

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

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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

HUMILITY 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

FATHER 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 discourage 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.

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