

# HUMILITY OF HEART

*“Never suffer pride to reign in thy mind or in thy words, for from it all perdition took its beginning.”* —Tobias 4:14



# HUMILITY OF HEART

*By*

Fr. Cajetan Mary da Bergamo

1660-1753

CAPUCHIN

*Translated from the Italian by*

Herbert Cardinal Vaughan

1832-1903

*“God hath overturned the thrones of proud  
princes and hath set up the meek in their stead.  
God hath made the roots of proud nations to  
wither and hath planted the humble of these  
nations . . . God hath abolished the memory of  
the proud and hath preserved the memory of  
them that are humble in mind.”*

—Ecclesiasticus 10:17, 18, 21

TAN Books

Charlotte, North Carolina

First published circa 1905. Published by TAN Books in 1978 by photographic reproduction from a 1944 reprint edition of Newman Bookshop, Westminster, Maryland. Retypeset, with minor copy editing, and republished by TAN Books in 2006.

The text of this book has numbered sections from Unnumbered 1 at the beginning of Chapter 1 through Number 153, the last section of the book. Some section numbers are missing. These are also missing from the text reprinted by Newman Bookshop in 1944, from which TAN Books reset this edition. These missing section numbers could represent typographical errors in the original English edition dating from about 1905, which interior evidence would indicate Newman Bookshop reproduced photographically. Or, they could represent sections of the original Italian edition purposely omitted by Cardinal Vaughan in his translation, or even by whoever had his translation originally typeset and published after his death. A search has been initiated by TAN Books for a complete Italian edition of *Humility of Heart* to solve this question.

ISBN 978-0-89555-766-7

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

TAN Books  
Charlotte, North Carolina  
[www.TANBooks.com](http://www.TANBooks.com)

2011

To  
The priests ordained by me  
For the Diocese of Salford  
And the Archdiocese of Westminster  
And for the  
foreign missions.

Also to  
The Ladies of Charity  
Established by me in  
Salford and Westminster,  
In the conviction that  
Their works of charity, if planted in  
The garden of humility,  
Will bear a fuller and  
Richer harvest than if sown in  
Any other soil.

Herbert Cardinal Vaughan  
Archbishop of Westminster  
April 23, 1903



## Publisher's Preface

**H**UMILITY OF HEART is one of the few books on the virtue of humility, and it is probably the best! As the author points out in several places, humility is typical of all Saints; it is the underlying virtue of all virtues; and as the author shows, the easiest way to acquire all other virtues is to concentrate first on acquiring humility.

What exactly is humility? It is definitely *not* a grovelling self-deprecation or even low self-esteem. Rather, it is an accurate view of oneself and where one stands in relation to all others, but especially where one stands in relationship to God and how difficult it is for a person consistently to perform supernaturally good acts purely from a motive of love of God.

Humility, as the author points out, is diametrically opposed to the Capital Sin of Pride and wars against that powerful inclination within fallen man. Before we can commit any sin, we have to commit the sin of Pride, for as Scripture says, "*Pride goeth before the destruction, and the spirit is lifted up before a fall.*" (Proverbs 16:18). Also, before every sin we commit, we have to lie to ourselves that it is *not* a sin, or at least that our sin

is *not so bad* as we may think. Thus, lying blots out humility because it purposely obscures the truth and is directly opposed to the virtue of humility, which sees the exact truth of things.

Now Pride can take on many and very subtle forms, deceiving even the most intelligent of spiritual aspirants. It is the one Capital Sin that even the highly principled and noble-minded can fall into. Often, as Father da Bergamo points out, it is the one sin that ensnares the intelligent, educated, highly moral person, even him who is dedicated to God's work. Whereas such highly disciplined and enlightened people would perhaps never descend to Gluttony, Lust, Covetousness, Avarice, etc., they nonetheless will often succumb to some subtle form of Pride.

The author repeatedly says here that *if one thinks he is humble, he is not!* This is a very discouraging thought! And the reader should be prepared *not* to become discouraged by what he or she will encounter in this seemingly simple little book. For *Humility of Heart* tackles the greatest spiritual enemy man has, his own pride, which *per Sacred Scripture itself*, (*Proverbs 16:18*)—along with lying—precedes every sin. Now we know that everyone commits some sins. As the Bible says, “For a just man shall fall seven times and shall rise again.” (*Proverbs 24:16*). Therefore, everyone is proud—to some extent at least. The logic is inescapable. And therefore, *Humility of Heart* is addressing mankind's biggest problem: pride-filled lying, which precedes every sin that



all human beings engage in—at least to some slight degree—despite what might be their great education, learning, accomplishments, status, honor, esteem, rank, adulation, etc.

Thus, acquiring true humility and also properly assessing the enormity of the job one shoulders in honestly pursuing humility is nothing short of the toughest assignment one will ever undertake. But we *must* undertake it, for Our Lord has admonished us: “*Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart.*” (Matthew 11:29). The neophyte to serious spirituality, therefore, should be on his guard against discouragement at the prospect of attaining this essential virtue. It will entail a spiritual sort of “hand-to-hand combat” that will continue all one’s life and battle him right to the end. For it is a struggle against the most profound, inherent flaw in human nature—Pride.

Once overcome, however, all the other virtues follow in its train rather easily. The beginner in the spiritual life simply has to be aware of the strength of this powerful adversary he is challenging in attempting to acquire humility—it is his very own corrupt, often miserable self, his own nature at its deepest, most selfish level, inherited through Original Sin from our first parents, Adam and Eve!

Attaining humility, therefore, is *the great battle* in life, the one that will lead (through success) to sanctity and salvation, but (through defeat) to sin and perdition. It is a light, little book you hold,

Dear Reader, but one outlining the greatest fight you will ever enter—the battle to overcome your own prideful self, as you war against “the world, the flesh and the devil.” But the stakes are high, and the results eternal, one way or the other.

Cardinal Vaughan’s brother indicates that the Cardinal carried an Italian copy of this book with him, to read from again and again. It would behoove us all to read it at least *several* times—periodically—to impress its truths firmly upon our minds.

In passing, one cannot help admiring the Cardinal’s intrepidity in translating this essential book during the last days of his life, when he must have known he was dying. He could have easily and without criticism simply engaged his final days in a long retreat and self-examination before meeting Our Lord, but besides doing something like that, he also labored to bequeath this spiritual gem to the English-speaking world and thus ultimately to make it available everywhere. May God reward him for doing so and may you the reader be rewarded for taking up its challenge.

—Thomas A Nelson  
Original Publisher  
February 7, 2006  
St. Romuald–Abbot  
St. Richard of Lucca–King

## Original Preface

THESE “Thoughts and Sentiments on Humility” were written by Cardinal Vaughan during the last months of his life. Being ordered out of London by his medical advisers, the Cardinal went to Derwent, where, as the guest of Lord and Lady Edmund Talbot, he found that perfect freedom and multitude of peace of which he had long felt the need.

It was while reposing his soul in quiet prayer and feasting his sight on the fine scenery of this ideal spot among the moorlands of Derbyshire, that the thought came to him of translating, while yet there was time, Father Cajetan’s treatise on humility.

For more than thirty years Cardinal Vaughan had known and studied that work, and it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that he had made it during the last fourteen years of his life his constant companion, his *vade mecum*—[literally, “go with me”; a handy reference book one carries].

What lessons it had taught him, what sights it had shown him, what stories it had told him, those only know to whom he revealed his inmost soul. However even those who knew the Cardinal less intimately could scarcely fail to realize in

their dealings with him that they were treating with a man whose growing characteristic was humility of heart. A more truly humble man I have seldom if ever come across. It was the humility of a child; it was so sweet and simple, and yet so strong and saint-like—may I not even venture to say, Christ-like?

It was the sort of humility that could not go wrong, for it was founded on truth. It *was* truth! Does not St. Bernard remind us that “Humility is truth?” It is a truth which, inasmuch as it is a home-thrusting truth, none of us can afford to ignore. It is the truth all about oneself in one’s triple alliance with God, with one’s neighbor, with one’s own soul.

Humility may not inappropriately be called the starting post in that race for Heaven of which the Apostle speaks. It is the *terminus a quo*—“the end to which” one ultimately tends—in the spiritual life. It is the first of the many lessons set before us in the school of sanctity—a difficult lesson, I grant you, and one which Nature seeks to shirk or to put off indefinitely, but for the man who means to graduate to Heaven, there is no escape from it. Accordingly, our Divine Master . . . reminds all His would-be followers, without distinction, that they must learn this lesson, get it well by heart, and into the heart; for Humility is the alphabet out of which every other virtue is formed and built up. It is the soil of the garden of the soul, “the good ground” on which the Divine Sower goes forth to sow His seed.

It is in the school of Christ and from the lips of Christ Himself that we must learn humility. "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart." (*Matt.* 11:29). By following the Master Himself, by studying His own Heart, we have to acquire, to appreciate and to practice this first, this vital, this vitalizing, energizing virtue—without which no man can hope to make any progress at all on the Royal Road heavenward.

So all-important for us creatures is the acquisition of humility that Our Divine Lord became man in order to put before us in His Own Person this great object-lesson in its most attractive beauty. "He humbled Himself." "He emptied Himself." He became the humblest of the humble because, as St. Augustine points out, the "Divine Master was unwilling to teach what He Himself was not; He was unwilling to command what He Himself did not practice."

With Our Dear and Blessed Lord as our great example of humility, we may well—one and all of us—set about practicing, with some hope of success, this indispensable virtue, this *maximum bonum*—"greatest good"—as St. Thomas calls it.

To his own soul Cardinal Vaughan found so much benefit from the cultivation in it of humility, that he resolved, at no small cost to himself, in the feeble state in which he then was, to gird himself and to go forth sowing broadcast into the soil of the hearts of the laity, as well as of the clergy, this despised little mustard seed of which men speak so much but know so little.

It was Padre Gaetano's work on humility that had been the instrument in God's hand of helping the Cardinal. Accordingly, in his zeal for souls, he proposed to put it into English, in order to bring the work within the reach of all who care for the health, growth and strength of their own individual souls in solid virtue.

That the Cardinal has left us a precious legacy in this treatise on humility will, I feel sure, be the verdict of all who study or who only peruse these pages, rendered into English from the Italian of the devout Minor Capuchin, whose death occurred two centuries ago [d. 1753].

Between the covers of this unpretending volume there is nourishment for all who "hunger and thirst after justice" (*Matt.* 5:6). For the proficient in the spiritual life, as well as for the beginner, humility, as it were, is holding in itself all those elements that are needed to build up the strong Christian man. In humility, the soul will find a sovereign remedy for its many ills, a matchless balm for its many wounds, while a soul-beauty all its own will spring up in all who shall learn how to use it wisely, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. "He who is truly humble," says St. Bernard, "knows how to convert all his humiliations into humility," while out of humility, God can raise a soul to what otherwise might be giddy heights of sanctity. If anyone should need a proof of this statement, I will refer him to any chapter in the life of any Saint in our Calendar. For a moment, gaze into the face of "the Woman clothed

with the Sun" (*Apoc.* 12:1), and remember the words, "*Respexit humilitatem ancillæ suæ*"—"He hath regarded the humility of his handmaid." (*Luke* 1:48). The height of Mary's sanctity is gauged by the depth of her humility: "*Exaltavit humiles*"—"He shall exalt the humble."

To the Clergy and Ladies of Charity, to whom the Cardinal dedicates these "Thoughts and Sentiments," this volume will come with very special meaning. It enshrines the last words of a great churchman, of a truly spiritual man, while it conveys a special message from the Cardinal's heart to all readers.

This treatise is a sort of last will and testament of Cardinal Vaughan, bequeathed to those with whom he was most intimately associated in work for the good of souls. It is a legacy from one who made humility a life-long study and who had more opportunities than most of us know of making tremendous strides in it, through the humiliations which he welcomed as most precious opportunities offered him by God for the salvation and sanctification of his soul. May he rest in peace.

Bernard Vaughan, S.J.  
Derwent Hall,  
August 8, 1905.





## Introduction

**F**ATHER Cajetan, or Padre Gaetano Maria da Bergamo, was one of the great Italian missionaries of the eighteenth century. Born in 1672, he was professed a Minor Capuchin in 1692, and died in 1753. His eulogy, contained in the work on Illustrious Writers of the Order of Minor Capuchins, is brief and pregnant: "*In religiosae vitae moribus nemini secundus, in omni genere scribendi facile primus.*" ["Second to none in the customs of religious life, first in writing with ease on things of every kind."]

He was one of the reformers of the Italian pulpit, substituting for the vapid, empty rhetoric which then prevailed, a solid, learned and instructive style, animated by zeal and real devotion.

His religious works, written amid missions and courses of sermons, are contained in thirty volumes; of his writings Benedict XIV says that "they have this rare quality in our day, that they satisfy the intellect and the heart; their solid doctrine in no way dries up their tender devotion, and their devotional sweetness in no way detracts from the perfect solidity of their doctrine." He was a model religious, remarkable for his charity, zeal and love for God and for souls, which he had built

up in the solid foundation of profound humility, with which he united a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

I confess that, though I have been in possession of the Monza edition of his work for over thirty years, it was not till recently that I looked seriously into them. The first of his volumes is the one that has most struck me; and this I took up thirteen or fourteen years ago and have never put it down since. For it seems to supply so much of what the soul most needs, and which everyone must feel that he can never possess sufficiently, if even he possess it really at all, namely *Humility of Heart*.

There is a great advantage in using such a book as this for two or three years consecutively as a meditation book. The human mind is so volatile, the character so restless, convictions are so slow in taking a deep and permanent hold on our practical life, that I have always considered that a retreat made upon one idea, and two or three years given to the meditation on one great subject is productive of more solid good than the following out of the ordinary system, which of course has its own advantages, commending it to the greater number. I venture even to think that for many persons living amidst the distractions of the world, such as priests engaged in the active ministry and devout men and women of the laity who are deeply in earnest about the work of their sanctification, the persevering study of one book for years—such as the *Spiritual Combat*, St.

Alphonsus on *Prayer*, Blessed [now "Saint" Louis] De Montfort on *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Padre Gaetano on *Humility of Heart*, Palma on *The Passion*, and certain other treatises which need not be named here—is far more important than for recluses and good people living out of the world. We never get a proper hold of a great spiritual doctrine until we have lived in it and been saturated by it. The soul must soak in the brine until it has become wholly impregnated with its qualities. And is this process likely to be carried out by one who thirsts for variety and is always on the move towards some totally new sensation from the one that at present occupies his feelings? There is the question of breadth, I know, as well as depth. But he who said "*Times hominem unius libri*" ["Fear the man of one book"] hit a truth that must be felt by every earnest soul.

One need not fear that the constant handling of one book will dry up the mind, if the topic treated be one of primary importance and if it be the work of a master on the spiritual life. The number of thoughts and truths suggested by such a book are truly wonderful. It often will happen that far more is suggested than is actually put down by the hand of the writer. But to enjoy this result, you must have put away all hurry; you must have said, "I am going to spend at least a year with this friend; I am going to take him, not merely for a friend, but for a master and a guide." I well remember how one night before bedtime, reading

my da Bergamo in the Chapel of St. Bede's College, a single line suggested this idea or train of thought, God in the Old and New Testaments, named people after their personal characteristics. Now, were I to name myself after my personal traits, I might name myself by the names of the Seven Capital Sins. These are the innate springs of evil within me. They are the heads and sources from which all other sins take their rise. They are like the gall spots, the sour or iron oozings that often disfigure a whole field that has been neither drained nor cultivated. Indeed they are much more mischievous and fatal than these, for they are capable of overflowing and destroying everything that is good and profitable.

The springs of these evil tendencies are so deeply imbedded in our nature that it is almost impossible to get rid of them altogether. The doing so is the work of a lifetime, unless we be able to get below the main well-spring of them all, and so inflict a permanent injury on them all. I may, therefore, take myself in hand thus, and say: "In the name of God, I will call you what you really are, *Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Envy, Sloth*; and I will add to these Seven Capital Sins five other characteristics of my soul, viz., *Weakness, Ignorance, Poverty, Theft and Cruelty*—twelve names which may not be the less appropriate because I do not desire to be publicly known by them: twelve names that may bring home to me some truths and which may be exceedingly good and valuable for private use. For

the first thing is to begin by a profound knowledge of oneself, and of one's own miseries—though it may not be wise or prudent to begin by proclaiming one's sins to the world. Some of these names may be obviously applicable to ourselves, such as Weakness, Ignorance and Poverty. For how weak and ignorant we are, physically and morally! How dependent upon others for the things of commonest use! How poor, too, in grace and virtue and every kind of excellence, especially if compared with many others.

The title of Theft is not so very obvious until we recognize that instead of giving glory to God for every good thing we may seem to do or to possess, we rob Him of this glory as much as we can, in the most natural and thoughtless manner, and attribute to ourselves and appropriate from others to ourselves all the credit and glory of any little thing we do. He who makes this his habit may very deservedly be named a *thief* or "Theft," calling himself by the act he is habitually doing and is habitually famous for. But *Cruelty*, how is this name justified? I have never been fond of giving pain to animals, at least not since I was a senseless child: why should I be called "Cruelty"? We have only to remember and understand that—by our sins we crucify again to ourselves the Son of God—to realize how well deserving we are of the name of *Cruelty*. We give wanton pain to an animal, and we are punished by the law; we are cruel to children, and we are prosecuted; we inflict pain unnecessarily on our friends and dependents, and

we are justly esteemed heartless brutes. It is only Our Lord Jesus Christ, only Our Lord God and Father in Heaven whom we may treat with wanton injury and insult, disobedience and neglect, and escape without any name or mark of contempt and disapproval. I have but to consider my own share in the sorrows and Passion and Death of Jesus Christ, and how His Mother participated in all He suffered, to see how truly I have been a monster of *Cruelty*. And so it seems that in this simple way, by merely repeating thoughtfully these our twelve vicious names to ourselves, we may become each time a little better grounded in the truth inculcated by this admirable treatise on "Humility of Heart."

All this to some may seem fanciful, and they may brush it away as unworthy of consideration. But to others it will not be so, especially if they are given "to ponder over these things in their hearts." [Cf. *Luke 2:19*: "But Mary kept all these words, pondering *them* in her heart."] Such thoughts may be particularly serviceable at certain times. For instance, if you are receiving public homage and addresses in circumstances of unusual pomp and ceremony; or if you happen to be, from your position, the object of any other special veneration, and certain noxious fumes of vanity or self-complacency be found ascending for a moment to your head, an obvious remedy is to reflect that it is not yourself, but your office that is receiving such special honor, and that anyone else occupying the same position would be the

object of just the same respect. But better still than this will it be quietly to call yourself over [again] by the twelve names drawn from your moral qualities and tendencies. The noxious gas is then extinguished; the decked-out worm that you are is crushed in its own exuding slime beneath your feet; and you realize at once that you are playing a part which receives honor due to your official, not to your private, character.

Of course, it is only a small number who are in a position to receive public honors and addresses. But there is no one who is not the recipient from time to time of praise and admiration; and when this seems stinted in kind or quantity, our pride and self-love quickly rises up to supply the defect. It is on these occasions that the slow and measured recital to yourself of our twelve names will scatter the fumes of vanity and leave you in the full enjoyment of a multitude of peace.

But above all, we priests have to bear in mind that, as true representatives of Jesus Christ, we must wear His livery and become truly meek and humble of heart. Without this, He will not know us, except "afar off"—*et alta a longe cognoscit* ["and the high he knoweth afar off." *Psalm 137:6*]. This humility must be consistent and of universal application. We must be humble with our fellow-priests and humble with those with whom we work. The priest is likened by Christ to a fisherman—a fisherman working with his nets, mending them, caring for them, using them to catch fish. He is not represented as fishing with a worm

or as throwing the fly, but as working with his net. The net used by us priests is a rational net, made up of good people who co-operate with us. Thus, Our Lord Himself used the Apostles and disciples and women, as well as preaching with His own mouth. The Apostles did the same. Read the closing sentences to several of the Pauline Epistles to see how many lay people, men and women, rich and poor, He used as forming part of His net to catch souls.

There is a great need in the present day to make use of the Catholic laity in the salvation of souls. The priest must use them like a net held in his hand; he must care for his net, not be surprised if its meshes break from time to time and if they need to be mended.

The rock on which the Ladies of Charity and other lay people who are zealous to help the clergy in apostolic work for souls so often founder is one or other of the many forms of pride. They are unwilling to be guided, to be contradicted, to be restrained in their ardor. They see and above all *feel* things so clearly, so keenly, that they cannot imagine that they are going too fast, doing too much and perhaps spoiling other good work done by persons who deserve consideration. They fully realize that they are impelled by zeal and enthusiasm and that no one just now comes up to them, but they do not know and realize how unsteady and fickle they really are and that it will require only a very moderate amount of coldness or contradiction to throw them off the line and to dis-



courage and fill them with such feelings of annoyance and indifference as will lead them to throw up everything in disgust. Thus they end by doing more harm than they have done good. And all this because they are wanting in the first principles of humility. I should like every Lady of Charity to study this book well, to make it the foundation of her practical life. The result would be that she would become secretly a saint before God, and that she would in the course of her life do ten times, a hundred times, more than she could ever accomplish without humility, "*Humilia respicit in terra, et alta a longe cognoscit,*" says the Psalmist, when speaking of God's dealings with men. ["For the Lord is high, and looketh on the low: and the high he knoweth afar off."—*Psalm 137:6*].

Like all good works, the conversion and salvation of souls are really the work of the Holy Ghost. He employs means and instruments. Happy are we if He employ us, if He associate us in this way with Himself. Do you desire to persuade Him to use you? Do you long to attract Him? Well, there is no surer way than by the practice of humility. You must be humble toward God, toward His visible representatives (for thus you prove your humility toward God), toward your fellow workers, and toward the people whom you must serve lovingly, humbly, patiently, as though you were dealing with Christ.

I have the strongest possible conviction that Our Lord desires to be served, especially in a country like England, where we are "the little

flock,” by a great development of religious activity among the laity, acting in co-operation with and under the guidance of the clergy. But I am equally convinced that unless these new workers are formed on the humility of heart which Our Lord told all of us to learn of Him, they and their overtures will be rejected by God and man. It is for this reason that I have dedicated this volume, written by a most holy and learned missionary, many times commended by zealous popes and bishops, to the Ladies of Charity, as well as to the priests for whose ordination I have been responsible.

—Herbert Cardinal Vaughan  
(1832-1903)  
Archbishop of Westminster\*

---

\* Originally, Cardinal Vaughan did not append his name to the Introduction; it was added by the Publisher of this edition of *Humility of Heart* in 2006.

# Contents

CHAPTER 1	
Thoughts and Sentiments on Humility . . .	1
CHAPTER 2	
Practical Examen on the Virtue of Humility . . . . .	131
CHAPTER 3	
Examen on Humility toward God . . . . .	137
Chapter 4	
Examen on Humility toward Our Neighbor . . . . .	153
CHAPTER 5	
Examen on Humility toward Oneself . . . .	165
CHAPTER 6	
Moral Doctrine . . . . .	175



# HUMILITY OF HEART

*“The beginning of the pride of man is to fall off from God because his heart is departed from him that made him, for pride is the beginning of all sin; he that holdeth it, shall be filled with maledictions, and it shall ruin him in the end.”*

—Ecclesiasticus 10:14-15



## Thoughts and Sentiments on Humility

**I**N Paradise there are many Saints who never gave alms on earth: their poverty justified them. There are many Saints who never mortified their bodies by fasting or wearing hair shirts: their bodily infirmities excused them. There are many Saints too who were not virgins: their vocation was otherwise. But in Paradise there is no Saint who was not humble.

God banished Angels from Heaven for their pride; therefore, how can we pretend to enter therein if we do not keep ourselves in a state of humility? Without humility, says St. Peter Damian (*Serm.* 45), not even the Virgin Mary herself, with her incomparable virginity, could have entered into the glory of Christ, and we ought to be convinced of this truth that, though destitute of some of the other virtues, we may yet be saved, but never without humility. There are people who flatter themselves that they have done much by preserving unsullied chastity, and truly chastity is a beautiful adornment; but as the angelic St. Thomas says: "Speaking

absolutely, humility excels virginity.”<sup>1</sup>

We often study diligently to guard against and correct ourselves of the vices of concupiscence, which belong to a sensual and animal nature, and this inward conflict which the body wages *adversus carnem*—“against the flesh”—(*Gal.* 5:17) is truly a spectacle worthy of God and of His angels. But, alas, how rarely do we use this diligence and caution to conquer spiritual vices, of which pride is the first and the greatest of all, and which sufficed of itself to transform an angel into a demon!

**2.** Jesus Christ calls us all into His school to learn, not to work miracles, nor to astonish the world by marvellous enterprises, but to be humble of heart. “Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart.” (*Matt.* 11:29). He has not called everyone to be doctors, preachers or priests, nor has He bestowed on all the gift of restoring sight to the blind, healing the sick, raising the dead or casting out devils, but to all He has said: “Learn of Me, to be humble of heart,” and to all He has given the power to learn humility of Him. Innumerable things are worthy of imitation in the Incarnate Son of God, but He only asks us to imitate His humility. What then? Must we suppose that all the treasures of Divine Wisdom which were in Christ are to be reduced to the virtue of humility? “So it certainly is,”<sup>2</sup> answers

---

1. *Simpliciter loquendo humilitas virginitatem excedit.* (4 dist., Q. 33, art. 3 ad 6; et 22, Q. 161, art. 5.)

2. *Ita plane.* (*Lib. de sancta virginit.*, c. 35.)



St. Augustine. Humility contains all things because in this virtue is truth; therefore, God must also dwell therein, since He is the Truth.

The Saviour might have said: "Learn of Me to be chaste, humble, prudent, just, wise, abstemious, etc." But He only says: "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart." (*Matt.* 11:29). And in humility alone He includes all things, because as St. Thomas so truly says, "Acquired humility is in a certain sense the greatest good."<sup>3</sup> Therefore whoever possesses this virtue may be said, as to his proximate disposition, to possess all virtues, and he who lacks it, lacks all.

**3.** Reading the works of St. Augustine, we find in them all that his sole idea was the exaltation of God above the creature as far as possible, and as far as possible, the humble subjection of the creature to God. The recognition of this truth should find a place in every Christian mind, thus establishing—according to the acuteness and penetration of our intelligence—a sublime conception of God and a lowly and vile conception of the creature. But we can only succeed in doing this by humility.

Humility is in reality a confession of the greatness of God, who after His voluntary self-annihilation, was exalted and glorified; wherefore, Holy

---

3. *Humilitas acquisita est maximum bonum secundum quid.*  
(*Lib. de Verit.*, Q. 1, art. 1. ad 3: et art. 19 ad 7).

Writ says: "For great is the power of God alone, and He is honored by the humble." (*Ecclus. 3:21*).

It was for this reason that God pledged Himself to exalt the humble and continually showers new graces upon them in return for the glory He constantly receives from them. Hence the Inspired Word again reminds us: "The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things, and thou shalt find grace before God." (*Ecclus. 3:20*).

The humblest man honors God most by his humility, and has the reward of being more glorified by God, who has said: "Whosoever shall glorify me, him will I glorify." (*1 Kings 2:30*). Oh, if we could only see how great is the glory of the humble in Heaven!

**4.** Humility is a virtue that belongs essentially to Christ, not only as man, but more especially as God, because with God, to be good, holy and merciful is not virtue, but nature; and humility is only a virtue. God cannot exalt Himself above what He is in His most high Being, nor can He increase His vast and infinite greatness; but He can humble Himself, as in fact He did humble and lower Himself. "He humbled Himself, He emptied Himself" (*Phil. 2:7, 8*), revealing Himself to us, through His humility, as the Lord of all virtues, the conqueror of the world, of death, of Hell and of sin.

No greater example of humility can be given than that of the Only Son of God when "the Word was made Flesh." Nothing could be more sublime

than the words of St. John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word." And no abasement can be deeper than that which follows: "And the Word was made Flesh." By this union of the Creator with the creature, the Highest was united with the lowest. Jesus Christ summed up all His heavenly doctrine in humility, and before teaching it, it was His Will to practice it perfectly Himself. As St. Augustine says: "He was unwilling to teach what He Himself was not, He was unwilling to command what He Himself did not practice."<sup>4</sup>

But to what purpose did He do all this, if not that by this means all His followers should learn humility by practical example? He is our Master, and we are His disciples; but what profit do we derive from His teachings, which are practical and not theoretical?

How shameful it would be for anyone, after studying for many years in a school of art or science, under the teaching of excellent masters, if he were still to remain absolutely ignorant! My shame is great indeed, because I have lived so many years in the school of Jesus Christ, and yet I have learned nothing of that holy humility which He sought so earnestly to teach me. "Have mercy upon me according to Thy Word. Thou art good, and in Thy goodness teach me Thy justifications. Give me understanding, and I will learn Thy commandments." (*Ps.* 118:58, 68, 73).

---

4. "*Noluit docere quod ipse non esset, noluit jubere quod ipse non faceret.*" (*Lib. de Sanct. Virginit.*, c. 36).

5. There is a kind of humility which is of counsel and of perfection, such as that which desires and seeks the contempt of others; but there is also a humility which is of necessity and of precept, without which, says Christ, we cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven: "You shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven." (*Matt.* 18:3). And this consists in not esteeming ourselves and in not wishing to be esteemed by others above what we really are.

No one can deny this truth, that humility is essential to all those who wish to be saved. "No one reaches the kingdom of Heaven except by humility," says St. Augustine.<sup>5</sup>

But practically speaking, I ask, what is this humility which is so necessary? When we are told that faith and hope are necessary, it is also explained to us in what we are to believe and to hope. In like manner, when humility is said to be necessary, in what should its practice consist, except in the lowest opinion of ourselves? It is in this moral sense that the humility of the heart has been explained by the Fathers of the Church. But can I say with truth that I possess this humility, which I recognize as necessary and obligatory? What care or solicitude do I display to acquire it? When a virtue is of precept [i.e., commanded], so is its practice also, as St. Thomas teaches. And therefore, as there is a humility

---

5. "*Ad regnum cœlorum nemo venit nisi per humilitatem sine aliis.*" (*Lib. de Salut. c.* 32).

which is of precept, “it has its rule in the mind, viz., that one is not to esteem himself to be above that which he really is.”<sup>6</sup>

How and when do I practice its acts, acknowledging and confessing my unworthiness before God? The following was the frequent prayer of St. Augustine, *Noscam Te, noscam me*—“May I know Thee; may I know myself?” And by this prayer he asked for humility, which is nothing else but a true knowledge of God and of oneself. To confess that God is what He is, the Omnipotent, “Great is the Lord, and exceedingly to be praised” (*Ps.* 47:1), and to declare that we are but nothingness before Him: “My substance is as nothing before Thee.” (*Ps.* 38:6)—this is to be humble.

**6.** There is no valid excuse for not being humble, because we have always, within and without, abundant reasons for humility: “And thy humiliation shall be in the midst of thee.” It is the Holy Ghost who sends us this warning by the mouth of His prophet Micheas. (*Micheas* 6:14).

When we consider well what we are in body and what we are in soul, it seems to me most easy to humble oneself and even most difficult to be proud. To be humble, it suffices that I should nourish within myself that right feeling—which belongs to every man who is honorable in the eyes of the world—to be content with one’s own, with-

---

6. “*Et regulam habet in cognitione, ut scilicet aliquis non se existimet supra id esse quod est.*” (22, Q. 16, 2, art. 6).

out unjustly depriving our neighbor of what is his. Therefore, as I have nothing of my own but my own nothingness, it is sufficient for humility that I should be content with this nothingness. But if I am proud, I become like a thief, appropriating to myself that which is not mine, but God's. And most assuredly, it is a greater sin to rob God of that which belongs to God than to rob man of that which is man's.

To be humble, let us listen to the revelation of the Holy Ghost, which is infallible. "Behold you are of nothing, and your work of that which hath no being." (*Is.* 41:24). But who is really convinced of his own nothingness?

It is for this reason that in Holy Scripture it is said: "Every man is a liar." (*Ps.* 115:2). For there is no man who from time to time does not entertain some incredible self-esteem and form some false opinion as to his being, or having, or achieving something more than is possible to his own nothingness.

To know what our body is in reality, it will suffice for us to look into the grave, for from what we see there, we must inevitably conclude that, as it is with those decayed bodies, so it will soon be with us. And with this reflection, I must say to myself: "Why is earth and ashes proud?" (*Ecclus.* 10:9). Behold the glory of man! "For his glory is dung and worms; today he is lifted up, and tomorrow he shall not be found, because he is returned into his earth; and his thought is come to nothing." (*1 Mach.* 2:62, 63).