

HUGH OF BALMA'S DE THEOLOGIA MYSTICA
(On Mystical Theology)

[PROLOGUS]ⁿ¹

[1] “The ways of Zion mourn because there is no one who goes to the solemn feast.”¹ Although this statement was made by the Prophet Jeremiah, deploring incessantly the captivity of his people, it can also be uttered by each comprehending observer when he discerns, throughout the entire world, the very extensive captivity of souls and the vast deviation from the paths of justice and the ways of equity. For “ways” signifies the longings of loving souls—[longings] by means of which even souls that inhabit earthly bodies are elevated, beyond all reason and intellect, unto God and the Heavenly City, Jerusalem. Moreover, these ways are spoken of as mourning because there is no one who has regard for so solemn a feast. For having cast aside true wisdom, the clerics as well as the laity immerse themselves in worldly delights and in useless curiosities.

But what is much more to be deplored and to be lamented unceasingly with tears of the heart [is the following]: that just as formerly the Israelites (having abandoned worship of their Creator), bowed down to hand-made idols, so [nowadays] many of the religious and also many of the well-known and the well-reputed (having abandoned true wisdom, by which God alone is inwardly and perfectly worshiped and adored solely by those who love [Him]) have wretchedly filled their minds with various forms of knowledge and with man-made constructions of multiple arguments—[i.e., filled their minds] with certain idols,² as it were. Being urged on by the Devil, they are so absorbed with these matters, and their minds are so completely prepossessed therewith, that in their minds true wisdom finds no place. [2] For by this very harmful activity—[an activity] which God has granted to the sons of men—they are miserably encaptivated, so that there is no outlet whereby their souls may attain unto their Creator through fiery affections³ of love. For [God] did not create the soul to the end that, contrary to His generosity, it would be filled with multitudinous quires of parchment; rather, [He created it] to the end that it would be the seat-of-wisdom in which would reside the Heavenly City’s peace-loving King, viz., the Most High [Son of God]. For this wisdom, which

is called mystical theology [and which was] taught by the Apostle Paul and written down by his disciple Blessed Dionysius the Areopagite, is the same thing as a stretching forth unto God, by means of longing love. As far as the East is from the West, [so far does this wisdom] incomparably excel all creaturely knowledge. For the teachers of our world teach other forms of knowledge; but the [human] spirit is taught about this [form of knowledge, viz., mystical wisdom] only immediately by God alone, not by mortal man.

[3] This [knowledge] is written on the heart by divine illuminations and heavenly infusions; but that [worldly knowledge] is written on parchment with ink and the quill of a goose. This [knowledge] says “It is sufficient.” For through this [knowledge] the mind discovers the Cause of all things, viz., God, its Creator; and in Him, who is the Fount of all goodness and beauty, it finds rest altogether immediately. But that [worldly knowledge] never says “It is sufficient.” For [the following] is a just judgment: [viz.,] that one who deviates from the supreme truth, as a result of being unconcerned about supreme wisdom, is enveloped in darkness, as is a blind man; and, thus, his soul runs to and fro, stultified by various errors and muddled by human contrivances. Furthermore, [mystical] knowledge kindles the affections and illumines the intellect; but the other [form of knowledge], very often finding a heart devoid of true wisdom, inflates [that heart]; and very often it bedarkens the intellect with various opinions and diverse errors. Therefore, after having abandoned human curiosity that is held captiveⁿ² to the useless knowledge of arguments and opinions, let the religious soul, by longing, ascend through an upward movement of love unto the Fount-of-all-things, in which alone it will find truth; and after having found this precious pearl, let [that soul] be the more attentive to abandoning most willingly other things, for the sake of keeping this truth which previously it either did not love or else loved badly.

[4] But because this supreme wisdom cannot be taught by men, [Dionysius] adds that each [attainer], regardless of the extent to which he is a layman in the school of God, receives this wisdom immediately from God—receives it, beyond all intellect, through the affection of love. No philosopher and no other secular scholar or teacher will apprehend it, regardless of how much he engages in the pursuit of our human wisdom. [5] Accordingly, this way to God is threefold: viz., (1) the purgative way, by which the mind becomes disposed for learning true wisdom; (2) the illuminative way, by which the mind, through reflecting, is kindled into a flame of love; and (3) the unitive

way, by which—beyond all reason, intellect, and intelligence⁴—the mind is directed upward by God alone. By way of illustration: In the case of bridges, when they are being erected, we see that at the outset wooden beams are used as supports, so that the rigid layers of stone may be built over them. But after the erecting is completed, the supporting wooden beams are completely removed. Something similar holds true of the mind. Since at first the mind is imperfect in love, it first ascends unto the perfection of love by meditating. But when as a result of much exercise it is confirmed in unitive love, and when on account of many fiery affections, or yearnings, of love it is elevated beyond itself by the right-hand of its Creator, then sooner than can be conceived and without any guiding or accompanying reflection and as often as it will—whether one hundred times or one thousand times, whether during the daytime or at night—it is touched by God, while yearning with countless desires to possess Him alone. [6] For in this way each new disciple mounts upward, by degrees, unto the perfection of this knowledge. Thus, he first most diligently exercises himself in the purgative way, which is a childish way and the way for beginners.

This [purgative] way commences with the following [consideration]: “Justice and judgment are the preparation of Your throne.”⁵ But next,⁶ after a brief period of time—viz., a month or two, according as will seem to him expedient, on the basis of the divine light radiating from on high—he ascends, by means of reflecting, unto love. But perhaps to someone it may seem presumptuous that the soul, becloaked with numerous sins, would dare to seek from Christ a union of love. If so, let him realize that there is no danger, provided he first kiss Christ on the feet through the recalling of sins, and then on the hand through the recognition of the benefits bestowed upon himself, and provided, thirdly, he ascend unto kissing the mouth⁷ by desiring Christ alone and by cleaving through fiery affections only unto Him, and provided that (as will be seen later) by praying the Lord’s Prayer he mount up in stages, according as through the Lord’s Prayer the mind ascends by reflecting—exercising itself in accordance with the illuminative way, which begins with the following [consideration]: “Night [shall be] my illumination in my pleasures.”⁸ Thereafter, the soul ascends unto a much more excellent stage and state,⁹ where the soul, as often as it will and apart from any guiding knowledge, is immediately touched by God—something which cannot be fully explained by any human effort.

[7] By exercising itself through the purgative and the illumina-

tive ways in the foregoing manner, the soul—being inwardly directed and taught by God alone—experientially perceives that which cannot be disclosed by any mortal knowledge or eloquence. For neither Aristotle nor Plato nor any other mortal is able or was able or will be ableⁿ³ to understand, by means of any philosophy or of any [worldly] knowledge, that which love alone teaches inwardly in order that every rational soul may learn how to obtain knowledge from the supreme and eternal Teacher. All reason, all knowledge, and all intellect fall short of this knowledge. And the affections, disposed by love, soar transcendently above all human understanding, with only the norm of unitive love directing the spirit unto Him who is the Fount of all goodness. This, then, is mystical theology, viz., a hidden divine word by which the mind, disposed through the fervor of love, speaks hiddenly with tongues of affection unto its beloved Christ.

[8] The present mystical treatise proceeds as follows: First, the *purgative way* is exhibited, in which three [topics] are expounded: (a) how the soul ought to be purified; (b) how by means of true prayer an abundanceⁿ⁴ of grace is obtained; (c) how a sinner obtains full remission of sins. Secondly, there is added something about the *illuminative way*, where two [points] are exhibited: I teach (a) how it is that, usually, the mind ascends unto love through meditating by means of the Lord's Prayer and (b) how it is that through this same [illuminative] way, [illustrated] in the interpretation of the Lord's Prayer, all Scripture is interpreted spiritually, by referring everything anagogically¹⁰ to God. Thirdly, there is a specification of the *unitive way*, which begins with the following [consideration]: "You, O wisdom, that have come from the mouth of the Most High"¹¹ In this section [on the unitive way] there is first of all shown how great a sublimity of life there is through mystical wisdom and how great a perfection of virtues there is. [These points are shown] to the end that [mystical wisdom] may be desired more intensely, and may be more greatly obtained, by its practicants.

But perhaps to some reader [this obtaining of wisdom] may seem especially difficult both because of the profundity of the knowledge and the obscure meanings of the words. Since this [difficulty] applies to the third way, which is beyond all understanding, let him exercise himself in the purgative way and in the subsequent illuminative way; and immediately he will experience and sense and understand in his own case, solely through God's inward working, whatever he will find written about the third way or whatever he will be told [about it] by

anyone. [9] For with regard to this wisdom he must first—in his own case and experientially—perceive the truth; and thereafter he will deem the meaning of all the words that pertain to mystical wisdom to be very easy in comparison with whatsoever other doctrine. For this wisdom differs from all other forms of knowledge in the following way: that with respect thereto (1) one must have the use in his own case before understanding the words and (2) practice precedes theory. With regard to all other forms of knowledge one must understand the words before he has the knowledge that is gained. Knowledge is possessed more quickly in proportion to the excellence of the teacher from whom it is acquired. And, thus, it happens that with regard to mystical wisdom a disciple, being taught by God, is more perfect than with regard to any of the liberal arts is a teacher who understands perfectly, or even than with regard to a mechanical art is a good artisan or a diligent architect.

Secondly, in this passage, viz., “Come to Him and be illumined,”¹² there is taught how it is that by reference to all creatures—higher ones as well as lower ones—the rational soul receives perfect instruction for attaining unto love of the Creator. Thirdly, there is plainly expounded the text of [Dionysius’s] *Mystical Theology*, in which, although there are few words, there is “infinite” knowledge and meaning, as it were. By means of this perfect understanding, the difficulty of the books of Blessed Dionysius as well as the mystical sense of the entire New Testament and Old Testament becomes cleared up for true lovers [of God]. For from one fount many streams issue forth, which are distributed into an “infinite” number of rivers, as it were; likewise, from one central point proceed an “infinite” number of lines, as it were. The case is similar with regard to understanding those few words which are interpreted there [in that section of mine]. By those words the [human] spirit, established in its own summit, is taught how it should be united to God; and in this union it will find, experientially, the origin of all wisdom. From this union, without doubt, the faithful disciple is multiply and abundantly instructed about lower forms of knowledge that must be understood clearly for inflaming the hearts of listeners—inflaming them, in the course of preaching, by means of suitable words explanatory of Sacred Scripture.

Fourthly, there are added eight industries,¹³ [or spiritual activities], by which the soul is wisely taught how to obtain this wisdom and how to preserve it, once obtained. Lastly, an argument is appended against certain self-styled intellectuals who impugn this supreme wis-

dom and who maintain that the affections do not at all ascend except by pre-meditating and by reflecting. In the course of this argument their error is refuted by means of authorities and of rational considerations; and the truth about this wisdom is quite effectively explained—viz., that the soul, apart from any intermediary or preventing rational discrimination, and solely by means of the conveyance of love, is experientially elevated beyond itself, as often as it wills to be. Reason does not understand this elevation, nor does the intellect behold it; rather, it is then said, “Taste and see.”¹⁴

[THE PURGATIVE WAY]ⁿ⁵

[*Via Purgativa*]

[1] “Justice and judgment [are] the preparation of Your Throne.”¹ For since by means of the mind’s affection the soul desires to arrive at perfect union with the heavenly Bridegroom, it is necessary that the soul—which, still dwelling in wretchedness, desires to be satisfied (as if by certain falling crumbs)² by the bread-of-angels, by which the blessed spirits are fed in glory—be elevated (ascending in stages, as it were, by means of a threefold office characteristic of angels) through the transmission of a divine influx. For by means of the same heavenly bread, and the same wisdom, the church triumphant and militant is restored, enlivened, and glorified.⁶ For since Blessed Dionysius says that in the hierarchy of the angels there is a threefold angelic office (viz., purifying, illumining, and perfecting): the soul which wills to ascend presently unto Himⁿ⁷ who is the Most High, in whom angelic minds are absorbed in glory (the soul being, as it were, the imitator of those angels) must first be purified, secondly be illumined by divine rays, and thirdly (once situated at the summit of the affective power) be perfected by the loftiness of unitive love.ⁿ⁸

Humility and Grief over Sins

[2] First of all, then, the first way must be discussed, viz., the purgative way, which is a puerile way, as it were, and a way of beginners. Through it the mind, still untrained, is so disposed (apart from the instruction of mortal men and considering only heavenly teachings) that, necessarily, it is elevated (by divine manifestation) from practice unto theoretical illumination—elevated experientially, as simple and as laical as the mind may be. For before that wisdom, which is the Most Blessed God, finds rest in the rational spirit as in its own home (according to the [statement] “the soul of the just man is the seat of wisdom”),³ it is necessary that there be judgment and justice as concerns the soul.⁴ [It is necessary that there be] judgment as follows: in turning away from its Creator (as happens in the case of every mortal sin) the soul, deplorably forsaking the Creator in favor of the creature, despised the Creator. Accordingly, the soul is entirely humbled, so that the humility of this beginner evokes the mercy of God (against whom it offended) in proportion as the soul’s contempt for God provoked divine judgment against the soul for its antecedent sins [of con-

tempt]. It is also necessary that there be justice there.

Thus, that soul which once transformed delight in the Creator into delight in the creature grieves (as its own sins require)—or, at least, grieves that it does not grieve—to such an extent that in accordance with the judgment of the injury to God, nevertheless mercifully, the injury seems satisfied, to some extent, in accordance with the verse “Give to her torment and sorrow in proportion to her having glorified herself and having frolicked.”⁵ Thus, in accordance with the rule of the art of medicine: through two opposites (viz., through humility, [the medicine] opposed to the original contempt, and through grief-over-sins, [the medicine] opposed to the original delight) the soul, as if born anew, would be united to Him who is the Supreme Majesty and Unfailing Goodness—united by means of the unitive bond of most fervent love. Accordingly, we must discuss how it is that humility and grief-over-sins are acquiredⁿ⁹ by a certain befitting necessity.

[3] Although this purgative way seems puerile to some, especially in regard to the subsequent [two ways], nevertheless unless the mind passes through this way, being careful and attentive in its approach to engaging in divine matters, it will never in the present life be able to ascend, in practice, unto a knowledge of divine matters or of God; nor will it be able to ascend unto the fervor of unitive love, nor will it be able to be separated from those lower [objects] that consume those who possess them. Therefore, the soul ought to humble itself in such a way that, first, it recalls its sins in some private and very hidden placeⁿ¹⁰ (especially in the secret silence of the night).

Step One: Confession of Sins

[Let the soul recall] its greater sins succinctly, lest the Devil expose it to delighting [in that thing] for which it was supposed to obtain medicine. Raising its face toward Heaven, let it, as best it can, enumerate before God (as if speaking to Him) its greater sins (up to ten or twelve); and, in enumerating, let the soul sigh, exalting God in every respect and disparaging itself in every respect, and saying as best it can: “Lord Jesus Christ,” (or [phrasing it] in whatever manner it prefers) “I am the most worthless, most miserable sinner, more wretched and more abominable than all others. I have offended against Your majesty and mercy by means of so many and so grave wrongdoings that I am unable to count them—even as the sands of the seashore, because of their multitude, cannot be counted.” And let the soul sigh and groan as effectively as it can. For just as a file brings it

about, in the case of a piece of iron, that with each single rubbing some rust is removed, so each sigh and groan removes some of the rust of sin—the rust which remains even after the outpouring of grace. And in this way the soul, purifying itself more and more, is elevated more and more by divine assistance—elevated unto perceiving things that reason does not investigate and that intellect does not behold.

Step Two: Remembrance of General Divine Benefits

[4] And in order that the mind be more intentlyⁿ¹¹ grief-stricken, let it recall—most attentively and as best it can and unto its own confounding and abasement—the divine benefits (first, in general and, secondly, in particular) that were divinely conferred upon that ungrateful mind. [Let the mind recall], first of all, that from nothing God created it, with respect to its species, to be a very noble creature. Let it say: “O Lord, although beforehand I was nothing, did You not create me, in conformity with Your image, into a very noble being? [Did You not create me] so that at present I might cling to You through grace and in glory might contemplate You face to face? But I provoked Your strict judgment to such an extent that unless You assist me, it would have been better for wretched me not to have been born than to have been brought into the light of this present life.” Secondly, let [his mind], speaking as follows, recall the benefit of the Lord’sⁿ¹² Incarnation: “Are You not, O Lord, that most high King-of-angels who so annihilated Yourself for me that You humbly sustained, after the fashion of a pauper, our miseries and the journeyings of thisⁿ¹³ pathway? By contrast, I, O Lord, not humbling myself but shamelessly exalting myself, despised Your majesty and exchanged You, the Fount of allⁿ¹⁴ beauty, for the momentary miseries of this present life. Whereto, then, shall I flee? If I ascend unto Heaven, You are there; if I descend unto Hell, You are present there, etc.”⁶

Step Three: Remembrance of Christ’s Sufferings

[5] After dwelling a little on this second [phase], let [his mind], speaking as follows, move on to the third [phase], viz., to the recalling of the Lord’s suffering: “It wasⁿ¹⁵ not enough for You, O most sweet Lord Jesus Christ, that You stooped to such an extent that, while remaining God, You assumed the humanity of mortal flesh; rather, in order to lighten the miseries of all mortals You endured such harsh scourgings, such countless wounds, that from the sole of Your foot to the top of Your head there was not a member of Your body that was not splattered with Your own most sacred blood. What, then, shall I

do?—I a most wretched man who am the cause of Your death. Not only did I not repay You like for like but I provoked You with my impurities, so that by a worthy judgment the entire orbit of the world, from the highest pole of the heavens to the deepest center of Hell, ought to war against me. Therefore, let all creatures rise up and, as servants to their own Lord, avenge their Creator concerning me.” And let [his mind] then, [thirdly], reflect a bit upon the Lord’s suffering, so that it may merit, by means of the wound of Christ’s side, to make contact—through the experience of intimate love—with the divinity, concealed hiddenly and internally. These three [steps] the Most High provided not only for that mind but also for all others. Insofar as these steps are the more widespread, they indicate the greater divine mercy.

Step Four: Remembrance of Particular Divine Benefits

[6] Thereafter, let [his mind] reflect particularly upon the things which the Father of all mercy conferred not upon all others but upon it, whom divine mercy called to the office of a priest or to the religion of the Carthusian Order. For this purgative way is the way only of those who (being set apart from the secular way) attempt (although still weak) to soar—like a dove, or a turtle-dove, in the desert—beyond themselves unto the solitude of contemplation, necessarily submitting the removal of all mortal sin to the judgment of conscience.

[7] First, then, let [his mind] reflect upon how many ones more worthy, how many more fit, how many multiply more prepared for the abundant inflow of divine grace the Most High has left embroiled in miseries and in mundane turmoils and has called that mind from the darkness of such great misery unto its own unchangeable brightness. Secondly, let [his mind] not only reflect again on the benefit conferred on it in regard to mundane misery but also ponder the benefit of divine mercy in regard to infernal misery. For many who have not offended so greatly the eyes of Divine Majesty are perpetually thwarted by everlasting curses; yet, his mind, which much more greatly deserved the same [treatment] is called—not because of its own merits but by the free gift of the Creator—unto the ray of grace in this present life and unto the rewards of eternal bliss in the future life. [This situation] recalls the like situation of two thieves—one of whom, being altogether deserving [of punishment], is hung by an earthly king, but the other of whom, being a greater offender than the former, is made (solely by the mercy of the earthly king) a dinner-guest to the king (although his merits speak against this) and obtains honor, not disgrace.

Thirdly, let [his mind] remember that unto which it is called; for the grace of the Redeemer has called it not to the rule of Benedict or of Augustine but to that most blessed rule which our Redeemer Himself chose when He was led into the desert, where He fasted continuously for forty days andⁿ¹⁶ forty nights. And [that mind's] own Forerunner⁷ instituted [this rule] in and of Himself; observing it in His own case, He showed us how it is to be observed. This rule is as exalted over other rules as the divine eloquence excels human teaching.

Exhortation to Humility

[8] But let [his mind], persevering in prayer in the foregoing way, not only reflect upon itself but also direct its own eloquence immediately unto God as it humbly considers both sins and benefits, both generally and particularly, while, nevertheless, recalling in a certain order these things and those things or other things according as the Lord will teach the mind inwardly. So, then, now ashamed because of the recalling of sins and of divine benefits, let [the mind] begin the way of humility, saying: "O Lord, Father of all mercy, I cannot make enough satisfaction to You for the evils that I have wretchedly committed before Your eyes. I am unable to reciprocate You for the benefits that You have conferred on unworthy me. But because I ought not to take my own life, You be the one to put an end to wretched me. However, if this [deed] is not acceptable to Your Benignity, send Your sword-bearing angel to take vengeance upon me. But if because of Your mercy You do not will to bring about that which I have deserved, then because I cannot take my own life, I will do all that I can: I will give myself back to You as Your hireling, serving You perpetually and never at any time during my life ceasing to serve You."

Then let [the mind] prostrate itself face down and humble itself as much as it can, abasing itself and exalting the offended Most High. And the more humble it is, the more quickly and abundantly it will call forth the grace of divine mercy. And thereupon because of the necessity of the divine congruity, the following must happen when the most gracious Father sees the mind thus humbled before itself: He affords sorrow over sins (or, at least, sorrow over not sorrowing), so that because of these two factors, [weighed] against the aforesaid two factors, the purified soul now recovers that which was previously abandoned, and that very thing is at some time restored to it much more fully than beforehand. But even if [the mind] cannot experience sorrow as a result of the afore-prescribed activities, nevertheless let it

every night adhere, briefly, to the aforesaid prescription; for the Creator is satisfied when a man does the best he can. Moreover, the Lord Himself, looking unto the outcome of the matter, withdraws Himself at some time, so that the man, following the aforesaid prescriptions, experiences neither sorrow nor consolation, so that his patience is temporarily tried by God's endurance and so that, later, fuller consolation and greater contrition for his sins are divinely afforded to him.

[9] But because those actions that were prescribed above cannot be done without special grace, there [here] follows [a discussion] of the obtaining of grace through praying—as pertains to the purgative way.

Intercessory Prayer: Praise as Prelude

As regards jesters in the courts of great men, we discern with the sensible eye that when they desire to obtain, unabashedly, from a prince someⁿ¹⁷ temporal advantage or benefit, they first of all praise him in many respects; then they ask for that which they wish to be given to them. Analogously, a new spiritual jester, despising the world as being a deceiver, ought to proceed in an ordered way. First, he ought to praise God in many respects; then he ought to ask for the thing he desires. [10] Although God is unnameable in and of Himself, nevertheless we name Him in terms of His works. And on the basis of these works we praise His magnificence. [We praise Him] *first* in accordance with the fact that He is the Origin and Beginning of every creature, both physical and spiritual. *Secondly*, somewhat more sublimely, [we praise Him] according as He stands in relation to those contemplating Him in His glory, viz., angelic and human minds, whom He beatifies by means of their contemplation of His ineffable beauty, which they behold as it is, and from whom He eliminates, in this way,ⁿ¹⁸ all neediness.

Thirdly, still more sublimely, [we praise Him] according as He stands in relation to all creatures, whom, as Most High, He commands; and all creatures, both rational and non-rational, obey [Him as] their Majesty. *Fourthly*, [we praise Him] in regard to His most noble creature, viz., man. [We praise Him] principally in regard to men who serve their Creator in love. [We praise Him] with respect to the following: that the Father fore-shows to His sons, still dwelling in this life that is subject to misery, many gifts of inner consolation. These gifts are certain indicators of a future happiness, or bliss—indicators for men who, barely existing, are as sons of the Most High. *Fifthly*, and lastly, [we praise Him] in regard to those sinners who have for a

long time existed in sins, however great, and have protracted their wicked deeds. Notwithstanding, when they beat upon the door of divine graciousness, the divine mercy gathers them into the bosom of its love. And [God] mercifully forgives them for the sins committed—forgives them in such a way that from Him, against whom they have so abominably offended, they will one day obtain, more than do the innocent, quite abundant and quite precious benefits flowing down from Heaven. For in these men the divine goodness is shown—shown from the initial manifestation of divinely diffused grace all the way down to the dregs of those existing in sins. And these five [praises] are succinctly included in the following five words: “good,” “beautiful,” “lord,” “sweet,” “merciful.” And after God has been praised with these [words], one will be able, without fear, to ask for that which he intended to, viz., the full remission of the wicked acts that he has done.

[11] For the foregoing manner of praying and petitioning is taught in the Canticles, where the bridegroom says to the bride: “Your voice is sweet and your countenance lovely.”⁸ That is, [we are to pray] by expelling the darkening mist by means of the antecedent purging of sins; and [let there be] a sweet voice, so that in each word the Eternal Bridegroom is specially praised in some respect. And these [five] appellations are properly a “canticle of canticles”; and they befit the soul to such an extent that when the mind directs itself to God, it finds a sweetness enveloped by these words, so that the mind need not wander about in a lengthy discourse through the use of verbose narratives and wordy utterances but may be totally united within itself, having gained access [to God] by means of these [five words]. Thus, then, let him say, as often as he can, “O good, beautiful, sweet, merciful Lord, have mercy on this sinner, whom You have redeemed by Your blood.” Let him pay attention to this alone: that the mercy of the Redeemer spare him with regard to the evils he has committed, without paying attention to that which is included in [the meaning of] each of those [five] words. However, he can say these words, or similar ones, affectionately, according as in giving utterance he knows how to experience greater affection by means of these or similar words.

Intercessory Prayer: Imploring God's Mercy

[12] But in order that the mind obtain the fulfillment of its desire, it must imitate the divine inflow. Thus, just as the spiritual sun of the heavenly city of Jerusalem shines, as far as concerns itself, upon the good and the evil with rays of its goodness, so it is necessary that

the mind prayerfully seek, with all its might, the mercy of the Creator not only for itself or for its kinsmen but also for all those who are engraven with the image of the most blessed Trinity, so that just as God created all and redeemed all, so too He may deign mercifully to aid all without distinction [of persons]. And, assuredly, by means of so praying, the mind will quite quickly call forth the divine mercy—insofar as the mind imitates the vestiges of the Creator-of-all-things and the Redeemer-of-all-mortals, who sheds His love on all men most diffusely. Unless for a brief while the intercession of the one praying both for himself and for others is concentrated in a particular way (although love is always such as to be diffused), the one who is earnestly praying will adopt, for others as for himself, the same affectional manner (regardless of the measure of its smallness), speaking as follows: “O good, beautiful, sweet, merciful Lord, have mercy on all sinners, whom You have redeemed by Your most precious blood.” And then, as best he can, let him have the following representation when he says “have mercy”: that the entire world be inclined toward its Creator through true worship and very worthy reverence.

Intercessory Prayer: Enlisting the Virgin’s Aid

[13] But because, on account of exceeding carnality and mutability, the mind cannot obtain all those foregoing [goods], according as would be expedient: it must act expediently after the fashion of those who have important business at the palace of a regal court or of a supreme pontiff. These men, seeing that they cannot obtain what they propose, approach some important member of the court in order that what they cannot obtain by themselves may be obtained by the interceding reverence of that intermediary. Now, suppose that this needy man locates some outstanding individualⁿ¹⁹ who meets the conditions of being humble enough to listen to the petitions of the needy man and of being distinguished in the court, so that (if necessary) many others [on the court] will intercede with him for the needy man—an outstanding individual beloved by the supremeⁿ²⁰ pontiff, so that the pontiff, being bound to him in affection, wishes to deny him nothing at all. [In such a case] the needy man will obtain, without any subterfuge or any outright refusal, that which he desires.

[14] But because, among the other saints, the foregoing [features] are found most excellently in the Blessed Virgin, let [the mind] flee unto her, speaking as follows: “You, who are most merciful, who are more humble than all others, who are someone most powerful who

inclines herself toward sinners, because through you the fallen angels are restored, through you the door of life is opened to the saints: for these reasons, if you intercede in favor of a needy one, all others will likewise join you in interceding with the most beloved Eternal King, whom you have suckled at your sacred breasts, so that He is joined to you by an ineffable bond of love. I beseech you, then, to assist me in my need, so that in this way I may obtain through your assistance the true purgation of my sins, so that, at length, I may by means of perfect love constrain Him whom you have loved with all your being.”

Thereafter, let [the man’s mind] say “Ave Maria” forty or fifty times—either at the same time or dividing the forty or fifty by a certain number, if he wishes to, according as it will seem best to him. Let [his mind] address these immediately to her face,ⁿ²¹ rendering them to her daily for a tribute and as a sign of love and of spiritual homage, saluting her, attentively and affectionately, not in a picture [of her] on the wall or in a wooden sculpture [of her], but in Heaven.

[15] This is the purgative way and the exposition of it. This way can much more greatly, and much more quickly, be entertained in the heart than considered in writing or in words. Let one who is a beginner reflect briefly and succinctly upon this purgation, and the very broad second way will quite quickly be manifest to him.