God."

1. Union of the human will with the Divine permissive Will : *Holy Indifference*, is an attitude of the mind and heart which accepts fully whatever God wills and permits, without expressing any personal choice. The soul wants only the will of God, nothing else. It is expressed in St. Paul's words: I live not I any more, but Christ lives in me.

This Holy Indifference or disinterested love is practised:

a) In trials and sufferings. **Ch. 2** The only thing attractive in them is God's will. Eg. of Abraham's Sacrifice. Job, St. Catherine of Siena.

b) In the difficulties of spiritual life. **Ch.3** In dryness and inward trials, we accept God's will by deference or resignation, that is compliance with and respect for God's will...

c) Resignation is made more perfect by holy indifference or disinterestedness. "What pleases God pleases me". **Ch. 4** "The heart of a disinterested man is like wax in God's hands, ready for every impression of the eternal will". Eg. of St. Ignatius.

d) This indifference extends to everything. **Ch. 5**

e) It even extends to what concerns God's service. **Ch. 6** Failures in God's service have to be accepted peacefully. Eg. of St. Louis, of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius. We have to do our duty. The outcome, success or failure, is not in our hands.

f) Indifference regarding our growth in virtue. **Ch. 7**

g) How to practise Indifference, when God allows sin. **Ch. 8**

2. The perfection of Indifference in our love for God

a) We must seek God alone and not our pleasure. **Ch. 9** Eg. of the deaf flute player.

b) A way to find out if we truly love God for Himself. **Ch.10** Simplicity is the best way in spiritual matters.

c) How to behave when we don't know if we really love God. **Ch. 11**

3. The perfect Union of our will with God

a) The death of our will. **Ch.12**

b) Dead to self, the will is alive only to God. **Ch.13** eg. of Queen Margaret, wife of St. Louis. Comparison of a man on board a ship.

c) Further light on the death of the will. **Ch. 14**

d) How to deal with the troubles of life. **Ch.15** Await peacefully the outcome of God's permissive will. Eg. of the surgeon's daughter.

e) Perfect union with God's will strips the soul of everything. **Ch.16**

BOOK X : The Beauty Of God's Love

The Commandment Of Charity : *The Treatise on the Love of God* ends with Book IX. The story of God's Love is now complete. The last three Books are a kind of epilogue, reminding us of the commandment of loving God above all things, and giving advice for the progress of the soul in Divine Love.

1. The love of God is the goal, the perfection of the Universe. **Ch. 1 and 2** That's why God not only allows us to love Him, but commands us. It's the source of our joy on earth and for all eternity.

The human being is the perfection of the universe. The spirit is the perfection of the human being. Love is the perfection of the spirit and charity is the perfection of love. That is why the love of God is the end, the perfection and the excellence of the universe.

What is the meaning of "whole" ? It doesn't mean that we must have no other love as long as we maintain the reverence and submission due to Him.

3. Several stages in our way of loving God. Ch. 4 and 5

- a) Those who love God above all things, but also love many other things.
- b) Those who have given up love for dangerous things, but still love lawful things to excess. Eg. The love of a husband for his wife. Love of a mother for her children.
- c) Those who love God above everything, in everything.
- d) Those who love God equally in everything.
- e) Our Lady is the only one who loved God perfectly.

4. Loving God above everything else is common to all those who love God. **Ch. 6 and 7** The story of Sapricius and Nicephorus. **Ch. 8** The story of Lia and Rachel **Ch. 9**

5. We ought to love God more than ourselves. **Ch. 10** Our love is imperfect because we don't know God in the fullness of his being. Yet, there is in us an instinct of loving God.

- a) because we belong to Him. He is more present to us than we are to ourselves.
- b) we are made in His image and resemblance.

6. Consequences of a true love of God.

- a) It compels us to love our neighbour, because he bears God's likeness. **Ch. 11**
- b) It entails the practice of zeal. **Ch. 12** zeal = earnest and fervent love.
- c) God's jealousy towards us. **Ch. 13** God endures no rival.
- d) Our zeal and jealousy towards God. **Ch. 14**
- e) Our zeal must be kept under control. **Ch. 15 and 16** Eg. of the saints. The monk Demophilus. Zeal can be practised : 1. by correction 2. by good example 3. by acceptance of crosses.

Our Lord Practised The Most Perfect Activities of Love. **Ch. 17** The love of Jesus Christ is a compelling motive (2Cor. 5:14).

St. Francis de Sales gives 12 touching motives for growing in the love of Christ.

BOOK XI : Charity Reigns Supreme Over All Virtues And Perfections

Virtue is pleasing to God. Virtue a good habit by which man lives rightly. Virtues perfect man's humanity and increase his likeness to God.

Natural virtues practised by unbelievers and sinners are good but do not merit eternal reward, since they are not prompted by God's love. **Ch. 1**

Charity gives a greater worth to virtues. Importance of the virtues which relate to the service of God. **Ch. 2 and 3**

Virtues acquire a greater value when their direct motive is charity, i.e. when we do any action out of love for God. **Ch. 4, 5, 6**

Perfect virtues cannot be found singly, separate from others. **Ch. 7**

We can't practise all the virtues perfectly, but if we are perfect in one, we must love all the others. Charity includes all the virtues. It is a river with four streams, made of the four moral virtues: Prudence, Justice, Temperance, Fortitude. **Ch. 8** Virtues are perfected by charity. **Ch. 9**

The virtues of unbelievers good but limited, cannot be perfect as they lack charity. **Ch. 10**

Charity gives supernatural value to our actions. Without it, our good actions have no supernatural merit, deserve no reward in Heaven. **Ch. 11** If we lack charity all goes for nothing. (St. Paul. I Cor.13)

When charity dies in a soul, all merits and fruits of the other virtues die also. **Ch. 12** Eg. of the Dead Sea. The good deeds of an upright man are deadened through sin. They are not destroyed, but in a state of coma. They are revived by the return of grace to the soul. Eg. of Spring. A sinner who recovers sanctifying grace recovers the merit of his previous good deeds.

The importance of the right motive or intention for our actions. **Ch.13 and 14** "Let us be good money-changers".

Purity of intention, i.e. the intention of doing everything for the love of God, makes our actions more perfect and worthy of reward. Eg. the glass of water for the sake of Christ's love.

All virtues have to be brought under obedience to charity. Charity brings us the gifts of the Holy Spirit. **Ch.15** A soul filled with God's love receives some supernatural habits or perfections, corresponding to the seven natural good habits leading to man's natural perfection. They are called the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit.

A special Case. The gift of the Fear of the Lord. **Ch. 16,17,18.** Good fears that help us to keep charity: servile fear, mercenary fear, filial fear.

The fruits of Charity. **Ch. 19** The 12 fruits of the Holy Spirit. The 8 Beatitudes.

Charity subdues the passions and emotions. **Ch.20** Self-love as a goal is thus replaced by God's love.

Physical healing can be achieved by two kinds of treatment, Allopathy and Homeopathy. Similarly, we can fight against passions. a) either by opposing contrary passions to them. b) Or by setting up stronger affections of the same kind.

Charity leads to Joy. **Ch. 21** Hence sadness is not the sign of a true love for God.

Difference between contrition and guilt, between supernatural and natural remorse. The sorrow for sin that leads to feeling of sadness, guilt and depression, is not caused by true love, and we must not encourage it. "God is the God of Joy"

BOOK XII : Growing In Charity

The whole *Treatise* can be summed up in this act of charity; "My God, I love you with all my heart, with all my strength."

Practically, we are invited to give its full meaning to this sentence “My God, I love you more than anything else, above all things.” Such a fundamental attitude of our soul is:

1. Independent from our natural dispositions. **Ch. 1** Both those inclined to love and those who are hardhearted are invited to God’s love.

2. A permanent continual longing. **Ch. 2 and 3** First, we have to get rid of the multiplicity of desires.

3. Compatible with our legitimate occupations, our personal vocation, our human loves. **Ch. 4 and 5** Eg. of St. Frances of Rome. We must make use of every opportunity to practise divine love. We need not wait for great actions. We can and must grow in love in our ordinary daily actions, taking care of doing everything well. If something is worth doing, it’s worth doing well. God rewards not the verb, but the adverb. **I do something well.**

Ways of serving God In everything. **Ch. 8 and 9**

- a) Our morning Offering.
- b) Awareness of God’s Presence.
- c) Special offering on important occasions.

Finally, we must sacrifice our free will to God. **Ch. 10** Eg. of Abraham’s Sacrifice.

Theotimus, our free will is never so free as when it is a slave of the will of God. So too, it is never so enslaved as when it serves our own will. It has never so much life as when it dies to self. Our free will is never so dead as when it lives for itself alone. We have the freedom to do good or evil. But to choose evil is not to use but abuse our freedom. Let us renounce this unhappy freedom. Let us subject our free will for ever to divine love. Thus, we reach the last chapter.

Mount Calvary Is The True School Of Love. Ch. 13 : Here, Francis de Sales gives free rein to his personal love for Christ. If you wish to learn how to love God, come to Calvary. Jesus Christ on his Cross will teach you.

Theotimus, mount Calvary is the mount of lovers. All love which does not take its origin (source) from the Passion of the Saviour is foolish and dangerous. Unhappy is the death without the love of the Saviour. Unhappy is the love without the death of the Saviour. Love and death are eternally blended together in the Passion of the Saviour. We cannot have one in our heart without the other. On Calvary we cannot have life without love, or love without the death of the Redeemer.

O, eternal love, my soul needs you and chooses you eternally. Yes, “Come, Holy Spirit and inflame our hearts with your love.” Either to love or to die! To die and to love! To die to all other love to live for the love of Jesus so that we may not die eternally. Thus living in your eternal love, O Saviour of our souls, we may sing eternally: Live Jesus! I love Jesus! Live Jesus that I may love. I love Jesus living and reigning for ever and ever. Amen.

N.B.: Several notes and ideas have been taken from the book of Fr Andre Ravier, SJ. *Initiation to the Reading of the Treatise of the Love of God*, by St. Francis de Sales. (French Text).

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