

THE
SINNER'S
GUIDE

THE SINNER'S GUIDE

VENERABLE LOUIS
of GRANADA, OP

Translated by
a Dominican Father

“If you walk in my precepts, and keep my commandments, and do them, I will give you rain in due seasons. And the ground shall bring forth its increase, and the trees shall be filled with fruit: . . . And you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land without fear. I will give peace in your coasts: you shall sleep, and there shall be none to make you afraid. . . . I will set my tabernacle in the midst of you, and my soul shall not cast you off. I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people.”

—Leviticus 26:3-6, 11-12

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“Be assured, ye who seek that true peace promised to a future life, that you may here enjoy it by anticipation, if you will but love and keep the commandments of Him who promises this reward; for you will soon find by experience that the fruits of justice are sweeter than those of iniquity. You will learn that the joys of virtue, even in the midst of trials and misfortunes, far exceed all the delights of pleasure and prosperity accompanied by the remorse of a bad conscience.”

—St. Augustine



Luis de Granada

Venerable Louis of Granada, O.P.

1504–1588

The Writer of the Spanish Empire

BRIEF OF OUR HOLY FATHER GREGORY XIII

*To our well-beloved Son, Louis of Granada,
of the Order of Friars Preachers*

GREGORY PP. XIII

Dearly Beloved Son, Health and Apostolic Benediction:

Your arduous and incessant labors, both for the conversion of sinners and for the guidance of souls to perfection, together with the valuable assistance you render those who are earnestly engaged in the work of the ministry, have always afforded us great consolation.

Your sermons and writings, filled with sublime doctrine and practical piety, are unceasingly drawing souls to God. This is particularly gratifying to us, for all who have profited by your teaching (and their number is very great) may be considered as so many souls gained to Christ. You have thus benefited your fellow creatures more than if you had given sight to the blind and raised the dead to life. For the knowledge of the Eternal Light and the enjoyment of the heavenly

life, according as they are given to man on earth to know and enjoy, are far above the knowledge and enjoyment of the transitory goods of this world.

The charity with which you have devoted yourself to your great and important labor has gained for you many crowns.

Continue, then, to devote all your energies to the prosecution of your undertakings. Finish what you have begun, for we understand that you have some works yet incomplete. Give them to the world for the health of the sick, for the strength of the weak, for the delight of God's servants, and for the glory of the Church both militant and triumphant.

Given at Rome the 21st of July, 1582,
in the eleventh year of our pontificate.

ANT. BUCCIPALULE

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CHAPTER 1

*The First Motive which obliges us to practice
Virtue and to serve God: His Being in itself,
and the excellence of His Perfections*

TWO things, Christian reader, particularly excite the will of man to good. A principle of justice is one, the other the profit we may derive therefrom. All wise men, therefore, agree that justice and profit are the two most powerful inducements to move our wills to any undertaking. Now, though men seek profit more frequently than justice, yet justice is in itself more powerful; for, as Aristotle teaches, no wordly advantage can equal the excellence of virtue, nor is any loss so great that a wise man should not suffer it rather than yield to vice. The design of this book being to win men to virtue, we shall begin by showing our obligation to practice virtue because of the duty we owe to God. God being essentially goodness and beauty, there is nothing more pleasing to Him than virtue, nothing He more earnestly requires. Let us first seriously consider upon what grounds God demands this tribute from us.

But as these are innumerable, we shall only treat of the six principal motives which claim for God all that man is or all that man can do. The first, the greatest, and the most inexplicable is the very essence of God, embracing His infinite majesty, goodness, mercy, justice, wisdom, omnipotence, excellence, beauty, fidelity, immutability, sweetness, truth, beatitude, and all the inexhaustible riches and perfections which are contained in the Divine Being.

All these are so great that if the whole world, according to St. Augustine, were full of books, if the sea were turned to ink, and every creature employed in writing, the books would be filled, the sea would be drained, and the writers would be exhausted before any one of His perfections could be adequately expressed. The same Doctor adds, "Were any man created with a heart as large and capacious as the hearts of all men together, and if he were enabled by an extraordinary light to apprehend one of the divine attributes, his joy and delight would be such that, unless supported by special assistance from God, he could not endure them."

This, then, is the first and chief reason which obliges us to love and serve God. It is a truth so universally acknowledged that even the Epicureans, who endeavored to destroy all philosophy by denying a Divine Providence and the immortality of the soul, nevertheless maintained religion, or the worship due to God.

One of these philosophers (Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*) proves the existence of God by strong and undeniable arguments. He proclaims the greatness and sovereignty of His admirable perfections, which oblige us to reverence and adore

Him, and shows that for this reason alone, independently of any other title, God has a right to our love and service.

If we treat a king, even out of his own dominion, with respect and honor purely because of the dignity of his person, though we owe him nothing, with how much more justice should we render honor and service to this King and Lord, who, as St. John tells us, bears written "on his garment, and on his thigh: King of kings and Lord of lords"! (*Apoc.* 19:16). This is He who hath "poised with three fingers the bulk of the earth." (*Is.* 40:12).

All beings are in His power; He disposes of them as He wills. It is He who propels the heavenly bodies, commands the winds, changes the seasons, guides the elements, distributes the waters, controls the stars, creates all things; it is He, in fine, who, as King and Lord of the universe, maintains and nourishes all creatures.

Nor is His kingdom acquired or inherited. By His very nature it is for Him an inherent right. Just as man is above the ant, for example, so is the Divine Substance in an eminent degree above all created things, and the whole universe is no more than one of these little insects compared to Him. If this truth were so manifest to the Epicureans, otherwise unworthy of the name of philosophers, how much clearer ought it not be to us, who have been illumined by the light of true Christian philosophy! For this latter teaches us, in fact, that among the innumerable reasons which oblige us to serve God, this is the greatest; and though men were endowed with a thousand hearts and a thousand bodies, this reason alone should be sufficient to cause them to devote them all to His love and service.

Though of all motives this is the most powerful, yet it has the least influence on the imperfect. The reason for this is that, on the one hand, they are more moved by self-interest, self-love having deep root in their hearts; and on the other, being still ignorant, and novices in the ways of God, they are unable to appreciate His grandeur and beauty. Had they a better knowledge of His perfections, His beauty would enrap-ture their souls and cause them to love Him above all things. Therefore we shall furnish some considerations from the mystical theology of St. Denis which will help them to apprehend the perfections of the Master they serve.

To lead us to a knowledge of God, St. Denis teaches us first to turn our eyes from the qualities or perfections of creatures, lest we be tempted to measure by them the perfections of the Creator. Then, turning from the things of earth, he raises our souls to the contemplation of a Being above all beings, a Substance above all substances, a Light above all lights—or rather a Light before which all light is darkness—a Beauty above all beauties and before which all other beauty is but deformity. This is what we are taught by the cloud into which Moses entered to converse with God, and which shut out from his senses all that was not God. (*Ex.* 24:16, 18). And the action of Elias, covering his face with his cloak when he saw the glory of God passing before him, is a lively expression of the same sentiment. (*3 Kg.* 19:13). Therefore, to contemplate the glory of God, man must close his eyes to earthly things, which bear no proportion to this supreme Being.

We shall better understand this truth if we consider with more attention the vast difference between this uncreated Being and all other beings, between the Creator

and His creatures. The latter without exception have had a beginning and may have an end, while this eternal Being is without beginning and without end. They all acknowledge a superior and depend upon another, while He has no superior and is the supreme Arbiter of all things. Creatures are composed of various substances, while He is a pure and simple Being; were He composed of diverse substances it would presuppose a being above and before Him to ordain the composition of these substances, which is altogether impossible. Creatures are subject to change; God is immutable. They all admit of greater perfection; they can increase in possessions, in knowledge. God cannot increase in perfection, containing within Himself all perfection; nor in possessions, for He is the source of all riches; nor in knowledge, for everything is present to His eternal omniscience. Therefore Aristotle calls Him a *pure act*—that is, Supreme Perfection, which admits of no increase. The needs of creatures subject them to movement and change; God, having no necessities, is fixed and immovable, and present in all places. We find in all creatures diversities which distinguish them one from another, but the purity of God's Essence admits of no distinction; so that His Being is His Essence, His Essence is His Power, His Power is His Will, His Will is His Understanding, His Understanding is His Being, His Being is His Wisdom, His Wisdom is His Justice, His Justice is His Mercy. And though the last two attributes are differently manifested, the duty of mercy being to pardon, that of justice to punish, yet they are one and the same power.

The Divine Being thus comprises in its unity apparently opposite qualities and perfections which we can

never sufficiently admire; for, as St. Augustine observes, "He is a profoundly hidden God, yet everywhere present; He is essentially strength and beauty; He is immutable and incomprehensible; He is beyond all space, yet fills all the universe; invisible, yet manifest to all creatures; producing all motion, yet is Himself immovable; always in action, yet ever at rest, He fills all things and is circumscribed by nothing; He provides for all things without the least solicitude; He is great without quantity, therefore He is immense; He is good without qualification, and therefore He is the Supreme Good." Nay, "One is good, God." (*Matt.* 19:17).

Finally, all created things having a limited being, their power is likewise limited; the works they accomplish, the space they fill, their very names, are no less limited. Human words can define them; they can be assigned a certain character and reduced to a certain species. But the Divine Substance cannot be defined nor comprehended under any species, nor can It be confined to any place, nor can any name express It. Though nameless, therefore, as St. Denis says, It yet has all possible names, since It possesses in Itself all the perfections expressed by these names.

As limited beings, therefore, creatures can be comprehended; but the Divine Essence, being infinite, is beyond the reach of any created understanding. For that which is limitless, says Aristotle, can only be grasped by an infinite understanding. As a man on the shore beholds the sea, yet cannot measure its depth or vastness, so the blessed spirits and all the elect contemplate God, yet cannot fathom the abyss of His greatness nor measure the duration of His eternity. For this reason also God is represented "seated upon the cherubim"

(*Dan.* 3:55 and *Ps.* 17:11), who, though filled with treasures of divine wisdom, continue beneath His majesty and power, which it is not given them to grasp or understand.

This is what David teaches when he tells us that God “made darkness His covert” (*Ps.* 17:12), or, as the Apostle more clearly expresses it, He “inhabiteth light inaccessible.” (*1 Tim.* 6:16). The prophet calls this light darkness because it dazzles and blinds our human vision. Nothing is more resplendent and more visible than the sun, as a philosopher admirably remarks, yet because of its very splendor and the weakness of our vision there is nothing upon which we can gaze less. So also there is no being more intelligible in itself than God, and yet none we understand less in this present life.

Know, therefore, you who aspire to a knowledge of God, that He is a Being superior to anything you can conceive. The more sensible you are of your inability to comprehend Him, the more you will have advanced in a knowledge of His Being. Thus St. Gregory, commenting on these words of Job: “Who doth great things and unsearchable, and wonderful things without number” (*Job* 5:9), says, “We never more eloquently praise the works of the Almighty than when our tongue is mute in rapt wonder; silence is the only adequate praise when words are powerless to express the perfections we would extol.”

St. Denis also tells us to honor with mute veneration, and a silence full of love and fear, the wonders and glory of God, before whom the most sublime intelligences are prostrate. The holy Doctor seems to allude here to the words of the prophet as translated by St. Jerome, “Praise is mute before

thee, God of Sion,” giving us to understand, doubtless, that the most adequate praise is a modest and respectful silence springing from the conviction of our inability to comprehend God. We thus confess the incomprehensible grandeur and sovereign majesty of Him whose being is above all being, whose power is above all power, whose glory is above all glory, whose substance is immeasurably raised above all other substances, visible or invisible. Upon this point St. Augustine has said with much beauty and force, “When I seek my God I seek not corporal grace, nor transient beauty, nor splendor, nor melodious sound, nor sweet fragrance of flowers, nor odorous essence, nor honeyed manna, nor grace of form, nor anything pleasing to the flesh. None of these things do I seek when I seek my God. But I seek a light exceeding all light, which the eyes cannot see; a voice sweeter than all sound, which the ear cannot hear; a sweetness above all sweetness, which the tongue cannot taste; a fragrance above all fragrance, which the senses cannot perceive; a mysterious and divine embrace, which the body cannot feel. For this light shines without radiance, this voice is heard without striking the air, this fragrance is perceived though the wind does not bear it, this taste inebriates with no palate to relish it, and this embrace is felt in the center of the soul.”

If you would have further proof of the infinite power and greatness of God, contemplate the order and beauty of the world. Let us first bear in mind, as St. Denis tells us, that effects are proportioned to their cause, and then consider the admirable order, marvelous beauty, and incomprehensible grandeur of the universe. There are stars in heaven several hundred times larger than the earth and sea together.

Consider also the infinite variety of creatures in all parts of the world, on the earth, in the air, and in the water, each with an organization so perfect that never has there been discovered in them anything superfluous or not suited to the end for which they are destined; and this truth is in no way weakened by the existence of monsters, which are but distortions of nature, due to the imperfection of created causes.

And this vast and majestic universe God created in a single instant, according to the opinion of St. Augustine and St. Clement of Alexandria; from nothing He drew being, without matter or element, instrument or model, unlimited by time or space. He created the whole world and all that is contained therein by a single act of His will. And He could as easily have created millions of worlds greater, more beautiful, and more populous than ours, and could as easily reduce them again to nothing.

Since, therefore, according to St. Denis, effects bear a proportion to their cause, what must be the power of a cause which has produced such effects? Yet all these great and perfect works are vastly inferior to their Divine Author. Who could not but be filled with admiration and astonishment in contemplating the greatness of such a Being? Though we cannot see it with our corporal eyes, yet the reflections we have just indicated must enable us in a measure to conceive the grandeur and incomprehensibility of His power.

St. Thomas, in his *Summa Theologica*, endeavors by the following argument to give us some idea of the immensity of God: We see, he tells us, that in material things that which excels in perfection also excels in quantity. Thus the water is greater than the earth, the air is greater than the water, and

fire is greater than the air. The first heaven is more extensive than the element of fire, the second heaven is more extensive than the first, the third likewise exceeds the second, and so of the others till we come to the tenth sphere, or the empyreal heaven, to the grandeur and beauty of which nothing in the universe can be compared. Consequently the empyreal heavens, the finest and noblest of all the bodies which compose the universe, being incomparably greater than all the rest, we may infer, adds the Angelic Doctor, how far God, the first, the greatest, the most perfect of all beings, spiritual or corporal, and the Creator of all, exceeds them, not in material quantity—for He is a pure spirit—but in every possible perfection.

Thus we begin to understand, in some manner, what are the perfections of God, since they cannot but be in proportion to His being. For, as we read in Ecclesiasticus, “According to His greatness, so also is His mercy with Him.” (*Ecclus.* 2:23). Nor are any of His other attributes less. Hence He is infinitely wise, infinitely merciful, infinitely just, infinitely good, and, therefore, infinitely worthy to be obeyed, feared, and revered by all creatures. Were the human heart capable of infinite homage, infinite love, it should offer them to this supreme Master. For if reverence and homage must be proportioned to the greatness and dignity of him to whom they are offered, then the homage we offer God should, if we were capable of it, be infinite also.

How great, then, is our obligation to love God, had He no other title to our love and service! What can he love who does not love such Goodness? What can he fear who does not fear this infinite Majesty? Whom will he serve who refuses to

serve such a Master? And why was our will given to us, if not to embrace and love good? If, therefore, this great God be the Sovereign Good, why does not our will embrace it before all other goods? If it be a great evil not to love and reverence Him above all things, who can express the crime of those who love everything better than they love Him?

It is almost incredible that the malice and blindness of man can go so far; but yet, alas! How many there are who for a base pleasure, for an imaginary point of honor, for a vile and sordid interest, continually offend this Sovereign Goodness! There are others who go further and sin without any of these motives, through pure malice or habit. Oh! Incomprehensible blindness! Oh! More than brute stupidity! Oh! Rashness! Oh! Folly worthy of demons! What is the chastisement proportioned to the crime of those who thus despise their Maker? Surely none other than that which these senseless creatures will receive—the eternal fire of Hell.

Here, then, is the first motive which obliges us to love and serve God. This is an obligation so great that compared to it, all obligations to creatures, whatever their excellence or perfections, are only obligations in name. For as the perfections of creatures are mere imperfections compared with the perfections of God, so the obligations resulting therefrom cannot with justice be considered obligations when contrasted with those which we owe to God. Nor can our offences against the creature be regarded as offenses, except in name, when we remember the guilt we have incurred by our many sins against God.

For this reason David cried out, "Against thee only, O God, have I sinned" (*Ps.* 50:6), though he had sinned against

Urias, whom he murdered; against the wife of Urias, whom he dishonored; and against his subjects, whom he scandalized. The penitent king knew that his offences against creatures, notwithstanding their different degrees of deformity, could not equal the enormity of his revolt against God. For God being infinite, our obligations towards Him and our offences against Him are, in a measure, infinite.