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## Notes on The Way of Perfection

### Introduction

The Way of Perfection was written during the height of controversy which raged over the reforms St. Teresa enacted within the Carmelite Order. Its specific purpose was to serve as a guide in the practice of prayer and it sets forth her counsels and directives for the attainment of spiritual perfection through prayer. It was composed by St. Teresa at the express command of her superiors, and was written during the late hours in order not to interfere with the day's already crowded schedule.

The nuns of St. Joseph's knew something of their Mother Foundress' autobiography, and, though in all probability none of them had actually read it, they would have been aware that it contained valuable counsels to aspirants after religious perfection, of which, had the book been accessible to them, they would have been glad to avail themselves. Such intimate details did it contain, however, about St. Teresa's spiritual life that her superiors thought it should not be put into their hands; ***so the only way in which she could grant their persistent requests was to write another book dealing expressly with the life of prayer.*** This P. Bañez was very anxious that she should do.

**Through the entire Way of Perfection there runs the author's desire to teach her daughters to love prayer, the most effective means of attaining virtue.**

St. Teresa begins by describing the reason which led her to found the first Reformed Carmelite convent—viz., the desire to minimize the ravages being wrought, in France and elsewhere, by Protestantism, and, within the limits of her capacity, to check the passion for a so-called “freedom”, which at that time was exceeding all measure.

Knowing how effectively such inordinate desires can be restrained by a life of humility and poverty, St. Teresa extols the virtues of poverty and exhorts her daughters to practise it in their own lives. Even the buildings in which they live should be poor: ***on the Day of Judgment both majestic palaces and humble cottages will fall*** and she has no desire that the convents of her nuns should do so with a resounding clamour.

Chapters 1-3, the author also charges her daughters very earnestly to **commend to God those who have to defend the Church of Christ —particularly theologians and preachers.**

Chaps. 4-15 stresses the importance of a strict observance of the Rule and Constitutions, and before going on to its main subject— **prayer**—**treats of three essentials of the prayer-filled life —*mutual love, detachment from created things* and *true humility*, the last of these being the most important and including all the rest.**

***With the mutual love* which nuns should have for one another** she deals most minutely, giving what Introduction 5 Introduction might be termed homely prescriptions for the domestic disorders of convents with the skill which we should expect of a writer with so perfect a knowledge of the psychology of the cloister. Her counsels are the fruit, not of lofty mental speculation, but of mature practical expedience. No less aptly does she speak of the relations between nuns and their confessors, so frequently a source of danger. **Since excess is possible even in mutual love, she next turns to detachment.**

***Her nuns must be detached from relatives and friends, from the world, from worldly honour, and—the last and hardest achievement—from themselves.*** To a large extent their efforts in this direction will involve humility, for, **so long as we have *an exaggerated opinion of our own merits, detachment is impossible.***

**Humility**, to St. Teresa, is nothing more nor less than truth, **which will give us the precise estimate of our own worth that we need.**

***Fraternal love, detachment and humility***: these three virtues, if they are sought in the way these chapters direct, will make the soul mistress and sovereign over all created things—a “royal soul”, in the Saint’s happy phrase, the slave of none save of Him Who bought it with His blood

Chaps. 16-26 develops these ideas, and leads the reader directly to the themes of prayer and contemplation.

Many people are greatly attracted by the life of contemplation because they have acquired imperfect and misleading notions of the ineffable mystical joys which they believe almost synonymous with contemplation.

The Saint protests against such ideas as these and lays it down clearly that, as a general rule, **there is no way of attaining to union with the Beloved save by the practice of the “great virtues”, which can be acquired only at the cost of continual self-sacrifice and self-conquest.** The favours which God grants to contemplatives are only exceptional and of a transitory kind and they are intended to incline them more closely to virtue and to inspire their lives with greater fervour.

And here the Saint propounds a difficult question which has occasioned no little debate among writers on mystical theology.

*Can a soul in **grave sin** enjoy supernatural contemplation?* At first sight, and judging from what the author says in Chapter 16, the answer would seem to be that, **though but rarely and for brief periods, it can.** In the original (or Escorial) autograph, **however, she expressly denies this, and states that contemplation is not possible for souls in mortal sin,** though **it may be experienced by those who are so lukewarm, or lacking in fervour, that they fall into venial sins with ease.**

St. Teresa then examines a number of other questions, on which opinion has also been divided and even now is by no means unanimous.

*Can all souls attain to contemplation?*

*Is it possible, without experiencing contemplation, to reach the summit of Christian perfection?*

*Have all the servants of God who have been canonized by the Church necessarily been contemplatives?*

*Does the Church ever grant non-contemplatives beatification?*

On these questions and others often discussed by the mystics much light is shed in the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters.

Then the **author crosses swords once more with those who suppose that contemplatives know nothing of suffering and that their lives are one continuous series of favours.**

On the contrary, ***she asserts, they suffer more than actives***: *to imagine that God admits to this closest friendship people whose lives are all favours and no trials is ridiculous*. Recalling the doctrine expounded in the nineteenth chapter of her Life she gives various counsels for the practice of prayer, using once more the figures of water which she had employed in her first description of the Mystic Way. She consoles those who cannot reason with the understanding, shows how ***vocal prayer may be combined with mental***, and ends by *advising those who suffer from aridity in prayer to picture Jesus as within their hearts and thus always beside them*— one of her favourite themes.

This leads up to the subject which occupies her for the rest of the book (Chaps. 27- 42)—the Lord's Prayer. *These chapters, in fact, comprise a commentary on the Paternoster, taken petition by petition, touching incidentally upon the themes of Recollection, Quiet and Union.*

CHAPTER 1            Of the reason which moved me to found this convent in such strict observance.

When this convent was originally founded, *for the reasons set down in the book which, as I say, I have already written, and also because of certain wonderful revelations by which the Lord showed me how well He would be served in this house.*

*it was not my intention that there should be so much austerity (without comfort) <sup>1</sup>in external matters*, nor that it should have **no regular income**: on the contrary, **I should have liked there to be no possibility of want**. I acted, in short, like the weak and wretched woman that I am, **although I did so with good intentions and not out of consideration for my own comfort**.

At about this time there came to my notice the harm and havoc that were being wrought in France by these Lutherans and the way in which their unhappy sect was increasing. This

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<sup>1</sup> Severity, strictness

troubled me very much, and, as though I could do anything, or be of any help in the matter, I wept before the Lord and entreated Him to remedy this great evil.

I felt that I would have laid down a thousand lives to save a single one of all the souls that were being lost there.

And, seeing that I was **a woman, and a sinner, and incapable of doing all I should like in the Lord's service**, and as my whole yearning was, and still is, that, as **He has so many enemies and so few friends, these last should be trusty ones**, I determined to do the little that was in me—namely, ***to follow the evangelical counsels as perfectly as I could***, and ***to see that these few nuns who are here should do the same***, confiding in the great goodness of God, Who never fails to help those who resolve to forsake everything for His sake.

*As they are all that I have ever painted them as being in my desires, I hoped that their virtues would more than counteract my defects*, and I should **thus be able to give the Lord some pleasure**, and all of us, *by busying ourselves in prayer for those who are defenders of the Church, and for the preachers and learned men who defend her*, should do everything we could to aid this Lord of mine Who is so much oppressed by those to whom He has shown so much good that it seems as though these traitors would send Him to the Cross again and that He would have nowhere to lay His head.

*Oh, my Redeemer, my heart cannot conceive this without being sorely distressed!*

*What has become of Christians now?*

**Must those who owe Thee most always be those who distress Thee?**

Those to whom Thou doest the greatest kindnesses, whom Thou dost choose for Thy friends, among whom Thou dost move, communicating Thyself to them through the Sacraments?

***Do they not think, Lord of my soul, that they have made Thee endure more than sufficient torments?***

*It is certain, my Lord, that in these days withdrawal from the world means no sacrifice at all.*

*Since worldly people have so little respect for Thee, what can we expect them to have for us?*

*Can it be that we deserve that they should treat us any better than they have treated Thee?*

*Have we done more for them than Thou hast done that they should be friendly to us? What then?*

*What can we expect—we who, through the goodness of the Lord, are free from that pestilential infection, and do not, like those others, belong to the devil?*

*They have won severe punishment at his hands and their pleasures have richly earned them eternal fire.*

*So to eternal fire they will have to go, though none the less it breaks my heart to see so many souls travelling to perdition.*

*I would the evil were not so great and I did not see more being lost every day.*

*Oh, my sisters in Christ! Help me to entreat this of the Lord, Who has brought you together here for that very purpose.*

**This is your vocation; this must be your business; these must be your desires; these your tears; these your petitions. (to pray for these souls travelling to perdition)**

**Let us not pray for worldly things, my sisters.**

**It makes me laugh, and yet it makes me sad, when I hear of the things which people come here to beg us to pray to God for; we are to ask His Majesty to give them money and to provide them with incomes—I wish that some of these people would entreat God to enable them to trample all such things beneath their feet.**



Their intentions are quite good, and I do as they ask because I see that they are really devout people, though I do not myself believe that God ever hears me when I pray for such things.

## **The world is on fire.**

Men try to condemn Christ once again, as it were, for they bring a thousand false witnesses against Him. They would raze His Church to the ground—***and are we to waste our time upon things which, if God were to grant them, would perhaps bring one soul less to Heaven?***

No, my sisters, **this is no time to treat with God for things of little importance.**

**Were it not necessary to consider human frailty,** which finds satisfaction in every kind of help—***and it is always a good thing if we can be of any help to people***—I should like it to be understood that it is not for things like these that God should be importuned with such anxiety.

## CHAPTER 2      Treats of how the necessities of the body should be disregarded and of the good that comes from poverty

Do not think, my sisters, that because you do not go about trying to please people in the world you will lack food. You will not, I assure you: **never try to sustain yourselves by human artifices**, or *you will die of hunger*, and rightly so.

*Keep your eyes fixed upon your Spouse:* **it is for Him to sustain you;** and, if He is pleased with you, **even those who like you least will give you food**, if unwillingly, as you have found by experience.

**If you should do as I say and yet die of hunger, then happy are the nuns of Saint Joseph's!**

For the love of the Lord, let us not forget this: **you have forgone a regular income;** *forgo worry about food as well, or thou will lose everything.*

**Let those whom the Lord wishes to live on an income do so:** if that is their vocation, they are perfectly justified; but for us to do so, sisters, would be inconsistent.

Worrying about getting money from other people seems to me like thinking about what other people enjoy. **However much you worry, you will not make them change their minds nor will they become desirous of giving you alms.**

*Leave these anxieties to Him Who can move everyone, Who is the Lord of all money and of all who possess money.*

It is by His command that we have come here and His words are true—they cannot fail: Heaven and earth will fail first.

**Let us not fail Him, and let us have no fear that He will fail us;** if He should ever do so it will be for our greater good, ***just as the saints failed to keep their lives when they were slain for the Lord's sake***, and their bliss was increased through their martyrdom.

We should be making a good exchange if we could have done with this life quickly and enjoy everlasting satiety.

**Remember, sisters, that this will be important when I am dead; and that is why I am leaving it to you in writing.**

For, with God's help, as long as I live, I will remind you of it myself, as I know by experience what a great help it will be to you. ***It is when I possess least that I have the fewest worries and the Lord knows that, as far as I can tell,***

***I am more afflicted when there is excess of anything than when there is lack of it;***  
I am not sure if that is the Lord's doing, **but I have noticed that He provides for us immediately.**

To act otherwise would be to deceive the world by pretending to be poor when we are not poor in spirit but only outwardly.

My conscience would give me a bad time.

**It seems to me it would be like stealing what was being given us, as one might say; for I should feel as if we were rich people asking alms: please God this may never be so.**

*Those who worry too much about the alms that they are likely to be given will find that sooner or later this bad habit will lead them to go and ask for something which they do not need, and perhaps from someone who needs it more than they do.*

God forbid this should ever happen, my daughters; if it were likely to do so, I should prefer you to have a regular income.

**Such a person would gain rather than lose by giving it us but we should certainly be the worse off for having it.**

- never to allow this to occupy your thoughts.
- If such a thing happening in this house, cry out about it to His Majesty and speak to your Superior. **Tell her humbly that she is doing wrong;**
- this is so serious a matter that it may cause true poverty gradually to disappear.
- My daughters must believe that it is for their own good that the Lord has enabled me to realize in some small degree **what blessings are to be found in holy poverty**
- Poverty is good and contains within itself all the good things in the world
- **he who cares nothing for the good things of the world has dominion over them all**

Those of them who practise it will also realize this, though perhaps not as clearly as I do; for, **although I had professed poverty, I was not only without poverty of spirit, but my spirit was devoid of all restraint.**

What do kings and lords matter to me if I have no desire to possess their money, or to please them, if by so doing I should cause the least displeasure to God?

***And what do their honours mean to me if I have realized that the chief honour of a poor man consists in his being truly poor?***

For my own part, **I believe that honour and money nearly always go together**, and that **he who desires honour never hates money, while he who hates money cares little for honour.**

Understand this clearly, for **I think this concern about honour always implies some slight regard for endowments or money: *seldom or never is a poor man honoured by the world***; however worthy of honour he may be, he is apt rather to be despised by it.

**With true poverty there goes a different kind of honour to which nobody can take objection.** I mean that, if poverty is embraced for God's sake alone, no one has to be pleased save God.

It is certain that a **man who has no need of anyone has many friends**: in my own experience I have found this to be very true.

*A great deal has been written about this virtue which I cannot understand, still less express, and I should only be making things worse if I were to eulogize it, so I will say no more about it now.*

I have only spoken of what I have myself experienced and I confess that I have been so much absorbed that until now I have hardly realized what I have been writing.

However, it has been said now. **Our arms are holy poverty, which was so greatly esteemed and so strictly observed by our holy Fathers at the beginning of the foundation of our Order.**

**(Someone who knows about this tells me that they never kept anything from one day to the next.)**

For the love of the Lord, then, [I beg you] now **that the rule of poverty is less perfectly observed as regards outward things, let us strive to observe it inwardly.**

**Our life lasts only for a couple of hours; our reward is boundless;** and, if there were no reward but to follow the counsels given us by the Lord, to imitate His Majesty in any degree would bring us a great recompense.

These arms must appear on our banners **and at all costs we must keep this rule**—as regards our house, our clothes, our speech, and (which is much more important) our thoughts.

So long as this is done, there need be no fear, with the help of God, that religious observances in this house will decline, **for, as Saint Clare said, the walls of poverty are very strong.**

**It was with these walls, she said, (poverty ) and with those of humility, that she wished to surround her convents;** and assuredly, *if the rule of poverty is truly kept, both chastity and all the other virtues are fortified much better than by the most sumptuous edifices.*

Have a care to this, for the love of God; and this I beg of you by His blood. If I may say what my conscience bids me, **I should wish that, on the day when you build such edifices, they may fall down and kill you all.**

It **seems very wrong**, my daughters, **that great houses should be built with the money of the poor;** may God forbid that this should be done; **let our houses be small and poor in every way.**

Let us to some extent resemble our King, **Who had no house save the porch in Bethlehem where He was born and the Cross on which He died.**

These were houses where little comfort could be found. Those who erect large houses will no doubt have good reasons for doing so. I do not utterly condemn them: they are moved by various holy intentions. But any corner is sufficient for thirteen poor women. ***If grounds should be thought necessary on account of the strictness of the enclosure, and also as an aid to prayer and devotion, and because our miserable nature needs such things, well and good;*** and let there be a few hermitages in them in which the sisters may go to pray. But as for a large ornate convent, with a lot of buildings—God preserve us from that!

***Always remember that these things will all fall down on the Day of Judgment, and who knows how soon that will be?***

***It would hardly look well if the house of thirteen poor women made a great noise when it fell, for those who are really poor must make no noise: unless they live a noiseless life people will never take pity on them.***

**And how happy my sisters will be if they see someone freed from hell by means of the alms which he has given them; and this is quite possible, since they are strictly bound to offer continual prayer for persons who give them food.**

***It is also God's will that, although the food comes from Him, we should thank the persons by whose means He gives it to us: let there be no neglect of this.*** I do not remember what I had begun to say, for I have strayed from my subject. But I think this must have been the Lord's will, for I never intended to write what I have said here. May His Majesty always keep us in His hand so that we may never fall. Amen

## CHAPTER 3

Continues the subject begun in the first chapter and persuades the sisters to busy themselves constantly in beseeching God to help those who work for the Church. Ends with an exclamatory prayer.

Let us now return to the principal reason for which the Lord has brought us together in this house, for which **reason I am most desirous that we may be able to please His Majesty.**

*Seeing how great are the evils of the present day and how no human strength will suffice to quench the fire kindled by these heretics (though attempts have been made to organize opposition to them, as though such a great and rapidly spreading evil could be remedied by force of arms), it seems to me that it is like a war in which the enemy has overrun the whole country, **and the Lord of the country, hard pressed, retires into a city, which he causes to be well fortified**, and whence from time to time he is able to attack.*

Those who are in the city are picked men who can do more by themselves than they could do with the aid of many soldiers if they were cowards.

*Often this method gains the victory; or, if the garrison does not conquer, it is at least not conquered; for, **as it contains no traitors, but picked men**, it can be reduced only by hunger. In our own conflict, however, we cannot be forced to surrender by hunger; we can die but we cannot be conquered.*

Now why have I said this? So that you may understand, my sisters, **that what we have to ask of God is that, in this little castle of ours, inhabited as it is by good Christians, none of us may go over to the enemy.**

We must ask God, too, to make the captains in this castle or city—that is, **the preachers and theologians—highly proficient in the way of the Lord.**

And as most of **these are religious, we must pray that they may advance in perfection, and in the fulfilment of their vocation, for this is very needful.**

For, as I have already said, **it is the ecclesiastical and not the secular arm which must defend us.**

And as we can do nothing by either of these means to help our King, ***let us strive to live in such a way that our prayers may be of avail to help these servants of God, who, at the cost of so much toil, HAVE FORTIFIED THEMSELVES WITH LEARNING AND VIRTUOUS LIVING AND HAVE LABOURED TO HELP THE LORD.***

You may ask **why I emphasize this so much** and **why I say we must help people who are better than ourselves.** I will tell you, for I am **not sure if you properly understand** as yet ***how much we owe to the Lord for bringing us to a place where we are so free from business matters, occasions of sin and the society of worldly people.***

This is a very great favour and one which is not granted to the persons of whom I have been speaking, nor is it fitting that it should be granted to them; it would be less so now, indeed, than at any other time, ***for it is they who must strengthen the weak and give courage to God's little ones.***

A fine thing it would be for soldiers if they lost their captains!



**These preachers and theologians have to live among men and associate with men and stay in palaces and sometimes even behave as** Continues the subject begun in the first chapter and ***persuades the sisters to busy themselves constantly in beseeching God to help those who work for the Church.*** .

Ends with an exclamatory prayer 25 Continues the subject begun in the first chapter and persuades the sisters... people in palaces do in outward matters.

*Do you think, my daughters, that it is an easy matter to have to do business with the world, to live in the world, to engage in the affairs of the world, and, as I have said, to live as worldly men do, and yet inwardly to be strangers to the world, and enemies of the world, like persons who are in exile—to be, in short, not men but angels?*

Yet unless these persons act thus, they neither deserve to bear the title of captain nor to be allowed by the Lord to leave their cells, for they would do more harm than good.

***This is no time for imperfections in those whose duty it is to teach.***

***And if these teachers are not inwardly fortified by realizing the great importance of spurning everything beneath their feet and by being detached from things which come to an end on earth, and attached to things eternal, they will betray this defect in themselves***, however much they may try to hide it.

For with whom are they dealing but with the world? They need not fear: the world will not pardon them or fail to observe their imperfections.

Of the good things they do many will pass unnoticed, or will even not be considered good at all; but they need not fear that any evil or imperfect thing they do will be overlooked.

I am amazed when I wonder from whom they learned about perfection, when, instead of practising it themselves (for they think they have no obligation to do that and have done quite enough by a reasonable observance of the

Commandments), they condemn others, and at times mistake virtue for indulgence.

Do not think, then, that they need but little Divine favour in this great battle upon which they have entered; on the contrary, ***they need a great deal.***

***I beg you to try to live in such a way as to be worthy to obtain two things from God.***

1) First, that ***there may be many of these very learned and religious men*** who have the qualifications for their task which I have described, and that the Lord may prepare those who are not completely prepared already and who lack anything, for a single one who is perfect will do more than many who are not.

2) Secondly, that after they have entered upon this struggle, which, as I say, is not light, but a very heavy one, ***the Lord may have them in His hand so that they may be delivered from all the dangers that are in the world,*** and, ***while sailing on this perilous sea, may shut their ears to the song of the sirens.***

If we can prevail with God in the smallest degree about this, we shall be fighting His battle even while living a cloistered life and I shall consider as well spent all the trouble to which I have gone in founding this retreat,<sup>1</sup> where I have also tried to ensure that this Rule of Our Lady and Empress shall be kept in its original perfection.

Do not think that offering this petition continually is useless.

Some people think it a hardship not to be praying all the time for their own souls.

Yet what better prayer could there be than this? You may be worried because you think it will do nothing to lessen your pains in Purgatory, but actually praying in this way will relieve you of some of them and anything else that is left—well, let it remain.

After all, ***what does it matter if I am in Purgatory until the Day of Judgment provided a single soul should be saved through my prayer?***

And how much less does it matter if many souls profit by it and the Lord is honoured!

***Make no account of any pain which has an end if by means of it any greater service can be rendered to Him Who bore such pains for us.***

Always try to find out wherein lies the greatest perfection.

And for the love of the Lord I beg you to beseech His Majesty to hear us in this; ***I, miserable creature though I am, beseech this of His Majesty, since it is for His glory and the good of His Church, which are my only wishes.***

It seems over-bold of me to think that I can do anything towards obtaining this.

***But I have confidence, my Lord, in these servants of Thine who are here, knowing that they neither desire nor strive after anything but to please Thee.***

***For Thy sake they have left the little they possessed, wishing they had more so that they might serve Thee with it.***

***Since Thou, my Creator, art not ungrateful, I do not think Thou wilt fail to do what they beseech of Thee, for when Thou wert in the world, Lord, Thou didst not despise women, but didst always help them and show them great compassion.***<sup>2</sup>

***Thou didst find more faith and no less love in them than in men, and one of them was Thy most sacred Mother,*** from whose merits we derive merit, and whose habit we wear, though our sins make us unworthy to do so.

***3We can do nothing in public that is of any use to Thee, nor dare we speak of some of the truths over which we weep in secret lest Thou shouldst not hear this our just petition.***

Yet, ***Lord I cannot believe this of Thy goodness and righteousness,*** for Thou art a righteous Judge, not like judges in the world, who, being, after all, **men and sons of Adam,** refuse to consider any woman's virtue as above suspicion.

**Yes, my King, but the day will come when all will be known.**

I am ***not speaking on my own account***, for the whole world is already aware of my wickedness, and I am glad that it should become known; but, when I see what the times are like, ***I feel it is not right to repel spirits which are virtuous and brave, even though they be the spirits of women.***

**Hear us not when we ask Thee for honours, endowments, money, or anything that has to do with the world; but *why shouldst Thou not hear us, Eternal Father, when we ask only for the honour of Thy Son,* WHEN WE WOULD FORFEIT A THOUSAND HONOURS AND A THOUSAND LIVES FOR THY SAKE?**

*Not for ourselves, Lord, for we do not deserve to be heard, but for the blood of Thy Son and for His merits.*

Oh, Eternal Father! Surely all these scourgings and insults and grievous tortures will not be forgotten.

***How, then, my Creator, can a heart so [merciful and] loving as Thine endure that an act which was performed by Thy Son in order to please Thee the more***

**(FOR HE LOVED THEE MOST DEEPLY AND THOU DIDST COMMAND HIM TO LOVE US) *should be treated as lightly as those heretics treat the Most Holy Sacrament today***, in taking it from its resting-place when they destroy the churches?

**Could it be that [Thy Son and our Redeemer] had failed to do something to please Thee? No: He fulfilled everything.**

***Was it not enough, Eternal Father, that while He lived He had no place to lay His head and had always to endure so many trials?***

Must they now deprive Him of the places 4 to which He can invite His friends, seeing how weak we are and knowing that those who have to labour need such food to sustain them?

Had He not already more than sufficiently paid for the sin of Adam?

Has this most loving Lamb to pay once more whenever we relapse into sin?

Permit it not, my Emperor; let Thy Majesty be appeased; look not upon our sins but upon our redemption by Thy Most Sacred Son, upon His merits and upon those of His glorious Mother and of all the saints and martyrs who have died for Thee.

Alas, Lord, who is it that has dared to make this petition in the name of all? What a poor mediator am I, my daughters, to gain a hearing for you and to present your petition!

When this Sovereign Judge sees how bold I am it may well move Him to anger, as would be both right and just.

But behold, Lord, Thou art a God of mercy; have mercy upon this poor sinner, this miserable worm who is so bold with Thee.

Behold my desires, my God, and the tears with which I beg this of Thee; ***forget my deeds, for Thy name's sake, and have pity upon all these souls who are being lost, and help Thy Church.***

Do not permit more harm to be wrought to Christendom, Lord; give light to this darkness.

For the love of the Lord, my sisters, I beg you to commend this poor sinner 5 to His Majesty and to beseech Him to give her humility, as you are bound to do.

***I do not charge you to pray particularly for kings and prelates of the Church, especially for our Bishop, for I know that those of you now here are very careful about this and so I think it is needless for me to say more.***

**Let those who are to come remember that, IF THEY HAVE A PRELATE WHO IS HOLY, THOSE UNDER HIM WILL BE HOLY TOO, and let them realize how important it is to bring him continually before the Lord.**

***If your prayers and desires and disciplines and fasts are not performed for the intentions of which I have spoken, reflect [and believe] that you are not carrying out the work or fulfilling the object for which the Lord has brought you here.***

CHAPTER 4                      Exhorts the nuns to keep their Rule and names three things which are important for the spiritual life. Describes the first of these three things, which is love of one's neighbour, and speaks of the harm which can be done by individual friendships.

Now, daughters, you have looked at the great enterprise which we are trying to carry out. What kind of persons shall we have to be if we are not to be considered over-bold in the eyes of God and of the world? It is clear that we need to labour hard and it will be a great help to us if we have sublime thoughts so that we may strive to make our actions sublime also. If we endeavour to observe our Rule and Constitutions in the fullest sense, and with great care, I hope in the Lord that He will grant our requests. I am not asking anything new of you, my daughters—only that we should hold to our profession, which, as it is our vocation, we are bound to do, although there are many ways of holding to it. Our Primitive Rules tells us to pray without ceasing. Provided we do this with all possible care (and it is the most important thing of all) we shall not fail to observe the fasts, disciplines and periods of silence which the Order commands; for, as you know, if prayer is to be genuine it must be reinforced with these things—prayer cannot be accompanied by self-indulgence. It is about prayer that you have asked me to say something to you. As an acknowledgment of what I shall say, I beg you to read frequently and with a good will what I have said about it thus far, and to put this into practice. Before speaking of the interior life—that is, of prayer—I shall speak of certain things which those who attempt to walk along the way of prayer must of necessity practise. So necessary are these that, even though not greatly given to contemplation, people who have them can advance a long way in the Lord's service, while, unless they have them, they cannot possibly be great contemplatives, and, if they think they are, they are much mistaken. May the Lord help me in this task and teach me what I must say, so that it may be to His glory. Amen. Do not suppose, my friends and sisters, that I am going to charge you to do a great many things; may it please the Lord that we do the things which our holy Fathers ordained and practised and by doing which they merited that name. It would be wrong of us to look for any other way or to learn from anyone else. There are only three things which I will explain at some length and which are taken from our Constitution itself. It is essential that we should understand how very important they are to us in helping us to preserve that peace, both inward and outward, which the Lord so earnestly recommended to us. One of these is love for each other; the second, detachment from all created things; the third, true humility, which, although I put it last, is the most important of the three and embraces all the rest.

With regard to the first—namely, love for each other— this is of very great importance; for there is nothing, however annoying, that cannot easily be borne by those who love each other,

and anything which causes annoyance must be quite exceptional. If this commandment were kept in the world, as it should be, I believe it would take us a long way towards the keeping of the rest; but, what with having too much love for each other or too little, we never manage to keep it perfectly. It may seem that for us to have too much love for each other cannot be wrong, but I do not think anyone who had not been an eye-witness of it would believe how much evil and how many imperfections can result from this. The devil sets many snares here which the consciences of those who aim only in a rough-and-ready way at pleasing God seldom observe—indeed, they think they are acting virtuously—but those who are aiming at perfection understand what they are very well: little by little they deprive the will of the strength which it needs if it is to employ itself wholly in the love of God. This is even more applicable to women than to men and the harm which it does to community life is very serious. One result of it is that all the nuns do not love each other equally: some injury done to a friend is resented; a nun desires to have something to give to her friend or tries to make time for talking to her, and often her object in doing this is to tell her how fond she is of her, and other irrelevant things, rather than how much she loves God. These intimate friendships are seldom calculated <sup>1</sup> to make for the love of God; I am more inclined to believe that the devil initiates them so as to create factions within religious Orders. When a friendship has for its object the service of His Majesty, it at once becomes clear that the will is devoid of passion and indeed is helping to conquer other passions. Where a convent is large I should like to see many friendships of that type; but in this house, where there are not, and can never be, more than thirteen nuns, all must be friends with each other, love each other, be fond of each other and help each other. For the love of the Lord, refrain from making individual friendships, however holy, for even among brothers and sisters such things are apt to be poisonous and I can see no advantage in them; when they are between other relatives, <sup>2</sup> they are much more dangerous and become a pest. Believe me, sisters, though I may seem to you extreme in this, great perfection and great peace come of doing what I say and many occasions of sin may be avoided by those who are not very strong. If our will becomes inclined more to one person than to another (this cannot be helped, because it is natural—it often leads us to love the person who has the most faults if she is the most richly endowed by nature), we must exercise a firm restraint on ourselves and not allow ourselves to be conquered by our affection. Let us love the virtues and inward goodness, and let us always apply ourselves and take care to avoid attaching importance to externals. Let us not allow our will to be the slave of any, sisters, save of Him Who bought it with His blood. Otherwise, before we know where we are, we shall find ourselves trapped, and unable to move. God help me! The puerilities which result from this are innumerable. And, because they are so trivial that only those who see how bad they are will realize and believe it, there is no point in speaking of them here except to say that they are wrong in anyone, and, in a prioress, pestilential. In checking these preferences we must be strictly on the alert from the moment that such a friendship begins and we must proceed diligently and lovingly rather than severely. One effective precaution against this is that the



sisters should not be together except at the prescribed hours, and that they should follow our present custom in not talking with one another, or being alone together, as is laid down in the Rule: each one should be alone in her cell. There must be no workroom at Saint Joseph's; for, although it is a praiseworthy custom to have one, it is easier to keep silence if one is alone, and getting used to solitude is a great help to prayer. Since prayer must be the foundation on which this house is built, it is necessary for us to learn to like whatever gives us the greatest help in it. Returning to the question of our love for one another, it seems quite unnecessary to commend this to you, for where are there people so brutish as not to love one another when they live together, are continually in one another's company, indulge in no conversation, association or recreation with any outside their house and believe that God loves us and that they themselves love God since they are leaving everything for His Majesty? More especially is this so as virtue always attracts love, and I hope in God that, with the help of His Majesty, there will always be love in the sisters of this house. It seems to me, therefore, that there is no reason for me to commend this to you any further. With regard to the nature of this mutual love and what is meant by the virtuous love which I wish you to have here, and how we shall know when we have this virtue, which is a very great one, since Our Lord has so strongly commended it to us and so straitly enjoined it upon His Apostles—about all this I should like to say a little now as well as my lack of skill will allow me; if you find this explained in great detail in other books, take no notice of what I am saying here, for it may be that I do not understand what I am talking about. There are two kinds of love which I am describing. The one is purely spiritual, and apparently has nothing to do with sensuality or the tenderness of our nature, either of which might stain its purity. The other is also spiritual, but mingled with it are our sensuality and weakness; 3 yet it is a worthy love, which, as between relatives and friends, seems lawful. Of this I have already said sufficient. It is of the first kind of spiritual love that I would now speak. It is untainted by any sort of passion, for such a thing would completely spoil its harmony. If it leads us to treat virtuous people, especially confessors, with moderation and discretion, it is profitable; but, if the confessor is seen to be tending in any way towards vanity, he should be regarded with grave suspicion, and, in such a case, conversation with him, however edifying, should be avoided, and the sister should make her confession briefly and say nothing more. It would be best for her, indeed, to tell the superior that she does not get on with him and go elsewhere; this is the safest way, providing it can be done without injuring his reputation.<sup>4</sup> In such cases, and in other difficulties with which the devil might ensnare us, so that we have no idea where to turn, the safest thing will be for the sister to try to speak with some learned person; if necessary, permission to do this can be given her, and she can make her confession to him and act in the matter as he directs her. For he cannot fail to give her some good advice about it, without which she might go very far astray. How often people stray through not taking advice, especially when there is a risk of doing someone harm! The course that must on no account be followed is to do nothing at all; for, when the devil begins to make trouble in this way, he will do a great deal of harm if he is not stopped quickly; the plan I have

suggested, then, of trying to consult another confessor is the safest one if it is practicable, and I hope in the Lord that it will be so. Reflect upon the great importance of this, for it is a dangerous matter, and can be a veritable hell, and a source of harm to everyone. I advise you not to wait until a great deal of harm has been done but to take every possible step that you can think of and stop the trouble at the outset; this you may do with a good conscience. But I hope in the Lord that He will not allow persons who are to spend their lives in prayer to have any attachment save to one who is a great servant of God; and I am quite certain He will not, unless they have no love for prayer and for striving after perfection in the way we try to do here. For, unless they see that he understands their language and likes to speak to them of God, they cannot possibly love him, as he is not like them. If he is such a person, he will have very few opportunities of doing any harm, and, unless he is very simple, he will not seek to disturb his own peace of mind and that of the servants of God. As I have begun to speak about this, I will repeat that the devil can do a great deal of harm here, which will long remain undiscovered, and thus the soul that is striving after perfection can be gradually ruined without knowing how. For, if a confessor gives occasion for vanity through being vain himself, he will be very tolerant with it in [the consciences of] others. May God, for His Majesty's own sake, deliver us from things of this kind. It would be enough to unsettle all the nuns if their consciences and their confessor should give them exactly opposite advice, and, if it is insisted that they must have one confessor only, they will not know what to do, nor how to pacify their minds, since the very person who should be calming them and helping them is the source of the harm. In some places there must be a great deal of trouble of this kind: I always feel very sorry about it and so you must not be surprised if I attach great importance to your understanding this danger.

## Appendix To Chapter 4

The following variant reading of the Escorial Manuscript seems too important to be relegated to a footnote. It occurs the twelfth paragraph of ch. 4 (cf. n. 24) , and deals, as will be seen, with the qualifications and character of the confessor. Many editors substitute it in their text for the corresponding passage in V. As will be seen, however, it is not a pure addition; we therefore reproduce it separately. The important thing is that these two kinds of mutual love should be untainted by any sort of passion, for such a thing would completely spoil this harmony. If we exercise this love, of which I have spoken, with moderation and discretion, it is wholly meritorious, because what seems to us sensuality is turned into virtue. But the two may be so closely intertwined with one another that it is sometimes impossible to distinguish them, especially where a confessor is concerned. For if persons who are practising prayer find that

their confessor is a holy man and understands the way they behave, they become greatly attached to him. And then forthwith the devil lets loose upon them a whole battery of scruples which produce a terrible disturbance within the soul, this being what he is aiming at. In particular, if the confessor is guiding such persons to greater perfection, they become so depressed that they will go so far as to leave him for another and yet another, only to be tormented by the same temptation every time. What you can do here is not to let your minds dwell upon whether you like your confessor or not, but just to like him if you feel so inclined. For, if we grow fond of people who are kind to our bodies, why should we not love those who are always striving and toiling to help our souls? Actually, if my confessor is a holy and spiritual man and I see that he is taking great pains for the benefit of my soul, I think it will be a real help to my progress for me to like him. For so weak are we that such affection sometimes helps us a great deal to undertake very great things in God's service. But, if your confessor is not such a person as I have described, there is a possibility of danger, and for him to know that you like him may do the greatest harm, most of all in houses where the nuns are very strictly enclosed. And as it is a difficult thing to get to know which confessors are good, great care and caution are necessary. The best advice to give would be that you should see he has no idea of your affection for him and is not told about it. But the devil is so active that this is not practicable: you feel as if this is the only thing you have to confess and imagine you are obliged to confess it. For this reason I should like you to think that your affection for him is of no importance and to take no more notice of it. Follow this advice if you find that everything your confessor says to you profits your soul; if you neither see nor hear him indulge in any vanity (and such things are always noticed except by one who is wilfully dull) and if you know him to be a God-fearing man, do not be distressed over any temptation about being too fond of him, and the devil will then grow tired and stop tempting you. But if you notice that the confessor is tending in any way towards vanity in what he says to you, you should regard him with grave suspicion; in such a case conversation with him, even about prayer and about God, should be avoided—the sister should make her confession briefly and say nothing more. It would be best for her to tell the Mother (Superior) that she does not get on with him and go elsewhere. This is the safest way if it is practicable, and I hope in God that it will be, and that you will do all you possibly can to have no relations with him, though this may be very painful for you. Reflect upon the great importance of this, etc. (pp. 58-9)

May the Lord grant, for His Majesty's own sake, that no one in this house shall experience the trials that have been described, or find herself oppressed in this way in soul and body. I hope the superior will never be so intimate with the confessor that no one will dare to say anything about him to her or about her to him. For this will tempt unfortunate penitents to leave very grave sins unconfessed because they will feel uncomfortable about confessing them. God help me! What trouble the devil can make here and how dearly people have to pay for their miserable worries and concern about honour! If they consult only one confessor, they think they are acting in the interests of their Order and for the greater honour of their convent: and that is the way the devil lays his snares for souls when he can find no other. If the poor sisters ask for another confessor, they are told that this would mean the complete end of all discipline in the convent; and, if he is not a priest of their Order, even though he be a saint, they are led to believe that they would be disgracing their entire Order by consulting him. Give great praise to God, Daughters, for this liberty that you have, for, though there are not a great many priests whom you can consult, there are a few, other than your ordinary confessors, who can give you light upon everything. I beg every superior, 1 for the love of the Lord, to allow a holy liberty here: let the Bishop or Provincial be approached for leave for the sisters to go from time to time beyond their ordinary confessors and talk about their souls with persons of learning, especially if the confessors, though good men, have no learning; for learning is a great help in giving light upon everything. It should be possible to find a number of people who combine both learning and spirituality, and the more favours the Lord grants you in prayer, the more needful is it that your good works and your prayers should have a sure foundation. You already know that the first stone of this foundation must be a good conscience and that you must make every effort to free yourselves from even venial sins and follow the greatest possible perfection. You might suppose that any confessor would know this, but you would be wrong: it happened that I had to go about matters of consciences to a man who had taken a complete course in theology; and he did me a great deal of mischief by telling me that certain things were of no importance. I know that he had no intention of deceiving me, or any reason for doing so: it was simply that he knew no better. And in addition to this instance I have met with two or three similar ones. 1 Lit.: "I beg her who is in the position of a senior (mayor)." Mayor was the title given to the superior at the Incarnation, Ávila, and many other convents in Spain, at that time. Continues speaking of confessors. Explains why it is important that they should be learned men 36 Continues speaking of confessors. Explains why it is important that they... Everything depends on our having true light to keep the law of God perfectly. This is a firm basis for prayer; but without this strong foundation the whole building will go awry. In making their confessions, then, the nuns must be free to discuss spiritual matters with such persons as

I have described. I will even go farther and say that they should sometimes do as I have said even if their confessor has all these good qualities, for he may quite easily make mistakes and it is a pity that he should be the cause of their going astray. They must try, however, never to act in any way against obedience, for they will find ways of getting all the help they need: it is of great importance to them that they should, and so they must make every possible effort to do so. All this that I have said has to do with the superior. Since there are no consolations but spiritual ones to be had here, I would beg her once again to see that the sisters get these consolations, for God leads [His handmaidens] by different ways and it is impossible that one confessor should be acquainted with them all. I assure you that, if your souls are as they ought to be, there is no lack of holy persons who will be glad to advise and console you, even though you are poor. For He Who sustains our bodies will awaken and encourage someone to give light to our souls, and thus this evil of which I am so much afraid will be remedied. For if the devil should tempt the confessor, with the result that he leads you astray on any point of doctrine he will go slowly and be more careful about all he is doing when he knows that the penitent is also consulting others. If the devil is prevented from entering convents in this way, I hope in God that he will never get into this house at all; so, for love of the Lord, I beg whoever is Bishop to allow the sisters this liberty and not to withdraw it so long as the confessors are persons both of learning and of good lives, a fact which will soon come to be known in a little place like this. In what I have said here, I am speaking from experience of things that I have seen and heard in many convents and gathered from conversation with learned and holy people who have considered what is most fitting for this house, so that it may advance in perfection. Among the perils which exist everywhere, for as long as life lasts, we shall find that this is the least. No vicar should be free to go in and out of the convent, and no confessor should have this freedom either. They are there to watch over the recollectedness and good living of the house and its progress in both interior and exterior matters, so that they may report to the superior whenever needful, but they are never to be superiors themselves. As I say, excellent reasons have been found why, everything considered, this is the best course, and why, if any priest hears confessions frequently, it should be the chaplain; but, if the nuns think it necessary, they can make their confessions to such persons as have been described, provided the superior is informed of it, and the prioress is such that the Bishop can trust her discretion. As there are very few nuns here, this will not take up much time. This is our present practice; and it is not followed merely on my advice. Our present Bishop, Don Álvaro de Mendoza, under whose obedience we live (since for many reasons 37 Continues speaking of confessors. Explains why it is important that they... we have not been placed under the jurisdiction of the Order), is greatly attached to holiness and the religious life, and, besides being of most noble extraction, is a great servant of God. He is always very glad to help this house in every way, and to this very end he brought together persons of learning, spirituality and experience, and this decision was then come to. It will be only right that future superiors should conform to his opinion, since it has been decided on by such good men, and after so many prayers to the Lord

that He would enlighten them in every possible way, which, so far as we can at present see, He has certainly done. May the Lord be pleased to promote the advancement of this to His greater glory. Amen.









I have digressed a great deal but no one will blame me who understands the importance of what has been said. Let us now return to the love which it is good [and lawful] for us to feel. This I have described as purely spiritual; I am not sure if I know what I am talking about, but it seems to me that there is no need to speak much of it, since so few, I fear, possess it; let any one of you to whom the Lord has given it praise Him fervently, for she must be a person of the greatest perfection. It is about this that I now wish to write. Perhaps what I say may be of some profit, for if you look at a virtue you desire it and try to gain it, and so become attached to it. God grant that I may be able to understand this, and even more that I may be able to describe it, for I am not sure that I know when love is spiritual and when there is sensuality mingled with it, or how to begin speaking about it. I am like one who hears a person speaking in the distance and, though he can hear that he is speaking, cannot distinguish what he is saying. It is just like that with me: sometimes I cannot understand what I am saying, yet the Lord is pleased to enable me to say it well. If at other times what I say is [ridiculous and] nonsensical, it is only natural for me to go completely astray. Now it seems to me that, when God has brought someone to a clear knowledge of the world, and of its nature, and of the fact that another world (or, let us say, another kingdom) exists, and that there is a great difference between the one and the other, the one being eternal and the other only a dream; and of what it is to love the Creator and what to love the creature (this must be discovered by experience, for it is a very different matter from merely thinking about it and believing it); when one understands by sight and experience what can be gained by the one practice and lost by the other, and what the Creator is and what the creature, and many other things which the Lord teaches to those who are willing to devote themselves to being taught by Him in prayer, or whom His Majesty wishes to teach—then one loves very differently from those of us who have not advanced thus far. It may be, sisters, that you think it irrelevant for me to treat of this, and you may say that you already know everything that I have said. God grant that this may be so, and that you may indeed know it in the only way which has any meaning, and that it may be graven upon your inmost being, and that you may never for a moment depart from it, for, if you know it, you will see that I am telling nothing but the truth when I say that he whom the Lord brings thus far possesses this love. Those whom God brings to this state are, I think, generous and royal souls; they are not content with loving anything so miserable as these bodies, however beautiful they be and however numerous the graces they possess. If the sight of the body gives them pleasure they praise the Creator, but as for dwelling upon it for more than just a moment—no! When I use that phrase “dwelling upon it”, I refer to having Returns to the subject of perfect love, already begun 39 Returns to the subject of perfect love, already begun love for such things. If they had such love, they would think they were loving something insubstantial and were conceiving fondness for a shadow, they would feel shame for themselves and would not

have the effrontery to tell God that they love Him, without feeling great confusion. You will answer me that such persons cannot love or repay the affection shown to them by others. Certainly they care little about having this affection. They may from time to time experience a natural and momentary pleasure at being loved; yet, as soon as they return to their normal condition, they realize that such pleasure is folly save when the persons concerned can benefit their souls, either by instruction or by prayer. Any other kind of affection wearies them, for they know it can bring them no profit and may well do them harm; none the less they are grateful for it and recompense it by commending those who love them to God. They take this affection as something for which those who love them lay the responsibility upon the Lord, from Whom, since they can see nothing lovable in themselves, they suppose the love comes, and think that others love them because God loves them; and so they leave His Majesty to recompense them for this and beg Him to do so, thus freeing themselves and feeling they have no more responsibility. When I ponder it carefully, I sometimes think this desire for affection is sheer blindness, except when, as I say, it relates to persons who can lead us to do good so that we may gain blessings in perfection. It should be noted here that, when we desire anyone's affection, we always seek it because of some interest, profit or pleasure of our own. Those who are perfect, however, have trodden all these things beneath their feet—[and have despised] the blessings which may come to them in this world, and its pleasures and delights—in such a way that, even if they wanted to, so to say, they could not love anything outside God, or unless it had to do with God. What profit, then, can come to them from being loved themselves? When this truth is put to them, they laugh at the distress which had been assailing them in the past as to whether their affection was being returned or no. Of course, however pure our affection may be, it is quite natural for us to wish it to be returned. But, when we come to evaluate the return of affection, we realize that it is insubstantial, like a thing of straw, as light as air and easily carried away by the wind. For, however dearly we have been loved, what is there that remains to us? Such persons, then, except for the advantage that the affection may bring to their souls (because they realize that our nature is such that we soon tire of life without love), care nothing whether they are loved or not. Do you think that such persons will love none and delight in none save God? No; they will love others much more than they did, with a more genuine love, with greater passion and with a love which brings more profit; that, in a word, is what love really is. And such souls are always much fonder of giving than of receiving, even in their relations with the Creator Himself. This [holy affection], I say, merits the name of love, which name has been usurped from it by those other base affections. 40 Returns to the subject of perfect love, already begun Do you ask, again, by what they are attracted if they do not love things they see? They do love what they see and they are greatly attracted by what they hear; but the things which they see are everlasting. If they love anyone they immediately look right beyond the body (on which, as I say, they cannot dwell), fix their eyes on the soul and see what there is to be loved in that. If there is nothing, but they see any suggestion or inclination which shows them that, if they dig deep, they will find gold within this

mine, they think nothing of the labour of digging, since they have love. There is nothing that suggests itself to them which they will not willingly do for the good of that soul since they desire their love for it to be lasting, and they know quite well that that is impossible unless the loved one has certain good qualities and a great love for God. I really mean that it is impossible, however great their obligations and even if that soul were to die for love of them and do them all the kind actions in its power; even had it all the natural graces joined in one, their wills would not have strength enough to love it nor would they remain fixed upon it. They know and have learned and experienced the worth of all this; no false dice can deceive them. They see that they are not in unison with that soul and that their love for it cannot possibly last; for, unless that soul keeps the law of God, their love will end with life— they know that unless it loves Him they will go to different places. Those into whose souls the Lord has already infused true wisdom do not esteem this love, which lasts only on earth, at more than its true worth—if, indeed, at so much. Those who like to take pleasure in worldly things, delights, honours and riches, will account it of some worth if their friend is rich and able to afford them pastime and pleasure and recreation; but those who already hate all this will care little or nothing for such things. If they have any love for such a person, then, it will be a passion that he may love God so as to be loved by Him; for, as I say, they know that no other kind of affection but this can last, and that this kind will cost them dear, for which reason they do all they possibly can for their friend's profit; they would lose a thousand lives to bring him a small blessing. Oh, precious love, forever imitating the Captain of Love, Jesus, our Good!

## CHAPTER 7                      Treats of the same subject of spiritual love and gives certain counsels for gaining it.

It is strange to see how impassioned this love is; how many tears, penances and prayers it costs; how careful is the loving soul to commend the object of its affection to all who it thinks may prevail with God and to ask them to intercede with Him for it; and how constant is its longing, so that it cannot be happy unless it sees that its loved one is making progress. If that soul seems to have advanced, and is then seen to fall some way back, her friend seems to have no more pleasure in life: she neither eats nor sleeps, is never free from this fear and is always afraid that the soul whom she loves so much may be lost, and that the two may be parted for ever. She cares nothing for physical death, but she will not suffer herself to be attached to something which a puff of wind may carry away so that she is unable to retain her hold upon it. This, as I have said, is love without any degree whatsoever of self-interest; all that this soul wishes and desires is to see the soul [it loves] enriched with blessings from Heaven. This is love, quite unlike our ill-starred earthly affections—to say nothing of illicit affections, from which may God keep us free. These last affections are a very hell, and it is needless for us to

weary ourselves by saying how evil they are, for the least of the evils which they bring are terrible beyond exaggeration. There is no need for us ever to take such things upon our lips, sisters, or even to think of them, or to remember that they exist anywhere in the world; you must never listen to anyone speaking of such affections, either in jest or in earnest, nor allow them to be mentioned or discussed in your presence. No good can come from our doing this and it might do us harm even to hear them mentioned. But with regard to the lawful affections which, as I have said, we may have for each other, or for relatives and friends, it is different. Our whole desire is that they should not die: if their heads ache, our souls seem to ache too; if we see them in distress, we are unable (as people say) to sit still under it; 1 and so on. This is not so with spiritual affection. Although the weakness of our nature may at first allow us to feel something of all this, our reason soon begins to reflect whether our friend's trials are not good for her, and to wonder if they are making her richer in virtue and how she is bearing them, and then we shall ask God to give her patience so that they may win her merit. If we see that she is being patient, we feel no distress—indeed, we are gladdened and consoled. If all the merit and gain which suffering is capable of producing could be made over to her, we should still prefer suffering her trial ourselves to seeing her suffer it, but we are not worried or disquieted. 1 Lit.: “There remains, as people say, no patience”; but, as the phrase “as people say” (which E. omits) suggests that this was a popular phrase, I have translated rather more freely and picturesquely. T. has (after “ache too”): “and it upsets us, and so on.”

Treats of the same subject of spiritual love and gives certain counsels for gaining it 42 Treats of the same subject of spiritual love and gives certain counsels... I repeat once more that this love is a similitude and copy of that which was borne for us by the good Lover, Jesus. It is for that reason that it brings us such immense benefits, for it makes us embrace every kind of suffering, so that others, without having to endure the suffering, may gain its advantages. The recipients of this friendship, then, profit greatly, but their friends should realize that either this intercourse—I mean, this exclusive friendship—must come to an end or that they must prevail upon Our Lord that their friend may walk in the same way as themselves, as Saint Monica prevailed with Him for Saint Augustine. Their heart does not allow them to practise duplicity: if they see their friend straying from the road, or committing any faults, they will speak to her about it; they cannot allow themselves to do anything else. And if after this the loved one does not amend, they will not flatter her or hide anything from her. Either, then, she will amend or their friendship will cease; for otherwise they would be unable to endure it, nor is it in fact endurable. It would mean continual war for both parties. A person may be indifferent to all other people in the world and not worry whether they are serving God or not, since the person she has to worry about is herself. But she cannot take this attitude with her friends: nothing they do can be hidden from her; she sees the smallest mote in them. This, I repeat, is a very heavy cross for her to bear. Happy the souls that are loved by such as these! Happy the day on which they came to know them! O my Lord, wilt Thou not grant me the favour of giving me many who have such love for me? Truly, Lord, I would rather have this than be loved by all the

kings and lords of the world—and rightly so, for such friends use every means in their power to make us lords of the whole world and to have all that is in it subject to us. When you make the acquaintance of any such persons, sisters, the Mother Prioress should employ every possible effort to keep you in touch with them. Love such persons as much as you like. There can be very few of them, but none the less it is the Lord's will that their goodness should be known. When one of you is striving after perfection, she will at once be told that she has no need to know such people—that it is enough for her to have God. But to get to know God's friends is a very good way of "having" Him; as I have discovered by experience, it is most helpful. For, under the Lord, I owe it to such persons that I am not in hell; I was always very fond of asking them to commend me to God, and so I prevailed upon them to do so. Let us now return to what we were saying. It is this kind of love which I should like us to have; at first it may not be perfect but the Lord will make it increasingly so. Let us begin with the methods of obtaining it. At first it may be mingled with emotion, 2 but this, as a rule, will do no harm. It is sometimes good and necessary for us to show emotion in our love, and also to feel it, and to be distressed by some of our sisters, trials and weaknesses, however trivial they may be. For on one occasion as much distress may be caused by quite 2 Ternura. Lit.: "tenderness." 43 Treats of the same subject of spiritual love and gives certain counsels... a small matter as would be caused on another by some great trial, and there are people whose nature it is to be very much cast down by small things. If you are not like this, do not neglect to have compassion on others; it may be that Our Lord wishes to spare us these sufferings and will give us sufferings of another kind which will seem heavy to us, though to the person already mentioned they may seem light. In these matters, then, we must not judge others by ourselves, nor think of ourselves as we have been at some time when, perhaps without any effort on our part, the Lord has made us stronger than they; let us think of what we were like at the times when we have been weakest. Note the importance of this advice for those of us who would learn to sympathize with our neighbours' trials, however trivial these may be. It is especially important for such souls as have been described, for, desiring trials as they do, they make light of them all. They must therefore try hard to recall what they were like when they were weak, and reflect that, if they are no longer so, it is not due to themselves. For otherwise, little by little, the devil could easily cool our charity toward our neighbours and make us think that what is really a failing on our part is perfection. In every respect we must be careful and alert, for the devil never slumbers. And the nearer we are to perfection, the more careful we must be, since his temptations are then much more cunning because there are no others that he dare send us; and if, as I say, we are not cautious, the harm is done before we realize it. In short, we must always watch and pray, for there is no better way than prayer of revealing these hidden wiles of the devil and making him declare his presence. Contrive always, even if you do not care for it, to take part in your sisters' necessary recreation and to do so for the whole of the allotted time, for all considerate treatment of them is a part of perfect love. It is a very good thing for us to take compassion on each others' needs. See that you show no lack of discretion about

things which are contrary to obedience. Though privately you may think the prioress' orders harsh ones, do not allow this to be noticed or tell anyone about it (except that you may speak of it, with all humility, to the prioress herself), for if you did so you would be doing a great deal of harm. Get to know what are the things in your sisters which you should be sorry to see and those about which you should sympathize with them; and always show your grief at any notorious fault which you may see in one of them. It is a good proof and test of our love if we can bear with such faults and not be shocked by them. Others, in their turn, will bear with your faults, which, if you include those of which you are not aware, must be much more numerous. Often commend to God any sister who is at fault and strive for your own part to practise the virtue which is the opposite of her fault with great perfection. Make determined efforts to do this so that you may teach your sister by your deeds what perhaps she could never learn by words nor gain by punishment. The habit of performing some conspicuously virtuous action through seeing it performed by another is one which very easily takes root. This is good advice: do not forget it. Oh, how 44 Treats of the same subject of spiritual love and gives certain counsels... true and genuine will be the love of a sister who can bring profit to everyone by sacrificing her own profit to that of the rest! She will make a great advance in each of the virtues and keep her Rule with great perfection. This will be a much truer kind of friendship than one which uses every possible loving expression (such as are not used, and must not be used, in this house): "My life!" "My love!" "My darling!" 3 and suchlike things, one or another of which people are always saying. Let such endearing words be kept for your Spouse, for you will be so often and so much alone With Him that you will want to make use of them all, and this His Majesty permits you. If you use them among yourselves they will not move the Lord so much; and, quite apart from that, there is no reason why you should do so. They are very effeminate; and I should not like you to be that, or even to appear to be that, in any way, my daughters; I want you to be strong men. If you do all that is in you, the Lord will make you so manly that men themselves will be amazed at you. And how easy is this for His Majesty, Who made us out of nothing at all! It is also a very clear sign of love to try to spare others household work by taking it upon oneself and also to rejoice and give great praise to the Lord if you see any increase in their virtues. All such things, quite apart from the intrinsic good they bring, add greatly to the peace and concord which we have among ourselves, as, through the goodness of God, We can now see by experience. May His Majesty be pleased ever to increase it, for it would be terrible if it did not exist, and very awkward if, when there are so few of us, we got on badly together. May God forbid that. If one of you should be cross with another because of some hasty word, the matter must at once be put right and you must betake yourselves to earnest prayer. The same applies to the harbouring of any grudge, or to party strife, or to the desire to be greatest, or to any nice point concerning your honour. (My blood seems to run cold, as I write this, at the very idea that this can ever happen, but I know it is the chief trouble in convents.) If it should happen to you, consider yourselves lost. Just reflect and realize that you have driven your Spouse from His home: He will have to go and seek another abode, since

you are driving Him from His own house. Cry aloud to His Majesty and try to put things right; and if frequent confessions and communions do not mend them, you may well fear that there is some Judas among you. For the love of God, let the prioress be most careful not to allow this to occur. She must put a stop to it from the very outset, and, if love will not suffice, she must use heavy punishments, for here we have the whole of the mischief and the remedy. If you gather that any of the nuns is making trouble, see that she is sent to some other convent and God will provide them with a dowry for her. Drive away this plague; cut off the branches as well as you can; and, if that is not sufficient, pull up the roots. If you cannot do this, shut up anyone who is 3 Lit.: “My life!” “My soul!” “My good!” 45 Treats of the same subject of spiritual love and gives certain counsels... guilty of such things and forbid her to leave her cell; far better this than that all the nuns should catch so incurable a plague. Oh, what a great evil is this! God deliver us from a convent into which it enters: I would rather our convent caught fire and we were all burned alive. As this is so important I think I shall say a little more about it elsewhere, so I will not write at greater length here, except to say that, provided they treat each other equally, I would rather that the nuns showed a tender and affectionate love and regard for each other, even though there is less perfection in this than in the love I have described, than that there were a single note of discord to be heard among them. May the Lord forbid this, for His own sake. Amen.

## CHAPTER 8                      Treats of the great benefit of self-detachment, both interior and exterior, from all things created.

Let us now come to the detachment which we must practise, for if this is carried out perfectly it includes everything else. I say “it includes everything else” because, if we care nothing for any created things, but embrace the Creator alone, His Majesty will infuse the virtues into us in such a way that, provided we labour to the best of our abilities day by day, we shall not have to wage war much longer, for the Lord will take our defence in hand against the devils and against the whole world. Do you suppose, daughters, that it is a small benefit to obtain for ourselves this blessing of giving ourselves wholly to Him, 1 and keeping nothing for ourselves? Since, as I say, all blessings are in Him, let us give Him hearty praise, sisters, for having brought us together here, where we are occupied in this alone. I do not know why I am saying this, when all of you here are capable of teaching me, for I confess that, in this important respect, I am not as perfect as I should like to be and as I know I ought to be; and I must say the same about all the virtues and about all that I am dealing with here, for it is easier to write of such things than to practise them. I may not even be able to write of them effectively, for sometimes ability to do this comes only from experience—[that is to say, if I have any success, it must be because] I explain the nature of these virtues by describing the contraries of the qualities I myself



possess. As far as exterior matters are concerned, you know how completely cut off we are from everything. Oh, my Creator and Lord! When have I merited so great an honour? Thou seemest to have searched everywhere for means of drawing nearer to us. May it please Thy goodness that we lose not this through our own fault. Oh, sisters, for the love of God, try to realize what a great favour the Lord has bestowed on those of us whom He has brought here. Let each of you apply this to herself, since there are only twelve of us <sup>2</sup> and His Majesty has been pleased for you to be one. How many people—what a multitude of people!—do I know who are better than myself and would gladly take this place of mine, yet the Lord has granted it to me who so ill deserve it! Blessed be Thou, my God, and let the angels and all created things praise Thee, for I can no more repay this favour than all the others Thou hast shown me. It was a wonderful thing to give me the vocation to be a nun; but I have been so wicked, Lord, that Thou couldst not trust me. In a place where there were many good women living together my wickedness would not perhaps have been noticed right down to the end of my life: I should have concealed it, as I did for so many years. So Thou didst bring me here, where, as there are so few of us that it would seem impossible for it to remain unnoticed, Thou dost remove occasions of sin from me so that I may walk the more carefully. There is no excuse <sup>1</sup> Lit.: *de darnos todas a Él todo*: “giving ourselves wholly to Him wholly.” <sup>2</sup> The thirteenth was St. Teresa. Treats of the great benefit of self-detachment, both interior and exterior, from all things created <sup>47</sup> Treats of the great benefit of self-detachment, both interior and exterior,...

for me, then, O Lord, I confess it, and so I have need of Thy mercy, that Thou mayest pardon me. Remember, my sisters, that if we are not good we are much more to blame than others. What I earnestly beg of you is that anyone who knows she will be unable to follow our customs will say so [before she is professed]: there are other convents in which the Lord is also well served and she should not remain here and disturb these few of us whom His Majesty has brought together for His service. In other convents nuns are free to have the pleasure of seeing their relatives, whereas here, if relatives are ever admitted, it is only for their own pleasure. A nun who [very much] wishes to see her relatives in order to please herself, and does not get tired of them after the second visit, must, unless they are spiritual persons and do her soul some good, consider herself imperfect and realize that she is neither detached nor healthy, and will have no freedom of spirit or perfect peace. She needs a physician—and I consider that if this desire does not leave her, and she is not cured, she is not intended for this house. The best remedy, I think, is that she should not see her relatives again until she feels free in spirit and has obtained this freedom from God by many prayers. When she looks upon such visits as crosses, let her receive them by all means, for then they will do the visitors good and herself no harm. But if she is fond of the visitors, if their troubles are a great distress to her and if she delights in listening to the stories which they tell her about the world, she may be sure that she will do herself harm and do them no good.

Oh, if we religious understood what harm we get from having so much to do with our relatives, how we should shun them! do not see what pleasure they can give us, or how, quite apart from the harm they do us as touching our obligations to God, they can bring us any peace or tranquillity. For we cannot take part in their recreations, as it is not lawful for us to do so; and, though we can certainly share their troubles, we can never help weeping for them, sometimes more than they do themselves. If they bring us any bodily comforts, there is no doubt that our spiritual life and our poor souls will pay for it. From this you are [quite] free here; for, as you have everything in common and none of you may accept any private gift, all the alms given us being held by the community, you are under no obligation to entertain your relatives in return for what they give you, since, as you know, the Lord will provide for us all in common. I am astounded at the harm which intercourse with our relatives does us: I do not think anyone who had not experience of it would believe it. And how our religious Orders nowadays, or most of them, at any rate, seem to be forgetting about perfection, though all, or most, of the saints wrote about it! I do not know how much of the world we really leave when we say that we are leaving everything for God's sake, if we do not withdraw ourselves from the chief thing of all—namely, our kinsfolk. The matter has reached such a pitch that some people think, when religious are not fond of their relatives and do not see much of them, it shows a want of virtue in them. And they not only assert this but allege reasons for it. In this house, daughters, we must be most careful to commend our relatives to God, for that is only right. For the rest, we must keep them out of our minds as much as we can, as it is natural that our desires should be attached to them more than to other people. My own relatives were very fond of me, or so they used to say, and I was so fond of them that I would not let them forget me. But I have learned, by my own experience and by that of others, that it is God's servants who have helped me in trouble; my relatives, apart from my parents, have helped me very little. Parents are different, for they very rarely fail to help their children, and it is right that when they need our comfort we should not refuse it them: if we find our main purpose is not harmed by our so doing we can give it them and yet be completely detached; and this also applies to brothers and sisters. Believe me, sisters, if you serve God as you should, you will find no better relatives than those [of His servants] whom His Majesty sends you. I know this is so, and, if you keep on as you are doing here, and realize that by doing otherwise you will be failing your true Friend Treats of the great blessing that shunning their relatives brings to those who have left the world and shows how by doing so they will find truer friends 49 Treats of the great blessing

that shunning their relatives brings to... and Spouse, you may be sure that you will very soon gain this freedom. Then you will be able to trust those who love you for His sake alone more than all your relatives, and they will not fail you, so that you will find parents and brothers and sisters where you had never expected to find them. For these help us and look for their reward only from God; those who look for rewards from us soon grow tired of helping us when they see that we are poor and can do nothing for them. This cannot be taken as a generalization, but it is the most usual thing to happen in the world, for it is the world all over! If anyone tells you otherwise, and says it is a virtue to do such things, do not believe him. I should have to write at great length, in view of my lack of skill and my imperfection, if I were to tell you of all the harm that comes from it; as others have written about it who know what they are talking about better than I, what I have said will suffice. If, imperfect as I am, I have been able to grasp as much as this, how much better will those who are perfect do so! All the advice which the saints give us about fleeing from the world is, of course, good. Believe me, then, attachment to our relatives is, as I have said, the thing which sticks to us most closely and is hardest to get rid of. People are right, therefore, when they flee from their own part of the country <sup>1</sup>—if it helps them, I mean, for I do not think we are helped so much by fleeing from any place in a physical sense as by resolutely embracing the good Jesus, Our Lord, with the soul. Just as we find everything in Him, so for His sake we forget everything. Still, it is a great help, until we have learned this truth, to keep apart from our kinsfolk; later on, it may be that the Lord will wish us to see them again, so that what used to give us pleasure may be a cross to us.

CHAPTER 10                      Teaches that detachment from the things aforementioned is insufficient if we are not detached from our own selves and that this virtue and humility go together.

Once we have detached ourselves from the world, and from our kinsfolk, and are cloistered here, in the conditions already described, it must look as if we have done everything and there is nothing left with which we have to contend. But, oh, my sisters, do not feel secure and fall asleep, or you will be like a man who goes to bed quite peacefully, after bolting all his doors for fear of thieves, when the thieves are already in the house. And you know there is no worse thief than one who lives in the house. We ourselves are always the same; <sup>1</sup> unless we take great care and each of us looks well to it that she renounces her self-will, which is the most important business of all, there will be many things to deprive us of the holy freedom of spirit which our souls seek in order to soar to their Maker unburdened by the leaden weight of the earth. It will be a great help towards this if we keep constantly in our thoughts the vanity of all

things and the rapidity with which they pass away, so that we may withdraw our affections from things which are so trivial and fix them upon what will never come to an end. This may seem a poor kind of help but it will have the effect of greatly fortifying the soul. With regard to small things, we must be very careful, as soon as we begin to grow fond of them, to withdraw our thoughts from them and turn them to God. His Majesty will help us to do this. He has granted us the great favour of providing that, in this house, most of it is done already; but it remains for us to become detached from our own selves and it is a hard thing to withdraw from ourselves and oppose ourselves, because we are very close to ourselves and love ourselves very dearly. It is here that true humility can enter, 2 for this virtue and that of detachment from self, I think, always go together. They are two sisters, who are inseparable. These are not the kinsfolk whom I counsel you to avoid: no, you must embrace them, and love them, and never be seen without them. Oh, how sovereign are these virtues, mistresses of all created things, empresses of the world, our deliverers from all the snares and entanglements laid by the devil so dearly loved by our Teacher, Christ, Who was never for a moment without them! He that possesses them can safely go out and fight all the united forces of hell and the whole world and its temptations. Let him fear none, for his is the kingdom of the Heavens. There is none whom he need fear, for he cares nothing if he loses everything, nor 1 The sense of this passage, especially without the phrase from E. which V. omits, is not very clear. T. remodels thus: "You know there is no worse thief for the perfection of the soul than the love of ourselves, for unless etc." 2 Here, in the margin, is written: "Humility and mortification, very great virtues." Teaches that detachment from the things aforementioned is insufficient if we are not detached from our own selves and that this virtue and humility go together 51 Teaches that detachment from the things aforementioned is insufficient... does he count this as loss: his sole fear is that he may displease his God and he begs Him to nourish these virtues within him lest he lose them through any fault of his own. These virtues, it is true, have the property of hiding themselves from one who possesses them, in such a way that he never sees them nor can believe that he has any of them, even if he be told so. But he esteems them so much that he is for ever trying to obtain them, and thus he perfects them in himself more and more. And those who possess them soon make the fact clear, even against their will, to any with whom they have intercourse. But how inappropriate it is for a person like myself to begin to praise humility and mortification, when these virtues are so highly praised by the King of Glory—a praise exemplified in all the trials He suffered. It is to possess these virtues, then, my daughters, that you must labour if you would leave the land of Egypt, for, when you have obtained them, you will also obtain the manna; all things will taste well to you; and, however much the world may dislike their savour, to you they will be sweet. The first thing, then, that we have to do, and that at once, is to rid ourselves of love for this body of ours—and some of us pamper our natures so much that this will cause us no little labour, while others are so concerned about their health that the trouble these things give us (this is especially so of poor nuns, but it applies to others as well) is amazing. Some of us, however, seem to think that we

embraced the religious life for no other reason than to keep ourselves alive<sup>3</sup> and each nun does all she can to that end. In this house, as a matter of fact, there is very little chance for us to act on such a principle, but I should be sorry if we even wanted to. Resolve, sisters, that it is to die for Christ, and not to practise self-indulgence for Christ, that you have come here. The devil tells us that self-indulgence is necessary if we are to carry out and keep the Rule of our Order, and so many of us, forsooth, try to keep our Rule by looking after our health that we die without having kept it for as long as a month— perhaps even for a day. I really do not know what we are coming to. No one need be afraid of our committing excesses here, by any chance—for as soon as we do any penances our confessors begin to fear that we shall kill ourselves with them. We are so horrified at our own possible excesses—if only we were as conscientious about everything else! Those who tend to the opposite extreme will I know, not mind my saying this, nor shall I mind if they say I am judging others by myself, for they will be quite right. I believe—indeed, I am sure —that more nuns are of my way of thinking than are offended by me because they do just the opposite. My own belief is that it is for this reason that the Lord is pleased to make us such weakly creatures; at least He has shown me great mercy in making me so; for, as I was sure to be self-indulgent in any case, He was pleased to provide me with an excuse for this. It is really amusing to see how some people torture themselves<sup>3</sup> Lit.: “to contrive not to die.” But the reading of E. (“to think that we came to the convent for no other reason than to serve our bodies and look after them”) suggests that this is what is meant. 52 Teaches that detachment from the things aforementioned is insufficient... about it, when the real reason lies in themselves; sometimes they get a desire to do penances, as one might say, without rhyme or reason; they go on doing them for a couple of days; and then the devil puts it into their heads that they have been doing themselves harm and so he makes them afraid of penances, after which they dare not do even those that the Order requires—they have tried them once! They do not keep the smallest points in the Rule, such as silence, which is quite incapable of harming us. Hardly have we begun to imagine that our heads are aching than we stay away from choir, though that would not kill us either. One day we are absent because we had a headache some time ago; another day, because our head has just been aching again; and on the next three days in case it should ache once more. Then we want to invent penances of our own, with the result that we do neither the one thing nor the other. Sometimes there is very little the matter with us, yet we think that it should dispense us from all our obligations and that if we ask to be excused from them we are doing all we need. But why, you will say, does the Prioress excuse us? Perhaps she would not if she knew what was going on inside us; but she sees one of you wailing about a mere nothing as if your heart were breaking, and you come and ask her to excuse you from keeping the whole of your Rule, saying it is a matter of great necessity, and, when there is any substance in what you say, there is always a physician at hand to confirm it or some friend or relative weeping at your side. Sometimes the poor Prioress sees that your request is excessive, but what can she do? She feels a scruple if she thinks she has been lacking in charity and she would rather the fault were

yours than hers: she thinks, too, that it would be unjust of her to judge you harshly. Oh, God help me! That there should be complaining like this among nuns! May He forgive me for saying so, but I am afraid it has become quite a habit. I happened to observe this incident once myself: a nun began complaining about her headaches and she went on complaining to me for a long time. In the end I made enquiries and found she had no headache whatever, but was suffering from some pain or other elsewhere. These are things which may sometimes happen and I put them down here so that you may guard against them; for if once the devil begins to frighten us about losing our health, we shall never get anywhere. The Lord give us light so that we may act rightly in everything! Amen.

## CHAPTER 11                      Continues to treat of mortification and describes how it may be attained in times of sickness.

These continual moanings which we make about trifling ailments, my sisters, seem to me a sign of imperfection: if you can bear a thing, say nothing about it. When the ailment is serious, it proclaims itself; that is quite another kind of moaning, which draws attention to itself immediately. Remember, there are only a few of you, and if one of you gets into this habit she will worry all the rest—that is, assuming you love each other and there is charity among you. On the other hand, if one of you is really ill, she should say so and take the necessary remedies; and, if you have got rid of your self-love, you will so much regret having to indulge yourselves in any way that there will be no fear of your doing so unnecessarily or of your making a moan without proper cause. When such a reason exists, it would be much worse to say nothing about it than to allow yourselves unnecessary indulgence, and it would be very wrong if everybody were not sorry for you. However, I am quite sure that where there is prayer and charity among you, and your numbers are so small that you will be aware of each other's needs, there will never be any lack of care in your being looked after. Do not think of complaining about the weaknesses and minor ailments from which women suffer, for the devil sometimes makes you imagine them. They come and go; and unless you get rid of the habit of talking about them and complaining of everything (except to God) you will never come to the end of them. I lay great stress on this, for I believe myself it is important, and it is one of the reasons for the relaxation of discipline in religious houses. For this body of ours has one fault: the more you indulge it, the more things it discovers to be essential to it. It is extraordinary how it likes being indulged; and, if there is any reasonable pretext for indulgence, however little necessity for it there may be, the poor soul is taken in and prevented from making progress. Think how many poor people there must be who are ill and have no one to complain to, for poverty and self-indulgence make bad company. Think, too, how many married women—people of position, as I know—have serious complaints and sore trials and yet dare not complain to their husbands about them for fear of annoying them. Sinner that I am! Surely we have not come here to indulge ourselves more than they! Oh, how free you are from the

great trials of the world! Learn to suffer a little for the love of God without telling everyone about it. When a woman has made an unhappy marriage she does not talk about it or complain of it, lest it should come to her husband's knowledge, she has to endure a great deal of misery and yet has no one to whom she may relieve her mind. Cannot we, then, keep secret between God and ourselves some of the ailments which He sends us because of our sins? The more so since talking about them does nothing whatever to alleviate them. Continues to treat of mortification and describes how it may be attained in times of sickness 54 Continues to treat of mortification and describes how it may be attained... In nothing that I have said am I referring to serious illnesses, accompanied by high fever, though as to these, too, I beg you to observe moderation and to have patience: I am thinking rather of those minor indispositions which you may have and still keep going 1without worrying everybody else to death over them. What would happen if these lines should be seen outside this house? What would all the nuns say of me! And how willingly would I bear what they said if it helped anyone to live a better life! For when there is one person of this kind, the thing generally comes to such a pass that some suffer on account of others, and nobody who says she is ill will be believed, however serious her ailment. As this book is meant only for my daughters, they will put up with everything I say. Let us remember our holy Fathers of past days, the hermits whose lives we attempt to imitate. What sufferings they bore, what solitude, cold, [thirst] and hunger, what burning sun and heat! And yet they had no one to complain to except God. Do you suppose they were made of iron? No: they were as frail as we are. Believe me, daughters, once we begin to subdue these miserable bodies of ours, they give us much less trouble. There will be quite sufficient people to see to what you really need, 2 so take no thought for yourselves except when you know it to be necessary. Unless we resolve to put up with death and ill-health once and for all, we shall never accomplish anything. Try not to fear these and commit yourselves wholly to God, come what may. What does it matter if we die? How many times have our bodies not mocked us? Should we not occasionally mock them in our turn? And, believe me, slight as it may seem by comparison with other things, this resolution is much more important than we may think; for, if we continually make it, day by day, by the grace of the Lord, we shall gain dominion over the body. To conquer such an enemy is a great achievement in the battle of life. May the Lord grant, as He is able, that we may do this. I am quite sure that no one who does not enjoy such a victory, which I believe is a great one, will understand what advantage it brings, and no one will regret having gone through trials in order to attain this tranquillity and self-mastery.

We now come to some other little things which are also of very great importance, though they will appear trifling. All this seems a great task, and so it is, for it means warring against ourselves. But once we begin to work, God, too, works in our souls and bestows such favours on them that the most we can do in this life seems to us very little. And we nuns are doing everything we can, by giving up our freedom for the love of God and entrusting it to another, and in putting up with so many trials—fasts, silence, enclosure, service in choir—that however much we may want to indulge ourselves we can do so only occasionally: perhaps, in all the convents I have seen, I am the only nun guilty of self-indulgence. Why, then, do we shrink from interior mortification, since this is the means by which every other kind of mortification may become much more meritorious and perfect, so that it can then be practised with greater tranquillity and ease? This, as I have said, is acquired by gradual progress and by never indulging our own will and desire, even in small things, until we have succeeded in subduing the body to the spirit. I repeat that this consists mainly or entirely in our ceasing to care about ourselves and our own pleasures, for the least that anyone who is beginning to serve the Lord truly can offer Him is his life. Once he has surrendered his will to Him, what has he to fear? It is evident that if he is a true religious and a real man of prayer and aspires to the enjoyment of Divine consolations, he must not [turn back or] shrink from desiring to die and suffer martyrdom for His sake. And do you not know, sisters, that the life of a good religious, who wishes to be among the closest friends of God, is one long martyrdom? I say “long”, for, by comparison with decapitation, which is over very quickly, it may well be termed so, though life itself is short and some lives are short in the extreme. How do we know but that ours will be so short that it may end only one hour or one moment after the time of our resolving to render our entire service to God? This would be quite possible; and so we must not set store by anything that comes to an end, least of all by life, since not a day of it is secure. Who, if he thought that each hour might be his last, would not spend it in labour? Believe me, it is safest to think that this is so; by so doing we shall learn to subdue our wills in everything; for if, as I have said, you are very careful about your prayer, you will soon find yourselves gradually reaching the summit of the mountain without knowing how. But how harsh it sounds to say that we must take pleasure in nothing, unless we also say what consolations and delights this renunciation brings in its train, and what a great gain it is, even in this life! What security it gives us! Here, as you all practise this, you have done. Teaches that the true lover of God must care little for life and honour 56 Teaches that the true lover of God must care little for life and hon... the principal part; each of you encourages 1 and helps the rest; and each of you must try to outstrip her sisters. Be very careful about your interior thoughts, especially if they have to do with precedence. May God, by His Passion, keep us from expressing, or dwelling upon, such thoughts as these: “But I am her senior [in the Order]”; “But I am older”; “But I have worked harder”; “But that other sister is being better treated than I am”. If these thoughts come, you must quickly check them; if you allow yourselves to dwell on them, or introduce them into your conversation, they will spread like the plague and in religious houses they may give rise to



great abuses. Remember, I know a great deal about this. If you have a prioress who allows such things, however trifling, you must believe that God has permitted her to be given to you because of your sins and that she will be the beginning of your ruin. Cry to Him, and let your whole prayer be that He may come to your aid by sending you either a religious or a person given to prayer; for, if anyone prays with the resolve to enjoy the favours and consolations which God bestows in prayer, it is always well that he should have this detachment. You may ask why I lay such stress on this, and think that I am being too severe about it, and say that God grants consolations to persons less completely detached than that. I quite believe He does; for, in His infinite wisdom, He sees that this will enable Him to lead them to leave everything for His sake. I do not mean, by “leaving” everything, entering the religious life, for there may be obstacles to this, and the soul that is perfect can be detached and humble anywhere. It will find detachment harder in the world, however, for worldly trappings will be a great impediment to it. Still, believe me in this: questions of honour and desires for property can arise within convents as well as outside them, and the more temptations of this kind are removed from us, the more we are to blame if we yield to them. Though persons who do so may have spent years in prayer, or rather in meditation (for perfect prayer eventually destroys [all] these attachments), they will never make great progress or come to enjoy the real fruit of prayer. Ask yourselves, sisters, if these things, which seem so insignificant, mean anything to you, for the only reason you are here is that you may detach yourselves from them. Nobody honours you any the more for having them and they lose you advantages which might have gained you more honour; the result is that you get both dishonour and loss at the same time. Let each of you ask herself how much humility she has and she will see what progress she has made. If she is really humble, I do not think the devil will dare to tempt her to take even the slightest interest in matters of precedence, for he is so shrewd that he is afraid of the blow she would strike him. If a humble soul is tempted in this way by the devil, that virtue cannot fail to bring her more fortitude and greater profit. For clearly the temptation will cause her to look into her life, to compare the services she has rendered the Lord with what 1 Lit.: “awakens.” 57 Teaches that the true lover of God must care little for life and hon... she owes Him and with the marvellous way in which He abased Himself to give us an example of humility, and to think over her sins and remember where she deserves to be on account of them. Exercises like this bring the soul such profit that on the following day Satan will not dare to come back again lest he should get his head broken. Take this advice from me and do not forget it: you should see to it that your sisters profit by your temptations, not only interiorly (where it would be very wrong if they did not), but exteriorly as well. If you want to avenge yourself on the devil and free yourselves more quickly from temptation, ask the superior, as soon as a temptation comes to you, to give you some lowly office to do, or do some such thing, as best you can, on our own initiative, studying as you do it how to bend your will to perform tasks you dislike. The Lord will show you ways of doing so and this will soon rid you of the temptation. God deliver us from people who wish to serve Him yet who are mindful of their own honour. Reflect how little they

gain from this; for, as I have said, the very act of desiring honour robs us of it, especially in matters of precedence: there is no poison in the world which is so fatal to perfection. You will say that these are little things which have to do with human nature and are not worth troubling about; do not trifle with them, for in religious houses they spread like foam on water, and there is no small matter so extremely dangerous as are punctiliousness about honour and sensitiveness to insult. Do you know one reason, apart from many others, why this is so? 2 It may have its root, perhaps, in some trivial slight—hardly anything, in fact—and the devil will then induce someone else to consider it important, so that she will think it a real charity to tell you about it and to ask how you can allow yourself to be insulted so; and she will pray that God may give you patience and that you may offer it to Him, for even a saint could not bear more. The devil is simply putting his deceitfulness into this other person's mouth; and, though you yourself are quite ready to bear the slight, you are tempted to vainglory because you have not resisted something else as perfectly as you should. This human nature of ours is so wretchedly weak that, even while we are telling ourselves that there is nothing for us to make a fuss about, we imagine we are doing something virtuous, and begin to feel sorry for ourselves, particularly when we see that other people are sorry for us too. In this way the soul begins to lose the occasions of merit which it had gained; it becomes weaker; and thus a door is opened to the devil by which he can enter on some other occasion with a temptation worse than the last. It may even happen that, when you yourself are prepared to suffer an insult, your sisters come and ask you if you are a beast of burden, and say you ought to be more sensitive about things. Oh, my sisters, for the love of God, never let charity move you to show pity for another in anything to do with these fancied insults, for that is like the pity shown to holy Job by his wife and friends.

## CHAPTER 13                      Continues to treat of mortification and explains how one must renounce the world's standards of wisdom in order to attain to true wisdom.

I often tell you, sisters, and now I want it to be set down in writing, not to forget that we in this house, and for that matter anyone who would be perfect, must flee a thousand leagues from such phrases as: "I had right on my side"; "They had no right to do this to me"; "The person who treated me like this was not right". God deliver us from such a false idea of right as that! Do you think that it was right for our good Jesus to have to suffer so many insults, and that those who heaped them on Him<sup>1</sup> were right, and that they had any right to do Him those wrongs? I do not know why anyone is in a convent who is willing to bear only the crosses that she has a perfect right to expect: such a person should return to the world, though even there such rights will not be safeguarded. Do you think you can ever possibly have to bear so much that you ought not to have to bear any more? How does right enter into the matter at all? I

really do not know. Before we begin talking about not having our rights, let us wait until we receive some honour or gratification, or are treated kindly, for it is certainly not right that we should have anything in this life like that. When, on the other hand, some offence is done to us (and we do not feel it an offence to us that it should be so described), I do not see what we can find to complain of. Either we are the brides of this great King or we are not. If we are, what wife is there with a sense of honour who does not accept her share in any dishonour done to her spouse, even though she may do so against her will? Each partner, in fact, shares in the honour and dishonour of the other. To desire to share in the kingdom [of our Spouse Jesus Christ], and to enjoy it, and yet not to be willing to have any part in His dishonours and trials, is ridiculous. God keep us from being like that! Let the sister who thinks that she is accounted the least among all consider herself the [happiest and] most fortunate, as indeed she really is, if she lives her life as she should, for in that case she will, as a rule, have no lack of honour either in this life or in the next. Believe me when I say this—what an absurdity, though, it is for me to say “Believe me” when the words come from Him Who is true Wisdom, Who is Truth Itself, and from the Queen of the angels! Let us, my daughters, in some small degree, imitate the great humility of the most sacred Virgin, whose habit we wear and whose nuns we are ashamed to call ourselves. Let us at least imitate this humility of hers in some degree—I say “in some degree” because, however much we may seem to humble ourselves, we fall far short of being the daughters of such a Mother, and the brides of such a Spouse. If, then, the habits I have described are not sternly checked, what seems nothing to-day will perhaps be 1 Lit.: “did them to Him.” Continues to treat of mortification and explains how one must renounce the world's standards of wisdom in order to attain to true wisdom 59 Continues to treat of mortification and explains how one must renounce... a venial sin to-morrow, and that is so infectious a tendency that, if you leave it alone, the sin will not be the only one for long; and that is a very bad thing for communities. We who live in a community should consider this very carefully, so as not to harm those who labour to benefit us and to set us a good example. If we realize what great harm is done by the formation of a bad habit of over-punctiliousness about our honour, we should rather die a thousand deaths than be the cause of such a thing. For only the body would die, whereas the loss of a soul is a great loss which is apparently without end; some of us will die, but others will take our places and perhaps they may all be harmed more by the one bad habit which we started than they are benefited by many virtues. For the devil does not allow a single bad habit to disappear and the very weakness of our mortal nature destroys the virtues in us. Oh, what a real charity it would be, and what a service would be rendered to God, if any nun who sees that she cannot [endure and] conform to the customs of this house would recognize the fact and go away [before being professed, as I have said elsewhere], and leave the other sisters in peace! And no convent (at least, if it follows my advice) will take her or allow her to make her profession until they have given her many years' probation to see if she improves. I am not referring to shortcomings affecting penances and fasts, for, although these are wrong, they are not things which do so much harm. I am thinking of nuns who are of

such a temperament that they like to be esteemed and made much of; who see the faults of others but never recognize their own; and who are deficient in other ways like these, the true source of which is want of humility. If God does not help such a person by bestowing great spirituality upon her, until after many years she becomes greatly improved, may God preserve you from keeping her in your community. For you must realize that she will neither have peace there herself nor allow you to have any. As you do not take dowries, God is very gracious to you in this respect. It grieves me that religious houses should often harbour one who is a thief and robs them of their treasure, either because they are unwilling to return a dowry or out of regard for the relatives. In this house you have risked losing worldly honour and forgone it (for no such honour is paid to those who are poor); do not desire, then, that others should be honoured at such a cost to yourselves. Our honour, sisters, must lie in the service of God, and, if anyone thinks to hinder you in this, she had better keep her honour and stay at home. It was with this in mind that our Fathers ordered a year's probation (which in our Order we are free to extend to four years): personally, I should like it to be prolonged to ten years. A humble nun will mind very little if she is not professed: for she knows that if she is good she will not be sent away, and if she is not, why should she wish to do harm to one of Christ's communities? 2 2 Lit.: "to this college of Christ." 60 Continues to treat of mortification and explains how one must renounce... By not being good, I do not mean being fond of vanities, which, I believe, with the help of God, will be a fault far removed from the nuns in this house. I am referring to a want of mortification and an attachment to worldly things and to self-interest in the matter which I have described. Let anyone who knows that she is not greatly mortified take my advice and not make her profession if she does not wish to suffer a hell on earth, and God grant there may not be another hell awaiting such a nun in the world to come! There are many reasons why she should fear there may be and possibly neither she nor her sisters may realize this as well as I do. Believe what I say here; if you will not, I must leave it to time to prove the truth of my words. For the whole manner of life we are trying to live is making us, not only nuns, but hermits [like the holy Fathers our predecessors] and leading us to detachment from all things created. I have observed that anyone whom the Lord has specially chosen for this life is granted that favour. She may not have it in full perfection, but that she has it will be evident from the great joy and gladness that such detachment gives her, and she will never have any more to do with worldly things, for her delight will be in all the practices of the religious life. I say once more that anyone who is inclined to things of the world should leave the convent 3 if she sees she is not making progress. If she still wishes to be a nun she should go to another convent; if she does not, she will see what happens to her. She must not complain of me as the foundress of this convent and say I have not warned her. This house is another Heaven, if it be possible to have Heaven upon earth. Anyone whose sole pleasure lies in pleasing God and who cares nothing for her own pleasure will find our life a very good one; if she wants anything more, she will lose everything, for there is nothing more that she can have. A discontented soul is like a person suffering from severe nausea, who rejects all food, however nice it may be;

things which persons in good health delight in eating only cause her the greater loathing. Such a person will save her soul better elsewhere than here; she may even gradually reach a degree of perfection which she could not have attained here because we expected too much of her all at once. For although we allow time for the attainment of complete detachment and mortification in interior matters, in externals this has to be practised immediately, because of the harm which may otherwise befall the rest; and anyone who sees this being done, and spends all her time in such good company, and yet, at the end of six months or a year, has made no progress, will, I fear, make none over a great many years, and will even go backward. I do not say that such a nun must be as perfect as the rest, but she must be sure that her soul is gradually growing healthier—and it will soon become clear if her disease is mortal.

## CHAPTER 14            Treats of the great importance of not professing anyone whose spirit is contrary to the things aforementioned.

I feel sure that the Lord bestows great help on anyone who makes good resolutions, and for that reason it is necessary to enquire into the intentions of anyone who enters [the life of religion]. She must not come, as many nuns [now] do, simply to further her own interests, although the Lord can perfect even this intention if she is a person of intelligence. If not intelligent, a person of this kind should on no account be admitted; for she will not understand her own reasons for coming, nor will she understand others who attempt subsequently to improve her. For, in general, a person who has this fault always thinks she knows better than the wisest what is good for her; and I believe this evil is incurable, for it is rarely unaccompanied by malice. In a convent where there are a great many nuns it may be tolerated, but it cannot be suffered among a few. When an intelligent person begins to grow fond of what is good, she clings to it manfully, for she sees that it is the best thing for her; this course may not bring her great spirituality but it will help her to give profitable advice, and to make herself useful in many ways, without being a trouble to anybody. But I do not see how a person lacking in intelligence can be of any use in community life, and she may do a great deal of harm. This defect, like others, will not become obvious immediately; for many people are good at talking and bad at understanding, while others speak in a sharp and none too refined a tone, and yet they have intelligence and can do a great deal of good. There are also simple, holy people who are quite unversed in business matters and worldly conventions but have great skill in converse with God. Many enquiries, therefore, must be made before novices are admitted, and the period of probation before profession should be a long one. The world must understand once and for all that you are free to send them away again, as it is often necessary to do in a convent where the life is one of austerity; and then if you use this right no one will take offence. I say this because these times are so unhappy, and our weakness is so great, that we are not content to follow the instructions of our predecessors and disregard the current

ideas about honour, lest we should give offence to the novices' relatives. God grant that those of us who admit unsuitable persons may not pay for it in the world to come! Such persons are never without a pretext for persuading us to accept them, though in a matter of such importance no pretext is valid. If the superior is unaffected by her personal likings and prejudices, and considers what is for the good of the house, I do not believe God will ever allow her to go astray. But if she considers other people's feelings and trivial points of detail, I feel sure she will be bound to err. 1 An untranslatable play upon words: *corto y no muy cortado*—as though “sharpened” could be used in the sense of “refined”. Treats of the great importance of not professing anyone whose spirit is contrary to the things aforementioned 62 Treats of the great importance of not professing anyone whose spirit... This is something which everyone must think out for herself; she must commend it to God and encourage her superior when her courage fails her, of such great importance is it. So I beg God to give you light about it. You do very well not to accept dowries; for, if you were to accept them, it might happen that, in order not to have to give back money which you no longer possess, you would keep a thief in the house who was robbing you of your treasure; and that would be no small pity. So you must not receive dowries from anyone, for to do so may be to harm the very person to whom you desire to bring profit.

## CHAPTER 15      Treats of the great advantage which comes from our not excusing ourselves, even though we find we are unjustly condemned.

But how disconnectedly I am writing! I am just like a person who does not know what she is doing. It is your fault, sisters, for I am doing this at your command. Read it as best you can, for I am writing it as best I can, and, if it is too bad, burn it. I really need leisure, and, as you see, I have so little opportunity for writing that a week passes without my putting down a word, and so I forget what I have said and what I am going to say next. Now what I have just been doing—namely, excusing myself—is very bad for me, and I beg you not to copy it, for to suffer without making excuses is a habit of great perfection, and very edifying and meritorious; and, though I often teach you this, and by God's goodness you practise it, His Majesty has never granted this favour to me. May He be pleased to bestow it on me before I die. I am greatly confused as I begin to urge this virtue upon you, for I ought myself to have practised at least something of what I am recommending you with regard to it: but actually I must confess I have made very little progress. I never seem unable to find a reason for thinking I am being virtuous when I make excuses for myself. There are times when this is lawful, and when not to do it would be wrong, but I have not the discretion (or, better, the humility) to do it only when fitting. For, indeed, it takes great humility to find oneself unjustly condemned and be silent, and to do this is to imitate the Lord Who set us free from all our sins. I beg you, then, to study

earnestly to do so, for it brings great gain; whereas I can see no gain in our trying to free ourselves from blame: none whatever—save, as I say, in a few cases where hiding the truth might cause offence or scandal. Anyone will understand this who has more discretion than I. I think it is very important to accustom oneself to practise this virtue and to endeavour to obtain from the Lord the true humility which must result from it. The truly humble person will have a genuine desire to be thought little of, and persecuted, and condemned unjustly, even in serious matters. For, if she desires to imitate the Lord, how can she do so better than in this? And no bodily strength is necessary here, nor the aid of anyone save God. These are great virtues, my sisters, and I should like us to study them closely, and to make them our penance. As you know, I deprecate [other severe and] excessive penances, which, if practised indiscreetly, may injure the health. Here, however, there is no cause for fear; for, however great the interior virtues may be, they do not weaken the body so that it cannot serve the Order, while at the same time they strengthen the soul; and, furthermore, they can be applied to very little things, and thus, as I have said on other occasions, they accustom one to gain great victories in very important matters. I have not, however, been Treats of the great advantage which comes from our not excusing ourselves, even though we find we are unjustly condemned 64 Treats of the great advantage which comes from our not excusing ourselves,... able to test this particular thing myself, for I never heard anything bad said of me which I did not clearly realize fell short of the truth. If I had not sometimes—often, indeed—offended God in the ways they referred to, I had done so in many others, and I felt they had treated me far too indulgently in saying nothing about these: I much preferred people to blame me for what was not true than to tell the truth about me. For I disliked hearing things that were true said about me, whereas these other things, however serious they were, I did not mind at all. In small matters I followed my own inclinations, and I still do so, without paying any affection to what is most perfect. So I should like you to begin to realize this at an early stage, and I want each of you to ponder how much there is to be gained in every way by this virtue, and how, so far as I can see, there is nothing to be lost by it. The chief thing we gain is being able, in some degree, to follow the Lord. It is a great help to meditate upon the great gain which in any case this is bound to bring us, and to realize how, properly speaking, we can never be blamed unjustly, since we are always full of faults, and a just man falls seven times a day, 1 so that it would be a falsehood for us to say we have no sin. If, then, we are not to blame for the thing that we are accused of, we are never wholly without blame in the way that our good Jesus was. Oh, my Lord! When I think in how many ways Thou didst suffer, and in all of them undeservedly, I know not what to say for myself, or what I can have been thinking about when I desired not to suffer, or what I am doing when I make excuses for myself. Thou knowest, my Good, that if there is anything good in me it comes from no other hands than Thine own. For what is it to Thee, Lord, to give much instead of little? True, I do not deserve it, but neither have I deserved the favours which Thou hast shown me already. Can it be that I should wish a thing so evil as myself to be thought well of by anyone, when they have said such wicked things of Thee, Who art good above all other good?

It is intolerable, my God, it is intolerable; nor would I that Thou shouldst have to tolerate anything displeasing in Thine eyes being found in Thy handmaiden. For see, Lord, mine eyes are blind and very little pleases them. Do Thou give me light and make me truly to desire that all should hate me, since I have so often left Thee, Who hast loved me with such faithfulness. What is this, my God? What advantage do we think to gain from giving pleasure to creatures? What does it matter to us if we are blamed by them all, provided we are without blame in the sight of the Lord? Oh, my sisters we shall never succeed in understanding this truth and we shall never attain perfection unless we think and meditate upon what is real and upon what is not. If there were no other gain than the confusion which will be felt by the person who has blamed you when she sees that you have allowed yourselves to be condemned unjustly, that would be a very great thing. Such an experience uplifts the soul more 1 Proverbs xxiv, 16. 65 Treats of the great advantage which comes from our not excusing ourselves,... than ten sermons. And we must all try to be preachers by our deeds, since both the Apostle and our own lack of ability forbid us to be preachers in word. Never suppose that either the evil or the good that you do will remain secret, however strict may be your enclosure. Do you suppose, daughter, that, if you do not make excuses for yourself, there will not be someone else who will defend you? Remember how the Lord took the Magdalen's part in the Pharisee's house and also when her sister blamed her. He will not treat you as rigorously as He treated Himself: it was not until He was on the Cross that He had even a thief to defend Him. His Majesty, then, will put it into somebody's mind to defend you; if He does not, it will be because there is no need. This I have myself seen, and it is a fact, although I should not like you to think too much of it, but rather to be glad when you are blamed, and in due time you will see what profit you experience in your souls. For it is in this way that you will begin to gain freedom; soon you will not care if they speak ill or well of you; it will seem like someone else's business. It will be as if two persons are talking in your presence and you are quite uninterested in what they are saying because you are not actually being addressed by them. So here: it becomes such a habit with us not to reply that it seems as if they are not addressing us at all. This may seem impossible to those of us who are very sensitive and not capable of great mortification. It is indeed difficult at first, but I know that, with the Lord's help, the gradual attainment of this freedom, and of renunciation and self-detachment, is quite possible.

CHAPTER 16                      Describes the difference between perfection in the lives of contemplatives and in the lives of those who are content with mental prayer. Explains how it is sometimes possible for God to raise a distracted soul to perfect contemplation and the reason for this. This chapter and that which comes next are to be noted carefully.



I hope you do not think I have written too much about this already; for I have only been placing the board, as they say. You have asked me to tell you about the first steps in prayer; although God did not lead me by them, my daughters I know no others, and even now I can hardly have acquired these elementary virtues. But you may be sure that anyone who cannot set out the pieces in a game of chess will never be able to play well, and, if he does not know how to give check, he will not be able to bring about a checkmate.<sup>2</sup> Now you will reprove me for talking about games, as we do not play them in this house and are forbidden to do so. That will show you what kind of a mother God has given you—she even knows about vanities like this! However, they say that the game is sometimes legitimate. How legitimate it will be for us to play it in this way, and, if we play it frequently, how quickly we shall give checkmate to this Divine King! He will not be able to move out of our check nor will He desire to do so. It is the queen which gives the king most trouble in this game and all the other pieces support her. There is no queen who can beat this King as well as humility can; for humility brought Him down from Heaven into the Virgin's womb and with humility we can draw Him into our souls by a single hair. Be sure that He will give most humility to him who has most already and least to him who has least. I cannot understand how humility exists, or can exist, without love, or love without humility, and it is impossible for these two virtues to exist save where there is great detachment from all created things.

<sup>1</sup> The first four paragraphs of this chapter originally formed part of V., but, after writing them, St. Teresa tore them out of the manuscript, as though, on consideration, she had decided not to leave on record her knowledge of such a worldly game as chess. The allegory, however, is so expressive and beautiful that it has rightly become famous, and from the time of Fray Luis de León all the editions have included it. The text here followed is that of E. <sup>2</sup> Chess was very much in vogue in the Spain of St. Teresa's day and it was only in 1561 that its great exponent Ruy López de Segura had published his celebrated treatise, in Spanish, entitled "Book of the liberal invention and art of the game of chess". Describes the difference between perfection in the lives of contemplatives and in the lives of those who are content with mental prayer. Explains how it is sometimes possible for God to raise a distracted soul to perfect contemplation and the reason for this. This chapter and that which comes next are to be noted carefully <sup>67</sup> Describes the difference between perfection in the lives of contemplatives... You will ask, my daughters, why I am talking to you about virtues when you have more than enough books to teach you about them and when you want me to tell you only about contemplation. My reply is that, if you had asked me about meditation, I could have talked to you about it, and advised you all to practise it, even if you do not possess the virtues. For this is the first step to be taken towards the acquisition of the virtues and the very life of all Christians depends upon their beginning it. No one, however lost a soul he may be, should neglect so great a blessing if God inspires him to make use of it. All this I have already written elsewhere, and so have many others who know what they are writing about, which I certainly do not: God

knows that. But contemplation, daughters, is another matter. This is an error which we all make: if a person gets so far as to spend a short time each day in thinking about his sins, as he is bound to do if he is a Christian in anything more than name, people at once call him a great contemplative; and then they expect him to have the rare virtues which a great contemplative is bound to possess; he may even think he has them himself, but he will be quite wrong. In his early stages he did not even know how to set out the chess-board, and thought that, in order to give checkmate, it would be enough to be able to recognize the pieces. But that is impossible, for this King does not allow Himself to be taken except by one who surrenders wholly to Him. Therefore, daughters, if you want me to tell you the way to attain to contemplation, do allow me to speak at some length about these things, even if at the time they do not seem to you very important, for I think myself that they are. If you have no wish either to hear about them or to practise them, continue your mental prayer all your life; but in that case I assure you, and all persons who desire this blessing, that in my opinion you will not attain true contemplation. I may, of course, be wrong about this, as I am judging by my own experience, but I have been striving after contemplation for twenty years. I will now explain what mental prayer is, as some of you will not understand this. God grant that we may practise it as we should! I am afraid, however, that, if we do not achieve the virtues, this can only be done with great labour, although the virtues are not necessary here in such a high degree as they are for contemplation. I mean that the King of glory will not come to our souls—that is, so as to be united with them— unless we strive to gain the greatest virtues. 3 I will explain this, for if you once catch me out in something which is not the truth, you will believe nothing I say—and if I were to say something untrue intentionally, from which may God preserve me, you would be right; but, if I did, it would be because I knew no better or did not understand what I said. I will tell you, then, that God is sometimes pleased to show great favour to persons who are in an evil state [and to raise them to perfect 3 Lit.: “the great virtues.” In V. St. Teresa originally began this sentence thus: “In the last chapter I said that the King of glory, etc.,” and ended it: “to gain the virtues which I there described as great.” Later she altered it to read as above. 68 Describes the difference between perfection in the lives of contemplatives... contemplation], so that by this means He may snatch them out of the hands of the devil. It must be understood, I think, that such persons will not be in mortal sin at the time. They may be in an evil state, and yet the Lord will allow them to see a vision, even a very good one, in order to draw them back to Himself. But I cannot believe that He would grant them contemplation. For that is a Divine union, in which the Lord takes His delight in the soul and the soul takes its delight in Him; and there is no way in which the Purity of the Heavens can take pleasure in a soul that is unclean, nor can the Delight of the angels have delight in that which is not His own. And we know that, by committing mortal sin, a soul becomes the property of the devil, and must take its delight in him, since it has given him pleasure; and, as we know, his delights, even in this life, are continuous torture. My Lord will have no lack of children of His own in whom He may rejoice without going and taking the children of others.

Yet His Majesty will do what He often does—namely, snatch them out of the devil’s hands. 4 Oh, my Lord! How often do we cause Thee to wrestle with the devil! Was it not enough that Thou shouldst have allowed him to bear Thee in his arms when he took Thee to the pinnacle of the Temple in order to teach us how to vanquish him? What a sight it would have been, daughters, to see this Sun by the side of the darkness, and what fear that wretched creature must have felt, though he would not have known why, since God did not allow Him to understand! Blessed be such great pity and mercy; we Christians ought to feel great shame at making Him wrestle daily, in the way I have described, with such an unclean beast. Indeed, Lord, Thine arms had need to be strong, but how was it that they were not weakened by the many [trials and] tortures which Thou didst endure upon the Cross? Oh, how quickly all that is borne for love’s sake heals again! I really believe that, if Thou hadst lived longer, the very love which Thou hast for us would have healed Thy wounds again and Thou wouldst have needed no other medicine. Oh, my God, who will give me such medicine for all the things which grieve and try me? How eagerly should I desire them if it were certain that I could be cured by such a health-giving ointment! Returning to what I was saying, there are souls whom God knows He may gain for Himself by this means; seeing that they are completely lost, His Majesty wants to leave no stone unturned to help them; and therefore, though they are in a sad way and lacking in virtues, He gives them consolations, favours and emotions 5 which begin to move their desires, and occasionally even brings them to a state of contemplation, though rarely and not for 4 Lit.: “out of his hands”, but the meaning, made more explicit in V., is evident. On the doctrinal question involved in this paragraph, see Introduction, above. P. Silverio (III, 75-6), has a more extensive note on the subject than can be given here and cites a number of Spanish authorities, from P. Juan de Jesús María (*Theologia Mystica*, Chap. III) to P. Seisdedos Sanz (*Principios fundamentales de la mística*, Madrid, 1913, II, 61-77.) 5 Lit.: “and tenderness.” 69 Describes the difference between perfection in the lives of contemplatives... long at a time. And this, as I say, He does because He is testing them to see if that favour will not make them anxious to prepare themselves to enjoy it often; if it does not, may they be pardoned; pardon Thou us, Lord, for it is a dreadful thing that a soul whom Thou hast brought near to Thyself should approach any earthly thing and become attached to it. For my own part I believe there are many souls whom God our Lord tests in this way, and few who prepare themselves to enjoy this favour. When the Lord does this and we ourselves leave nothing undone either, I think it is certain that He never ceases from giving until He has brought us to a very high degree of prayer. If we do not give ourselves to His Majesty as resolutely as He gives Himself to us, He will be doing more than enough for us if He leaves us in mental prayer and from time to time visits us as He would visit servants in His vineyard. But these others are His beloved children, whom He would never want to banish from His side; and, as they have no desire to leave Him, He never does so. He seats them at His table, and feeds them with His own food, almost taking the food from His mouth in order to give it them. Oh, what blessed care of us is this, my daughters! How happy shall we be if by leaving these few, petty 6 things we can arrive at so

high an estate! Even if the whole world should blame you, and deafen you with its cries, what matter so long as you are in the arms of God? He is powerful enough to free you from everything; for only once did He command the world to be made and it was done; with Him, to will is to do. Do not be afraid, then, if He is pleased to speak with you, for He does this for the greater good of those who love Him. His love for those to whom He is dear is by no means so weak: He shows it in every way possible. Why, then, my sisters, do we not show Him love in so far as we can? Consider what a wonderful exchange it is if we give Him our love and receive His. Consider that He can do all things, and we can do nothing here below save as He enables us. And what is it that we do for Thee, O Lord, our Maker? We do hardly anything [at all]— just make some poor weak resolution. And, if His Majesty is pleased that by doing a mere nothing we should win everything, let us not be so foolish as to fail to do it. O Lord! All our trouble comes to us from not having our eyes fixed upon Thee. If we only looked at the way along which we are walking, we should soon arrive; but we stumble and fall a thousand times and stray from the way because, as I say, we do not set our eyes on the true Way. One would think that no one had ever trodden it before, so new is it to us. It is indeed a pity that this should sometimes happen. I mean, it hardly seems that we are Christians at all or that we have ever in our lives read about the Passion. Lord help us —that we should be hurt about some small point of honour! And then, when someone tells us not to worry about it, we think he is no Christian. I used to laugh—or sometimes I used to be distressed—at the things I heard in the world, and sometimes, for my sins, in religious Orders. 6 Lit.: “low”, contrasting with “high” at the end of the sentence. 70 Describes the difference between perfection in the lives of contemplatives... We refuse to be thwarted over the very smallest matter of precedence: apparently such a thing is quite intolerable. We cry out at once: “Well, I’m no saint”; I used to say that myself. God deliver us, sisters, from saying “We are not angels”, or “We are not saints”, whenever we commit some imperfection. We may not be; but what a good thing it is for us to reflect that we can be if we will only try and if God gives us His hand! Do not be afraid that He will fail to do His part if we do not fail to do ours. And since we come here for no other reason, let us put our hands to the plough, as they say. Let there be nothing we know of which it would be a service to the Lord for us to do, and which, with His help, we would not venture to take in hand. I should like that kind of venturesomeness to be found in this house, as it always increases humility. We must have a holy boldness, for God helps the strong, being no respecter of persons; 7 and He will give courage to you and to me. I have strayed far from the point. I want to return to what I was saying—that is, to explain the nature of mental prayer and contemplation. It may seem irrelevant, but it is all done for your sakes; you may understand it better as expressed in my rough style than in other books which put it more elegantly. May the Lord grant me His favour, so that this may be so. Amen.

CHAPTER 17                      How not all souls are fitted for contemplation and how some take long to attain it. True humility will walk happily along the road by which the Lord leads it.

CHAPTER 18                      Continues the same subject and shows how much greater are the trials of contemplatives than those of actives. This chapter offers great consolation to actives.

CHAPTER 19                      Begins to treat of prayer. Addresses souls who cannot reason with the understanding

CHAPTER 20                      Describes how, in one way or another, we never lack consolation on the road of prayer. Counsels the sisters to include this subject continually in their conversation.

CHAPTER 21                      Describes the great importance of setting out upon the practice of prayer with firm resolution and of heeding no difficulties put in the way by the devil.

CHAPTER 22                      Explains the meaning of mental prayer.

CHAPTER 23                      Describes the importance of not turning back when one has set out upon the way of prayer. Repeats how necessary it is to be resolute.

CHAPTER 24 Describes how vocal prayer may be practised with perfection and how closely allied it is to mental prayer.

CHAPTER 25 Describes the great gain which comes to a soul when it practises vocal prayer perfectly. Shows how God may raise it thence to things supernatural.

*In case you should think there is little gain to be derived from practising vocal prayer perfectly, I must tell you that, while you are repeating the Paternoster or some other vocal prayer, it is quite possible for the Lord to grant you perfect contemplation.*

CHAPTER 26                      Continues the description of a method for recollecting the thoughts. Describes means of doing this. This chapter is very profitable for those who are beginning prayer.

CHAPTER 27                      Describes the great love shown us by the Lord in the first words of the Paternoster and the great importance of our making no account of good birth if we truly desire to be the daughters of God.

CHAPTER 28                      Describes the nature of the Prayer of Recollection and sets down some of the means by which we can make it a habit

CHAPTER 29                      Continues to describe methods for achieving this Prayer of Recollection. Says what little account we should make of being favoured by our superiors.

CHAPTER 30 Describes the importance of understanding what we ask for in prayer. Treats of these words in the Paternoster: “Sanctificetur nomen tuum, adveniat regnum tuum.”<sup>1</sup> Applies them to the Prayer of Quiet, and begins the explanation of them

CHAPTER 31 Continues the same subject. Explains what is meant by the Prayer of Quiet. Gives several counsels to those who experience it. This chapter is very noteworthy.

CHAPTER 32 Expounds these words of the Paternoster: “Fiat voluntas tua sicut in coelo et in terra.”<sup>1</sup> Describes how much is accomplished by those who repeat these words with full resolution and how well the Lord rewards them for it.

CHAPTER 33 Treats of our great need that the Lord should give us what we ask in these words of the Paternoster: “Panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie.”<sup>1</sup>

CHAPTER 34 Continues the same subject. This is very suitable for reading after the reception of the Most Holy Sacrament

CHAPTER 35 Describes the recollection which should be practised after Communion. Concludes this subject with an exclamatory prayer to the Eternal Father.

I have written at length about this, although, when writing of the Prayer of Recollection, I spoke of the great importance of our entering into solitude with God. When you hear Mass without communicating, daughters, you may communicate spiritually, which is extremely profitable, and afterwards you may practise inward recollection in exactly the same way, for this impresses upon us a deep love of the Lord. If we prepare to receive Him, He never fails to give, and He gives in many ways that we cannot understand. It is as if we were to approach a fire: it might be a very large one, but, if we remained a long way from it and covered our

hands, we should get little warmth from it, although we should be warmer than if we were in a place where there was no fire at all. But when we try to approach the Lord there is this difference: if the soul is properly disposed, and comes with the intention of driving out the cold, and stays for some time where it is, it will retain its warmth for several hours, and if any little spark flies out, it will set it on fire. It is of such importance, daughters, for us to prepare ourselves in thy way that you must not be surprised if I often repeat this counsel. If at first you do not get on with this practice (which may happen, for the devil will try to oppress and distress your heart, knowing what great harm he can do in this way), the devil will make you think that you can find more devotion in other things and less in this. But [trust me and] do not give up this method, for the Lord will use it to prove your love for Him. Remember that there are few souls who stay with Him and follow Him in His trials; let us endure something for Him and His Majesty will repay us. Remember, too, that there are actually people who not only have no wish to be with Him but who insult Him and with great irreverence drive Him away from their homes. We must endure something, therefore, to show Him that we have the desire to see Him. In many places He is neglected and ill-treated, but He suffers everything, and will continue to do so, if He finds but one single soul which will receive Him and love to have Him as its Guest. 1 Let this soul be yours, then, for, if there were none, the Eternal Father would rightly refuse to allow Him to remain with us. Yet the Lord is so good a Friend to those who are His friends, and so good a Master to those who are His servants, that, when He knows it to be the will of His Beloved Son, He will not hinder Him in so excellent a work, in which His Son so fully reveals the love which He has for His Father, as this wonderful way which He seeks of showing how much He loves us and of helping us to bear our trials. Since, then, Holy Father, Who art in the Heavens, Thou dost will and accept this (and it is clear that Thou couldst not deny us a thing which is so good for us) there must be 1 Lit.: “and have him within itself with love.” Describes the recollection which should be practised after Communion. Concludes this subject with an exclamatory prayer to the Eternal Father. 138 Describes the recollection which should be practised after Communion.... someone, as I said at the beginning, who will speak for Thy Son, for He has never defended Himself. Let this be the task for us, daughters, though, having regard to what we are, it is presumptuous of us to undertake it. Let us rely, however, on Our Lord’s command to us to pray to Him, and, in fulfilment of our obedience to Him, let us beseech His Majesty, in the name of the good Jesus, that, as He has left nothing undone that He could do for us in granting sinners so great a favour, He may be pleased of His mercy to prevent Him from being so ill-treated. Since His Holy Son has given us this excellent way in which we can offer Him up frequently as a sacrifice, let us make use of this precious gift so that it may stay the advance of such terrible evil and irreverence as in many places is paid to this Most Holy Sacrament. For these Lutherans seem to want to drive Him out of the world again: they destroy churches, cause the loss of many priests and abolish the sacraments.2 And there is something of this even among Christians, who sometimes go to church meaning to offend Him rather than to worship Him. Why is this, my Lord and my God? Do Thou bring the world to



an end or give us a remedy for such grievous wrongs, which even our wicked hearts cannot endure. I beseech Thee, Eternal Father, endure it no longer: quench this fire, Lord, for Thou canst do so if Thou wilt. Remember that Thy Son is still in the world; may these dreadful things be stopped out of respect for Him, horrible and abominable and foul as they are. With His beauty and purity He does not deserve to be in a house where such things happen. Do this, Lord, not for our sake, for we do not deserve it, but for the sake of Thy Son. We dare not entreat Thee that He should no longer stay with us, for Thou hast granted His prayer to Thee to leave Him with us for to-day—that is, until the end of the world. If He were to go, what would become of us? It would be the end of everything. If anything can placate Thee it is to have on earth such a pledge as this. Since some remedy must be found for this, then, my Lord, I beg Thy Majesty to apply it. For if Thou wilt, Thou art able. O my God, if only I could indeed importune Thee! If only I had served Thee well so that I might be able to beg of Thee this great favour as a reward for my services, for Thou leavest no service unrewarded! But I have not served Thee, Lord; indeed, it may perhaps be for my sins, and because I have so greatly offended Thee, that so many evils come. What, then, can I do, my Creator, but present to Thee this most holy Bread, which, though Thou gavest it to us, I return to Thee, beseeching Thee, by the merits of Thy Son, to grant me this favour, which on so many counts He has merited? Do Thou, Lord, calm this sea, and no longer allow this ship, which is Thy Church, to endure so great a tempest. Save us, my Lord, for we perish.

## CHAPTER 36      Treats of these words in the Paternoster: “*Dimitte nobis debita nostra.*”

Our good Master sees that, if we have this heavenly food, everything is easy for us, except when we are ourselves to blame, and that we are well able to fulfil our undertaking to the Father that His will shall be done in us. So He now asks Him to forgive us our debts, as we ourselves forgive others. Thus, continuing the prayer which He is teaching us, He says these words: “And forgive us, Lord, our debts, even as we forgive them to our debtors.” Notice, sisters, that He does not say: “as we shall forgive.” We are to understand that anyone who asks for so great a gift as that just mentioned, and has already yielded his own will to the will of God, must have done this already. And so He says: “as we forgive our debtors.” Anyone, then, who sincerely repeats this petition, “*Fiat voluntas tua*”, must, at least in intention, have done this already. You see now why the saints rejoiced in insults and persecutions: it was because these gave them something to present to the Lord when they prayed to Him. What can a poor creature like myself do, who has had so little to forgive others and has so much to be forgiven herself? This, sisters, is something which we should consider carefully; it is such a serious and important matter that God should pardon us our sins, which have merited eternal fire, that we must pardon all trifling things which have been done to us and which are not wrongs at all, or

anything else. For how is it possible, either in word or in deed, to wrong one who, like myself, has deserved to be plagued by devils for ever? Is it not only right that I should be plagued<sup>2</sup> in this world too? As I have so few, Lord, even of these trifling things, to offer Thee, Thy pardoning of me must be a free gift: there is abundant scope here for Thy mercy. Thy Son must pardon me, for no one has done me any injustice, and so there has been nothing that I can pardon for Thy sake. But take my desire to do so, Lord, for I believe I would forgive any wrong if Thou wouldst forgive me and I might unconditionally do Thy will. True, if the occasion were to arise, and I were condemned without cause, I do not know what I should do. But at this moment I see that I am so guilty in Thy sight that everything I might have to suffer would fall short of my deserts, though anyone not knowing, as Thou knowest, what I am, would think I was being wronged. Blessed be Thou, Who endurest one that is so poor: when Thy most holy Son makes this petition in the name of all mankind, I cannot be included, being such as I am and having nothing to give. And supposing, my Lord, that there are others who are like myself but have not realized that this is so? If there are any such, I beg them, in Thy name, to remember this truth, and to pay no heed to little things about which they think they are being slighted, for, if they 1 “Forgive us our debts.” 2 Lit.: “ill-treated.” The same verb is used in the following sentence. Treats of these words in the Paternoster: ‘Dimitte nobis debita nostra.’ 140 Treats of these words in the Paternoster: ‘Dimitte nobis debita nost... insist on these nice points of honour, they become like children building houses of straw. Oh, God help me, sisters! If we only knew what honour really is and what is meant by losing it! I am not speaking now about ourselves, for it would indeed be a bad business if we did not understand this; I am speaking of myself as I was when I prided myself on my honour without knowing what honour meant; I just followed the example of others. Oh, how easily I used to feel slighted! I am ashamed to think of it now; and I was not one of those who worried most about such things either. But I never grasped the essence of the matter, because I neither thought nor troubled about true honour, which it is good for us to have because it profits the soul. How truly has someone said: “Honour and profit cannot go together.” I do not know if this was what that person was thinking of when he said it; but it is literally true, for the soul’s profit and what the world calls honour can never be reconciled. Really, the topsy-turviness of the world is terrible. Blessed be the Lord for taking us out of it! May His Majesty grant that this house shall always be as far from it as it is now! God preserve us from religious houses where they worry about points of honour! Such places never do much honour to God. God help us, how absurd it is for religious to connect their honour with things so trifling that they amaze me! You know nothing about this, sisters, but I will tell you about it so that you may be wary. You see, sisters, the devil has not forgotten us. He has invented honours of his own for religious houses and has made laws by which we go up and down in rank, as people do in the world. Learned men have to observe this with regard to their studies (a matter of which I know nothing): anyone, for example, who has got as far as reading theology must not descend and read philosophy— that is their kind of honour, according to which you must always be going up and never going down. Even if

someone were commanded by obedience to take a step down, he would in his own mind consider himself slighted; and then someone would take his part [and say] it was an insult; next, the devil would discover reasons for this—and he seems to be an authority even in God's own law. Why, among ourselves, anyone who has been a prioress is thereby incapacitated from holding any lower office for the rest of her life. We must defer to the senior among us, and we are not allowed to forget it either: sometimes it would appear to be a positive merit for us to do this, because it is a rule of the Order. The thing is enough to make one laugh—or, it would be more proper to say, to make one weep. After all, the Order does not command us not to be humble: it commands us to do everything in due form. And in matters which concern my own esteem I ought not to be so formal as to insist that this detail of our Rule shall be kept as strictly as the rest, which we may in fact be observing very imperfectly. We must not put all our effort into observing just this one detail: let my interests be looked after by others—I will forget about myself altogether. The fact is, although we shall never rise as far as Heaven in this way, we are attracted by the thought of rising higher, and we dislike climbing down. O, Lord, Lord, art Thou our 141 Treats of these words in the Paternoster: 'Dimitte nobis debita nost... Example and our Master? Yes, indeed. And wherein did Thy honour consist, O Lord, Who hast honoured us?3 Didst Thou perchance lose it when Thou wert humbled even to death? No, Lord, rather didst Thou gain it for all. For the love of God, sisters! We have lost our way; we have taken the wrong path from the very beginning. God grant that no soul be lost through its attention to these wretched niceties about honour, when it has no idea wherein honour consists. We shall get to the point of thinking that we have done something wonderful because we have forgiven a person for some trifling thing, which was neither a slight nor an insult nor anything else. Then we shall ask the Lord to forgive us as people who have done something important, just because we have forgiven someone. Grant us, my God, to understand how little we understand ourselves and how empty our hands are when we come to Thee that Thou, of Thy mercy, mayest forgive us. For in truth, Lord, since all things have an end and punishment is eternal, I can see nothing meritorious which I may present to Thee that Thou mayest grant us so great a favour. Do it, then, for the sake of Him Who asks it of Thee, and Who may well do so, for He is always being wronged and offended. How greatly the Lord must esteem this mutual love of ours one for another! For, having given Him our wills, we have given Him complete rights over us, and we cannot do that without love. See, then, sisters, how important it is for us to love one another and to be at peace. The good Jesus might have put everything else before our love for one another, and said: "Forgive us, Lord, because we are doing a great deal of penance, or because we are praying often, and fasting, and because we have left all for Thy sake and love Thee greatly." But He has never said: "Because we would lose our lives for Thy sake"; or any of these [numerous] other things which He might have said. He simply says: "Because we forgive." Perhaps the reason He said this rather than anything else was because He knew that our fondness for this dreadful honour made mutual love the hardest virtue for us to attain, though it is the virtue dearest to His Father. Because of its very difficulty He put it where He

did, and after having asked for so many great gifts for us, He offers it on our behalf to God. Note particularly, sisters, that He says: “As we forgive.” As I have said, He takes this for granted. And observe especially with regard to it that unless, after experiencing the favours granted by God in the prayer that I have called perfect contemplation, a person is very resolute, and makes a point, if the occasion arises, of forgiving, not [only] these mere nothings which people call wrongs, but any wrong, however grave, you need not think much of that person’s prayer. 4 For wrongs have no effect upon a soul whom God draws to Himself in 3 Lit.: “our Honourer” — Honrador nuestro: a rather unusual phrase which T. changes into the quite conventional honrado Maestro—“honoured Master.” 4 St. Teresa left this sentence uncompleted. Luis de León added: “You need not . . . prayer” in his edition, since when it has always been included. It figures as an anonymous correction in T. 142 Treats of these words in the Paternoster: ‘Dimitte nobis debita nost... such sublime prayer as this, nor does it care if it is highly esteemed or no. That is not quite correct: it does care, for honour distresses much more than dishonour and it prefers trials to a great deal of rest and ease. For anyone to whom the Lord has really given His Kingdom no longer wants a kingdom in this world, knowing that he is going the right way to reign in a much more exalted manner, and having already discovered by experience what great benefits the soul gains and what progress it makes when it suffers for God’s sake. For only very rarely does His Majesty grant it such great consolations, and then only to those who have willingly borne many trials for His sake. For contemplatives, as I have said elsewhere in this book, have to bear heavy trials, and therefore the Lord seeks out for Himself souls of great experience. Understand, then, sisters, that as these persons have already learned to rate everything at its proper valuation, they pay little attention to things which pass away. A great wrong, or a great trial, may cause them some momentary distress, but they will hardly have felt it when reason will intervene, and will seem to raise its standard aloft, and drive away their distress by giving them the joy of seeing how God has entrusted them with the opportunity of gaining, in a single day, more lasting favours and graces in His Majesty’s sight than they could gain in ten years by means of trials which they sought on their own account. This, as I understand (and I have talked about it with many contemplatives), is quite usual, and I know for a fact that it happens. Just as other people prize gold and jewels, so these persons prize and desire trials, for they know quite well that trials will make them rich. Such persons would never on any account esteem themselves: they want their sins to be known and like to speak about them to people who they see have any esteem for them. The same is true of their descent, which they know quite well will be of no advantage to them in the kingdom which has no end. If being of good birth were any satisfaction to them, it would be because this would enable them to serve God better. If they are not well born, it distresses them when people think them better than they are, and it causes them no distress to disabuse them, but only pleasure. The reason for this is that those to whom God grants the favour of possessing such humility and great love for Him forget themselves when there is a possibility of rendering Him greater services, and simply cannot believe that others are troubled by things which they themselves

do not consider as wrongs at all. These last effects which I have mentioned are produced in persons who have reached a high degree of perfection and to whom the Lord commonly grants the favour of uniting them to Himself by perfect contemplation. But the first of these effects—namely, the determination to suffer wrongs even though such suffering brings distress—is very quickly seen in anyone to whom the Lord has granted this grace of prayer as far as the stage of union. If these effects are not produced in a soul and it is not strengthened by prayer, you may take it that this was not Divine favour but indulgence and illusion coming from the devil, which he makes us think to be good, so that we may attach more importance to our honour. 143

Treats of these words in the Paternoster: 'Dimitte nobis debita nost... It may be that, when the Lord first grants these favours, the soul will not immediately attain this fortitude. But, if He continues to grant them, He will soon give it fortitude— certainly, at least, as regards forgiveness, if not in the other virtues as well. I cannot believe that a soul which has approached so nearly to Mercy Itself, and has learned to know itself and the greatness of God's pardon, will not immediately and readily forgive, and be mollified and remain on good terms with a person who has done it wrong. For such a soul remembers the consolation and grace which He has shown it, in which it has recognized the signs of great love, and it is glad that the occasion presents itself for showing Him some love in return. I repeat that I know many persons to whom Our Lord has granted the grace of raising them to supernatural experiences and of giving them this prayer, or contemplation, which has been described; and although I may notice other faults and imperfections in them, I have never seen such a person who had this particular fault, nor do I believe such a person exists, if the favours he has received are of God. If any one of you receives high favours, let her look within herself and see if they are producing these effects, and, if they are not, let her be very fearful, and believe that these consolations are not of God, Who, as I have said, when He visits the soul, always enriches it. That is certain; for, although the grace and the consolations may pass quickly, it can be recognized in due course through the benefits which it bestows on the soul. And, as the good Jesus knows this well, He gives a definite assurance to His Holy Father that we are forgiving our debtors.

CHAPTER 37                      Describes the excellence of this prayer called the Paternoster, and the many ways in which we shall find consolation in it.

The sublimity of the perfection of this evangelical prayer is something for which we should give great praise to the Lord. So well composed by the good Master was it, daughters, that each of us may use it in her own way. I am astounded when I consider that in its few words are enshrined all contemplation and perfection, so that if we study it no other book seems necessary. For thus far in the Paternoster the Lord has taught us the whole method of prayer

and of high contemplation, from the very beginnings of mental prayer, to Quiet and Union. With so true a foundation to build upon, I could write a great book on prayer if only I knew how to express myself. As you have seen, Our Lord is beginning here to explain to us the effects which it produces, when the favours come from Him. I have wondered why His Majesty did not expound such obscure and sublime subjects in greater detail so that we might all have understood them. It has occurred to me that, as this prayer was meant to be a general one for the use of all, so that everyone could interpret it as he thought right, ask for what he wanted and find comfort in doing so, He left the matter in doubt;<sup>1</sup> and thus contemplatives, who no longer desire earthly things, and persons greatly devoted to God, can ask for the heavenly favours which, through the great goodness of God, may be given to us on earth. Those who still live on earth, and must conform to the customs of their state, may also ask for the bread which they need for their own maintenance and for that of their households, as is perfectly just and right, and they may also ask for other things according as they need them. (Blessed be His name for ever and ever. Amen. For His sake I entreat the Eternal Father to forgive my debts and grievous sins: though no one has wronged me, and I have therefore no one to forgive;<sup>2</sup> I have myself need for forgiveness every day. May He give me grace so that every day I may have some petition to lay before Him.) The good Jesus, then, has taught us a sublime method of prayer, and begged that, in this our life of exile, we may be like the angels, if we endeavour, with our whole might, to make our actions conform to our words—in short, to be like the children of such a Father, and the brethren of such a Brother. His Majesty knows that if, as I say, our actions and our words are one, the Lord will unfailingly fulfil our petitions, give us His kingdom and help us by means

1 Lit.: “He left it thus confused.” Here follows in E., in place of the rest of this paragraph, a passage which interrupts the trend of the thought, and therefore, in the text above, is printed in italics and in brackets at the end of this paragraph. 2 The words “though . . . forgive” are crossed out in the manuscript, as is the following sentence “May He . . . before Him.” Describes the excellence of this prayer called the Paternoster, and the many ways in which we shall find consolation in it. 145 Describes the excellence of this prayer called the Paternoster, and the... of supernatural gifts, such as the Prayer of Quiet, perfect contemplation and all the other favours which the Lord bestows on our trifling efforts—and everything is trifling which we can achieve and gain by ourselves alone. It must be realized, however, that these two things— surrendering our will to God and forgiving others—apply to all. True, some practise them more and some less, as has been said: those who are perfect will surrender their wills like the perfect souls they are and will forgive others with the perfection that has been described. For our own part, sisters, we will do what we can, and the Lord will accept it all. It is as if He were to make a kind of agreement on our behalf with His Eternal Father, and to say: “Do this, Lord, and My brethren shall do that.” It is certain that He for His own part will not fail us. Oh, how well He pays us and how limitless are His rewards! We may say this prayer only once, and yet in such a way that He will know that there is no duplicity about us and that we shall do what we say; and so He will leave us rich. We must never be

insincere with Him, for He loves us, in all our dealings with Him, to be honest, and to treat Him frankly and openly, never saying one thing and meaning another; and then He will always give us more than we ask for. Our good Master knows that those who attain real perfection in their petitions will reach this high degree through the favours which the Father will grant them, and is aware that those who are already perfect, or who are on the way to perfection, do not and cannot fear, for they say they have trampled the world beneath their feet, and the Lord of the world is pleased with them. They will derive the greatest hope of His Majesty's pleasure from the effects which He produces in their souls; absorbed in these joys, they wish they were unable to remember that there is any other world at all, and that they have enemies. O Eternal Wisdom! O good Teacher! What a wonderful thing it is, daughters, to have a wise and prudent Master who foresees our perils! This is the greatest blessing that the spiritual soul still on earth can desire, because it brings complete security. No words could ever exaggerate the importance of this. The Lord, then, saw it was necessary to awaken such souls and to remind them that they have enemies, and how much greater danger they are in if they are unprepared, and, since if they fall it will be from a greater height, how much more help they need from the Eternal Father. So, lest they should fail to realize their danger and suffer deception, He offers these petitions so necessary to us all while we live in this exile: "And lead us not, Lord, into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

CHAPTER 38                      Treats of the great need which we have to beseech the Eternal Father to grant us what we ask in these words: "Et ne nos inducas in tentationem, sed libera nos a malo."<sup>1</sup> Explains certain temptations. This chapter is noteworthy.

There are great things here for us to meditate upon, sisters, and to learn to understand as we pray. Remember I consider it quite certain that those who attain perfection do not ask the Lord to deliver them from trials, temptations, persecutions and conflicts—and that is another sure and striking sign that these favours and this contemplation which His Majesty gives them are coming from the Spirit of the Lord and are not illusions.

For, as I said a little way back, *perfect souls are in no way repelled by trials, but rather desire them and pray for them and love them*. They are like soldiers: the more wars there are, the better they are pleased, because they hope to emerge from them with the greater riches. <sup>2</sup> If there are no wars, they serve for their pay, but they know they will not get very far on that.

Believe me, sisters, *the soldiers of Christ—namely, those who experience contemplation and practise prayer—are always ready for the hour of conflict.* They are never very much afraid of their open enemies, for they know who they are and are sure that their strength can never prevail against the strength which they themselves have been given by the Lord: they will always be victorious and gain great riches, so they will never turn their backs on the battle. Those whom they fear, and fear rightly, and from whom they always beg the Lord to deliver them, are enemies who are treacherous, devils who transform themselves and come and visit them in the disguise of angels of light. The soul fails to recognize them until they have done it a great deal of harm; they suck our life-blood and put an end to our virtues and we go on yielding to temptation without knowing it. From these enemies let us pray the Lord often, in the Paternoster, to deliver us: may He not allow us to run into temptations which deceive us; may their poison be detected; and may light and truth not be hidden from us. How rightly does our good Master teach us to pray for this and pray for it in our name! Consider, daughters, in how many ways these enemies do us harm. Do not suppose that the sole danger lies in their making us believe that the consolations and the favours which they can counterfeit to us come from God. This, I think, in a way, is the least harmful thing they can do; it may even help some whom this sensible devotion entices to spend more time in prayer and thus to make greater progress. Being ignorant that these consolations come 1 “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” 2 Lit.: “gains”, as also in the next paragraph. E. has: “because they have hopes of becoming rich.” The reference in both manuscripts is, of course, to the spoils and booty of war. Treats of the great need which we have to beseech the Eternal Father to grant us what we ask in these words: 'Et ne nos inducas in tentationem, sed libera nos a malo.' 147 Treats of the great need which we have to beseech the Eternal Father... from the devil, and knowing themselves to be unworthy of such favours, they will never cease to give thanks to God and will feel the greater obligation to serve Him; further, they will strive to prepare themselves for more favours which the Lord may grant them, since they believe them to come from His hand. Always strive after humility, sisters, and try to realize that you are not worthy of these graces, and do not seek them. It is because many souls do this, I feel sure, that the devil loses them: he thinks that he has caused their ruin, but out of the evil which he has been trying to do the Lord brings good. For His Majesty regards our intention, which is to please Him and serve Him and keep near to Him in prayer, and the Lord is faithful. We shall do well to be cautious, and not to let our humility break down or to become in any way vainglorious. Entreat the Lord to deliver you from this, daughters, and you need then have no fear that His Majesty will allow you to be comforted much by anyone but Himself. Where the devil can do great harm without our realizing it is in making us believe that we possess virtues which we do not: that is pestilential. For, when consolations and favours come to us, we feel that we are doing nothing but receive, and have the greater obligation to serve; but when we suffer from this other delusion we think that we are giving



and serving, and that the Lord will be obliged to reward us; and this, little by little, does us a great deal of harm. On the one hand, our humility is weakened, while, on the other, we neglect to cultivate that virtue, believing we have already acquired it. We think we are walking safely, when, without realizing it, we stumble, and fall into a pit from which we cannot escape. Though we may not consciously have committed any mortal sin which would have sent us infallibly to hell, we have sprained our ankles and cannot continue on that road which I began to speak about and which I have not forgotten. You can imagine how much progress will be made by anyone who is at the bottom of a huge pit: it will be the end of him altogether and he will be lucky if he escapes falling right down to hell: at best, he will never get on with his journey. This being so, he will be unable to help either himself or others. It will be a bad thing for others, too, for, once the pit has been dug, a great many passers-by may fall into it. Only if the person who has fallen in gets out of it and fills it up with earth will further harm to himself and others be prevented. But I warn you that this temptation is full of peril. I know a great deal about it from experience, so I can describe it to you, though not as well as I should like. What can we do about it, sisters? To me the best thing seems to be what our Master teaches us: to pray, and to beseech the Eternal Father not to allow us to fall into temptation. There is something else, too, which I want to tell you. If we think the Lord has given us a certain grace, we must understand that it is a blessing which we have received but which He may take away from us again, as indeed, in the great providence of God, often happens. Have you never observed this yourselves, sisters? I certainly have: sometimes I think I am extremely detached, and, in fact, when it comes to the test, I am; yet at other times I find I have such attachment to things which the day before I should perhaps have scoffed at that 148 Treats of the great need which we have to beseech the Eternal Father... I hardly know myself. At some other time I seem to have so much courage that I should not quail at anything I was asked to do in order to serve God, and, when I am tested, I find that I really can do these things. And then on the next day I discover that I should not have the courage to kill an ant for God's sake if I were to meet with any opposition about it. Sometimes it seems not to matter in the least if people complain or speak ill of me, and, when the test comes, I still feel like this—indeed, I even get pleasure from it. And then there come days when a single word distresses me and I long to leave the world altogether, for everything in it seems to weary me. And I am not the only person to be like this, for I have noticed the same thing in many people better than myself, so I know it can happen. That being so, who can say that he possesses any virtue, or that he is rich, if at the time when he most needs this virtue he finds himself devoid of it? No, sisters: let us rather think of ourselves as lacking it and not run into debt without having the means of repayment. Our treasure must come from elsewhere and we never know when God will leave us in this prison of our misery without giving us any. If others, thinking we are good, bestow favours and honours upon us, both they and we shall look foolish when, as I say, it becomes clear that our virtues are only lent us. The truth is that, if we serve the Lord with humility, He will sooner or later succour us in our needs. But, if we are not strong in this virtue, the Lord will leave us to

ourselves, as they say, at every step. This is a great favour on His part, for it helps us to realize fully that we have nothing which has not been given us. And now you must take note of this other piece of advice. The devil makes us believe that we have some virtue—patience, let us say—because we have determination and make continual resolutions to suffer a great deal for God’s sake. We really and truly believe that we would suffer all this, and the devil encourages us in the belief, and so we are very pleased. I advise you to place no reliance on these virtues: we ought not to think that we know anything about them beyond their names, or to imagine that the Lord has given them to us, until we come to the test. For it may be that at the first annoying word which people say to you your patience will fall to the ground. Whenever you have frequently to suffer, praise God for beginning to teach you this virtue, and force yourself to suffer patiently, for this is a sign that He wants you to repay Him for the virtue which He is giving you, and you must think of it only as a deposit, as has already been said. The devil has yet another temptation, which is to make us appear very poor in spirit: we are in the habit of saying that we want nothing and care nothing about anything: but as soon as the chance comes of our being given something, even though we do not in the least need it, all our poverty of spirit disappears. Accustoming ourselves to saying this goes far towards making us think it true. It is very important always to be on the watch and to realize that this is a temptation, both in the things I have referred to and in many others. For when the Lord really gives one of these solid virtues, it seems to bring all the rest in its train: that is a very well-known fact. But I advise you once more, even if you think you possess it, to 149 Treats of the great need which we have to beseech the Eternal Father... suspect that you may be mistaken; for the person who is truly humble is always doubtful about his own virtues; very often they seem more genuine and of greater worth when he sees them in his neighbours. The devil makes you think you are poor, and he has some reason for doing so, because you have made (with the lips, of course) a vow of poverty, as have some other people who practise prayer. I say “with the lips” because, if before making the vow we really meant in our hearts what we were going to say, the devil could not possibly lead us into that temptation—not even in twenty years, or in our entire lifetime—for we should see that we were deceiving the whole world, and ourselves into the bargain. Well, we make our vow of poverty, and then one of us, believing herself all the time to be keeping it, says: “I do not want anything, but I am having this because I cannot do without it: after all, if I am to serve God, I must live, and He wants us to keep these bodies of ours alive.” So the devil, in his angelic disguise, suggests to her that there are a thousand different things which she needs and that they are all good for her. And all the time he is persuading her to believe that she is still being true to her vow and possesses the virtue of poverty and that what she has done is no more than her duty. And now let us take a test case, for we can only get to the truth of this by keeping a continual watch on ourselves: then, if there is any cause for anxiety on our part, we shall at once recognize the symptoms. Here is someone who has a larger income than he needs—I mean, needs for the necessities of life—and, though he could do with a single manservant, he keeps three. Yet, when he is sued in

the courts in connection with a part of his property, or some poor peasant omits to pay him his dues, he gets as upset and excited about it as if his life were at stake. He says he must look after his property or he will lose it, and considers that that justifies him. I do not suggest that he ought to neglect his property: whether or no things go well with him, he should look after it. But a person whose profession of poverty is a genuine one makes so little account of these things that, although for various reasons he attends to his own interests, he never worries about them, because he never supposes he will lose everything he has; and, even if he should do so, he would consider it of no great moment, for the matter is one of secondary importance to him and not his principal concern. His thoughts rise high above it and he has to make an effort to occupy himself with it at all. Now monks and nuns are demonstrably poor—they must be so, for they possess nothing: sometimes because there is nothing for them to possess. But if a religious of the type just mentioned is given anything, it is most unlikely that he will think it superfluous. He always likes to have something laid by; if he can get a habit of good cloth, he will not ask for one of coarse material. He likes to have some trifle, if only books, which he can pawn or sell, for if he falls ill he will need extra comforts. Sinner that I am! Is this the vow of poverty that you took? Stop worrying about yourself and leave God to provide for you, come what may. If you are going about trying to provide for your own future, it would be less trouble for you to have a fixed income. This may not involve any sin, but it is as well that we should learn to recognize the great need which we have to beseech the Eternal Father... our imperfections, so that we can see how far we are from possessing the virtue of poverty, which we must beg and obtain from God. If we think we already possess it, we shall grow careless, and, what is worse, we shall be deceiving ourselves. The same thing happens with regard to humility.<sup>3</sup> We think that we have no desire for honour and that we care nothing about anything; but as soon as our honour comes to be slighted in some detail our feelings and actions at once show that we are not humble at all. If an opportunity occurs for us to gain more honour, we do not reject it; even those who are poor, and to whom I have just referred, are anxious to have as much profit as possible—God grant we may not go so far as actually to seek it! We always have phrases on our lips about wanting nothing, and caring nothing about anything, and we honestly think them to be true, and get so used to repeating them that we come to believe them more and more firmly. But when, as I say, we keep on the watch, we realize that this is a temptation, as regards both the virtue I have spoken of and all the rest; for when we really have one of these solid virtues, it brings all the rest in its train: that is a very well-known fact.

CHAPTER 39 Continues the same subject and gives counsels concerning different kinds of temptation. Suggests two remedies by which we may be freed from temptations.

Beware also, daughters, of certain kinds of humility which the devil inculcates in us and which make us very uneasy about the gravity of our past sins. There are many ways in which he is accustomed to depress us so that in time we withdraw from Communion and give up our private prayer, because the devil suggests to us that we are not worthy to engage in it. When we come to the Most Holy Sacrament, we spend the time during which we ought to be receiving grace in wondering whether we are properly prepared or no. The thing gets to such a pass that a soul can be made to believe that, through being what it is, it has been forsaken by God, and thus it almost doubts His mercy. Everything such a person does appears to her to be dangerous, and all the service she renders, however good it may be, seems to her fruitless. She loses confidence and sits with her hands in her lap because she thinks she can do nothing well and that what is good in others is wrong in herself. Pay great attention, daughters, to this point which I shall now make, because sometimes thinking yourselves so wicked may be humility and virtue and at other times a very great temptation. I have had experience of this, so I know it is true. Humility, however deep it be, neither disquiets nor troubles nor disturbs the soul; it is accompanied by peace, joy and tranquillity. Although, on realizing how wicked we are, we can see clearly that we deserve to be in hell, and are distressed by our sinfulness, and rightly think that everyone should hate us, yet, if our humility is true, this distress is accompanied by an interior peace and joy of which we should not like to be deprived. Far from disturbing or depressing the soul, it enlarges it and makes it fit to serve God better. The other kind of distress only disturbs and upsets the mind and troubles the soul, so grievous is it. I think the devil is anxious for us to believe that we are humble, and, if he can, to lead us to distrust God. When you find yourselves in this state, cease thinking, so far as you can, of your own wretchedness, and think of the mercy of God and of His love and His sufferings for us. If your state of mind is the result of temptation, you will be unable to do even this, for it will not allow you to quiet your thoughts or to fix them on anything but will only weary you the more: it will be a great thing if you can recognize it as a temptation. This is what happens when we perform excessive penances in order to make ourselves believe that, because of what we are doing, we are more penitent than others. If we conceal our penances from our

1 A marginal addition made, in the autograph, to the title by another hand reads: "This chapter is very noteworthy, both for those tempted by false kinds of humility and for confessors." This is found in T. and in most of the editions. Continues the same subject and gives counsels concerning different kinds of temptation. Suggests two remedies by which we may be freed from temptations. 152

Continues the same subject and gives counsels concerning different kinds... confessor or superior, or if we are told to give them up and do not obey, that is a clear case of temptation.

Always try to obey, however much it may hurt you to do so, for that is the greatest possible perfection. There is another very dangerous kind of temptation: a feeling of security caused by the belief that we shall never again return to our past faults and to the pleasures of the world. "I know all about these things now," we say, "and I realize that they all come to an end and I get more pleasure from the things of God." If this temptation comes to beginners it is very serious; for, having this sense of security, they think nothing of running once more into occasions of sin. They soon come up against these—and then God preserve them from falling back farther than before! The devil, seeing that here are souls which may do him harm and be of great help to others, does all in his power to prevent them from rising again. However many consolations and pledges of love the Lord may give you, therefore, you must never be so sure of yourselves that you cease to be afraid of falling back again, and you must keep yourselves from occasions of sin. Do all you can to discuss these graces and favours with someone who can give you light and have no secrets from him. However sublime your contemplation may be, take great care both to begin and to end every period of prayer with self-examination. If these favours come from God, you will do this more frequently, without either taking or needing any advice from me, for such favours bring humility with them and always leave us with more light by which we may see our own unworthiness. I will say no more here, for you will find many books which give this kind of advice. I have said all this because I have had experience of the matter and have sometimes found myself in difficulties of this nature. Nothing that can be said about it, however, will give us complete security. What, then, Eternal Father, can we do but flee to Thee and beg Thee not to allow these enemies of ours to lead us into temptations? If attacks are made upon us publicly, we shall easily surmount them, with Thy help. But how can we be ready for these treacherous assaults, O my God? We need constantly to pray for Thy help. Show us, Lord, some way of recognizing them and guarding against them. Thou knowest that there are not many who walk along this road, and if so many fears are to beset them, there will be far fewer. What a strange thing it is! You might suppose that the devil never tempted those who do not walk along the road of prayer! People get a greater shock when deception overtakes a single one of the many persons who are striving to be perfect than when a hundred thousand others are deceived and fall into open sin, whom there is no need to look at in order to see if they are good or evil, for Satan can be seen at their side a thousand leagues away. But as a matter of fact people are right about this, for very few who say the Paternoster in the way that has been described are deceived by the devil, so that, if the deception of one of them 2 Lit.: "these treasons." 153 Continues the same subject and gives counsels concerning different kinds... causes surprise, that is because it is a new and an unusual thing. For human nature is such that we scarcely notice what we see frequently but are astounded at what we see seldom or hardly at all. And the devils themselves encourage this astonishment, for if a single soul attains perfection it robs them of many others. It is so strange, I repeat, that I am not surprised if people are amazed at it; for, unless they are altogether at fault, they are much safer on this road than on any other, just as people who watch a bull-fight from the grand-

stand are safer than the men who expose themselves to a thrust from the bull's horns. This comparison, which I heard somewhere, seems to me very exact. Do not be afraid to walk on these roads, sisters, for there are many of them in the life of prayer—and some people get most help by using one of them and others by using another, as I have said. This road is a safe one and you will the more readily escape from temptation if you are near the Lord than if you are far away from Him. Beseech and entreat this of Him, as you do so many times each day in the Paternoster.

CHAPTER 40 Describes how, by striving always to walk in the love and fear of God, we shall travel safely amid all these temptations.

Show us, then, O our good Master, some way in which we may live through this most dangerous warfare without frequent surprise. The best way that we can do this, daughters, is to use the love and fear given us by His Majesty. For love will make us quicken our steps, while fear will make us look where we are setting our feet so that we shall not fall on a road where there are so many obstacles. Along that road all living creatures must pass, and if we have these two things we shall certainly not be deceived. You will ask me how you can tell if you really have these two very, very great virtues. 1You are right to ask, for we can never be quite definite and certain about it; if we were sure that we possessed love, we should be sure that we were in a state of grace. But you know, sisters, there are some indications which are in no way secret but so evident that even a blind man, as people say, could see them. You may not wish to heed them, but they cry so loud for notice that they make quite an uproar, for there are not many who possess them to the point of perfection and thus they are the more readily noticed. Love and fear of God! These are two strong castles whence we can wage war on the world and on the devils. Those who really love God love all good, seek all good, help forward all good, praise all good, and invariably join forces with good men and help and defend them. They love only truth and things worthy of love. Do you think it possible that anyone who really and truly loves God can love vanities, riches, worldly pleasures or honours? Can he engage in strife or feel envy? No; for his only desire is to please the Beloved. Such persons die with longing for Him to love them and so they will give their lives to learn how they may please Him better. Will they hide their love? No: if their love for God is genuine love they cannot. Why, think of Saint Paul or the Magdalen. One of these—Saint Paul—found in three days that he was sick with love. The Magdalen discovered this on the very first day. And how certain of it they were! For there are degrees of love for God, which shows itself in proportion to its strength. If there is little of it, it shows itself but little; if there is much, it shows itself a great deal. But it always shows itself, whether little or much, provided it is real love for God. But to come to what we are chiefly treating of now—the deceptions and illusions practised against

contemplatives by the devil—such souls have no little love; for had they not a great deal they would not be contemplatives, and so their love shows itself plainly and in many ways. Being a great fire, it cannot fail to give out a very bright light. If they have not much love, they should proceed with many misgivings and realize that they have great cause for fear; and they should try to find out what is wrong with them, say their prayers, walk in 1 Lit.: “these two virtues, so great, so great.” Describes how, by striving always to walk in the love and fear of God, we shall travel safely amid all these temptations. 155 Describes how, by striving always to walk in the love and fear of God,... humility and beseech the Lord not to lead them into temptation, into which, I fear, they will certainly fall unless they bear this sign. But if they walk humbly and strive to discover the truth and do as their confessor bids them and tell him the plain truth, then the Lord is faithful, and, as has been said, by using the very means with which he had thought to give them death, the devil will give them life, with however many fantasies and illusions he tries to deceive them. If they submit to the teaching of the Church, they need not fear; whatever fantasies and illusions the devil may invent, he will at once betray his presence. But if you feel this love for God which I have spoken of, and the fear which I shall now describe, you may go on your way with happiness and tranquillity. In order to disturb the soul and keep it from enjoying these great blessings, the devil will suggest to it a thousand false fears and will persuade other people to do the same; for if he cannot win souls he will at least try to make them lose something, and among the losers will be those who might have gained greatly had they believed that such great favours, bestowed upon so miserable a creature, come from God, and that it is possible for them to be thus bestowed, for sometimes we seem to forget His past mercies. Do you suppose that it is of little use to the devil to suggest these fears? No, it is most useful to him, for there are two well-known ways in which he can make use of this means to harm us, to say nothing of others. First, he can make those who listen to him fearful of engaging in prayer, because they think that they will be deceived. Secondly, he can dissuade many from approaching God who, as I have said, see that He is so good that He will hold intimate converse with sinners. Many such souls think that He will treat them in the same way, and they are right: I myself know certain persons inspired in this way who began the habit of prayer and in a short time became truly devout and received great favours from the Lord. Therefore, sisters, when you see someone to whom the Lord is granting these favours, praise Him fervently, yet do not imagine that she is safe, but aid her with more prayer, for no one can be safe in this life amid the engulfing dangers of this stormy sea. Wherever this love is, then, you will not fail to recognize it; I do not know how it could be concealed. For they say that it is impossible for us to hide our love even for creatures, and that, the more we try to conceal it, the more clearly is it revealed. And yet this is so worthless that it hardly deserves the name of love, for it is founded upon nothing at all: it is loathsome, indeed, to make this comparison. How, then, could a love like God’s be concealed—so strong, so righteous, continually increasing, never seeing cause for ceasing to manifest itself, and resting upon the firm foundation of the love which is its reward? As to the reality of this reward there can be no

doubt, for it is manifest in Our Lord's great sorrows, His trials, the shedding of His blood and even the loss of His life. Certainly, then, there is no doubt as to this love. It is indeed love, and deserves that name, of which worldly vanities have robbed it. 156 Describes how, by striving always to walk in the love and fear of God,... God help me! How different must the one love be from the other to those who have experience of both! May His Majesty be pleased to grant us to experience this before He takes us from this life, for it will be a great thing at the hour of death, when we are going we know not whither, to realize that we shall be judged by One Whom we have loved above all things, and with a passion that makes us entirely forget ourselves. Once our debts have been paid we shall be able to walk in safety. We shall not be going into a foreign land, but into our own country, for it belongs to Him Whom we have loved so truly and Who Himself loves us. For this love of His, besides its other properties, is better than all earthly affection in that, if we love Him, we are quite sure that He loves us too. Remember, my daughters, the greatness of the gain which comes from this love, and of our loss if we do not possess it, for in that case we shall be delivered into the hands of the tempter, hands so cruel and so hostile to all that is good, and so friendly to all that is evil. What will become of the poor soul when it falls into these hands after emerging from all the pains and trials of death? How little rest it will have! How it will be torn as it goes down to hell! What swarms and varieties of serpents it will meet! How dreadful is that place! How miserable that lodging! Why, a pampered person (and most of those who go to hell are that) can hardly bear to spend a single night in a bad inn: what, then, will be the feelings of that wretched soul when it is condemned to such an inn as this and has to spend eternity there? 2 Let us not try to pamper ourselves, daughters. We are quite well off here: there is only a single night for us to spend in this bad inn. Let us praise God and strive to do penance in this life. How sweet will be the death of those who have done penance for all their sins and have not to go to purgatory! It may be that they will begin to enjoy glory even in this world, and will know no fear, but only peace. Even if we do not attain to this, sisters, let us beseech God that, if in due course we must suffer these pains, it may be with a hope of emerging from them. Then we shall suffer them willingly and lose neither the friendship nor the grace of God. May He grant us these in this life so that we may not unwittingly fall into temptation

## CHAPTER 41 Speaks of the fear of God and of how we must keep ourselves from venial sins.

How I have enlarged on this subject! Yet I have not said as much about it as I should like; for it is a delightful thing to talk about this love of God. What, then, must it be to possess it? May the Lord, for His own sake, give it me! May I not depart from this life till there is nothing in it that I desire, till I have forgotten what it is to love anything but Thee and till I deny the name of love



to any other kind of affection—for all love is false but love of Thee, and, unless the foundations of a building are true, the building itself will not endure. I do not know why it surprises us to hear people say: “So-and-so has made me a poor return for something.” “Someone else does not like me.” I laugh to myself when I hear that. What other sort of return do you expect him to make you? And why do you expect anyone to like you? These things will show you what the world is; your love itself becomes your punishment, and the reason why you are so upset about it is that your will strongly resents your involving it in such childish pastimes. Let us now come to the fear of God—though I am sorry not to be able to say a little about this worldly love, which, for my sins, I know well and should like to acquaint you with, so that you may free yourself from it for ever. But I am straying from my subject and shall have to pass on. This fear of God is another thing with which those who possess it and those who have to do with them are very familiar. But I should like you to realize that at first it is not very deep, save in a few people, to whom, as I have said, the Lord grants such great favours as to make them rich in virtues and to raise them, in a very short time, to great heights of prayer. It is not recognizable, therefore, at first, in everyone. As it increases, it grows stronger each day, and then, of course, it can be recognized, for those who possess it forsake sin, and occasions of sin, and bad company, and other signs of it are visible in them. When at last the soul attains to contemplation, of which we are chiefly treating at the moment, its fear of God is plainly revealed, and its love is not dissembled even outwardly. However narrowly we watch such persons, we shall not find them growing careless; for, close as our watch on them may be, the Lord so preserves them that they would not knowingly commit one venial sin even to further their own interests, and, as for mortal sin, they fear it like fire. These are the illusions, sisters, which I should like you always to fear; let us always beseech God that temptation may not be strong enough for us to offend Him but that He may send it to us in proportion to the strength which He gives us to conquer it. If we keep a pure conscience, we can suffer little or no harm. That is the important point; and that is the fear which I hope will never be taken from us, for it is that fear which will stand us in good stead. Speaks of the fear of God and of how we must keep ourselves from venial sins. 158 Speaks of the fear of God and of how we must keep ourselves from venial... Oh, what a great thing it is not to have offended the Lord, so that the servants and slaves of hell may be kept under control! In the end, whether willingly or no, we shall all serve Him—they by compulsion and we with our whole heart. So that, if we please Him, they will be kept at bay and will do nothing that can harm us, however much they lead us into temptation and lay secret snares for us. Keep this in mind, for it is very important advice, so do not neglect it until you find you have such a fixed determination not to offend the Lord that you would rather lose a thousand lives and be persecuted by the whole world, than commit one mortal sin, and until you are most careful not to commit venial sins. I am referring now to sins committed knowingly: as far as those of the other kind are concerned, who can fail to commit them frequently? But it is one thing to commit a sin knowingly and after long deliberation, and quite another to do it so suddenly that the knowledge of its being a venial sin

and its commission are one and the same thing, and we hardly realize what we have done, although we do to some extent realize it. From any sin, however small, committed with full knowledge, may God deliver us, especially since we are sinning against so great a Sovereign and realizing that He is watching us! That seems to me to be a sin committed of malice aforethought; it is as though one were to say: "Lord, although this displeases Thee, I shall do it. I know that Thou seest it and I know that Thou wouldst not have me do it; but, though I understand this, I would rather follow my own whim and desire than Thy will." If we commit a sin in this way, however slight, it seems to me that our offence is not small but very, very great. For the love of God, sisters, never be careless about this —and, glory be to the Lord, you are not so at present. If you would gain this fear of God, remember the importance of habit and of starting to realize what a serious thing it is to offend Him. Do your utmost to learn this and to turn it over in your minds; for our life, and much more than our life, depends upon this virtue being firmly planted in our souls. Until you are conscious within your soul of possessing it, you need always to exercise very great care and to avoid all occasions of sin and any kind of company which will not help you to get nearer to God. Be most careful, in all that you do, to bend your will to it; see that all you say tends to edification; flee from all places where there is conversation which is not pleasing to God. Much care is needed if this fear of God is to be thoroughly impressed upon the soul; though, if one has true love, it is quickly acquired. Even when the soul has that firm inward determination which I have described, not to offend God for the sake of any creature, or from fear of a thousand deaths, it may subsequently fall from time to time, for we are weak and cannot trust ourselves, and, the more determined we are, the less self-confidence we should have, for confidence must come from God. But, when we find ourselves in this state, we need not feel constrained or depressed, for the Lord will help us and the habits we have formed will be of assistance to 1 Lit.: "the infernal slaves." 159 Speaks of the fear of God and of how we must keep ourselves from venial... us so that we shall not offend Him; we shall be able to walk in holy freedom, and associate with anyone, as seems right to us, even with dissolute people. These will do you no harm, if you hate sin. Before we had this true fear of God worldly people would have been poisonous to us and would have helped to ruin our souls; but now they will often help us to love God more and to praise Him for having delivered us from what we see to be a notorious danger. And whereas we for our part may previously have helped to foster their weaknesses, we shall now be helping to repress them, because they will restrain themselves in our presence, and this is a compliment which they will pay us without our desiring it. I often praise the Lord (though I also wonder why it should be so) that merely by his presence, and without saying a word, a servant of God should frequently prevent people from speaking against Him. It may be as it is in worldly intercourse: a person is always spoken of with respect, even in his absence, before those who are known to be his friends, lest they should be offended. Since this servant of God is in a state of grace, this grace must cause him to be respected, however lowly his station, for people will not distress him in a matter about which they know him to feel so strongly as giving offence to

God. I really do not know the reason for this but I do know that it very commonly happens. Do not be too strict with yourselves, then, for, if your spirit begins to quail, it will do great harm to what is good in you and may sometimes lead to scrupulosity, which is a hindrance to progress both in yourselves and in others. Even if things are not as bad as this, a person, however good in herself, will not lead many souls to God if they see that she is so strict and timorous. Human nature is such that these characteristics will frighten and oppress it and lead people to avoid the road you are taking, even if they are quite clear it is the best one. Another source of harm is this: we may judge others unfavourably, though they may be holier than ourselves, because they do not walk as we do, but, in order to profit their neighbours, talk freely and without restraint. You think such people are imperfect; and if they are good and yet at the same time of a lively disposition, you think them dissolute. This is especially true of those of us who are unlearned and are not sure what we can speak about without committing sin. It is a very dangerous state of mind, leading to great uneasiness and to continual temptation, because it is unfair to our neighbour. It is very wrong to think that everyone who does not follow in your own timorous footsteps has something the matter with her. Another danger is that, when it is your duty to speak, and right that you should speak, you may not dare to do so lest you say too much and may perhaps speak well of things that you ought to hate. Try, then, sisters, to be as pleasant as you can, without offending God, and to get on as well as you can with those you have to deal with, so that they may like talking to you and want to follow your way of life and conversation, and not be frightened and put off by virtue. This is very important for nuns: the holier they are, the more sociable they should be with their sisters. Although you may be very sorry if all your sisters' conversation is not just as 160 Speaks of the fear of God and of how we must keep ourselves from venial... you would like it to be, never keep aloof from them if you wish to help them and to have their love. We must try hard to be pleasant, and to humour the people we deal with and make them like us, especially our sisters. So try, my daughters, to bear in mind that God does not pay great attention to all the trifling matters which occupy you, and do not allow these things to make your spirit quail and your courage fade, for if you do that you may lose many blessings. As I have said, let your intention be upright and your will determined not to offend God. But do not let your soul dwell in seclusion, or, instead of acquiring holiness, you will develop many imperfections, which the devil will implant in you in other ways, in which case, as I have said, you will not do the good that you might, either to yourselves or to others. You see that, with these two things—love and fear of God— we can travel along this road in peace and quietness, and not think at every step that we can see some pitfall, and that we shall never reach our goal.<sup>2</sup> Yet we cannot be sure of reaching it, so fear will always lead the way, and then we shall not grow careless, for, as long as we live, we must never feel completely safe or we shall be in great danger. And that was our Teacher's meaning when at the end of this prayer He said these words to His Father, knowing how necessary they were: "But deliver us from evil. Amen."

## CHAPTER 42 Treats of these last words of the Paternoster: "Sed libera nos a malo. Amen." "But deliver us from evil. Amen."

I think the good Jesus was right to ask this for Himself, for we know how weary of this life He was when at the Supper He said to His Apostles: "With desire I have desired to sup with you"<sup>1</sup>—and that was the last supper of His life. From this it can be seen how weary He must have been of living; yet nowadays people are not weary even at a hundred years old, but always want to live longer. It is true, however, that we do not live so difficult a life or suffer such trials or such poverty as His Majesty had to bear. What was His whole life but a continuous death, with the picture of the cruel death that He was to suffer always before His eyes? And this was the least important thing, with so many offenses being committed against His Father and such a multitude of souls being lost. If to any human being full of charity this is a great torment, what must it have been to the boundless and measureless charity of the Lord? And how right He was to beseech the Father to deliver Him from so many evils and trials and to give Him rest for ever in His Kingdom, of which He was the true heir. By the word "Amen," as it comes at the end of every prayer, I understand that the Lord is begging that we may be delivered from all evil for ever. It is useless, sisters, for us to think that, for so long as we live, we can be free from numerous temptations and imperfections and even sins; for it is said that whosoever thinks himself to be without sin deceives himself, and that is true. But if we try to banish bodily ills and trials—and who is without very many and various trials of such kinds?—is it not right that we should ask to be delivered from sin? Still, let us realize that what we are asking here—this deliverance from all evil—seems an impossibility, whether we are thinking of bodily ills, as I have said, or of imperfections and faults in God's service. I am referring, not to the saints, who, as Saint Paul said, can do all things in Christ<sup>2</sup> but to sinners like myself. When I find myself trammelled by weakness, lukewarmness, lack of mortification and many other things, I realize that I must beg for help from the Lord. You, daughters, must ask as you think best. Personally, I shall find no redress in this life, so I ask the Lord to deliver me from all evil "for ever." What good thing shall we find in this life, sisters, in which we are deprived of our great Good and are absent from Him? Deliver me, Lord, from this shadow of death; deliver me from all these trials; deliver me from all these pains; deliver me from all these changes, from all the formalities with which we are forced to comply for as long as we live, from all the many, many, many things which weary and depress me, and the enumeration of all of which would weary the reader if I were to repeat them. This 1 St. Luke xxii, 15. 2 Philippians iv, 13. Treats of these last words of the Paternoster: 'Sed libera nos a malo. Amen.' 'But deliver us from evil. Amen.' 162 Treats of these last words of the Paternoster: 'Sed libera nos a malo.... life is unendurable. The source of my own depression must be my own wicked life and the realization

that even now I am not living as I should, so great are my obligations. I beseech the Lord, then, to deliver me from all evil for ever, since I cannot pay what I owe, and may perhaps run farther into debt each day. And the hardest thing to bear, Lord, is that I cannot know with any certainty if I love Thee and if my desires are acceptable in Thy sight. O my God and Lord, deliver me from all evil and be pleased to lead me to that place where all good things are to be found. What can be looked for on earth by those to whom Thou hast given some knowledge of what the world is and those who have a living faith in what the Eternal Father has laid up for them because His Son asks it of Him and teaches us to ask Him for it too? When contemplatives ask for this with fervent desire and full determination it is a very clear sign that their contemplation is genuine and that the favours which they receive in prayer are from God. Let those who have these favours, 3 then, prize them highly. But if I myself make this request it is not for that reason (I mean, it must not be taken as being for that reason); it is because I am wearied by so many trials and because my life has been so wicked that I am afraid of living any longer. It is not surprising if those who share in the favours of God should wish to pass to a life where they no longer enjoy mere sips at them: being already partakers in some knowledge of His greatness, they would fain see it in its entirety. They have no desire to remain where there are so many hindrances to the enjoyment of so many blessings; nor that they should desire to be where the Sun of justice never sets. Henceforward all the things they see on earth seem dim to them and I wonder that they can live for even an hour. No one can be content to do so who has begun to enjoy such things, and has been given the Kingdom of God on earth, and must live to do, not his own will, but the will of the King. Oh, far other must be that life in which we no longer desire death! How differently shall we then incline our wills towards the will of God! His will is for us to desire truth, whereas we desire falsehood; His will is for us to desire the eternal, whereas we prefer that which passes away; His will is for us to desire great and sublime things, whereas we desire the base things of earth; He would have us desire only what is certain, whereas here on earth we love what is doubtful. What a mockery it all is, my daughters, unless we beseech God to deliver us from these perils for ever and to keep us from all evil! And although our desire for this may not be perfect, let us strive to make the petition. What does it cost us to ask it, since we ask it of One Who is so powerful? It would be insulting a great emperor to ask him for a farthing. Since we have already given Him our will, let us leave the giving to His will, so that we may be the more surely heard; and may His name be for ever hallowed in the Heavens and on the earth and may His will be ever done in me. Amen. 3 Lit.: "Let those who are so." 163 Treats of these last words of the Paternoster: 'Sed libera nos a malo.... You see now, friends, what is meant by perfection in vocal prayer, in which we consider and know to Whom the prayer is being made, Who is making it and what is its object. When you are told that it is not good for you to practise any but vocal prayer, do not be discouraged, but read this with great care and beg God to explain to you anything about prayer which you cannot understand. For no one can deprive you of vocal prayer or make you say the Paternoster hurriedly, without understanding it. If anyone tries to do so, or advises you to give

up your prayer, take no notice of him. You may be sure he is a false prophet; and in these days, remember, you must not believe everyone, for, though you may be told now that you have nothing to fear, you do not know what is in store for you. I had intended, as well as saying this, to talk to you a little about how you should say the Ave Maria, but I have written at such length that that will have to be left over. If you have learned how to say the Paternoster well, you will know enough to enable you to say all the other vocal prayers you may have to recite. Now let us go back and finish the journey which I have been describing, for the Lord seems to have been saving me labour by teaching both you and me the Way which I began to outline to you and by showing me how much we ask for when we repeat this evangelical prayer. May He be for ever blessed, for it had certainly never entered my mind that there were such great secrets in it. You have now seen that it comprises the whole spiritual road, right from the beginning, until God absorbs the soul and gives it to drink abundantly of the fountain of living water which I told you was at the end of the road. It seems, sisters, that the Lord's will has been to teach us what great consolation is comprised in it, and this is a great advantage to those who cannot read. If they understood this prayer, they could derive a great deal of sound instruction from it and would find it a real comfort. Our books may be taken from us, but this is a book which no one can take away, and it comes from the lips of the Truth Himself, Who cannot err. As we repeat the Paternoster so many times daily, then, as I have said, let us delight in it and strive to learn from so excellent a Master the humility with which He prays, and all the other things that have been described. May His Majesty forgive me for having dared to speak of such high matters. Well does His Majesty know that I should not have ventured to do so, and that my understanding would not have been capable of it, had He not taught me what I have said. Give thanks to Him for this, sisters, for He must have done it because of the humility with which you asked me to write it for you in your desire to be instructed by one so unworthy. Well, sisters, Our Lord seems not to want me to write any more, for, although I had intended to go on, I can think of nothing to say. The Lord has shown you the road and has taught me what I wrote in the book which, as I say, I have already written.<sup>4</sup> This tells you how to conduct yourselves on reaching this fount of living water and what the soul experiences when <sup>4</sup> The Life. 164 Treats of these last words of the Paternoster: 'Sed libera nos a malo.... there, and how God satiates it and takes away its thirst for earthly things, and makes it grow in things pertaining to God's service. This will be very helpful to those who have reached the fount, and will give them a great deal of light. Before you see this book I shall give it to my confessor, Father Presentado Domingo Bañez of the Order of Saint Dominic. If he thinks you will benefit by it, and gives it you to read, and if you find it of any comfort, I, too, shall be comforted. If he gives you this book, he will give you the other<sup>5</sup> as well. Should it be found unsuitable for anyone to read, you must take the will for the deed, as I have obeyed your command by writing it. <sup>6</sup> I consider myself well repaid for my labour in writing, though it has certainly been no labour to me to think about what I have been going to say, as the Lord has taught me the secrets of this

evangelical prayer, which has been a great comfort to me. Blessed and praised be the Lord, from Whom comes all the good that we speak and think and do. Amen.