

**APPENDIX**

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**ON THE LOVE OF GOD**

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TRACT BY

**SR. ROSA VIGNOLI**

CLARIST<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It was deemed proper to add this tract, copied out by Bartolomea C. in a notebook with other spiritual notes marked with the name of the authoress.



## ON THE LOVE OF GOD

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When the love of God is at work in a soul, it at times seems maddening, so vehement it is! Oh God, the forcefulness of it! It is like being in the midst of a furnace that reduces everything into ashes. However, the characteristic effect of this love is that of driving the soul to humble itself profoundly, lower than any other creature: of making it desire to be held in contempt and abasement and crave a thousand afflictions and crosses. These are the unmistakable signs that God's love is reigning in a soul; and this soul, so fully possessed by divine love, breaks down and reduces to nothing all obstacles that come in its way, threatening to impede its pursuit of the most perfect love.

The loving soul is in love with its supreme Good, but is always thirsting for more of it. It strives to love beyond its powers, with an unquenchable thirst for a greater capacity for love: she loves beyond what it lives of, nor does it live in itself but wholly in its Beloved. Its life is a ceaseless death because, as it does not live merely where it lives, it can be said that it lives continually of God and in God. When our Divine Redeemer was in mortal agony he cried out: *I thirst*<sup>1</sup>. «Ah! My

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<sup>1</sup> Original in Latin “*Sitio*”.

gentle Jesus, by saying so don't you get for yourself the bitter drink?» Jesus in His agony says to me in reply: «Beloved soul, I thirst, that is, I most ardently desire that all creatures may come and find rest in my Heart, by plunging into my infinite love, and that will be for me a most welcome water that will refresh my ardour, quench my thirst and soothe my wounds, whereby my most painful death will be made most sweet».

That is the answer given me by Jesus dying on the Cross, and who of us will be so unfeeling as to refuse to give his loving Father this last comfort?

My God, let that never come to be: do take my will, my heart, my soul, my intellect, for all is yours, my God! Let the burning flames of Divine Love melt me and turn me into a refreshing drink to quench your burning thirst. How happy I would be, my dearly-beloved Jesus, if I could give you this tiny comfort in your terrible pain!

Oh my soul, if you want to be a sweet drink for a God, you must give up every other love, you must be humble, self-denying, patient, disposed to die totally to your natural inclinations, in the pursuit of all the virtues.

The pure, perfect essence of love consists in voluntary suffering, in the practice of virtues, in profound humility and self-abasement, in never seeking esteem and appreciation, in ceaseless mortification both internal and external, and in perfect poverty of spirit. There is no other holiness-of-life here

on earth than that of perfectly following in the footsteps of our Divine Redeemer dying on the Cross.

St Paul says, “*Love bears all things, endures all things*”<sup>1</sup>. It is no use challenging a loving soul with countless difficulties, pains and torments; it will wave them aside, for love overcomes everything. Love knows no difficulty, because its area of activity goes beyond time; it knows no pain or sorrow because its reach is beyond mere feelings.

If you say to a person that loves most ardently: “Today there is no more time to do this or that thing for the glory of God?”, she will promptly reply, “I will do it at night.” “But you know very well that you need rest to keep healthy”, she will reply, “Rest! Health! Ah! The will of God alone is my rest”. And if you again say: “But in this time of the year you will grow numb with cold”, she will reply: “Cold! What do you mean? Don’t you know that fire needs no other heat; I have a fire within me that warms me and burns me, and so I don’t mind heat nor cold, nor any pain or hardship. Love sees nor feels anything except love. Besides, hardships are my toys, they serve me as wings to fly with to the Sacred Heart of my Supreme Good. And so there is nothing that can delay my speedy flight to God”.

Moral virtues, such as humility, patience, meekness and silence with other similar virtues must be practised by corresponding acts all through life, till we die. But since sustained, faithful practice of these virtues forms in the soul a

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<sup>1</sup> Original in Latin “*omnia suffert, omnia sustinet*”.

habit of these virtues, provided every act is done with an intense and perfect love, there will be derived from them a perfect habit that surpasses in perfection any particular act.

In that case, a virtue that has grown into a habit will prevail over particular acts, and love will then rule and have its way over that habit itself, never letting any act be done unless it be directed and handled by it. Thus, virtues are handmaids and love is their absolute Lord.

There is no way of knowing pure love in and for itself, but we can make it out through real virtues: only by that means can we come to know if our love is true or false. It is very difficult to know what pure love is; however, I shall tell the little that I know about it.

By pure love we mean disinterested love, a love that has no other aim than that of pleasing its God, simply because God deserves it, for being the good God he is. I suppose that pure love is found essentially in God alone because He is pure love itself, a pure, ardent love ever aflame in himself and in His affections. In himself, because he is infinitely loving, issuing out without ever leaving the two fiery furnaces, that is, the Heart of the Eternal Father, and Divine Son, and from there is sent to his creatures. And so, by setting them on fire he sanctifies them, and by sanctifying them he inflames them ever more, rendering them, through the continuance of this love, so pure and spotless that they become for him a garden of delight, and at this point the soul is so deeply possessed by God that it cannot know itself outside God, and lives so dead to its own creatureliness that it seems to be made divine.

God's pure love for us! Oh, how great it is! ... He loves us even though we are most unworthy, mean and ungrateful creatures, nor does He seek His own advantage in loving us: On the contrary, in return for His love he receives endless ingratitude from us. Is that not a most pure and disinterested love of our Supreme Good? ... Pure love in a soul is known from its affections, that is, from the uninterrupted practice of virtues; but as it is easy to practice virtue in times of sweetness and external consolation, one cannot be sure if there is pure love at such times.

But let times of dryness come, times of abandonment, boredom, fear and hesitation, and infirmities of every sort; pains and sorrows, persecution, scorn and disgrace, being forsaken by everyone even in dire need, when soul is beset by countless temptations from the devil, and hell bursts out in all its fury: it is in such circumstances that you can tell if there is pure love in the soul.

If the person bears everything in silence, and with a truly heroic fidelity embraces all pain and contempt, even craving more of it, and with a magnanimous heart faces the powers of hell out of love for the Supreme Good and keeps for God a superhuman fidelity: one can rightly say that such a generous soul is permeated through and through with pure love.

The person herself may not be conscious of it; in fact, she feels as cold as ice, but to such a person one might say with all truth: "Rejoice, blessed soul, because you are God's own beloved Bride. He finds his delight in you". However, a true,

faithful Bride of Jesus should never seek herself in anything whatsoever, be it within or without; she must always seek only to please God and meet with His approval, and in that way she will enjoy heavenly peace, even in the midst of afflictions. She will thus live on a plane higher than created things and might rightly say: "*I hold discourse in the Heavens ... I dwell in the heights above*"<sup>1</sup>. She is not dismayed by the human misery around her, because it has no hold on her; she lives above all earthly things with her spirit fixed in God, like the Blessed in Heaven.

When the Lord in His overflowing goodness graciously visits the soul with some extraordinary grace, he does it in order that she may be enkindled in loving contemplation of such an infinite bounty that deigns to visit the meanest worm on earth in answer to her genuine desire to be loved by him. Oh, my God! What a boundless bounty! What an infinite love! ... Let the soul, then, God's own Bride, attend to her inner shrine as much as she knows and is capable of; there, let her die to herself, humble herself and reduce herself to nothing; there let her believe, hope and trust, thank and pray; there let her conform her will to God's will in utter self-surrender and, lastly, tend to the infinite beyond all measure. In fact, even when she has done all this, she will not have overdone it, because everything is simply her duty, obligation, incumbent upon her, and she feels driven to do more in order to fulfil her duty. Being infinitely good, God deserves all she could ever offer. The holiness of a Religious is in proportion to her virtue, that is, to her charity towards God and neighbour, and to her

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<sup>1</sup> Original in Latin "*Mea conversation in Coelis est - Ego in altissimis habito*".



profound humility. These virtues, practised to a heroic degree, canonize the soul, acknowledging her a saint, not on earth, I mean, where genuine saintliness is more often taken for madness, foolishness and mental illness, but in Heaven, where there is no shadow of error. I mean to say, in the sight of God who is Wisdom and Truth incarnate. Indeed, God himself will sanctify the soul and he will then canonize her as a saint before the whole of Heaven's Court, presenting her to all the Blessed as the dearest object of his joy, rejoicing over her and taking delight in her in the sight of the whole Court of Heaven, and she is by all the Blessed admired and loved as a most cherished companion and a most beloved sister. It is true that the Blessed love all of us still in life's journeying as images of God, in whom is all their bliss. But they love much more those who, they know, are more greatly loved by God, and it is these souls who love so deeply that they desire to have among them. And so it must be a great happiness for a soul to be treated here on earth as the refuse of the world, but in Heaven, where truth prevails, to be regarded as a dear sister. A thousand times welcome, then, are humiliations that will turn into eternal happiness! ... The soul must remain in an unbroken awareness of God, submerged and sunken, as it were, in the infinite abyss of his love, made manifest to us in the Incarnation of the Divine Word, the greatest work that Almighty God himself could do, a Mystery that leaves the most highly-intelligent beings of Heaven amazed and lost in admiration. This can be clearly seen in the Heavenly Messenger, when he announced the Incarnation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, she asked in profound humility:

*“How shall this be done, because I know not man?”*<sup>1</sup>. And in his inability to explain such a sublime Mystery, the Archangel replied, *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you”*<sup>2</sup>: As if he meant to say: “You must know, Mary, that my intelligence does not reach so high, nor can it penetrate a Mystery so lofty and so profound. The Holy Spirit will set your soul on fire with his most high power and overshadow it, ‘knowing’ you as His delightful Bride”. In these words that the Angel said to Mary it can be seen that he did not understand such a profound Mystery. It was an unfathomable Mystery. But it is all the same an abyss of love where every soul must submerge itself totally until, swallowed up and absorbed in this furnace of love, it will no longer live in itself but wholly in God and, made one with him it is enabled in some way to respond to such an infinite love, returning love for love, pain for pain, that is: bearing with gladness and acceptance all the afflictions of this life for his sake; returning poverty for poverty, that is: rejoicing in being deprived of all things, even of the most necessary, imitating our beloved Jesus who was born and died in extreme poverty; returning life for life, that is: offering God our life in a ceaseless self-sacrifice, mortification and perpetual death of all things that could give delight to our human misery; and lastly everything for everything, offering to God a whole-burnt offering both internal and external, so that he himself may do of her, in time

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<sup>1</sup> Original in Latin *“Quomodo fiet istud, quoniam virum non cognosco?”*.

<sup>2</sup> Original in Latin *“Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi”*.

and in eternity, as He pleases. In so doing, the soul stores nothing for her own comfort. In fact, the one-and-only comfort of the soul must consist in dying to self, denying her own will in order to carry out God's will, perfectly. Nor should we think that dying to self means having gloomy thoughts all the time. As a matter of fact I can affirm that it consists in enjoying Heaven's bliss in anticipation, and if my word for it is not enough, let a Sister who practises mortification come here, and speak on her own experience. I am amazed when I look at your face, which seems to be the very picture of death. Tell me, then, Sister, how do you feel, and what do you do, with that look of melancholy and sad demeanour? - What do you mean? I am not sad at all! - But how can that be? You are so taciturn, you deny yourself even the tiniest comfort, you never speak up in your own defence, you never satisfy even the most natural curiosity, always ready to do whatever you are told, most prompt in regular observance, the first to lend a hand in hard work.

Sister dear, you are not made of bronze nor of iron, that you should never give in an inch. If you don't relax a bit, I can see it clear on your face that death is near; it is something that breaks my heart. I assure you once more, and tell you quite frankly, I don't know what melancholy is. Oh! If you knew what inner peace my soul enjoys, you wouldn't talk like that! You may be thinking that true joy means talking and having fun.

My God! If you really think so, you are very much mistaken, because true joy consists in being faithful to God and denying ourselves till death.

But such a marvellous grace is granted by God as a result of sustained prayer, profound fidelity to God and living as much as possible aware of His presence. By such means I have obtained from the Lord the grace of inner quiet, in which I find my God, and thus all virtuous practices become sweet and pleasant to me. You must know, then, that the quiet repose I have in God from the moment I wake up till I retire to rest, is derived from the three deaths that I have dealt to my soul: I mean to say, to all that is *Visible, Sensible and Spiritual*, and so I am all the time, moment by moment, attentive to my God, and to what he wants from me, and it is almost impossible for me to do otherwise.

By God's grace I am always ready to obey him faithfully, and with his assistance I will do so till I die. I know that some people do not like my silence, because it cuts me off from that sociability which in the community is very necessary and pleasing; but I must simply have patience because I must and want to please God, provided Holy Obedience does not require something different from me. In that case I will hold myself duty bound to leave God for God's sake, yet always acting in God. For the rest, I would never stray from my life-pattern. Don't be surprised, therefore, Sister dear, at my reservedness, since the cause for it is God, in whom I find my delight.

And why should I mind that I be forsaken and disliked by everybody? Or that my body should succumb to the rigour of a mortified life? What matters to me is that God is pleased; everything else does not worry me at all.

Indeed, let this poor life of mine soon be consumed so that I may go and see in all the splendour of his glory, my most beloved Spouse, my one-and-only Good: *When shall I come and see the face of God? I long to be dissolved, and be with Christ*<sup>1</sup>. - It is a thing that I crave for, that I long and pine for, and the more this desire consumes me, the more it comforts me. But you, dear Sister, don't be anxious about me. Let me be consumed that I may soon fly to the Centre of my being, and there be at rest for all eternity. I myself shall pray for you, too, that the Lord may make you perfect and holy. But is there anything else you want from me? - Tell me, don't you feel, as a first reaction, a certain dislike towards those who wrong you? - No, Sister dear. For many years now I have never felt anything of that sort. In fact, by God's grace, I enjoy a deep peace that puts me at rest in God, and makes me love those who offend me even more tenderly. I acknowledge this as a very special grace that God grants me; I could never deserve to have it. But do remember: the only means to acquire all the virtues is to attend to a sustained dying to yourself, never paying heed to that poisonous beast of self-love that is always lurking around to spoil all the virtues; in short, remember that in the measure that you die to yourself, you live in God. This explains why in mortifying oneself lies true joy. A genuine, ardent love is never, never tired; it burns ever more ardently as it tends towards the infinite, as the object of her love Himself is infinite.

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<sup>1</sup> Original in Latin "*Quando veniam et apparebo ante faciem Domini? - Cupio dissolvi, et esse cum Christo*".

For Him she bears much, but to her it seems too little, and all sorts of suffering, affliction and humiliation seem to her pearls of great price. She looks at them, but in order to embrace them; she likes to feel them because she knows that they enable her to acquire divine love, in which she finds delight and rest in the midst of her afflictions.

She loves beyond her capacity, and in the midst of love she is aflame with pure love, nor does she aspire to anything except to love, which is everything for her. Even in ordinary things she can't help loving. If she nourishes herself, she eats love; if she drinks, she drinks love; if she speaks, she speaks of love; if she walks, she walks in love; if she takes rest, she rests in love; she is wholly divinized in love, and here she abides in love, because love is everything for her.

Here all the virtues come to their perfection, at this point all the designs that God had in creating this soul are fulfilled; in this ardent love God is satisfied with the infinite benefits He has granted us and He considers Himself obliged to reward us for ever in Heaven. *I shall be your great reward*<sup>1</sup>. What a high motivation we have to love our Supreme Lord, when we reflect that our soul is like a 'particle'<sup>2</sup> of the divine essence, a beat of his divine heart, a ray of his divine face, a breath of his divine mouth, and as soon as it was created, he rested in her: *My*

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<sup>1</sup> Original in Latin "*Ego ero merces tua magna mimis*".

<sup>2</sup> In the sense that the soul, even before it is created, was from all eternity in the mind of God, as it is stated several times.

*Creator rested in my tabernacle*<sup>1</sup> - finding His delight in her, His Paradise.

From all eternity He had her in mind and established her in His love: *"I loved you with an everlasting love"*<sup>2</sup>. He had always loved her. Just like a skilful sculptor who forms in his own mind a beautiful statue: he sees it beautifully fashioned and established in his mind, and loves it even before he carves it out. God has done like that with us. From all eternity we have dwelt in his divine mind, and he has always loved us. *"I loved you with an everlasting love"*.

And so, what shall we do in this poor earthly dwelling when our whole being has been totally divinized in God? ... Ah! Let us rise aloft unto the stars, let us lift ourselves to the heavens above, let us enter our homeland and join the citizens of Heaven. My God! Since it is from you that I have come, grant me the grace to fly to you more speedily, without lingering a moment longer in this dark prison.

What have I to do here on earth, in this vale of tears and of misfortunes? It is to you, my God that I aspire, for you my heart is yearning. *When shall I come and see the face of God?* And again: *I long to be dissolved, and be with Christ*<sup>3</sup>. But since this is not granted me and I am compelled to live, and

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<sup>1</sup> Original in Latin *"Qui creavit me, requievit in tabernaculo meo"*.

<sup>2</sup> Original in Latin *"In charitate perpetua dilexi te"*.

<sup>3</sup> Original in Latin *"Quando veniam et apparebo ante faciem Dei? - Cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo"*.

God alone knows how long, in this painful exile I will embrace suffering, I will bear hardship and I will mortify myself and on the Cross I want to die with you, my Supreme Good, till in jubilation I will exclaim: “*It is finished*”<sup>1</sup>. And I will promptly add: “*I am coming to you, most gentle Jesus*”<sup>2</sup>.

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This is a copy taken from an original tract written in her own hand by the late Sr. Rosa Vignoli, a professed nun at St Clare’s Convent, Lovere, who died in the odour of sanctity.

**END**

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<sup>1</sup> Original in Latin “*Consummatum est*”.

<sup>2</sup> Original in Latin “*Ecce venio ad te, dolcissime Jesu*”.