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St. Louis Marie de Montfort

The Love of Eternal Wisdom

“The Love of Eternal Wisdom”
by St. Louis Marie de Montfort

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THE LOVE OF ETERNAL WISDOM

1. Prayer to eternal Wisdom

1. O divine Wisdom, Lord of heaven and earth, I humbly beg pardon for my audacity in attempting to speak of your perfections, ignorant and sinful as I am. I beg you not to consider the darkness of my mind or the uncleanness of my lips unless it be to take them away with a glance of your eyes and a breath of your mouth.

There is in you so much beauty and delight; you have shielded me from so many evils and showered on me so many favours, and you are moreover so little known and so much slighted. How can I remain silent? Not only justice and gratitude, but my own interests urge me to speak about you, even though it be so imperfectly. It is true, I can only lisp like a child, but then I am only a child, anxious to learn how to speak properly through my lisping, once I have attained the fullness of your age (cf. Eph. 4:13).

2. I know there seems to be neither order nor sense in what I write, but because I long so dearly to possess you, I am looking for you everywhere, like Solomon, wandering in all directions (Wisd. 8:18). If I am striving to make you known in this world, it is because you yourself have promised that all who explain you and make you known will have eternal life (cf. Sir. 8:18).

Accept, then, my loving Lord, these humble words of mine as though they were a masterly discourse. Look upon the strokes of my pen as so many steps to find you and from your throne above bestow your blessings and your enlightenment on what I mean to say about you, so that those who read it may be filled with a fresh desire to love you and possess you, on earth as well as in heaven.

2. Admonitions of divine Wisdom to the rulers of this world given in the sixth chapter of the "Book of Wisdom"

3. 1. Wisdom is better than strength and prudence is better than courage.

2. Listen, therefore, kings, and understand. Learn, you judges of the nations.

3. Hear this, you who rule the people and boast of the large number of nations subject to you.

4. Remember you have received your power from the Lord and your authority from the Most High, who will examine your works and scrutinise your thoughts.

5. For, though ministers of his kingdom, you have not judged fairly, nor observed the law of justice, nor walked according to his will.

6. He will appear to you terribly and swiftly, because those who rule others will be judged severely.

7. For God has more compassion for the lowly and they are forgiven more easily, but the mighty will be punished mightily.

8. God shows no partiality; he does not stand in awe of anyone's greatness, because he himself made both the lowly and the great and he is concerned for all alike.

9. But the great are threatened with greater punishment.

10. To you then, rulers, my words are directed so that you may learn wisdom and may not go astray.

11. For they who perform just deeds will be considered just and those who have understood what I teach will have a valid defence.

12. Therefore, desire ardently to know my words, love them and you will find instruction in them.

4. 13. Wisdom is resplendent and her beauty never fades. Those who love her will have no trouble in recognising her; and those who seek her will find her.

14. She anticipates those who desire her and makes herself known first to them.

15. He who rises early to look for her will not be disappointed, for she will be found sitting at his gate.

16. To reflect on Wisdom is the highest prudence and he who foregoes sleep to possess her will soon be given repose.

17. For she goes around seeking those worthy of her, graciously shows her ways to them, guides them and provides for them with loving care.

18. The first step, then, towards acquiring Wisdom is a sincere desire for instruction; the desire for instruction is love; and love is the keeping of her laws.

19. Assiduous obedience to her laws assures a perfect purity of soul.

20. And perfect purity brings one close to God.

21. Thus the desire for Wisdom leads to the everlasting kingdom.

22. If then, rulers of nations, you delight in thrones and sceptres, love Wisdom and you will reign eternally.

23. All you who rule over the peoples of the world, love the insight given by Wisdom.

24. I will tell you now what Wisdom is and how she came to be. I will not hide the secrets of God from you but I will trace her right from the beginning. I will throw light upon her and make her known and not hide the truth.

25. I will not imitate the man consumed with envy, for the envious have nothing in common with Wisdom.

26. Multitudes of wise men will bring salvation to the world, and a prudent king is a strong support for his people.

27. Accept, then, instruction from my words and you will draw profit from them.

[3. Preliminary observations]

5. I did not want, my dear reader, to mingle my poor words with the inspired words of the Holy Spirit. Yet I make bold to offer a few comments:

1. How gentle, attractive and approachable is eternal Wisdom who possesses such splendour, excellence and grandeur. He invites men to come to him because he wants to teach them the way to happiness. He is for ever searching for them and always greets them with a smile. He bestows blessings on them many times over and forestalls their needs in a thousand different ways, and even goes as far as to wait at their very doorstep to give them proofs of his friendship.

Who could be so heartless as to refuse to love this gentle conqueror?

6. 2. How unfortunate are the rich and powerful if they do not love eternal Wisdom. How terrifying are the warnings he gives them, so terrifying that they cannot be expressed in human terms: "He will appear to you terribly and swiftly ... those who rule will be judged severely ... the mighty will be punished mightily ... the great are threatened with greater punishment" (Wisd. 6:6,7,9).

To these words can be added those he uttered after he became man: "Woe to you who are rich (Lk. 6:24) ... it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mat. 19; Mk. 10; Lk. 18).

So often were these last words repeated by divine Wisdom while on earth that the three evangelists handed them down without the least variation. They ought to make the rich weep and lament: "And now, you rich people, weep and wail over the miseries that are coming upon you" (Jas. 5:1).

But alas! they find their consolation (Lk. 6:24) here on earth; they are as though captivated by the riches and pleasures they enjoy and are blind to the evils that hang over their heads.

7. 3. Solomon promises that he will give a faithful and exact description of divine Wisdom and that neither envy nor pride - both contrary to love - can prevent him from making known this heaven-sent knowledge, and he has not the least fear that anyone will surpass him or equal him in knowledge (cf. Wisd. 6:24-26).

Following the example of this great man, I am going, in my simple way, to portray eternal Wisdom before, during and after his incarnation and show by what means we can possess and keep him.

But as I do not have Solomon's profound learning or his insights I have less to fear from pride and envy than from my incompetence and ignorance, which I trust, in your kindness, you will overlook.

CHAPTER ONE

TO LOVE AND SEEK DIVINE WISDOM WE NEED TO KNOW HIM

[1. Our need to acquire knowledge of divine Wisdom]

8. Can we love someone we do not even know? Can we love deeply someone we know only vaguely? Why is Jesus, the adorable, eternal and incarnate Wisdom loved so little if not because he is either too little known or not known at all?

Hardly anyone studies the supreme science of Jesus, as did St. Paul (Eph. 3:19). And yet this is the most noble, the most consoling, the most useful and the most vital of all sciences and subjects in heaven and on earth.

9. 1. First, it is the most noble of all sciences because its subject is the most noble and the most sublime: Wisdom uncreated and incarnate. He possesses in himself the fullness of divinity and humanity alike and all that is great in heaven and on earth, namely, all creatures visible and invisible, spiritual and corporal.

St. John Chrysostom says that our Lord is the summary of all God's works, the epitome of all the perfections to be found in God and in his creatures (cf. Col. 1:16; 2:9).

"Jesus Christ is everything that you can and should wish for. Long for him, seek for him, because he is that unique and precious pearl for which you should be ready to sell everything you possess."

"Let the wise man boast no more of his wisdom nor the strong man of his strength, nor the rich man of his wealth. But if anyone wants to boast, let him boast only of understanding and knowing me and nothing else (Jer. 9:23-24)."

10. 2. Nothing is more consoling than to know divine Wisdom. Happy are those who listen to him; happier still are those who desire him and seek him; but happiest of all are those who keep his laws. Their hearts will be filled with that infinite consolation which is the joy and happiness of the eternal Father and the glory of the angels (cf. Prov. 2:1-9).

If only we knew the joy of a soul that perceives the beauty of divine Wisdom and is nourished with the milk of divine kindness, we would cry out with the bride in the Song of Songs: "Your love is better than wine" (Song 1:3) better by far than all created delights. This is especially true when divine Wisdom says to those who contemplate him, "Taste and see" (Ps. 33:9) eat and drink, be filled with my eternal sweetness (Song 5:1), for you will discover that conversing with me is in no way distasteful, that my companionship is never tedious and in me only will you find joy and contentment (Wisd. 8:16).

11. 3. This knowledge of eternal Wisdom is not only the most noble and the most consoling of all, it is also the most useful and the most necessary since eternal life consists in knowing God and Jesus Christ, his Son (Jn. 17:3). Speaking to eternal Wisdom, the Wise man exclaims, "To know you is perfect righteousness and to know your justice and your power is the root of immortality" (Wisd. 15:3). If we really want to have eternal life let us learn all there is to know about eternal Wisdom.

If we wish to have roots of immortality deeply embedded in our heart we must have in our mind knowledge of eternal Wisdom. To know Jesus Christ incarnate Wisdom, is to know all we need. To presume to know everything and not know him is to know nothing at all.

12. Of what use is it for an archer to hit the outer part of a target if he cannot hit the centre? What good will it do us to know all the other branches of knowledge necessary for salvation if we do not learn the only essential one, the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, the centre towards which all the other branches of knowledge must tend? Although the great Apostle St. Paul was a man of such extensive knowledge and so well versed in human learning, still he said that he did not know anything except Jesus Christ and him nailed to a cross (1 Cor. 2:2).

Let us then say with him, "I count as loss all the knowledge I have prized so highly until now when I compare it to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Saviour" (Phil. 3:7-8). Now I see and understand that this knowledge is so excellent, so captivating, so profitable, so admirable that I no longer take any interest in other branches of knowledge that I used to like so much. Everything else is so meaningless, so absurd and a foolish waste of time. "I say this to make sure that no one deceives you with beguiling words. Make sure that no one ensnares you with empty, rational philosophy" (Col. 2:4,8). I state that Jesus is the abyss of all knowledge so that you do not let yourself be deceived by the fine, glowing words of orators or by the specious subtleties of philosophers. "Grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

That we may all grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, incarnate Wisdom, we are going to speak of him in the following chapters. But first, let us consider the different kinds of wisdom.

[2. Definition and division of the subject]

13. In the general sense of the term wisdom means a delectable knowledge, a taste for God and his truth.

There are several kinds of wisdom.

First, true and false wisdom. True wisdom is a taste for truth without falsehood or deception. False wisdom is a taste for falsehood disguised as truth.

This false wisdom is the wisdom or the prudence of the world, which the Holy Spirit divides into three classes: earthly, sensual, and diabolical.

True wisdom may be divided into natural and supernatural wisdom.

Natural wisdom is the knowledge, in an outstanding degree, of natural things in their principles. Supernatural wisdom is knowledge of supernatural and divine things in their origin.

This supernatural wisdom is divided into substantial or uncreated Wisdom, and accidental or created wisdom. Accidental or created wisdom is the communication that uncreated Wisdom makes of himself to mankind. In other words, it is the gift of wisdom. Substantial or uncreated Wisdom is the Son of God, the second person of the most Blessed Trinity. In other words, it is eternal Wisdom in eternity or Jesus Christ in time.

It is precisely about this eternal Wisdom that we are going to speak.

14. Starting with his very origin, we shall consider Wisdom in eternity, dwelling in his Father's bosom and object of his Father's love.

Next, we shall see him in time, shining forth in the creation of the universe.

Then we shall consider him in the deep abasement of his incarnation and his mortal life; and then we shall see him glorious and triumphant in heaven.

Finally we shall propose the means to acquire and keep him.

I leave to philosophers their useless philosophical arguments and to scientists the secrets of their worldly wisdom.

Let us now speak to chosen souls seeking perfection (1 Cor. 2:6) of true wisdom, eternal Wisdom, Wisdom uncreated and incarnate.

CHAPTER TWO

ORIGIN AND EXCELLENCE OF ETERNAL WISDOM

15. Here, with St. Paul, we must declare, "O the depth, the immensity and the incomprehensibility of the Wisdom of God" (Rom. 11:33) : Generationem ejus quis enarrabit? (Is. 53:8; Acts 8:33). Who is the angel so enlightened, who is the man rash enough as to attempt to give us an adequate explanation of the origin of eternal Wisdom? For here all human beings must close their eyes so as not to be blinded by the vivid brightness of his light.

All should be silent for fear of tarnishing his perfect beauty by attempting to portray him.

Every mind should realise its inadequacy and adore, lest in striving to fathom him, it be crushed by the tremendous weight of his glory.

[1. Wisdom in reference to the Father]

16. Adapting himself to our weakness, the Holy Spirit offers this description of eternal Wisdom in the Book of Wisdom which he composed just for us.

"Eternal Wisdom is a breath of the power of God, a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty. Hence nothing defiled gains entrance into him. He is the reflection of eternal light, the spotless mirror of God's majesty, the image of his goodness" (Wisd. 7:25,26).

17. He is the substantial and eternal idea of divine beauty which was shown to St. John the Evangelist in his ecstatic vision on the island of Patmos, when he exclaimed, "In the beginning was the Word - the Son of God, or eternal Wisdom - and the Word was in God and the Word was God" (Jn. 1:1).

18. This is the eternal Wisdom of which Solomon often speaks in his book (cf. Sir. 1:4,8; 24:14) when he says that Wisdom was created - that is, produced - from the very beginning before anything was made or even before the beginning of time.

Speaking of himself, Wisdom says, "I was begotten from eternity, before the creation of the world. The depths did not exist as yet and I was already conceived" (Prov. 8:23,24).

19. God the Father was well pleased with the sovereign beauty of eternal Wisdom, his Son, throughout time and eternity, as he himself explicitly testified on the day of his Son's baptism and his transfiguration, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 17:5; cf. Mt. 3:17. Cf. Nos. 55, 98).

This splendour of dazzling and incomprehensible light of which the apostles caught a glimpse in the Transfiguration, filled them with delight and lifted them to the heights of ecstasy:

Illustre quiddam (cernimus)
Sublime, celsum, interminum,
Antiquius caelo et chao:

This eternal Wisdom is -

Something resplendent,
Sublime, immense, and infinite,
More ancient than the universe.

My words fail to give even the faintest idea of his beauty and supreme gentleness, and fall infinitely short of his excellence: for who can ever form an adequate idea of him? Who could ever portray him

faithfully? You alone, great God, know who he is and can reveal him to all you wish (cf. Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22).

[2. The activity of eternal Wisdom in souls]

20. This is how divine Wisdom himself describes in the twenty-fourth chapter of Ecclesiasticus the effects of his activity in souls. I shall not mingle my poor words with his for fear of diminishing their clarity and sublime meaning.

1. Wisdom will sing her own praises. She will be honoured in the Lord and will proclaim his glory before his own people.

2. In the assembly of the Most High she will open her mouth; she will glorify herself in the armies of the Lord.

3. She will be raised up in the midst of her own people and will be admired in the assembly of all the saints.

4. In the multitude of the elect she will be praised and will be blessed by those who are blessed by God. She will say:

21. 5. I came forth from the mouth of the Most High; I was born before all creatures.

6. I made an unquenchable light appear in the sky and I covered the whole earth like a mist.

7. I had my dwelling in the heights and my throne was in a pillar of cloud.

8. Alone I compassed the vault of heaven; I penetrated into the depths of the abyss; I walked on the waves of the sea,

9. and travelled all over the earth.

22. 10. I held sway over every people and every nation.

11. By my power I have trodden underfoot the hearts of all men, great and small; and among all these things I searched for a resting-place and a dwelling in the heritage of the Lord.

23. 12. Then the Creator of the universe commanded me and spoke to me: he who created me rested in my tent.

13. And he said to me: "Dwell in Jacob, let Israel be your heritage, and take root in my elect."

24. 14. In the beginning, before all ages, he created me and through the ages I shall never cease to be, and in the holy tabernacle I ministered before him.

15. I fixed my abode in Sion; I found rest in the holy City, and Jerusalem became my domain.

25. 16. I took root in the people whom the Lord had honoured, whose heritage is the portion of the Lord. I fixed my abode in the assembly of all the saints.

17. Like a cedar on Lebanon and like a cypress on Mount Sion I have grown tall.

18. I raised my branches high like a palm-tree in Engedi and like the rose-bushes of Jericho.

19. I grew tall like a beautiful olive-tree in the field, like a plane-tree planted along the road near the water.

20. I gave forth fragrance like cinnamon or the most precious balm; I gave forth perfume like the most exquisite myrrh.

21. I have filled my house with sweet fragrance as of galbanum, onycha, myrrh and with the sweet smell of incense; I exude the scent of the purest balm.

22. I spread out my branches like a terebinth and my branches are glorious and graceful.

23. I have grown sweet-smelling flowers like the vine; my blossoms are the fruits of glory and wealth.
26. 24. I am the mother of pure love, of fear, of knowledge and of holy hope.
25. In me is all grace of the way and of the truth; in me is all hope of life and strength.
27. 26. Come to me, all you who desire for me, and be filled with my fruits.
27. For my spirit is sweeter than honey and my inheritance more delightful than the sweetest honeycomb.
28. My renown will endure down through the ages.
28. 29. Those who eat of me will hunger for more; those who drink of me will thirst for more.
30. Those who listen to me will not be put to shame; those who work with me will not sin.
31. Those who make me known will possess eternal life.
32. All this is the book of life, the covenant of the Most High, and the knowledge of the truth."
29. Eternal Wisdom compares himself to all these trees and plants, characterised by their varied fruits and qualities which illustrate the great variety of states, functions and virtues of privileged souls. These resemble cedars by the loftiness of their hearts raised up towards heaven, or cypress trees by their constant meditation on death. They resemble palm-trees by their humble endurance of labour, or rose-bushes by martyrdom and the shedding of their blood. They resemble plane-trees planted along river banks, or terebinths with their branches spread out wide, signifying their great love for their fellow-men. They resemble all the other less noticeable but fragrant plants like balm, myrrh and others which symbolise all those retiring souls who prefer to be known by God more than by man.
30. Divine Wisdom shows himself to be the mother and source of all good and he exhorts all men to give up everything and desire him alone. Because, as St Augustine says, "he gives himself only to those who desire him and seek him with all the zeal such a lofty aim deserves."

In verses 30 and 31 divine Wisdom lists three degrees in holy living, the last of which constitutes perfection:

- (1) Listen to God with humble submission;
- (2) Act in him and through him with persevering fidelity;
- (3) Seek to acquire the light and unction you need to inspire others with that love for Wisdom which will lead them to eternal life.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MARVELLOUS POWER OF DIVINE WISDOM SHOWN IN THE CREATION OF THE WORLD AND MAN

[1. In the creation of the world]

31. Eternal Wisdom began to manifest himself outside the bosom of God the Father when, after a whole eternity, he made light, heaven and earth. St John tells us that everything was made through the Word, that is eternal Wisdom: "All things were made by him" (Jn. 1:3; cf. Heb. 1:2; Col. 1:16-17).

Solomon says that eternal Wisdom is the mother and maker of all things. Notice that Solomon does not call him simply the maker of the universe but also its mother because the maker does not love and care for the work of his hands like a mother does for her child (Wisd. 7: 12,21).

32. After creating all things, eternal Wisdom abides in them to contain, maintain and renew them (Wisd. 1:7; 7:27). It was this supremely perfect beauty who, after creating the universe, established the

magnificent order we find there. He it was who separated, arranged, evaluated, augmented and calculated everything.

He spread out the skies; he set the sun, the moon, the stars and the planets in perfect order. He laid the foundations of the earth and assigned limits and laws to the sea and depths to the ocean. He raised mountains and gave moderation to all things even to the springs of water. Finally, he says, "I was with God and I disposed everything with such perfect precision and such pleasing variety that it was like playing a game to entertain my Father and myself" (Prov. 8:30-31).

33. This mysterious game of divine Wisdom is clearly seen in the great variety of all he created. Apart from considering the different species of angels whose number is well-nigh infinite, and the varied brightness of the stars and the different temperaments of men, we are filled with wonderment at the changes we see in the seasons and the weather, at the variety of instincts in animals, at the different species of plants, at the diversified beauty of the flowers and the different tastes of the fruits. "Let him who is wise understand these things" (Hos. 14:10; cf. Jer. 9:12; Ps. 106:43). Who is the one to whom eternal Wisdom has communicated his wisdom? That person alone will understand these mysteries of nature.

34. Eternal Wisdom has revealed these things to the saints, as we learn from their biographies. At times they were so astonished at the beauty, the harmony and the order that God has put into the smallest things, such as a bee, an ant, an ear of corn, a flower, a worm, that they were carried away in rapture and ecstasy.

[2. In the creation of man]

35. If the power and gentleness of eternal Wisdom were so luminously evident in the creation, the beauty and order of the universe, they shone forth far more brilliantly in the creation of man. For man is his supreme masterpiece, the living image of his beauty and his perfection, the great vessel of his graces, the wonderful treasury of his wealth and in a unique way his representative on earth. "By your wisdom you appointed man to have dominion over every creature you made" (Wisd. 9:2).

36. For the glory of this magnificent and powerful Worker I must describe the original beauty and excellence of man as created by divine Wisdom. But the state of man's grievous sin has fallen upon me, poor miserable child of Eve, dulling my understanding to the point that I can describe only very imperfectly the work of man's creation.

37. We might say that eternal Wisdom made copies, that is, shining likenesses of his own intelligence, memory, and will, and infused them into the soul of man so that he might become the living image of the Godhead. In man's heart he enkindled the fire of the pure love of God. He gave him a radiant body and virtually enshrined within him a compendium of all the various perfections of angels, animals, and other created things.

38. Man's entire being was bright without shadow, beautiful without blemish, pure without stain, perfectly proportioned without deformity, flaw, or imperfection. His mind, gifted with the light of wisdom, understood perfectly both Creator and creature. The grace of God was in his soul making him innocent and pleasing to the most High God. His body was endowed with immortality. He had the pure love of God in his heart without any fear of death, for he loved God ceaselessly, without wavering and purely for God himself. In short, man was so godlike, so absorbed and rapt in God that he had no unruly passions to subdue and no enemies to overcome.

Such was the generosity shown to man by eternal Wisdom and such was the happiness that man enjoyed in his state of innocence.

39. But, alas, the vessel of the Godhead was shattered into a thousand pieces. This beautiful star fell from the skies. This brilliant sun lost its light. Man sinned, and by his sin lost his wisdom, his innocence, his beauty, his immortality. In a word, he lost all the good things he was given and found himself burdened with a host of evils. His mind was darkened and impaired. His heart turned cold towards the God he no longer loved. His sin-stained soul resembled Satan himself. The passions were in disorder; he was no longer master of himself. His only companions are the devils who have made him their slave and their abode. Even creatures have risen up in warfare against him.

In a single instant, man became the slave of demons, the object of God's anger (Cf. Eph. 2:3), the prey of the powers of hell.

He became so hideous in his own sight that he hid himself for shame. He was cursed and condemned to death. He was driven from the earthly paradise and excluded from heaven. With no hope of future happiness, he was doomed to eke out a pitiable life upon an earth under curse (cf. Gen. 3:10; 17:23; 4:11,12). He would eventually die like a criminal and after death, together with all his posterity, share the devil's damnation in body and soul.

Such was the frightful calamity which befell man when he sinned. Such was the well-deserved sentence God in his justice pronounced against him.

40. Seeing himself in such a plight, Adam came close to despair. He could not hope for help from angels or any of God's creatures. Nothing could restore his privileges because he had been so eminently fair, so very magnificently fashioned when he was created, and now by his sin he had become so hideous, so repulsive. He saw himself banished from Paradise and from the presence of God. He could see God's justice pursuing him in all his descendants. He saw heaven closed and no one to open it; he saw hell open and no one to close it.

CHAPTER FOUR

MARVELS OF WISDOM'S GOODNESS AND MERCY BEFORE HIS INCARNATION

41. Eternal Wisdom was deeply moved by the plight of Adam and all his descendants. He was profoundly distressed at seeing his vessel of honour shattered, his image torn to pieces, his masterpiece destroyed, his representative in this world overthrown.

He listened tenderly to man's sighs and entreaties and he was moved with compassion when he saw the sweat of his brow, the tears in his eyes, the fatigue of his arms, his sadness of heart, his affliction of soul.

[1. The Incarnation is decreed]

42. I seem to see this lovable Sovereign convoking and assembling the most holy Trinity, a second time, so to speak, for the purpose of rehabilitating man in the state he formerly created him (cf. Gen. 1:26). We can picture a kind of contest going on in this grand council between eternal Wisdom and God's justice.

43. I seem to hear eternal Wisdom, in his plea on behalf of man, admit that because of his sin man and all his descendants deserve to be condemned and to spend all eternity with the rebel angels. Still, man should be pitied because he sinned more through ignorance and weakness than through malice. He points out that it would be a pity if such an exquisite masterpiece were to become the slave of the devil for ever, and millions upon millions of men were to be lost eternally, through the sin of only one man. Besides, eternal Wisdom draws attention to the places left vacant by the fall of the apostate angels. Would it not be fitting to fill these places? And would not God receive great glory in time and in eternity if man were saved?

44. It seems to me that I hear the God of justice replying that the sentence of death and eternal damnation has been pronounced against man and his descendants, and it must be carried out without pardon or mercy, just as happened in the case of Lucifer and his followers. Man has shown himself ungrateful for the gifts he received, has followed the devil in pride and disobedience and should therefore follow him in his punishment, for sin must necessarily be punished.

45. Eternal Wisdom seeing that nothing on earth can expiate man's sin, that nothing can satisfy divine justice and appease God's anger and still, wishing to save unfortunate man whom he cannot help loving, finds a wonderful way of accomplishing this.

Wonder of wonders! With boundless and incomprehensible love, this tender-hearted Lord offers to comply with his justice, to calm the divine anger, to rescue us from the slavery of the devil and from the flames of hell, and to merit for us eternal happiness.

46. His offer is accepted; a decision is reached and made. Eternal Wisdom, the Son of God, will become man at a suitable time and in determined circumstances. For about four thousand years - from the creation of the world and Adam's sin until the Incarnation of divine Wisdom - Adam and his descendants were subject to death, just as God had decreed. But in view of the Incarnation of the Son of God, they received the graces they needed to obey his commandments and do salutary penance for any they might have transgressed. If they died in the state of grace and in God's friendship, their souls went to Limbo, there to await their Saviour and Deliverer who would open the gates of heaven for them.

[2. The time before the Incarnation]

47. During the whole time preceding his Incarnation, eternal Wisdom proved in a thousand ways his friendship for men and his great desire to bestow his favours on them and to converse with them. "My delight is to be with the children of men" (Prov. 8:31). He went about seeking those worthy of him (Wisd. 6:16), that is those worthy of his friendship, his precious gifts, his very person. He passed through different nations, making them prophets and friends of God (Wisd. 7:27; cf. 7:14). He it was who instructed all the holy patriarchs, all the friends of God, all the saints and prophets of the old and new testaments (Wisd. 7).

This same Wisdom inspired men of God and spoke by the mouths of the prophets. He directed their ways and enlightened them in their doubts. He upheld them in their weakness and freed them from all harm.

48. This is how the Holy Spirit tells it in the tenth chapter of the Book of Wisdom (Wisd. 10:1-21).

1. It was Wisdom who safeguarded Adam, the first man, created alone to be the father of all men.

2. He rescued him from his sin and gave him power to control and rule over all things.

3. When the sinful Cain in anger withdrew from Wisdom, he perished because through his fury he became the murderer of his brother.

4. When the Deluge flooded the earth, because of him, it was Wisdom again who saved it, piloting the just man Noah in a frail wooden ark.

5. When the nations conspired together to do evil, Wisdom discerned the just man, Abraham, preserved him in innocence before God and kept him resolute in overcoming the pity he felt for his son, Isaac.

6. Wisdom rescued the righteous man, Lot, when he fled from the company of wicked men who perished as fire descended upon the Five Cities.

7. Evidence of their wickedness still remains - a smoking wasteland, plants bearing fruit that never ripen, and a pillar of salt standing as a monument to an unbelieving soul.

8. For those who neglected to see Wisdom were not only kept from knowledge of good, but they also left to mankind a memorial of their folly, and so their crime could never remain hidden.

49. 9. But Wisdom delivered those who served him from all evils.

10. When the just man Jacob fled from the wrath of his brother Esau, Wisdom guided him along straight paths and showed him the kingdom of God. God gave him knowledge of holy things, prospered him in his labours and increased the fruits of his work.

11. He stood by him against the greed of defrauders and made him rich.

12. He protected him from his enemies and saved him from seducers. He gave him victory in his arduous struggle so that he might know that Wisdom is mightier than anything.

13. He did not abandon Joseph, the just man, when he was old, but delivered him from the hands of sinners and went down with him into the well.

14. He did not desert him in his chains until he brought him the sceptre of royalty and authority over his oppressors. He showed those who had defamed him to be liars and gave him an eternal renown.

15. He liberated a holy people and a blameless race, the Hebrews, from a nation of oppressors.

16. He entered the soul of God's servant, Moses, and withstood fearsome kings with signs and wonders.

17. He gave the holy ones the reward of their labours, led them along a perfect way, and became a shelter for them by day and shed a starry light upon them by night.

18. He brought them across the Red Sea and led them through the deep waters.

19. He submerged their enemies in the sea and gathered his own people up from the depths of the sea. Thus he carried off the spoils of the wicked.

20. They extolled you in their songs, O Lord, and together praised your conquering hand.

21. For Wisdom opened the mouths of the dumb and made the tongues of the babes speak with fluency.

50. In the next chapter of the Book of Wisdom (Wisd. 11) the Holy Spirit describes the various evils from which eternal Wisdom delivered Moses and the Israelites during the time they lived in the desert. To this we may add those who were delivered from great dangers by eternal Wisdom in the Old and New Testaments. Among them were Daniel who was freed from the lions' den, Susanna from the false crime she was accused of, the three young men from the furnace in Babylon, St Peter from prison, St John from the cauldron of boiling oil and numberless martyrs and confessors from the physical torments they were made to suffer and the calumnies which blackened their good name. All these were delivered and healed by eternal Wisdom. "O Lord, those who have pleased you from the beginning were healed by Wisdom (Wisd. 9:19).

[Conclusion]

51. And now let us proclaim: "A thousand times happy is the man into whose soul Wisdom has entered to have his abode! No matter what battles he has to wage, he will emerge victorious. No matter what dangers threaten him, he will escape unharmed. No matter what sorrows afflict him, he will find joy and consolation. No matter what humiliations are heaped upon him, he will be exalted and glorified in time and throughout eternity."

CHAPTER FIVE MARVELLOUS EXCELLENCE OF ETERNAL WISDOM

52. In the eighth chapter of the Book of Wisdom, the Holy Spirit shows the excellence of eternal Wisdom in terms so sublime and yet so clear that we need only quote them here, adding a few reflections.

53. 1. "Wisdom reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other and orders all things graciously."

Nothing is so gracious as eternal Wisdom. Of his very nature he is gracious without bitterness; gracious to those who love him, never showing displeasure; gracious in his conduct, never showing severity. He is so gentle and unobtrusive that you might often think that he is not present when you meet with accidents and contradictions. But, possessed of invincible power, he quietly but effectively brings all things to a happy issue in ways unknown to men. After his example, the wise man should be graciously firm and firmly gracious - *suaviter fortis et fortiter suavis*.

54. 2. "From my youth I have loved and sought him and desired to take him for my inseparable companion."

Whoever wishes to find this precious treasure of Wisdom should, like Solomon, search for him (a) early and, if possible, while still young; (b) purely and spiritually as a chaste young man seeks a bride; (c)

unceasingly, to the very end, until he has found him. It is certain that eternal Wisdom loves souls so much that he even espouses them, contracting with them a true, spiritual marriage which the world cannot understand. History furnishes us with examples of this.

55. 3. "Wisdom shows his glorious origin by being so intimately in union with God and by being loved by him who is Lord of all."

Wisdom is God himself - such is his glorious origin. God the Father has testified that he is pleased with him proving how much Wisdom is loved (Cf. Chapter One and No. 98).

56. 4. "Wisdom is the teacher of the knowledge of God and director of all his works."

Eternal Wisdom alone enlightens every man that comes into this world (Jn. 1:9). He alone came from heaven to teach the secrets of God (Cf. Jn. 1:18; Mt. 11:27; 1 Cor. 2:10). We have no real teacher (Mt. 23:8,10) except the incarnate Wisdom, whose name is Jesus Christ. He alone brings all the works of God to perfection, especially the saints, for he shows them what they must do and teaches them to appreciate and put into practice all he has taught them.

57. 5. "If it is riches we seek in this life, who is richer than divine Wisdom who created all things?"

6. "If the mind of man can produce things, who is more able than the fashioner of everything that exists?"

7. "If someone loves holiness, again the great virtues are the handiwork of Wisdom, for he teaches temperance and prudence, justice and fortitude, and nothing in this life is more useful than these."

Solomon clearly shows that since we should love Wisdom alone, then from Wisdom alone we should expect all things - material goods, knowledge of nature's secrets, all spiritual good, the theological and cardinal virtues.

58. 8. "If anyone desires knowledge, eternal Wisdom knows the past and can forecast the future. He understands the subtleties of speech and the lessons of parables. He recognises signs and wonders and knows all that is going to happen as seasons and ages pass by."

If anyone desires to possess a deep, holy and special knowledge of the treasures of grace and nature, and not merely dry, common and superficial knowledge, he must make every effort to acquire Wisdom. Without him, man is nothing in the sight of God, no matter how learned he may appear in the eyes of men. "He will count for nothing" (Wisd. 3:17).

59. 9. "I therefore resolved to take him as my companion in life, knowing that he would share his goods with me and be my consolation in my cares and sorrows."

Eternal Wisdom is so rich and generous; how can anyone who possesses him be poor? He is so gentle, attractive and tender; how can anyone who possesses him be unhappy? But among all those who seek eternal Wisdom how many can honestly say with Solomon, "I have resolved to possess him"? The majority of men do not make such a resolution with real sincerity. Their decisions are mere wishful thinking or at best weak and wavering resolves. That is why they never find eternal Wisdom.

60. 10. "Through him, I shall be acclaimed among the people and, although still a youth, honoured by the elders."

11. "I shall be considered shrewd when I sit in judgement. The most powerful will be surprised when they see me and princes will show their admiration for me."

12. "When I am silent, they will wait for me to speak; when I speak, they will pay attention to what I say. If I speak at some length, they will place their hands on their lips."

13. "He it is who will give me immortality, and through him I shall leave an everlasting remembrance to those who come after me."

14. "I shall govern people through him and nations shall be my subjects."

St Gregory has this comment to make on Solomon's self-praise, "Those whom God has chosen to write his sacred words are filled with the Holy Spirit. In a way, they seem to rise above themselves and enter into the very one who possesses them. Thus they become mouthpieces of God himself, for they are concerned with God alone in everything they say, and they speak of themselves as though speaking of someone else."

61. 15. "The most formidable kings shall be afraid when they hear of me. I shall show myself kind to my people and valiant in war."

16. "When I go home, I shall be at my ease with Wisdom, for his conversation is never disagreeable nor his company unpleasant. With him there is only contentment and joy."

17. "I thought about these things and I reflected in my heart that immortality is found in union with Wisdom."

18. "I found pure contentment in his friendship, inexhaustible wealth in his accomplishments, understanding in his teaching and conversation, and great joy listening to his counsels; and so I went about seeking him everywhere to make him my companion."

After summing up his previous commentary, Solomon draws this conclusion: "I went about seeking for eternal Wisdom in all directions." To possess him we must seek ardently; in other words, we must be ready to give up everything, to suffer everything, in order to obtain possession of him. Only a few find him because only a few look for him in a manner worthy of him.

62. In the seventh chapter of the Book of Wisdom, the Holy Spirit speaks of the excellence of eternal Wisdom in these terms: "In Wisdom there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, fruitful, subtle, eloquent, active, unsullied, lucid, gentle, benevolent, keen, irresistible, beneficent, kindly, firm, unyielding, unperturbed, all-powerful, all-seeing, possessing every spirit, understandable, pure and subtle. For Wisdom is more active than any active thing. He is so pure he penetrates all things" (Wisd. 7:22-24).

"Wisdom is an infinite treasure for men. Those who have utilised this treasure have become God's friends, and praiseworthy for their gifts of knowledge".⁶³ After reading such powerful but tender words which the Holy Spirit uses to show the beauty, the excellence and the treasures of eternal Wisdom, we cannot but love him and search for him with all our strength. All the more so since he is an inexhaustible source of riches for man who was made for him and infinitely eager to give himself to man.

CHAPTER SIX

EARNEST DESIRE OF DIVINE WISDOM TO GIVE HIMSELF TO MEN

64. The bond of friendship between eternal Wisdom and man is so close as to be beyond our understanding. Wisdom is for man and man is for Wisdom. "He is an infinite treasure for man," (Wisd. 7:14) and not for angels or any other creatures.

Wisdom's friendship for man arises from man's place in creation, from his being an abridgement of eternal Wisdom's marvels, his small yet ever so great world, his living image and representative on earth (cf. Nos. 35-38). Since Wisdom, out of an excess of love, gave himself up to death to save man, he loves man as a brother, a friend, a disciple, a pupil, the price of his own blood and co-heir of his kingdom. For man to withhold his heart from Wisdom or to wrench it away from him would constitute an outrage.

[1. Eternal Wisdom's letter of love]

65. This eternal beauty, ever supremely loving, is so intent on winning man's friendship that for this very purpose he has written a book in which he describes his own excellence and his desire for man's friendship. This book reads like a letter written by a lover to win the affections of his loved one, for in it he expresses such ardent desires for the heart of man, such tender longings for man's friendship, such loving invitations and promises, that you would say he could not possibly be the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth and at the same time need the friendship of man to be happy.

66. In his pursuit of man, he hastens along the highways, or scales the loftiest mountain peaks, or waits at the city gates, or goes into the public squares and among the gatherings of people, proclaiming at the top of his voice, "You children of men, it is you I have been calling so persistently; it is you I am addressing; it is you I desire and seek; it is you I am claiming. Listen, draw close to me, for I want to make you happy" (Prov. 8:4).

And the better to attract men, Wisdom says to them, "It is through me and through my grace that kings reign, princes rule, monarchs and sovereigns bear the sceptre and crown, I inspire legislators with the ability to enact just laws for the good of their people. I give magistrates the courage to administer justice fairly and fearlessly."

67. "I love those who love me and those who seek me diligently find me," and in finding me they will find good things in abundance. "For riches, glory, honours, dignities, real pleasure and true virtue are found in me; and it is far better for a man to possess me than to possess all the gold and silver, all the precious stones, and all the wealth of the whole universe. Those who come to me, I will lead along the paths of justice and prudence. I will enrich them with the inheritance due to rightful children and fulfil their greatest desires (cf. Prov. 8:15-21). Rest assured, it is my greatest pleasure and purest delight to converse and to abide with the children of men" (cf. Prov. 8:31).

68. "And now, my children, listen to me. Happy are those who keep my ways. Hear my instructions, be wise and do not ignore them. Happy is the man who listens to me, watching at my gates every day, waiting beside my door. He who finds me finds life and obtains salvation from the Lord, but he who sins against me, wounds his own soul. All who hate me love death" (Prov. 8:32-36).

69. Even though eternal Wisdom has spoken so kindly and so reassuringly to win the friendship of men, he still fears that they, filled with awe at his glorious state and sovereign majesty, will not dare approach him. That is why he tells them that "he is easily accessible, is quickly recognised by those who love him and is found by those who seek him; that he hastens to meet those who desire him and that anyone who rises early to look for him will have no trouble, for he will find him sitting at his door, waiting for him" (Wisd. 6:13b-15).

[2. Incarnation, Death and the Eucharist]

70. Finally, in order to draw closer to men and give them a more convincing proof of his love, eternal Wisdom went so far as to become man, even to become a little child, to embrace poverty and to die upon a cross for them.

How many times while here on earth could he be heard pleading, "Come to me, come to me, all of you. Do not be afraid, it is I. Why are you afraid? I am just like you; I love you. Are you afraid because you are sinners? But they are the very ones I am looking for; I am the friend of sinners. If it is because you have strayed from the fold through your own fault, then I am the good shepherd. If it is because you are weighted down with sin, covered with grime and utterly dejected, then that is just why you should come to me for I will unburden you, purify you and console you."

71. Eternal Wisdom, on the one hand, wished to prove his love for man by dying in his place in order to save him, but on the other hand, he could not bear the thought of leaving him. So he devised a marvellous way of dying and living at the same time, and of abiding with man until the end of time. So, in order fully to satisfy his love, he instituted the sacrament of Holy Eucharist and went to the extent of changing and overturning nature itself.

He does not conceal himself under a sparkling diamond or some other precious stone, because he does not want to abide with man in an ostentatious manner. But he hides himself under the appearance of a small piece of bread - man's ordinary nourishment - so that when received he might enter the heart of man and there take his delight. *Ardenter amantium hoc est* - Those who love ardently act in this way. "O eternal Wisdom," says a saint, "O God who is truly lavish with himself in his desire to be with man."

[3. The ingratitude of those who refuse]

72. How ungrateful and insensitive we would be if we were not moved by the earnest desire of eternal Wisdom, his eagerness to seek us out and the proofs he gives us of his friendship!

How cruel we would be, what punishment would we not deserve even in this world, if, instead of listening to him, we turn a deaf ear; if, instead of loving him, we spurn and offend him. The Holy Spirit tells us, "Those who neglected to acquire Wisdom not only inherited ignorance of what is good, but they actually left in the world a memorial of their folly in that their sins could not go unnoticed" (Wisd. 10:8).

Those who during their lifetime do not strive to acquire Wisdom suffer a triple misfortune. They fall (a) into ignorance and blindness, (b) into folly, (c) into sin and scandal.

But how unhappy they will be at the door of death when, despite themselves, they hear Wisdom reproach them, "I called you and you did not answer (Prov. 1:24). All the day long I held out my hands to you and you spurned me. Sitting at your door, I waited for you but you did not come to me. Now it is my turn to deride you (Prov. 1:26). No longer do I have ears to hear you weeping, eyes to see your tears, a heart to be moved by your sobs, or hands to help you."

How great will be their misery in hell! Read what the Holy Spirit himself has to say about the miseries, the wailings, the regrets and the despair of the fools in hell who, all too late, realise their folly and misfortune in rejecting the eternal Wisdom of God. "They are now beginning to speak sensibly - but they are in hell" (Wisd. 5:14).

[4. Conclusion]

73. Above all else let us seek and long for divine Wisdom. "All other things that are desired are not to be compared with Wisdom" (Prov. 3:15). And again, "Nothing that you desire can be compared with him" (Prov. 8:11). You may desire the gifts of God and even heavenly treasures, but if you do not desire Wisdom you desire always something of far less worth.

If only we could realise what Wisdom actually is, i.e. an infinite treasure made for man - and I must confess that what I have said about him really amounts to nothing at all - we would be longing for him night and day. We would fly as fast as we could to the ends of the earth, we would cheerfully endure fire and sword, if need be, to merit this infinite treasure.

But we must beware of choosing a wrong wisdom, because there is more than one kind.

CHAPTER SEVEN CHOICE OF TRUE WISDOM

74. God himself has his Wisdom, the one and only true Wisdom which we should love and seek as a great treasure. The corrupt world also has its wisdom which must be condemned and detested, for it is evil and destructive. Philosophers also have their wisdom which must be spurned as useless for it can often endanger our salvation.

So far we have been speaking of God's wisdom to those who are spiritually mature, as the Apostle calls them (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6), but lest they be deceived by the false glitter of worldly wisdom, let us unmask its hypocrisy and malice.

[1. Wisdom of the world]

75. The wisdom of the world is that of which it is said, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise (1 Cor. 1:19; cf. Is. 29:14), i.e. those whom the world calls wise." "The wisdom of the flesh is an enemy of God" (Rom. 8:7), and does not come from above. It is earthly, devilish and carnal (Jas. 3:15).

This worldly wisdom consists in an exact conformity to the maxims and fashions of the world; a continual inclination towards greatness and esteem; and a subtle and endless pursuit of pleasure and self-

interest, not in an uncouth and blatant way by scandalous sin, but in an astute, discreet, and deceitful way. Otherwise the world would no longer label it wisdom but pure licentiousness.

76. In the opinion of the world, a wise man is one with a keen eye to business; who knows how to turn everything to his personal profit without appearing to do so. He excels in the art of duplicity and well-concealed fraud without arousing suspicion. He thinks one thing and says or does another. Nothing concerning the graces and manners of the world is unknown to him. He accommodates himself to everyone to suit his own end, completely ignoring the honour and interests of God. He manages to make a secret but fatal reconciliation of truth and falsehood, of the gospel and the world, of virtue and sin, of Christ and Belial. He wishes to be considered an honest man but not a devout man, and most readily scorns, distorts and condemns devotions he does not personally approve of. In short, a man is worldly-wise who, following solely the lead of his senses and human reasoning, poses as a good Christian and a man of integrity, but makes little effort to please God or atone by penance for the sins he has committed against him.

77. The worldly man bases his conduct on personal honour, on "What will people say?", on convention, on high living, on self-interest, on ceremonious manners, and on witty conversation. These seven principles are the irreproachable supports on which, he believes, he can safely depend to enjoy a peaceful life.

The world will canonise him for such virtues as courage, finesse, tactfulness, shrewdness, gallantry, politeness and good humour. It stigmatises as serious offences, insensitiveness, stupidity, poverty, boorishness and bigotry.

78. He obeys as faithfully as he can the commandments which the world gives him:

- You shall be well acquainted with the world.
- You shall be respectable.
- You shall be successful in business.
- You shall hold on to whatever is yours.
- You shall rise above your background.
- You shall make friends for yourself.
- You shall frequent fashionable society.
- You shall seek the good life.
- You shall not be a kill-joy.
- You shall not be singular, uncouth or over-pious.

79. Never has the world been so corrupt as it is now, for never has it been so cunning, so wise in its own way, and so crafty. It cleverly makes use of the truth to foster untruth, virtue to justify vice, and the very maxims of Jesus Christ to endorse its own so that even those who are wisest in the sight of God are often deceived.

"Infinite is the number of these men, wise in the sight of the world but foolish in the eyes of God" (Eccles. 1:15).

80. Earthly wisdom of which St James speaks, is love for the things of this world. Worldly men secretly subscribe to this wisdom when they set their hearts on worldly possessions and strive to become rich. They institute court proceedings and engage in needless disputes to acquire wealth or hold on to it. Most of the time they are thinking, speaking, acting with the sole aim of acquiring or keeping some temporal possession. They pay little or no attention to their eternal salvation or to the means of saving their souls, such as Confession, Holy Communion, prayer, etc.; except in an offhand way out of routine, once in a while, and for the sake of appearances.

81. The wisdom of the flesh is the love of pleasure. This is the wisdom shown by the worldly-wise who seek only the satisfaction of the senses. They want to have a good time. They shun everything that might prove unpleasant or mortifying for the body, such as fasting, and other austerities. Usually they think only of eating, drinking, playing, laughing, enjoying life and having a good time. They must always be comfortable and insist on having entertaining pastimes, the best of food and good company.

They regale themselves with all these pleasures without the least scruple, with no disapproval from the world and no inconvenience to their health. Then they can go looking for some broad-minded confessor

(that is how they describe lax confessors who shirk their duty) to obtain from him on easy terms the peaceful sanction for their soft and effeminate way of living and a generous pardon for their sins. I say "on easy terms" because these worldly people usually want as a penance only a few prayers or a small offering to the poor. They detest anything that could possibly cause them any bodily discomfort.

82. Diabolical wisdom is the love and esteem of honours. This is the wisdom of the worldly-wise who, secretly, of course, long for distinctions, honours, dignities and high offices. They strive to be seen, esteemed, praised and applauded by men. In their studies, their work, their undertakings, their words and actions, all they want is the esteem and praise of men, to be reputed as devout or learned people, as great leaders, eminent lawyers, men of great and distinguished merit or deserving of high consideration. They cannot bear insult or blame and so they hide their shortcomings and parade their better qualities.

83. We must, like our Lord Jesus Christ, incarnate Wisdom, detest and condemn these three kinds of false wisdom if we are to possess the true one, which is not self-seeking, not found in the world nor in the heart of those who lead a comfortable life, and which loathes everything that men consider great and noble.

[2. Natural wisdom]

84. Besides worldly wisdom, which is pernicious and must be condemned, there is the natural wisdom of philosophers.

It was this natural wisdom that the Egyptians and Greeks eagerly sought for, "The Greeks look for wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:22). Those who had acquired this wisdom were called magi or wise men. This wisdom consists in an eminent knowledge of nature in its primary elements. It was given in full to Adam before the Fall. It was conferred on Solomon, and down through the ages many great men have received it, as history testifies.

85. Philosophers boast that their wisdom is acquired through philosophical argumentation. Alchemists boast of cabalistic secrets for finding the philosopher's stone in which, they imagine, this wisdom is to be found.

It is true that scholastic philosophy, when studied in a truly Christian way, develops the mind and enables it to understand the higher sciences, but it will never confer that so-called natural wisdom which the ancients prided themselves on possessing.

86. The science of alchemists, which purports to teach that natural bodies can be reduced to their basic principles, is still more worthless and dangerous. This science, although valid in itself, has duped and deceived multitudes of people regarding the end it proposes to attain. Judging by my own experience, I am sure that the devil is using this false science to cause a loss of money and time, as well as grace, and even the soul itself, under the pretext of finding the philosopher's stone. No other science claims to accomplish such great effects by such obvious means.

This science claims to produce the philosopher's stone or a powder (which they call "projection") which, when thrown upon any metal in a liquid state, will change it into silver or gold, which will restore health, cure illnesses, even prolong life, and effect countless marvels which ignorant people believe are divine and miraculous.

There is a group of people who consider themselves experts in this science and who are called "Cabalists" and these keep such a close guard on the hidden mysteries of this science that they would rather lose their life than reveal its so-called secrets.

87. They justify what they teach by:

(1) The history of Solomon, whom they firmly believe had been given the secret of the philosopher's stone, and as proof they produce a secret book which is false and insidious, entitled "The Clavicle of Solomon".

(2) The history of Esdras, to whom God gave a heavenly liquid to drink and which gave him "wisdom", as is related in the seventh book of Esdras.

(3) The history of Raymond Lully and of several great philosophers who say they have found this philosopher's stone.

(4) Finally, the better to cover their imposture with a cloak of piety, they call it a gift of God, which is given only to those who have persevered in asking for it and who have merited it by their works and prayers.

88. I have given an account of the fantasies or illusions of this futile science so that like many others you may not be deceived. I know that some who, after having spent so much money and wasted so much time, under the most laudable and pious pretexts in the world and in a most devoted manner, have finally regretted everything and confessed their pretence and their delusions.

I do not admit that the philosopher's stone is a possibility. A learned man named Del Rio is certain it is and has given proofs; others deny it. Be that as it may, it is not befitting, it is even dangerous, for a Christian to occupy himself in seeking it. It would be an insult to Jesus Christ, Wisdom incarnate, in whom are found all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God (Col. 2:3) as well as every gift of nature, grace and glory. It implies disobedience to the Holy Spirit who tells us in Ecclesiasticus 3: "Do not seek what is beyond your capabilities" (Sir. 3:22).

[3. Conclusion]

89. So let us remain with Jesus, the eternal and incarnate Wisdom. Apart from him, there is nothing but aimless wandering, untruth and death. "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life" (Jn. 14:6). Now let us see the effects of Wisdom in souls.

CHAPTER EIGHT MARVELLOUS EFFECTS OF WISDOM IN THE SOULS OF THOSE WHO POSSESS HIM

90. Eternal Wisdom, ever transcendent in beauty, by nature loves everything that is good, especially the good of man (Wisd. 7:22), and consequently nothing gives him more pleasure than to communicate himself. That is why the Holy Spirit tells us that Wisdom is for ever seeking throughout the world for souls worthy of him (Wisd. 6:17), and he fills these holy souls with his presence making them "friends of God and prophets" (Wisd. 7:27).

In former times he entered into the soul of God's servant Moses and filled him with abundant light to see great things, and endowed him with prodigious power to work miracles and gain victories. "He entered the soul of the servant of God and withstood fearsome kings with signs and wonders" (Wisd. 10:16).

When divine Wisdom enters a soul, he brings all kinds of good things with him and bestows vast riches upon that soul. "All good things came to me along with him and untold riches from his hand" (Wisd. 7:11). This is Solomon's own testimony to the truth after he had received Wisdom.

91. Among the countless effects eternal Wisdom produces in souls, often in such a secret way that the soul is not aware of them, the most usual are the following:

92. (1) Eternal Wisdom communicates his Spirit of enlightenment to the soul that possesses him, "I prayed, and understanding was given to me. I pleaded and the spirit of wisdom came upon me" (Wisd. 7:7). This subtle and penetrating spirit (cf. Wisd. 7:22-24) enables a man, as it enabled Solomon, to judge all things with keen discernment and deep penetration. "Because of Wisdom, who communicated his spirit to me, I shall be found keen in judgement and even the great shall be surprised in my presence" (Wisd. 8:11).

93. Eternal Wisdom communicates to man the great science of holiness as well as the natural sciences, and even the most secret ones when they are needed. "If anyone desires deep knowledge, eternal Wisdom knows the past and can forecast the future. He understands the subtleties of speech and the lessons of parables" (Wisd. 8:8). To Jacob he gave the science of the saints (Wisd. 10:10). To Solomon he gave a true

knowledge of the whole of nature (Wisd. 7:17). He revealed to him countless secrets that no one before him had ever known (Wisd. 7:21).

94. From this infinite source of light the great Doctors of the Church, like St Thomas (as he himself testifies) drew that eminent knowledge for which they are renowned. Note that this enlightened understanding given by eternal Wisdom is not dry, barren and unspiritual, but radiating splendour, unction, vigour and devotion. It moves and satisfies the heart at the same time as it enlightens the mind.

95. (2) Wisdom gives man not only light to know the truth but also a remarkable power to impart it to others. "Wisdom has the voice to convey knowledge" (Wisd. 1:7). Wisdom knows what we want to say and communicates to us the art of saying it well, for "he opened the mouths of those who were dumb and made the tongues of babies eloquent" (Wisd. 10:21).

He cured Moses of his impediment of speech (cf. Ex. 4:10-12). He imparted his words to the prophets, enabling them "to root up and to pull down, to destroy and to demolish, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:10), although they acknowledged that left to themselves they could speak no better than children (Jer. 1:6).

It was eternal Wisdom who gave the apostles the facility they had to preach the gospel everywhere and to proclaim the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:11). "He made their mouths a real treasury of words."

Since divine Wisdom is the Word of God throughout time and eternity, he has never ceased speaking and by his word everything was made and everything was restored (cf. Jn. 1:3-13). He spoke through the mouths of the prophets and apostles (Cf. No. 47) and he will go on speaking through the mouths of those to whom he gives himself until the end of time.

96. But the words that divine Wisdom communicates are not just ordinary, natural, human words; they are divine, "truly the words of God" (1 Thess. 2:13). They are powerful, touching, piercing words, "sharper than a two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12), words that go from the heart of the one through whom he speaks straight to the heart of the listener. Solomon is referring to this gift of Wisdom he himself had received when he said that God gave him the grace to speak according to the feelings of his heart (Wisd. 7:15).

97. These are the words which our Lord promised to his apostles, "I will give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist" (Lk. 21:15).

How few preachers there are today who possess this most wonderful gift of eloquence and who can say with St Paul, "We preach the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 2:7). Most of them speak according to the natural light of their minds, or from what they have taken from books. They do not speak under the impulse of divine Wisdom or from a heart filled to overflowing with wisdom (Mt. 12:34). That is why in these times we see so few conversions made through preaching. If a preacher had truly received from eternal Wisdom this gift of eloquence, his listeners would hardly be able to resist his words, as happened in the early days of the Church: "They could not resist the wisdom and the Spirit speaking in him" (Acts 6:10). Such a preacher would speak with so much unction and such authority (Mk. 1:22) that his words could never be ineffectual and void (cf. Is. 55:10-11).

98. (3) Eternal Wisdom, besides being the object of the eternal Father's delight, and the joy of angels (cf. Nos. 10,19,55), is also the source of purest joy and consolation for man who possesses him. He gives to man a relish for everything that comes from God and makes him lose his taste for things created. He enlightens his mind with the brightness of his own light and pours into his heart an indescribable joy, sweetness and peace even when he is in the midst of the most harrowing grief and suffering, as St Paul bears witness when he exclaims, "I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulations" (2 Cor. 7:4).

Whenever I go into my house, says Solomon, even though I am alone, I will take my rest with Wisdom because Wisdom's company is always pleasing, his companionship is never tedious but always satisfying and joyful (Wisd. 8:16). And not only at home did I find joy in conversing with him, but everywhere and in everything, because Wisdom went before me (Wisd. 7:12). There is a true and holy joy in Wisdom's friendship (Wisd. 8:18), while the joys and pleasures we find in created things are illusory, leading only to affliction of spirit.

99. (4) When eternal Wisdom communicates himself to a soul, he gives that soul all the gifts of the Holy Spirit and all the great virtues to an eminent degree. They are: the theological virtues - lively faith, firm hope, ardent charity; the cardinal virtues - well-ordered temperance, complete prudence, perfect justice, invincible fortitude; the moral virtues - perfect religion, profound humility, pleasing gentleness, blind obedience, complete detachment, continuous mortification, sublime prayer, etc. These are the wonderful virtues and heavenly gifts described briefly by the Holy Spirit when he says, "If anyone loves justice, great virtues are again Wisdom's handiwork, for he teaches temperance and prudence, justice and fortitude. Nothing in the world is more useful to man in this life than these" (Wisd. 8:7).

100. (5) Finally, as "nothing is more active than Wisdom" (Wisd. 7:24), he does not leave those who enjoy his friendship to languish in mediocrity and negligence. He sets them on fire, inspiring them to undertake great things for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. In order to discipline them and make them more worthy of himself, he permits them to engage in strenuous conflicts and in almost everything they undertake they encounter contradictions and disappointments.

At times, he allows the devil to tempt them, the world to calumniate and scorn them, their enemies to defeat and crush them, their friends and relatives to forsake and betray them. Sometimes they may have to suffer illness or loss of possessions, and at other times endure insults, sadness and heartbreak. In short, Wisdom tests them thoroughly in the crucible of tribulation like god is tested in a furnace.

"But their affliction", says the Holy Spirit, "was light and their reward will be great, for God has put them to the test and found them worthy of himself. He has tried them like gold in a furnace and accepted them as sacrificial victims. When the time comes, he will look upon them with favour" (Wisd. 3:4,6).

It is Wisdom who enriched the virtuous man in his labours and enabled him to reap the fruit of his toil. He came to his aid against those who were trying to deceive him and made him prosperous. He protected him against his enemies, shielded him against seducers and engaged him in combat so that he might come through victorious and so convince him that Wisdom is more powerful than anything in the world (Wisd. 10:10).

101. We read in the life of Blessed Henry Suso, a Dominican friar, that in his eagerness to possess Wisdom, he often offered himself to undergo any torment in return for his friendship. One day he said to himself, "Do you not know that lovers endure suffering upon suffering for the sake of the one they love? For them wakeful nights are pleasant, fatigue is delightful, labour is restful, once they are assured that the one they love is pleased and grateful. If men go to such lengths to please a mere mortal, are you not ashamed to show weakness in your resolve to obtain Wisdom? No, eternal Wisdom, I will never falter in my love for you, even though I have to plunge through thicket and bush to reach you, even though I have to undergo a thousand torments in body and soul. I will always prize your friendship more than anything else on earth and you will always have the first place in my affections."

102. While travelling a few days later, he fell into the hands of robbers who beat him so unmercifully that they themselves could not help pitying him. Seeing himself in such a state, Henry Suso forgot his resolution to be brave no matter what might happen and gave way to deep depression, weeping and wondering why God had afflicted him in this way. As he pondered over his plight, he fell asleep. Early next morning he heard a voice reproaching him, "Look at this warrior of mine. He can scale mountains, climb over rocks, break into strongholds, cut to pieces his enemies when everything is going right for him. But when he meets with adversity his courage fades and he is helpless and useless. In time of consolation he is a fierce lion, but in time of tribulation he is a timid deer. Wisdom does not share his friendship with such faint-hearted cowards."

At this reprimand, Blessed Henry confessed he was wrong in giving way to excessive discouragement, and went on to ask divine Wisdom to allow him to weep and so unburden his heart weighed down by grief.

"No," replied the voice, "all the saints in heaven would lose their respect for you, were you to cry like a baby or a woman. Wipe away your tears and show the world a cheerful face."

103. The cross, then, is the portion and reward of those who desire or already possess eternal Wisdom. But our loving Saviour numbers, weighs and measures everything and sends crosses to his friends in proportion to their strength, and tempers them with divine unction to such an extent that their hearts are filled with joy.

CHAPTER NINE

THE INCARNATION AND LIFE OF ETERNAL WISDOM

[1. The Incarnation]

104. When the eternal Word, eternal Wisdom, decided in the grand council of the Blessed Trinity (cf. Nos. 41-46) to become man in order to restore fallen humanity, it is possible he made it known to Adam, and Scripture tells us he promised the patriarchs of the Old Law that he would become man in order to redeem the world.

This explains why, during the 4,000 years since the creation of the world, all the holy people of the Old Law pleaded earnestly in their prayers for the coming of the Messiah. They groaned, they wept and cried out, "Clouds, rain forth the just one. Earth, bud forth the Saviour" (cf. Is. 45:8). "O Wisdom, who proceeded from the mouth of the Most High, come bring us deliverance."

But their cries, their prayers, and their sacrifices had not the power to draw the Son of God, Wisdom Eternal, from the bosom of his Father. They reached out towards heaven but their arms were not long enough to reach the throne of the Most High. They offered the sacrifice of their hearts unceasingly to God but they were not worthy enough to obtain the greatest of all graces.

105. At last, when the time appointed for the redemption of mankind came, eternal Wisdom built himself a house worthy to be his dwelling-place (Prov. 9:1). He created the most holy Virgin, forming her in the womb of St Anne with even greater delight than he had derived from creating the universe. It is impossible on the one hand to put into words the gifts with which the Blessed Trinity endowed this most fair creature, or on the other hand to describe the faithful care with which she corresponded to the graces of her Creator.

106. The torrential outpouring of God's infinite goodness which had been rudely stemmed by the sins of men since the beginning of the world, was now released precipitately and in full flood into the heart of Mary. Eternal Wisdom gave to her all the graces which Adam and his descendants would have received so liberally from him had they remained in their original state of justice. The fullness of God, says a saint, was poured into Mary, in so far as a mere creature is capable of receiving it. O Mary, masterpiece of the Most High, miracle of eternal Wisdom, prodigy of the Almighty, abyss of grace! I join all the saints in the belief that only the God who created you knows the height, the breadth and the depth of the grace he has conferred on you.

107. During the first fourteen years of her life the most holy Virgin Mary grew so marvellously in the grace and wisdom of God and responded so faithfully to his love that the angels and even God himself were filled with rapturous admiration for her. Her humility, deep as an abyss, delighted him. Her purity so other-worldly drew him down to her. He found her lively faith and her ceaseless entreaties of love so irresistible that he was lovingly conquered by her appeals of love. "So great was the love of Mary," explains St Augustine, "that it conquered the omnipotent God" - *O quantus amor illius qui vincit omnipotentem*.

Wondrous to relate, this divine Wisdom chose to leave the bosom of his Father and enter the womb of a virgin and there repose amid the lilies of her purity. Desiring to give himself to her by becoming man in her, he sent the archangel Gabriel to greet her on his behalf and to declare to her that she had won his heart and he would become man within her if she gave her consent. The archangel fulfilled his mission and assured her that she would still remain a virgin while becoming a mother. Notwithstanding her desire to be lowly, Mary wholeheartedly gave the angel that priceless consent which the Blessed Trinity, all the angels and the whole world awaited for so many centuries. Humbling herself before her Creator she said "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38).

108. Notice that at the very moment Mary consented to become the Mother of God, several miraculous events took place. The Holy Spirit formed from the most pure blood of Mary's heart a little body which he fashioned into a perfect living being: God created the most perfect soul that ever could be created. Eternal Wisdom, the Son of God, drew the body and soul into union with his person. Here we have the great wonder of heaven and earth, the prodigious excess of the love of God. "The Word was made flesh" (Jn. 1:14). Eternal Wisdom became incarnate. God became man without ceasing to be God. This God-man is Jesus Christ and his name means Saviour.

[2. Life of Wisdom Incarnate]

109. Here is a summary of his divine life on earth:

1. He wished to be born of a married woman, though she was indeed a virgin, lest he should be reproached as one born out of wedlock. Other important reasons are given by Fathers of the Church. His conception, as we have just said, was announced to the Blessed Virgin by the angel Gabriel. He became a child of Adam without inheriting Adam's sin.

110. 2. His conception took place on Friday, 25th March, and on 25th December the Saviour of the world was born at Bethlehem and was cradled in a manger in a poor stable. An angel brought the news of the Saviour's birth to shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks in the fields. He invited them to go to Bethlehem to adore their Saviour. At the same time they heard celestial music, voices of angels singing, "Glory to God in the heavens and peace on earth to men who are God's friends" (Lk. 2:14).

111. 3. On the eighth day after his birth, as prescribed by the Law of Moses, he was circumcised, even though he was not subject to the law, and he was called Jesus, the name that came from heaven. Three wise men came from the east to adore him having learnt of his birth through the appearance of an extraordinary star which guided them to Bethlehem. This event is celebrated on 6th January, the feast of the Epiphany, that is, the manifestation of God.

112. 4. Forty days after his birth he chose to offer himself in the Temple, observing all that the Law of Moses prescribed for the redeeming of the first-born. Some time later the angel told St Joseph, spouse of the Blessed Virgin, to take the infant Jesus and his Mother into Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod. This he did. Some authors hold the opinion that our Lord stayed in Egypt for two years; others say for three, and others such as Baronius, think it was as many as eight years. He sanctified the whole of the country by his presence by making it worthy to be dwelt in by the holy hermits, as history has shown. Eusebius tells us that at the approach of Jesus the devils took to flight, and St Athanasius adds that the idols toppled over.

113. 5. At the age of twelve the Son of God, sitting among the doctors, questioned them with such wisdom that all his hearers were filled with admiration. After this incident the gospel makes no mention of him until his baptism when he was thirty years old. He then retired into the desert, abstaining from food and drink for forty days. There he fought the devil and vanquished him.

114. 6. After this he began to preach in Judea, choosing his apostles and working all the miracles related in the gospels. I need only mention that Jesus during the third year of his public preaching and at the age of thirty-three, raised Lazarus from the dead, made his triumphant entry into Jerusalem on the 29th day of March, and on the 2nd day of April which was Thursday, the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan, celebrated the Pasch with his disciples, washed the feet of the apostles and instituted the sacrament of the holy Eucharist under the species of bread and wine.

115. 7. On the evening of this day he was apprehended by his enemies with Judas the traitor at their head. The next day, 3rd April, even though it was a feast-day of the Jews, he was condemned to death after being scourged, crowned with thorns, and treated most shamefully.

That same day he was led to Calvary and nailed to a cross between two criminals. The God of all innocence thus chose to die the most shameful of all deaths and undergo the torments which should have been incurred by a robber named Barabbas whom the Jews had preferred to him. The ancient Fathers believed that Jesus was attached to the cross by four nails and that there was in the middle of the cross a wooden support on which his body rested.

116. 8. After languishing for three hours, the Saviour of the world died at the age of thirty-three. Joseph of Arimathea had the courage to ask Pilate for the body and laid it in a new sepulchre which he had built. We must not forget that nature showed its sorrow at the death of its maker by many marvellous happenings which took place at the moment of his death. He rose from the dead on the fifth day of April and appeared several times to his Mother and his disciples during forty days. On Thursday, 14th May, he took his disciples to Mount Olivet and there in their presence, by his own power he ascended into heaven to take his place at the right hand of his Father, leaving on this earth the imprint of his sacred feet.

CHAPTER TEN

THE CAPTIVATING BEAUTY AND THE INEXPRESSIBLE GENTLENESS OF INCARNATE WISDOM

117. As the divine Wisdom became man only to stir the hearts of men to love and imitate him, he took pleasure in gracing his human nature with every kind of quality, especially an endearing gentleness and a kindness without any defect or blemish.

[1. Wisdom is gentle in his origin]

118. If we consider him in his origin he is everything that is good and gentle. He is a gift sent by the love of the eternal Father and a product of the love of the Holy Spirit. He was given out of love and fashioned by love (Jn. 3:16). He is therefore all love, or rather the very love of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

He was born of the sweetest, tenderest and the most beautiful of all mothers, Mary, the divinely favoured Virgin. To appreciate the gentleness of Jesus we must first consider the gentleness of Mary, his Mother, whom he resembles by his pleasing nature. Jesus is Mary's child; consequently there is no haughtiness, or harshness, or unpleasantness in him and even less, infinitely less, in him than in his Mother, since he is the eternal Wisdom and therefore pure gentleness and beauty.

[2. He is declared gentle by the Prophets]

119. The prophets, who had in advance been shown the incarnate Wisdom, referred to him as a sheep and a lamb because of his gentleness. They foretold that because of his gentleness "he would not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax" (Is. 42:3). He is so full of kindness that even if a poor sinner be weighed down, blinded, and depraved by his sins, with already, as it were, one foot in hell, he will not condemn him unless the sinner compels him to do so.

St John the Baptist for almost thirty years lived in the desert practising austerities to gain the knowledge and love of incarnate Wisdom. No sooner had he seen Jesus approaching than he pointed him out to his disciples, exclaiming, "Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world." (Jn. 1:29). He did not say, as seemingly he should, "Behold the Most High, behold the King of Glory, behold the Almighty." But knowing him more thoroughly than any man at any time, he said: Behold the Lamb of God, behold that eternal Wisdom who, to captivate our hearts and to take away our sins, has gathered into his person all that is meek in God and in man, in heaven and on earth.

[3. He is gentle in his name]

120. But what does the name of Jesus, the proper name of incarnate Wisdom signify to us if not ardent charity, infinite love and engaging gentleness? The distinctive characteristic of Jesus, the Saviour of the world, is to love and save men. "No song is sweeter, no voice is more pleasing, no thought is more appealing, than Jesus Son of God." How sweet the name of Jesus sounds to the ear and the heart of a chosen soul! Sweet as honey to the lips, a delightful melody to the ears, thrilling joy to the heart.

[4. He is gentle in his looks]

121. "Gentle is Jesus in his looks, and in his words and actions." The face of our loving Saviour is so serene and gentle that it charmed the eyes and hearts of those who beheld it. The shepherds who came to the stable to see him were so spellbound by the serenity and beauty of his face that they tarried for many days gazing in rapture upon him. The three Kings, proud though they were, had no sooner seen the tender features of this lovely child than, forgetting their high dignity, they fell down on their knees beside his crib. Time and again they said to one another, "Friend, how good it is to be here! There are no enjoyments in our palaces comparable to those we are experiencing in this stable looking at this dear Infant-God."

When Jesus was still very young, children and people in trouble came from the country around to see him and find comfort and joy. They would say to each other, "Let us go and see young Jesus, the lovely child of Mary." St John Chrysostom says, "The beauty and majesty of his face were at once so sweet and so worthy of respect that those who knew him could not prevent themselves from loving him, and distant kings, hearing of his beauty, desired to have a painting of him. It is even said that our Lord by special favour sent his portrait to King Abogare. Some writers tell us that the Roman soldiers and the Jews covered his face in order to strike and buffet him freely because there was in his eyes and face such a kindly and ravishing radiance as would disarm the most cruel of men."

[5. He is gentle in his words]

122. Jesus is also gentle in his words. When he dwelt on earth he won everyone over by his gentle speech. Never was he heard to raise his voice or argue heatedly. The prophets foretold this of him (Is. 42:2). Those who listened to him with good intentions were charmed by the words of life which fell from his lips and they exclaimed, "No man has ever spoken as this man" (Jn. 7:46). Even those who hated him were so surprised at his eloquence and wisdom that they asked one another, "Where did he get such wisdom?" (Mt. 13:54). No man has ever spoken with such meekness and unction. "Where did he acquire such wisdom in his speech?" they asked.

Multitudes of poor people left their homes and families and went even as far as the desert to hear him, going several days without food or drink, for his gentle words were food enough for them. The apostles were led to follow him by his kindly manner of speaking. His words healed the incurable and comforted the afflicted. He spoke only one word, - "Mary" - to the grief-stricken Mary Magdalene and she was overwhelmed with joy and happiness.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE GENTLENESS OF THE INCARNATE WISDOM IN HIS ACTIONS

[6. He is gentle in his actions]

123. Finally, Jesus is gentle in his actions and in the whole conduct of his life. "He did everything well" (Mt. 7:37), which means that everything he did was done with such uprightness, wisdom, holiness and gentleness that nothing faulty or distorted could be found in him. Let us consider what gentleness our loving Saviour always manifested in his conduct.

124. Poor people and little children followed him everywhere seeing him as one of their own. The simplicity, the kindness, the humble courtesy and the charity they witnessed in our dear Saviour made them press close about him. One day when he was preaching in the streets the children who were usually about him, pressed upon him from behind. The apostles who were nearest to our Lord pushed them back. On seeing this Jesus rebuked his apostles and said to them, "Do not keep the children away from me" (Mt. 19:14). When they gathered about him he embraced and blessed them with gentleness and kindness.

The poor, on seeing him poorly dressed and simple in his ways, without ostentation or haughtiness, felt at ease with him. They defended him against the rich and the proud when these calumniated and persecuted him, and he in his turn praised and blessed them on every occasion.

125. But how describe the gentleness of Jesus in his dealings with poor sinners: his gentleness with Mary Magdalene, his courteous solicitude in turning the Samaritan woman from her evil ways, his compassion in pardoning the adulterous woman taken in adultery, his charity in sitting down to eat with public sinners in order to win them over? Did not his enemies seize upon his great kindness as a pretext to persecute him, saying that his gentleness only encouraged others to transgress the law of Moses, and tauntingly called him the friend of sinners and publicans? With what kindness and concern did he not try to win over the heart of Judas who had decided to betray him, even when Jesus was washing his feet and calling him his friend! With what charity he asked God his Father to pardon his executioners, pleading their ignorance as an excuse.

126. How beautiful, meek and charitable is Jesus, the incarnate Wisdom! Beautiful from all eternity, he is the splendour of his Father, the unspotted mirror and image of his goodness. He is more beautiful than the sun and brighter than light itself. He is beautiful in time, being formed by the Holy Spirit pure and faultless, fair and immaculate, and during his life he charmed the eyes and hearts of men and is now the glory of the angels. How loving and gentle he is with men, and especially with poor sinners whom he came upon earth to seek out in a visible manner, and whom he still seeks in an invisible manner every day.

[7. He continues to be gentle in heaven]

127. Do you think that Jesus, now that he is triumphant and glorious, is any the less loving and condescending? On the contrary, his glory, as it were, perfects his kindness. He wishes to appear forgiving rather than majestic, to show the riches of his mercy rather than the gold of his glory.

128. Read the accounts of his apparitions and you will see that when Wisdom incarnate and glorified showed himself to his friends, he did not appear accompanied by thunder and lightning but in a kindly and gentle manner. He did not assume the majesty of a King or of the Lord of hosts, but the tenderness of a spouse and the kindness of a friend. On some occasions he has shown himself in the Blessed Sacrament, but I cannot remember having read that he ever did so otherwise than in the form of a gentle and beautiful child.

129. Not long ago an unhappy man, enraged because he had lost all his money at gambling, drew his sword against heaven, blaming our Lord for the loss of his money. Then, instead of thunderbolts and fiery darts falling upon this man, there came fluttering down from the sky a little piece of paper. Quite taken aback, he caught the paper, opened it and read, "O God, have mercy on me." The sword fell from his hands, and, stirred to the depths of his heart, he fell on his knees and begged for mercy.

130. St Denis the Areopagite relates that a certain bishop, Carpas by name, had, after a great deal of trouble, converted a pagan. On hearing afterwards that a fellow-pagan had lost no time in making the new convert abjure the faith, Carpas earnestly prayed to God all night to wreak vengeance and punishment upon the guilty one for his attack on the supreme authority of God. Suddenly, when his fervour and his entreaties were reaching their peak, he saw the earth opening and on the brink of hell he saw the apostate and the pagan whom the demons were trying to drag into the abyss. Then lifting up his eyes, he saw the heavens open and Jesus Christ accompanied by a multitude of angels coming to him and saying, "Carpas, you asked me for vengeance, but you do not know me. You do not realise what you are asking for, nor what sinners have cost me. Why do you want me to condemn them? I love them so much that if it were necessary I would be ready to die again for each one of them." Then our Lord approached Carpas, and, uncovering his shoulders, said to him, "Carpas, if you want to take vengeance, strike me rather than these poor sinners."

131. With this knowledge of eternal Wisdom, shall we not love him who has loved us and still loves us more than his own life; and whose beauty and meekness surpass all that is loveliest and most attractive in heaven and on earth?

132. We read in the life of Blessed Henry Suso that one day the eternal Wisdom, whom he so ardently desired, appeared to him. It happened in this way. Our Lord appeared in human form surrounded by a bright transparent cloud and seated upon a throne of ivory. A brightness like the rays of the sun at noonday radiated from his eyes and face. The crown he wore signified eternity; his robe blessedness; his word meekness; his embrace the fullness of bliss possessed by all the blessed. Henry contemplated this spectacle

of the divine Wisdom. What surprised him most was to see Jesus at one moment appearing as a young maiden of incomparable heavenly and earthly beauty and, at the next moment, appearing as a young man who, judging from his face, would seem to have espoused all that is beautiful in God's creation. Sometimes he saw him raise his head higher than the heavens and at the same time tread the chasms of the earth. Sometimes he looked wholly majestic and at other times condescending, gentle, meek and full of tenderness for those who came to him. Then he turned to Henry and said with a smile, "My son, give me your heart" (Prov. 23:26). At once Henry threw himself at his feet and offered him for all time the gift of his heart.

Following the example of this holy man, let us offer eternal Wisdom for all time the gift of our heart. That is all he asks for.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE PRINCIPAL UTTERANCES OF WISDOM INCARNATE WHICH WE MUST BELIEVE AND PRACTISE IF WE ARE TO BE SAVED

133. 1. If anyone wishes to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. Lk. 9:23.

2. If anyone loves me, he will keep my commandments, and my Father will love him and we will come to him. Jn. 14:23.

3. If you present your gift at the altar and you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go make peace with your brother. Mt. 23:24.

134. 4. If someone comes to me and does not hate his father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Lk. 14:26.

5. Whoever has left his house, or brothers or sisters, or children, or inheritance, out of love for me, will receive a hundredfold reward and will possess eternal life. Mt. 19:29.

6. If you wish to be perfect, go sell what you possess and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Mt. 19:21.

135. 7. Not everyone who cries out to me, "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who obeys the will of my heavenly Father will enter there. Mt. 7:21.

8. Whoever hears my words and obeys them is like a wise man who builds upon solid rock. Mt. 7:24.

9. I tell you solemnly, if you do not change and become as children you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Mt. 18:3.

10. Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls. Mt. 11:29.

136. 11. When you pray, beware of acting like those hypocrites who love to stand and pray in their synagogues so that men may notice them. Mt. 6:5.

12. Of what use is it when you pray to use many words, since your heavenly Father knows your needs before you place them before him. Mt. 6:7.

13. As you prepare to pray, forgive your neighbour the wrongs he may have committed against you so that your heavenly Father may show mercy to you. Mk. 11:25.

14. When you ask God in prayer for anything, believe that you will receive it, and you will indeed receive it. Mk. 11:24.

137. 15. When you are fasting, do not imitate those gloomy hypocrites who go about looking worn out to show others they are fasting. I tell you solemnly, they have already received their reward. Mt. 6:16.

138. 16. There will be greater rejoicing in heaven when one sinner is seen to be penitent than when ninety-nine just people show no repentance. Lk. 15:7.

17. I have not come to call the just, but to call sinners and draw them to repentance. Lk. 5:32.

139. 18. Blessed are they who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Mt. 5:10.

19. Blessed are you when men hate you and reject you from their company because of the Son of man; rejoice, for your reward will be great in heaven. Lk. 6:22.

20. If the world hates you and persecutes you, recall that it hated me before you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own; but because I have chosen you, it will hate you. Jn. 15:18.

140. 21. Come to me all you who are afflicted and heavily-burdened and I will refresh you. Mt. 11:28.

22. I am the bread of life come down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live for ever, and the bread that I give is my flesh. Jn. 6:51.

23. My food is the real food and my blood is the real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him. Jn. 6:55,56.

141. 24. You will be hated by all men because of me, but I promise you, not a single hair of your head will be lost. Lk. 21:17-18.

142. 25. No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate one and love the other, or he will uphold one and despise the other. Mt. 6:24.

143. 26. Evil thoughts which come from the heart make a person unclean: but eating with unwashed hands does not make a person unclean. Mt. 15:19.

27. A good man draws only what is good from his store of goodness; but the wicked man can only draw what is evil from his store. Mt. 12:35.

144. 28. No one is worthy of the kingdom of God, if, after putting his hand to the plough, he looks behind him. Lk. 9:62.

29. Every hair of your head is counted; so never fear, you are worth more than many sparrows. Lk. 12:7.

30. God did not send his son into the world to judge and condemn the world, but that he might save the world. Jn. 3:17.

145. 31. Every man who does evil avoids the light; he is afraid his evil deeds will be exposed. Jn. 3:20.

32. God is a spirit and those who adore him must do so in spirit and in truth. Jn. 4:24.

33. It is the spirit that gives life to everything; the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are words of life. Jn. 6:63.

34. Whoever commits sin becomes the servant and slave of sin, and the servant does not remain in the house for ever. Jn. 8:34-35.

35. Whoever is faithful in small things will be faithful in the greater; and whoever is dishonest in small things will be yet more dishonest in greater things. Lk. 16:10.

36. It is more likely that heaven and earth should perish than that one detail of the law should not be accomplished. Lk. 16:17.

37. Your light must shine before men so that they will see your good works and they will glorify your Father who is in heaven. Mt. 5:16.

146. 38. If your virtue is no better than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Mt. 5:20.

39. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; for it is better for you to lose one part of your body than to have your whole body thrown into hell. Mt. 5:29.

40. The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and only those who are violent can take it by force. Mt. 11:12.

41. Do not store up a treasure on earth to be destroyed by moths and rust or stolen by thieves; rather store up a treasure in heaven which no one can steal. Mt. 6:19.

42. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; for God will judge you in the same way as you judge others. Mt. 7:1.

147. 43. Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but who in their hearts are ravenous wolves; you will recognise them by their fruits. Mt. 7:15.

44. Beware of showing contempt for any of my little ones; their angels see the face of my Father who is in heaven. Mt. 18:10.

45. Be on the watch, for you do not know the day or the hour when the Lord will come. Mt. 25:13.

148. 46. Do not be afraid of those who can kill the body; fear rather the one who can kill the body, and then is able to cast the soul into hell. Lk. 12:4,5.

47. Do not worry over what you are to eat or how you are to clothe your body; your heavenly Father is well aware of all your needs. Lk. 12:22,30.

48. All that is hidden will be made known and all that is covered up will be revealed. Lk. 8:17.

149. 49. Anyone who aspires to be the greatest among you must become the servant of all, and anyone who wishes to be the first must serve as if he were the last. Mt. 20:26,27.

50. How difficult it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of heaven. Mk. 10:23.

51. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Lk. 18:25.

52. And I say to you, love your enemies; do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you. Mt. 5:44.

53. Alas for you who are rich; you have your consolation in this world. Lk. 6:24.

150. 54. Enter by the narrow gate, for the road that leads to perdition is broad and spacious and many pass along that way. But the gate and the road that lead to eternal life are narrow and only a few find them. Mt. 7:13,14.

55. The last will be first and the first will be last; for many are called but few are chosen. Mt. 20:16.

56. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek turn to him the other, and if anyone takes you to court to claim your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. Mt. 5:39,40.

57. You must always pray and never become discouraged. Lk. 18:1.

Keep watch and pray, lest you fall into temptation. Mt. 26:41.

58. Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be exalted. Lk. 14:11.

59. Give alms and everything will be clean for you. Lk. 11:41.

60. If your hand or your foot become a cause of sin for you, cut it off and cast it from you. If your eye is a cause of sin for you, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better that you enter heaven with only one hand or foot or one eye than to enter hell with two hands, two feet, and two eyes. Mt. 18:8,9.

151. 61. *The eight beatitudes*

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

2. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
3. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall find consolation.
4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be fully satisfied.
5. Blessed are the merciful, for mercy shall be shown to them.
6. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
7. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.
8. Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Mt. 5:3-10.

152. 62. I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for having hidden these things from the wise and prudent of this world and for revealing them to humble and little ones; yes, Father, for that is what it has pleased you to do. Mt. 11:25.

153. Such is the summary of the great and important truths which eternal Wisdom came on earth to teach us, having first put them into practice himself. His aim was to rid us of the blindness and waywardness caused by our sins.

Blessed are those who understand these eternal truths.

Still more blessed are those who believe them.

Most blessed of all are those who believe them, put them into practice and teach them to others; for they will shine in heaven like stars for all eternity (Dan. 12:13).

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SUMMARY OF THE UNBELIEVABLE SORROWS THE INCARNATE WISDOM CHOSE TO ENDURE OUT OF LOVE FOR US

[1. The most convincing reason for loving Wisdom]

154. Among all the motives impelling us to love Jesus Christ, the Wisdom incarnate, the strongest, in my opinion, is the sufferings he chose to endure to prove his love for us.

"There is," says St Bernard, "one motive which excels all others which I feel most keenly and which urges me to love Jesus. It is, dear Jesus, the bitter chalice which you drank for our sakes, and the great work of our Redemption which makes you so lovable to us. Indeed this supreme blessing and incomparable proof of your love makes us want to return your love. This motive attracts us more agreeably, makes most just demands upon us, moves us more pressingly and influences us more forcibly." And he gives the reason in a few words, "Our dear Saviour has laboured and suffered much to accomplish our redemption. What pain and anguish he has endured!"

[2. The circumstances of his Passion]

155. But what makes us realise more clearly the infinite love of eternal Wisdom for us is the circumstances surrounding his sufferings.

(a) The first of these is the perfection of his person. Being infinite he gave infinite value to all the sufferings of his passion. Had God sent a seraph or an angel of the lowest order to become man and die for us, it would have been a stupendous thing and worthy of our eternal gratitude. But that the Creator of heaven and earth, the only Son of God, eternal Wisdom himself should come and offer up his life! This is inconceivable charity, for, compared with his life, the lives of all angels and all men and all creatures together are of infinitely less value than say, the life of a gnat when compared with the lives of the kings of

this earth. Such an excess of love is shown to us in this mystery that our admiration and our gratitude should be great indeed.

156. (b) A second circumstance is the condition of the people for whom he suffered. They were human beings - unworthy creatures and his enemies, from whom he has nothing to fear nor anything to hope for. We sometimes hear of people dying for their friends; but are we ever likely to hear of anyone but the Son of God dying for his enemies?

But Jesus Christ proved how well he loved us because though we were sinners - and consequently his enemies - he died for us.

157. (c) The third circumstance is the amount, the grievousness and the duration of his sufferings. Their extent was so great that he is called "Man of sorrows". "A man of every sorrow in whom there is no soundness from the sole of the foot to the top of the head." (Is 53.3)

This dear friend of our souls suffered in every way exteriorly and inwardly, in body and soul.

158. He suffered even in material things, apart from the poverty of his birth, of his flight into Egypt and his stay there, and the poverty of his entire life; during his passion he was stripped of his garments by soldiers who shared them among themselves, and then fastened him naked to a cross without as much as a rag to cover his body.

159. He suffered in honour and reputation, for he was overwhelmed with insults and called a blasphemer, a revolutionary, a drunkard, a glutton and a possessed person.

He suffered in his wisdom when they classed him as an ignorant man and an impostor, and treated him as a fool and a madman. He suffered in his power, for his enemies considered him a sorcerer and a magician who worked false miracles through a compact with the devil.

He suffered in his disciples, one of whom bartered him for money and betrayed him; another, their leader, denied him; and the rest abandoned him.

160. He suffered from all kinds of people; from kings, governors, judges, courtiers, soldiers, pontiffs, priests, officials of the temple and lay members; from Jews and gentiles, from men and women; in fact, from everyone. Even his Blessed Mother's presence added painfully to his sufferings for, as he was dying, he saw her standing at the foot of the cross engulfed in a sea of sorrow.

161. Moreover, our dear Saviour suffered in every member of his body. His head was pierced with a crown of thorns. His hair and beard were torn out; his cheeks were buffeted; his face covered with spittle; his neck and arms bound with cords; his shoulders weighed down and bruised by the weight of the cross. His hands and feet were pierced by the nails, his side and heart opened by a lance; his whole body lacerated by more than five thousand strokes of the scourge, so that his almost fleshless bones became visible.

All his senses were almost immersed in a sea of sufferings. He suffered in his sight as he beheld the mocking faces of his enemies and the tears of grief of his friends. He suffered in his hearing as he listened to insulting words, false testimonies, calumnious statements and horrible blasphemies which evil tongues vomited against him. He suffered in his sense of smell by the foulness of the filth they spat into his face. He suffered in his sense of taste by a feverish thirst in which he was only given gall and vinegar to drink. He suffered in his sense of touch by the excruciating pain of the lashes, thorns and nails.

162. His most holy soul was grievously tormented because every sin committed by man was an outrage against his Father whom he loved infinitely; because sin was the cause of the damnation of so many souls who would be lost despite his passion and death; and because he had compassion not only for all men in general but for each one in particular, as he knew them all individually.

All these torments were much increased by the length of time they lasted, that is, from the first instance of his conception to the moment of his death, because all the sufferings he was to endure were, in the timeless view of his wisdom, always distinctly present to his mind.

To all these torments we must add the most cruel and the most fearful one, namely his abandonment upon the cross which caused him to cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

[3. The great love with which he suffered]

163. From all this we must conclude with St. Thomas and the Fathers of the Church that our good Jesus suffered more than all the martyrs both those of past ages and those of the future up to the end of the world. Now if the smallest pain of the Son of God is more precious and more likely to stir our hearts than all the sufferings of angels and men together had they died and given up everything for us, how deep then should be our grief, our love and our gratitude for our Lord who endured for our sakes freely and with the utmost love all that a man could possibly suffer. "For the joy set before him, he endured the cross." (Heb 12.2) According to the Fathers of the Church, these words mean that Jesus Christ, Eternal Wisdom, could have remained in his heavenly glory, infinitely distant from our misfortunes. But he chose on our account to come down upon earth, take the nature of man and be crucified. Even when he had become man he could have imparted to his body the same joy, the same immortality, the same blessedness which he now enjoys. But he did not choose this because he wanted to be free to suffer.

164. Rupert adds to this that at the Incarnation, the eternal Father proposed to his Son the saving of the world either by joyful means or by suffering, by acquiring honours or by suffering contempt, by richness or by poverty, by living or by dying. Hence while remaining himself glorious and triumphant, he could have redeemed men and taken them with him along a way paved with joys, delights, honours and riches had he wished to do so. But he chose rather to endure the cross and sufferings in order to give to God his Father greater glory and to men a proof of greater love.

165. Further, he loved us so much that instead of shortening his sufferings he chose to prolong them and to suffer even more. That is why when he was hanging on the cross, covered with opprobrium and plunged deep in sorrow, as if not suffering enough, he cried out, "I thirst." For what was he thirsting? St. Laurence Justinian gives us the answer. "His thirst arose from the ardour of his love, from the depth and abundance of his charity. He was thirsting for us, thirsting to give himself to us and suffer for us."

[4. Conclusion]

166. Knowing all this are we not right in exclaiming with St. Francis of Paula, "O God who is love, what excesses of love you have shown us in suffering and in dying!" Or with St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, kissing the crucifix, "O Love, how little are you known!" Or St. Francis of Assisi, trudging along the dusty streets, "Jesus, my crucified Love, is not loved."

Holy Church makes us repeat every day, "The world does not know Jesus Christ," (Jn 1.10) incarnate Wisdom; and in truth, to know what our Lord has endured for us, and yet like the world not to love him ardently, is morally impossible.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN THE TRIUMPH OF ETERNAL WISDOM IN AND BY THE CROSS

167. The Cross is according to my belief the greatest secret of the King (Tob 12.7) - the greatest mystery of Eternal Wisdom.

[1. Wisdom and the Cross]

How remote and how different are the thoughts and the ways of eternal Wisdom from those of even the wisest of men. (cf. Is 55.8) This great God wished to redeem the world, to cast out and chain up the devils, to seal the gates of hell and open heaven to men, and give infinite glory to his eternal Father. Such was his purpose, his arduous task, his great undertaking. What means will be chosen by divine Wisdom, whose knowledge reaches from one end of the universe to the other and orders all things well? (cf. Wis 8.1) His arm is almighty; at a stroke he can destroy all that is opposed to him and do whatever he wills. By a single word he can annihilate and create. What more can I say? He has but to will and all is done.

168. But his power is regulated by his love. He wishes to become incarnate in order to convince men of his friendship; he wishes to come down upon earth to help men to go up to heaven. So be it! It would be

expected then that this Wisdom incarnate would appear glorious and triumphant, accompanied by millions and millions of angels, or at least by millions of chosen men and women. With these armies, majestic in his splendour and untouched by poverty, dishonour, humiliations and weaknesses, he will crush all his enemies and win the hearts of men by his attractiveness, his delights, his magnificence and his riches.

Surely nothing less than that. But O wonder! He perceives something which is a source of scandal and horror to Jews and an object of foolishness to pagans. (cf. 1 Cor 1.23) He sees a piece of vile and contemptible wood which is used to humiliate and torture the most wicked and the most wretched of men, called a gibbet, a gallows, a cross. It is upon this cross that he casts his eyes; he takes his delight in it; he cherishes it more than all that is great and resplendent in heaven and on earth. He decides that that will be the instrument of his conquests, the adornment of his royal state. He will make it the wealth and joy of his empire, the friend and spouse of his heart. O the depths of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How amazing is his choice and how sublime and incomprehensible are his ways! But how inexpressible his love for that cross! (Rom 11.33)

169. Incarnate Wisdom loved the cross from his infancy. (cf. Wis 8.2) At his coming into the world, while in his Mother's womb, he received it from his eternal Father. He placed it deep in his heart, there to dominate his life, saying, "My God and my Father, I chose this cross when I was in your bosom. (Ps 39.9) I choose it now in the womb of my Mother. I love it with all my strength and I place it deep in my heart to be my spouse and my mistress." (cf. Wis. 8.2)

170. Throughout his life he eagerly sought after the Cross. If, like a thirsting deer, (cf. Ps 41.2) he hastened from village to village, from town to town; if with giant strides (cf. Ps 18.6) he pursued his way towards Calvary; if he spoke so frequently of his sufferings and death to his apostles and disciples, (cf Mt 16.21; 17.12,22,23; 20.17-19) and even to his prophets during his Transfiguration; (cf Lk 9.31) if he so often exclaimed, "I have longed for it with an infinite desire" (Lk 22.15); it was because all his journeying, all his eagerness, all his pursuits, all his desires were directed towards the Cross and because to die in its embrace was for him the very height of glory and success.

He espoused the Cross at his Incarnation with indescribable love. He sought it out and carried it with the utmost joy, throughout his whole life, which became but one continuous cross. After having made several efforts to embrace it in order to die upon it on Calvary, he asked, "How great is my distress until it is completed!" How am I hindered? What is delaying me? Why can I not embrace you yet, dear cross of Calvary? (Lk 12.50)

171. At last his wishes were fully satisfied. Bearing a stigma of shame he was attached to the cross, indissolubly joined to it, and died joyfully upon it as if in the arms of a dear friend and upon a couch of honour and triumph.

172. Do not think that, wanting to be more triumphant, he rejected the cross after his death. Far from it; he united himself so closely to it that neither angel nor man, nor any creature in heaven or on earth, could separate him from it. The bond between them is indissoluble, their union is eternal. Never the Cross without Jesus, or Jesus without the Cross.

Through his dying upon it the Cross of ignominy became so glorious, its poverty and starkness so enriching, its sorrows so agreeable, its austerity so attractive, that it became as it were deified and an object to be adored by angels and by men. Jesus now requires that all his subjects adore it as they adore him. It is not his wish that the honour even of a relative adoration be given to any other creature however exalted, such as his most Blessed Mother. This special worship is due and given only to his dear Cross. On the day of the last judgement he will bring to an end all veneration to the relics of the saints, even those most venerable, but not to those of his Cross. He will command the chief Seraphim and Cherubim to collect from every part of the world all the particles of the true Cross. By his loving omnipotence he will re-unite them so well that the whole Cross will be re-formed, the very Cross on which he died. He will have his Cross borne in triumph by angels joyfully singing its praises. It will go before him, borne upon the most brilliant cloud that has ever been seen. And with this Cross and by it, he will judge the world.

Great will be the joy of the friends of the Cross on beholding it. Deep will be the despair of its opponents who, not being able to bear the brilliant and fiery sight of this Cross, will plead for the mountains to fall upon them and for hell to swallow them. (cf Lk 23.30)

[2. The Cross and ourselves]

173. While waiting for that great day of the last judgement, Eternal Wisdom has decreed the Cross to be the sign, the emblem and the weapon of his faithful people.

He welcomes no child that does not bear its sign. He recognises no disciple who is ashamed to display it, or who has not the courage to accept it, or who either drags it reluctantly or rejects it outright. He proclaims, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Mt 16.24; Lk 9.23)

He enlists no soldier who does not take up the cross as the weapon to defend himself against all his enemies, to attack, to overthrow and to crush them. And he exclaims, "In this sign you will conquer. Have confidence, soldiers of mine, I am your leader; I have conquered my enemies by the cross (Jn 16.33), and by it you also will be victorious."

174. He has enclosed in the cross such an abundance of grace, life and happiness that only those who enjoy his special favour know about them. He often reveals to his friends his other secrets, as he did to his Apostles: "All things I have made known to you," (Jn 15.15) but he reveals the secrets of the Cross only to those who make themselves worthy by their great fidelity and great labours. One must be humble, little, self-disciplined, spiritual and despised by the world to learn the mystery of the Cross. The Cross even today is a source of scandal and an object of folly not only to Jews and pagans, Moslems and heretics, the worldly-wise and bad Catholics, but even to seemingly devout and very devout people. Yes, the Cross remains an object of scandal, folly, contempt and fear: not in theory, for never has so much been spoken or written about its beauty and its excellence than in these times; but in practice, because people lose courage, complain, excuse themselves, and run away as soon as a possibility of suffering arises.

"Father," said this incarnate Wisdom, when beholding in joyful rapture the beauty of the Cross, "I thank you for having hidden these things - the treasures and graces of my cross - from the wise and prudent of this world and revealed them to the little ones." (Lk 10.21)

175. If the knowledge of the mystery of the Cross is such a special grace, how great must be the enjoyment when one actually possesses it? This is a favour Eternal Wisdom bestows only on his best friends and only after they have prayed for it, longed for it, pleaded for it. However excellent is the gift of faith by which we please God, draw near to him and overcome our enemies, and without which we would be lost, the Cross is an even greater gift.

"It was a greater happiness for St. Peter," says St. John Chrysostom, "to be imprisoned for Jesus Christ than to be a witness of his glory on Mount Thabor; he was more glorious bound in chains than holding the keys of paradise in his hand." (Acts 12.3-7; Mt 16.19) St. Paul esteemed it a greater glory to wear a prisoner's chains for his Saviour than to be raised to the third heaven (Eph 3.1; 4.1; 2 Cor 12.2). God bestowed a greater favour on the Apostles and martyrs in giving them his Cross to carry in their humiliations, privations and cruel tortures than in conferring on them the gift of miracles or the grace to convert the world.

All those to whom Eternal Wisdom gave himself have desired the Cross, sought after it, welcomed it. Whatever sufferings came their way, they exclaimed from the depths of their heart with St. Andrew, "O wonderful Cross, so long have I yearned for you!"

176. The Cross is precious for many reasons:

1. Because it makes us resemble Jesus Christ;
2. Because it makes us worthy children of the eternal Father, worthy members of Jesus Christ, worthy temples of the Holy Spirit. "God the Father chastises every son he accepts;" (Heb 12.6) Jesus Christ

accepts as his own only those who carry their crosses. The Holy Spirit cuts and polishes all the living stones of the heavenly Jerusalem, that is, the elect (cf 1 Pet 2.5; Apoc 21.2,10). These are revealed truths.

3. The Cross is precious because it enlightens the mind and gives it an understanding which no book in the world can give. "He who has not been tried, what can he know?" (Sir 34.9)

4. Because when it is well carried it is the source, the food and the proof of love. The Cross enkindles the fire of divine love in the heart by detaching it from creatures. It keeps this love alive and intensifies it; as wood is the food of flames, so the Cross is the food of love. And it is the soundest proof that we love God. The Cross was the proof God gave us of his love for us; and it is also the proof which God requires to show our love for him.

5. The Cross is precious because it is an abundant source of every delight and consolation; it brings joy, peace and grace to our souls.

6. The Cross is precious because it brings the one who carries it "a weight of everlasting glory." (2 Cor 4.17)

177. If we knew the value of the Cross, we would, like St. Peter of Alcantara, have novenas made in order to acquire such a delightful morsel of paradise. We would say, like St. Theresa, "Either to suffer or to die;" or with St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, "Not to die but to suffer." Like blessed John of the Cross we would ask only for the grace to suffer and be despised. Heaven esteems nothing in this world except the Cross, he said after his death to a saintly person. And our Lord said to one of his servants, "I have crosses of such great value that my Mother, most powerful as she is, can procure from me nothing more precious for her faithful servants."

178. Wise and honest people living in this world, you do not understand the mysterious language of the Cross. You are too fond of sensual pleasures and you seek your comforts too much. You have too much regard for the things of this world and you are too afraid to be held up to scorn or looked down upon. In short, you are too opposed to the Cross of Jesus. True, you speak well of the Cross in general, but not of the one that comes your way. You shun this as much as you can or else you drag it along reluctantly, grumbling, impatient and protesting. I seem to see in you the oxen that drew the Ark of the Covenant against their will, bellowing as they went, unaware that what they were drawing contained the most precious treasure upon earth. (1 Kgs 6.12)

179. The number of fools and unhappy people is infinite, says Wisdom (Ecc 1.15), because infinite is the number of those who do not know the value of the Cross and carry it reluctantly. But you, true disciples of Eternal Wisdom, if you have trials and afflictions, if you suffer much persecution for justice's sake, if you are treated as the refuse of the world, be comforted, rejoice, be glad, and dance for joy because the cross you carry is a gift so precious as to arouse the envy of the saints in heaven, were they capable of envy. All that is honourable, glorious and virtuous in God and in his Holy Spirit is vested in you, for your reward is great in heaven and even on earth, because of the spiritual favours it obtains for you.

[3. Practical conclusion]

180. Friends of Jesus Christ, drink of his bitter cup and your friendship with him will increase. Suffer with him and you will be glorified with him. Suffer patiently and your momentary suffering will be changed into an eternity of happiness.

Make no mistake about it; since incarnate Wisdom had to enter heaven by the Cross, you also must enter by the same way. No matter which way you turn, says the Imitation of Christ, you will always find the Cross. Like the elect you may take it up rightly, with patience and cheerfulness out of love for God; or else like the reprobate you may carry it impatiently and unwillingly as those doubly unfortunate ones who are constrained to repeat perpetually in hell, "We have laboured and suffered in the world and after it all, here we are with the damned." (Wis 5.7)

True wisdom is not to be found in the things of this world nor in the souls of those who live in comfort. He has fixed his abode in the Cross so firmly that you will not find him anywhere in this world

save in the Cross. He has so truly incorporated and united himself with the Cross that in all truth we can say: Wisdom is the Cross, and the Cross is Wisdom.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN MEANS TO ACQUIRE DIVINE WISDOM

The First Means: An Ardent Desire

181. Children of men, how long will your hearts remain heavy and earthbound? How long will you go on loving vain things and seeking what is false? (Ps 4.3) Why do you not turn your eyes and your hearts towards divine Wisdom who is supremely desirable and who, to attract our love, makes known his origin, shows his beauty, displays his riches, and testifies in a thousand ways how eager he is that we should desire him and seek him? "Be desirous, therefore, of hearing my words," (Wis 6.12) he tells us. "Wisdom anticipates those who want her. (Wis 6.14) The desire of Wisdom leads to the everlasting kingdom." (Wis 6.21)

182. The desire for divine Wisdom must indeed be a great grace from God because it is the reward for the faithful observance of his commandments. "Son, if you rightly desire wisdom, observe justice and God will give it to you. Reflect on what God requires of you and meditate continually on his commandments and he himself will give you insight, and your desire for wisdom will be granted." (Sir 1.26; 6.37) "For Wisdom will not enter into a deceitful soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sin." (Wis 1.4)

This desire for Wisdom must be holy and sincere, and fostered by faithful adherence to the commandments of God. There are indeed an infinite number of fools and sluggards moved to be good by countless desires, or rather would-be desires, which, by not bringing them to renounce sin and do violence to themselves, are but spurious and deceitful desires which are fatal and lead to damnation. (Prov 21.25) The Holy Spirit, who is the teacher of true knowledge, shuns what is deceitful and withdraws himself from thoughts that are without understanding; iniquity banishes him from the soul. (Wis 1.5)

183. Solomon, the model given us by the Holy Spirit in the acquiring of Wisdom, only received this gift after he had desired it, sought after it and prayed for it for a long time. "I desired wisdom and it was given to me. I called upon God and the spirit of wisdom came to me." (Wis 7.7) "I have loved and sought wisdom from my youth, and in order to have her as my companion and spouse I went about seeking her." (Wis 8.2,18) Like Solomon and Daniel we must be men of desire if we are to acquire this great treasure which is wisdom. (cf Dan 9.23)

The Second Means: Continuous Prayer

184. The greater the gift of God, the more effort is required to obtain it. Much prayer and great effort, therefore, will be required to obtain the gift of Wisdom, which is the greatest of all God's gifts.

Let us listen to the voice of Wisdom himself: "Seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you, ask and it shall be given you." (Mt 7.7; Lk 11.9) It is as if he said: If you wish to find me, you must seek me; if you wish to enter my palace, you must knock at my door; if you wish to receive me, you must ask for me. Nobody finds me unless he searches for me; nobody enters my house unless he knocks at my door; nobody possesses me unless he asks for me. We can only do this by prayer.

Prayer is the usual channel by which God conveys his gifts, especially his Wisdom. The world was asking for the incarnation of divine Wisdom for four thousand years. For fourteen years Mary prepared herself by prayer to receive him in her womb. Solomon received Wisdom only after praying most fervently for a long time: "I went to the Lord and besought him, and I said with all my heart... Give me that Wisdom that sits by your throne." (Wis 8.21; 9.4) "If any of you lacks wisdom let him ask God, and it shall be given him, for God gives his gifts to all men abundantly and ungrudgingly." (Jas 1.5) Note here that the Holy Spirit does not say, "If anyone lack charity, humility, patience, etc.," although these are most excellent virtues, but he says, "If anyone lacks Wisdom." For by asking for Wisdom we ask for all the virtues possessed by incarnate Wisdom.

185. Therefore to possess Wisdom we must pray. But how should we pray?

First, we should pray for this gift with a strong and lively faith, not wavering, because he who wavers in his faith must not expect to receive any gift from the Lord. (Jas 1.6,7)

186. Secondly, we must pray for it with a pure faith, not counting on consolations, visions or special revelations. Although such things may be good and true, as they have been in some saints, it is always dangerous to rely on them. For the more our faith is dependent on these extraordinary graces and feelings, the less pure and meritorious it is. The Holy Spirit has revealed to us the grandeur and the beauty of Wisdom, and the desire of God to bestow this gift upon us, and our own need of it. Here we find motives strong enough to make us want it and pray God for it with unbounded faith and eagerness.

187. Simple faith is both the cause and the effect of Wisdom in our soul. The more faith we have, the more we shall possess wisdom. The more we possess it, the stronger our faith (cf Rom 1.17) without seeing, without feeling, without tasting and without faltering. "God has said it or promised it;" these words form the basis of all the prayers and actions of every wise man, although from a natural point of view it may seem that God is blind to his plight, deaf to his prayers, powerless to crush his enemies, seemingly empty-handed when help is needed, even though he may be troubled by distractions and doubts, by darkness of the mind, by illusions of the imagination, by weariness and boredom of the heart, by sadness and anguish of soul.

The wise man does not ask to see extraordinary things such as saints have seen, nor to experience sensible sweetness in his prayers. He asks with faith for divine Wisdom. And he will feel surer that this Wisdom will be given him than if it were vouched for by an angel come down from heaven, because God has said that all who pray in the right manner will receive what they ask for. (Lk 11.10) "If you, then, being evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the good spirit (of Wisdom) to those who ask him?" (Lk 11.13)

188. Thirdly, we must pray perseveringly to obtain this Wisdom. The acquisition of this precious pearl and infinite treasure requires from us a holy importunity in praying to God, without which we shall not obtain it. We ought not to act as so many do when praying for some grace: after they have prayed for a long time, perhaps for years, and God has not granted their request, they become discouraged and give up praying, thinking that God does not want to listen to them. Thus they deprive themselves of the benefit of their prayers and offend God, who loves to give and who always answers, in some way or another, prayers that are well said.

Whoever then wishes to obtain Wisdom must pray for it day and night without wearying or becoming disheartened. Blessings in abundance will be his if, after ten, twenty, thirty years of prayer, or even an hour before he dies, he comes to possess it. And if he does obtain this treasure after having spent his whole life seeking for it and praying for it and meriting it with much toil and suffering, let him remind himself that it is not a gift due to him in justice, a recompense that he has earned, but rather a charitable alms given to him out of mercy.

189. No, it is not those who are careless and inconstant in their prayers and searchings who obtain Wisdom, but those rather who are like the man in the Gospel who goes during the night to knock at the door of a friend, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread (cf Lk 11.15). Note that it is divine Wisdom himself who in this parable or story teaches us how we should pray if we wish to be heard. This man knocked and repeated his knocking and entreaties four or five times with increased force and insistence, in spite of the untimely hour, near midnight, and his friend having already gone to bed; and in spite of having been rebuffed and told repeatedly to be off and not make himself a selfish nuisance. At length the friend became so annoyed by the persistence of the man that he got out of bed, opened the door and gave him all he asked for. (cf Lk 11.5-8)

190. That is how we must pray to obtain Wisdom. And assuredly God wants to be importuned, will sooner or later rise up, open the door of his mercy and give us the three loaves of Wisdom, that is, the bread of life, the bread of understanding and the bread of angels. (cf Sir 15.3; Jn 6.35)

Here is a prayer composed by the Holy Spirit to ask for divine Wisdom:

[Prayer of Solomon]

191. God of my fathers, God of mercy, you created all things by your word, and by your wisdom you formed man that he might have dominion over all the creatures you have made; that he might govern the world in fairness and justice and pronounce judgement with an upright heart; give me this Wisdom that sits with you on your throne.

Do not exclude me from the number of your children for I am your servant and the son of your handmaid, a man who is weak and short-lived, with little understanding of judgement and laws. For even though a person be considered perfect among the children of men, he is nonetheless worthless if your Wisdom does not dwell in him.

192. It is your Wisdom who has knowledge of your works, who was with you when you made the world, and who knows what is pleasing in your sight and shows what is right according to your commandments.

Send him then from your sanctuary in heaven and from the throne of your majesty, for him to be with me and work with me so that I may know what is pleasing to you; for he possesses the knowledge and understanding of all things. He will lead me in all my works with true perception, and by his power will guard me. My actions then will be pleasing to you and I will lead your people with justice and be worthy of the throne of my father; for what man can know the designs of God, or can discover what is his will?

The thoughts of men are unsure and their plans uncertain, for a perishable body weighs heavily upon their soul, and the earthly dwelling depresses the spirit disturbed by many cares. We understand only with difficulty what is happening upon earth and we find it hard to discern even what is before our eyes. How can we know what is happening in heaven, and how can we know your thoughts unless you give us your Wisdom and send us your Holy Spirit from heaven so that he may straighten out the paths of those living on earth and teach us what is pleasing to you. Lord, it is through your Wisdom that all those who have been pleasing to you since the beginning of time have been saved. (Wis 9.1-6, 9-19)

193. To vocal prayer we must add mental prayer, which enlightens the mind, inflames the heart and disposes the soul to listen to the voice of Wisdom, to savour his delights and possess his treasures.

For myself, I know of no better way of establishing the kingdom of God, Eternal Wisdom, than to unite vocal and mental prayer by saying the holy Rosary and meditating on its fifteen mysteries.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN THE THIRD MEANS: UNIVERSAL MORTIFICATION

1. Necessity of Mortification

194. The Holy Spirit tells us that Wisdom is not found in the hearts of those who live in comfort, (Job 28.13) gratifying their passions and bodily desires, because "they who are of the flesh cannot please God," and "the wisdom of the flesh is an enemy to God." (Rom 8.8,7) "My spirit will not remain in man, because he is flesh." (Gen 6.3)

All those who belong to Christ, incarnate Wisdom, have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. They always bear about in their bodies the dying of Jesus. They continually do violence to themselves, carry their cross daily. They are dead and indeed buried with Christ. (Gal 5.24; 2 Cor 4.10; Lk 9.23; Rom 6.4,8)

These words of the Holy Spirit show us more clearly than the light of day that, if we are to possess incarnate Wisdom, Jesus Christ, we must practice self-denial and renounce the world and self.

195. Do not imagine that incarnate Wisdom, who is purer than the rays of the sun, will enter a soul and a body soiled by the pleasures of the senses. Do not believe that he will grant his rest and ineffable peace to those who love worldly company and vanities. "To him that overcomes the world and himself, I will give the hidden manna." (Apoc 2.17)

Although this lovable prince knows and perceives all things in an instant by his own infinite light, he still looks for persona worthy of him. (Wis 6.17) He has to search because there are so few and he can scarcely find any sufficiently unworldly or sufficiently interior and mortified to be worthy of him, of his treasures, and of union with him.

2. Qualities required for mortification

196. Wisdom is not satisfied with half-hearted mortification or mortification of a few days, but requires one that is total, continuous, courageous and prudent if he is to give himself to us.

If we would possess Wisdom:

197. 1. We must either give up actually our worldly possessions as did the apostles, the disciples and the first Christians, and as religious do now - this is the quickest, the best and the surest means to possess Wisdom - or at least we must detach our heart from material things, and possess them as though not possessing them, (cf 1 Cor 7.30) not eager to acquire more or being anxious to retain any of them, and not complaining or worrying when they are lost. This is something very difficult to accomplish.

198. 2. We must not follow the showy fashions of the world in our dress, our furniture or our dwellings. Neither must we indulge in sumptuous meals or other worldly habits and ways of living. "Be not conformed to this world." (Rom 12.2) Putting this into practice is more necessary than is generally thought.

199. 3. We must not believe or follow the false maxims of the world or think, speak or act like people of the world. Their doctrine is as opposed to that of incarnate Wisdom as darkness is to light, and death to life. Look closely at their opinions and their words: they think and speak disparagingly of all the great truths of our religion. True, they do not tell brazen lies, but they cover their falsehood with an appearance of truth; they do not think they are being untruthful, but they lie nonetheless. In general, they do not teach sin openly, but they speak of it as if it were virtuous, or blameless, or a matter of indifference and of little consequence. This guile which the devil has taught the world in order to conceal the heinousness of sin and falsehood is the wickedness spoken of by St. John when he wrote, "The whole world lies in the power of evil" (1 Jn 5.19) and now more than ever before.

200. 4. We must flee as much as possible from the company of others, not only from that of worldly people, which is harmful and dangerous, but even from that of religious people when our association with them would be useless and a waste of time. Whoever wishes to become wise and perfect must put into practice these three golden counsels which eternal Wisdom gave to St. Arsenius, "Flee, hide, be silent." Flee as much as possible the company of men, as the greatest saints have done. Let your life be hidden with Christ in God. (Col 3.3) In short, be silent with others, so as to converse with divine Wisdom. "He who knows how to keep silent is a wise man." (Sir 20.5)

201. 5. If we would possess Wisdom, we must mortify the body, not only by enduring patiently our bodily ailments, the inconveniences of the weather and the difficulties arising from other people's actions, but also by deliberately undertaking some penances and mortifications, such as fasts, vigils and other austerities practised by holy penitents.

It requires courage to do that because the body naturally idolises itself, and the world considers all bodily penances as pointless and rejects them. The world does and says everything possible to deter people from practising the austerities of the saints. Of every saint, it can be said, with due allowances, "the wise or the saintly man has brought his body into subjection by vigils, fasts and disciplines, by enduring the cold and nakedness and every kind of austerity, and he has made a compact not to give it any rest in this world" (cf Rom. Brev. St. Peter of Alcantara). The Holy Spirit says of all the saints, that they were enemies of the stained robe of the flesh (Jude 23).

202. 6. For exterior and voluntary mortification to be profitable, it must be accompanied by the mortifying of the judgement and the will through holy obedience, because without this obedience all mortification is spoiled by self-will and often becomes more pleasing to the devil than to God.

That is why no exceptional mortification should be undertaken without seeking counsel. "I, Wisdom, dwell in counsel." (Prov 8.12) "He who trusts in himself, trusts in a fool." (Prov 28.26) "The prudent man does all things with counsel." (Prov 13.16) And the great counsel given by the Holy Spirit is this: Do nothing without counsel and you shall have nothing to regret afterwards. (Sir 32.24) Seek counsel always of a wise man. (Tob 4.19)

By holy obedience we do away with self-love, which spoils everything; by obedience the smallest of our actions become meritorious. It protects us from illusions of the devil, enables us to overcome our enemies, and brings us surely, as though while sleeping, into the harbour of salvation.

All that I have just said is contained in this one great counsel: "Leave all things and you will find all things by finding Jesus Christ, incarnate Wisdom." (Imitation of Christ, III, c. 32, No. 1)

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

FOURTH MEANS: A LOVING AND GENUINE DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN

203. The greatest means of all, and the most wonderful of all secrets for obtaining and preserving divine Wisdom is a loving and genuine devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

[1 Necessity of genuine devotion to Mary]

No one but Mary ever found favour with God (cf Lk 1.30) for herself and for the whole human race. To no other person was given the power to conceive and give birth to Eternal Wisdom. No one else had the power to "incarnate" him, so to speak, in the predestinate by the operation of the Holy Spirit.

The patriarchs, prophets and saints of the Old Testament yearned and prayed for the incarnation of Eternal Wisdom, but none of them was able to merit it. Only Mary, by her exalted holiness, could reach the throne of the Godhead and merit this gift of infinite value.

She became the mother, mistress and throne of divine Wisdom.

204. Mary is his most worthy Mother because she conceived him and brought him forth as the fruit of her womb. "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." (Lk 1.42)

Hence it is true to say that Jesus is the fruit and product of Mary wherever he is present, be it in heaven, on earth, in our tabernacles or in our hearts. She alone is the tree of life and Jesus alone is the fruit of that tree.

Therefore anyone who wishes to possess this wonderful fruit in his heart must first possess the tree that produces it; whoever wishes to possess Jesus must possess Mary.

205. Mary is also mistress of divine Wisdom. Not that she is above him who is truly God, or even equal to him. To think or say such a thing would be blasphemous. But because the Son of God, Eternal Wisdom, by making himself entirely subject to her as his Mother, gave her a maternal and natural authority over himself which surpasses our understanding. He not only gave her this power while he lived on earth but still gives it now in heaven, because glory does not destroy nature but makes it perfect. And so in heaven Jesus is as much as ever the Son of Mary, and Mary the Mother of Jesus.

As his Mother, Mary has authority over Jesus, who because he wills it, remains in a sense subject to her. This means that Mary by her powerful prayers and because she is the Mother of God, obtains from Jesus all she wishes. It means that she gives him to whom she decides, and produces him every day in the souls of those she chooses.

206. Happy are those who have won Mary's favours! They can rest assured that they will soon possess divine Wisdom, for as she loves those who love her (cf Prov 8.17), she generously shares her blessings with them, including that infinite treasure which contains every good, Jesus, the fruit of her womb.

207. If it is true to say that Mary is, in a sense, mistress of Wisdom incarnate, what control must she have over all the graces and gifts of God, and what freedom must she enjoy in giving them to whom she chooses.

The Fathers of the Church tell us that Mary is an immense ocean of all the perfections of God, the great storehouse of all his possessions, the inexhaustible treasury of the Lord, as well as the treasurer and dispenser of all his gifts.

Because God gave her his Son, it is his will that we should receive all gifts through her, and that no heavenly gift should come down upon earth without passing through her as through a channel.

Of her fullness we have all received, and any grace or hope of salvation we may possess is a gift which comes to us from God through Mary. So truly is she mistress of God's possessions that she gives to whom she wills, all the graces of God, all the virtues of Jesus Christ, all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, every good thing in the realm of nature, grace and glory. These are the thoughts and expressions of the Fathers of the Church, whose words, for the sake of brevity, I do not quote in the Latin.

But whatever gifts this sovereign and lovable Queen bestows upon us, she is not satisfied until she has given us incarnate Wisdom, Jesus her Son; and she is ever on the look-out for those who are worthy of Wisdom (Wis 6.17), so that she may give him to them.

208. Moreover, Mary is the royal throne of Eternal Wisdom. It is in her that he shows his perfection, displays his treasures, and takes his delight. There is no place in heaven or on earth where Eternal Wisdom shows so much magnificence or finds more delight than in the incomparable Virgin Mary.

That is why the Fathers of the Church call her the tabernacle of the divinity, the place of rest and contentment of the Blessed Trinity, the throne of God, the city of God, the altar of God, the temple of God, the world of God and the paradise of God. All these titles are most correct with regard to the different wonders which the most high God has worked in Mary.

209. Only through Mary, then, can we possess divine Wisdom.

But if we do receive this great gift, where are we to lodge him? What dwelling, what seat, what throne are we to offer this Prince who is so dazzling that the very rays of the sun are dust and darkness in his presence? No doubt we will be told that he has asked only for our heart, that it is our heart we must offer him, and it is there we must lodge him.

210. But we know that our heart is tainted, carnal, full of unruly inclinations and consequently unfit to house such a noble and holy guest. If we had a thousand hearts like our own and offered him the choice of one of them as his throne, he would rightly reject our offer, turn a deaf ear to our entreaties, and even accuse us of boldness and impertinence in wanting to house him in a place so unclean and so unworthy of his royal dignity.

211. What then can we do to make our hearts worthy of him? Here is the great way, the wonderful secret. Let us, so to speak, bring Mary into our abode by consecrating ourselves unreservedly to her as servants and slaves. Let us surrender into her hands all we possess, even what we value most highly, keeping nothing for ourselves. This good mistress who never allows herself to be surpassed in generosity will give herself to us in a real but indefinable manner; and it is in her that Eternal Wisdom will come and settle as on a throne of splendour.

212. Mary is like a holy magnet attracting Eternal Wisdom to herself with such power that he cannot resist. This magnet drew him down to earth to save mankind, and continues to draw him every day into every person who possesses it. Once we possess Mary, we shall, through her intercession, easily and in a short time possess divine Wisdom.

Mary is the surest, the easiest, the shortest, and the holiest of all the means of possessing Jesus Christ. Were we to perform the most frightful penances, undertake the most painful journeys, or the most fatiguing labours, were we to shed all our blood in order to acquire divine Wisdom, all our efforts would be useless and inadequate if not supported by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and a devotion to her. But if Mary speaks a word in our favour, if we love her and prove ourselves her faithful servants and imitators, we shall quickly and at little cost possess divine Wisdom.

213. Note that Mary is not only the Mother of Jesus, Head of all the elect, but is also Mother of all his members. Hence she conceives them, bears them in her womb and brings them forth to the glory of heaven through the graces of God which she imparts to them. This is the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, and among them St. Augustine, who says that the elect are in the womb of Mary until she brings them forth into the glory of heaven. Moreover, God has decreed that Mary should dwell in Jacob, make Israel her inheritance and place her roots in his elect and predestinate (cf Sir 24.13).

214. From these truths we must conclude:

1. that it is futile for us to compliment ourselves on being the children of God and disciples of Wisdom, if we are not children of Mary;

2. that to be numbered among the elect we must have a loving and sincere devotion to our Lady, so that she may dwell in us and plant the roots of her virtues in us;

3. that Mary must beget us in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ in us, nurturing us towards the perfection and the fullness of his age (Eph 4.13), so that she may say more truthfully than St. Paul, "My dear children, I am in travail over you afresh until Jesus Christ my Son is perfectly formed in you" (Gal 4.19).

[2 What genuine devotion to Mary consists in]

215. If I were asked by someone seeking to honour our Lady, "What does genuine devotion to her involve?" I would answer briefly that it consists in a full appreciation of the privileges and dignity of our Lady; in expressing our gratitude for her goodness to us; in zealously promoting devotion to her; in constantly appealing for her help; in being completely dependent on her; and in placing firm reliance and loving confidence in her motherly goodness.

216. We must beware of those false devotions to our Lady which the devil makes use of to deceive and ruin many souls.

I shall not describe them here. I shall only say that genuine devotion to Mary must be sincere, free from hypocrisy and superstition; loving, not lukewarm or scrupulous; constant, not fickle or unfaithful; holy, without being presumptuous or extravagant.

217. We must avoid joining those whose devotion is false and hypocritical, being only on their lips and in their outward behaviour.

Neither must we be among those who are critical and scrupulous, who are afraid of going too far in honouring our Lady, as if honour given to our Lady could detract from her Son.

We must not be among those who are lukewarm or self-interested, who have no genuine love for our Lady or filial confidence in her, and who only pray to her to obtain or keep some temporal benefit.

We must not be like those who are inconstant and casual in their devotion to the Blessed Virgin, who serve her in fits and starts, honour her for a short time and fall away when temptation comes.

Lastly, we must avoid joining those whose devotion is presumptuous, who under the cloak of some exterior practices of devotion to Mary, conceal a heart corrupted by sin, and who imagine that because of such devotion to Mary they will not die without the sacraments but will be saved, no matter what sins they commit.

218. We must not neglect to become members of our Lady's confraternities, especially the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary, fulfilling faithfully the duties prescribed which can only make us holy.

219. But the most perfect and most profitable of all devotions to the Blessed Virgin consists in consecrating ourselves entirely to her, and to Jesus through her, as their slaves. It involves consecrating to her completely and for all eternity our body and soul, our possessions both spiritual and material, the atoning value and the merits of our good actions and our right to dispose of them. In short, it involves the

offering of all we have acquired in the past, all we actually possess at the moment, and all we will acquire in the future.

As there are several books treating of this devotion, I will content myself with saying that I have never found a practice of devotion to our Lady more solid than this one, since it takes its inspiration from the example of Jesus Christ. Neither have I found any devotion which redounds more to God's glory, is more salutary to the soul, and more feared by the enemies of our salvation; nor, finally, have I found a devotion that is more attractive and more satisfying.

220. This devotion, if well practised, not only draws Jesus Christ, Eternal Wisdom, into our soul, but also makes it agreeable to him and he remains there to the end of our life. For, I ask you, what would be the good of searching for secrets of finding divine Wisdom and of making every effort to possess this treasure, if after acquiring it, we were, like Solomon, to have the misfortune to lose it by our unfaithfulness? Solomon was wiser than we perhaps shall ever be, and consequently stronger and more enlightened. He went astray, was overcome by temptation, and fell into sin and folly. Thus he left to all those who came after him a double source of wonderment, that he should be so enlightened and still not see; so wise and still be so foolish in his sins. We can say that, if his example and writings have moved so many who came after him to desire and seek Wisdom, the example of his fall - a fact, as far as we can judge - has kept multitudes of souls from effectively going after something which, although priceless, could easily be lost.

221. To be then in some way wiser than Solomon, we should place in Mary's care all that we possess and the treasure of all treasures, Jesus Christ, that she may keep him for us. We are vessels too fragile to contain this precious treasure, this heavenly manna. We are surrounded by too many cunning and experienced enemies to trust in our own prudence and strength. And we have had too many sad experiences of our fickleness and natural thoughtlessness. Let us be distrustful of our own wisdom and fervour.

222. Mary is wise: let us place everything in her hands. She knows how to dispose of us and all that we have for the greater glory of God.

Mary is charitable: she loves us as her children and servants. Let us offer everything to her and we will lose nothing by it; she will turn everything to our gain.

Mary is liberal: she returns more than we give her. Let us give her unreservedly all that we own without any reservation; she will give us a hundredfold in return.

Mary is powerful: nothing on earth can take from her what we have placed in her keeping. Let us then commit ourselves to her care; she will defend us against our enemies and help us to triumph over them.

Mary is faithful: she will not permit anything we give her to be lost or wasted. She stands alone as the Virgin most faithful to God and to men. She faithfully guarded and kept all that God entrusted to her, never allowing the least bit to be lost; and she still keeps watch every day, with a special care, over all those who have placed themselves entirely under her protection and guidance.

Let us, then, confide everything to the faithful Virgin Mary, binding ourselves to her as to a pillar that cannot be moved, as to an anchor that cannot slip, or, better still, as to Mount Sion which cannot be shaken.

Thus whatever may be our natural blindness, our weakness, and our inconstancy, however numerous and wicked our enemies may be, we shall never go wrong or go astray or have the misfortune to lose the grace of God and that infinite treasure which is Eternal Wisdom.

CONSECRATION OF ONESELF TO JESUS CHRIST, WISDOM INCARNATE, THROUGH THE HANDS OF MARY

223. Eternal and incarnate Wisdom, most lovable and adorable Jesus, true God and true man, only Son of the eternal Father and of Mary always Virgin, I adore you profoundly, dwelling in the splendour of your

Father from all eternity and in the virginal womb of Mary, your most worthy Mother, at the time of your incarnation.

I thank you for having emptied yourself in assuming the condition of a slave to set me free from the cruel slavery of the evil one.

I praise and glorify you for having willingly chosen to obey Mary, your holy Mother, in all things, so that through her I may be a faithful slave of love.

But I must confess that I have not kept the vows and promises which I made to you so solemnly at my baptism. I have not fulfilled my obligations, and I do not deserve to be called your child or even your loving slave.

Since I cannot lay claim to anything except what merits your rejection and displeasure, I dare no longer approach the holiness of your majesty on my own. That is why I turn to the intercession and the mercy of your holy Mother, whom you yourself have given me to mediate with you. Through her I hope to obtain from you contrition and pardon for my sins, and that Wisdom whom I desire to dwell in me always.

224. I turn to you, then, Mary immaculate, living tabernacle of God, in whom eternal Wisdom willed to receive the adoration of both men and angels.

I greet you as Queen of heaven and earth, for all that is under God has been made subject to your sovereignty.

I call upon you, the unfailing refuge of sinners, confident in your mercy that has never forsaken anyone.

Grant my desire for divine Wisdom and, in support of my petition, accept the promises and the offering of myself which I now make, conscious of my unworthiness.

225. I, an unfaithful sinner, renew and ratify today through you my baptismal promises. I renounce for ever Satan, his empty promises, and his evil designs, and I give myself completely to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Wisdom, to carry my cross after him for the rest of my life, and to be more faithful to him than I have been till now.

This day, with the whole court of heaven as witness, I choose you, Mary, as my Mother and Queen. I surrender and consecrate myself to you, body and soul, with all that I possess, both spiritual and material, even including the spiritual value of all my actions, past, present, and to come. I give you the full right to dispose of me and all that belongs to me, without any reservations, in whatever way you please, for the greater glory of God in time and throughout eternity.

226. Accept, gracious Virgin, this little offering of my slavery to honour and imitate the obedience which eternal Wisdom willingly chose to have towards you, his Mother. I wish to acknowledge the authority which both of you have over this little worm and pitiful sinner. By it I wish also to thank God for the privileges bestowed on you by the Blessed Trinity. I solemnly declare that for the future I will try to honour and obey you in all things as your true slave of love.

O admirable Mother, present me to your dear Son as his slave now and for always, so that he who redeemed me through you, will now receive me through you.

227. Mother of mercy, grant me the favour of obtaining the true Wisdom of God, and so make me one of those whom you love, teach and guide, whom you nourish and protect as your children and slaves.

Virgin most faithful, make me in everything so committed a disciple, imitator, and slave of Jesus, your Son, incarnate Wisdom, that I may become, through your intercession and example, fully mature with the fullness which Jesus possessed on earth, and with the fullness of his glory in heaven. Amen.

Let those accept it who can (Mt 19.12).

Let the wise consider these things (Hos 14.9; cf Jer 9.12; Ps 106.43).