

THE FIFTH CONFERENCE(v1)

On Our Love for Human Persons

There are (v2) certain kinds of friendship which seem extremely noble and perfect in the eyes of human persons but which will be found to be insignificant and of no value in the sight of God. The reason is that these friendships are not rooted in true charity which is God (n1), but only in certain agreements and natural inclinations or in some consideration that is both pleasing and praiseworthy. On the other hand, there are others that seem extremely trivial and empty in the eyes of the world but will be found to be wholesome and very excellent before God because they are built up only in God and for God, without any influence of our own self-interest. The acts of charity which are rooted in those whom we love in this way are a thousand times more perfect inasmuch as they all tend toward God. The things we do for those whom we love through our natural inclination are very inferior in merit, because of the great pleasure and satisfaction we have in doing them and because we do them ordinarily more through this motivation than for the love of God. There is still another reason that makes these first kinds of friendships of which we have spoken inferior to the second. They are not lasting because the motive is so weak. Whenever anything happens that is the least bit in opposition (v3), they become cold and change. This does not happen with those that are rooted in God because their motivation is firmly rooted.

Saint Catherine of Siena makes a beautiful comparison (n2) precisely about this. She says, "If you take a glass and fill it in a fountain, and drink from it (v4) at the same time without removing it from the fountain, then you may drink as much as you want. The glass is never empty. But if you take the glass away from the fountain, when you have drunk, the glass will be empty." It is the same with friendships. If you draw them from their source, they will never dry up. The tokens and the signs of friendship that we give to those whom we dislike are better and more pleasing to God than those we do all the while drawing on our natural affections. And this should not be called duplicity or simulation because, even though I have a different feeling, it is only in my lower nature and the acts that I would do, I would do with the power of reason, which is the highest part of my human spirit. Likewise, even though a Sister to whom I offer signs of affection would know that I did so because I dislike her, she should not be offended but rather value and cherish it more than if it were given through natural affection. Dislikes are natural unless we follow through with them. However, it is a way to practice a thousand kinds of good virtues and (v5) Our Lord himself is more pleased when we come to kiss his feet with extreme reluctance than if we come with a great feeling of affection. So, those who have nothing lovable about them are indeed fortunate, for they are assured that the love that is given them is most excellent because it is rooted in God.

Oftentimes, we think that we love someone in God when we really love them for ourselves. We make a pretext of this virtue and say that (v6) is why we love them, when in reality it is because of the good feeling they give us. For isn't it more pleasant to have a person come to you full of good affections, a person who follows your advice exactly, one who faithfully and peacefully follows the way you have shown her, than to see another Sister very anxious, embarrassed and weak in following the right way, one who must be told the same things a thousand times? (v7) Undoubtedly, you will prefer the former more. The reality is then not that you love the person in God, because the latter

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belongs to him as much as the former and you ought to love the second Sister more, for there is more there to do for God. It is true that where there is more of God, that is, virtue which is a participation in the being of God, there must be more affection (v8). For example, if you discovered a person more perfect than our spiritual Father, we should love that person more on that ground. Nevertheless, we ought to love our spiritual Father much more because he is our father and leader.

We must love the good in our neighbor as in ourselves and especially those in religious life where all things ought to be perfectly in common. We must not be offended that a Sister practices some virtue at our expense. For example, I find myself at a door with a Sister much younger than myself and I step back to let her go ahead. As I do this act of humility, she ought to practice simplicity in a greater spirit and she should be ready on another occasion to let me go first. Likewise, if I offer her a seat or leave my place for her, she ought to be pleased that I gain a little merit and so she will share in it. It is as if she said: "Because I wasn't able to do this act of virtue, I am glad that this Sister has done it." And not only must we not be offended but we must be ready to contribute all we can for her, even our clothing, if there would be a need for it. As long as God is glorified, it should not matter (n3) to us through whom. Also, if an occasion should present itself to do some virtuous work and if Our Lord would ask us whom we would like best to do it, we ought to answer: "Lord, whoever would do it mostly for your glory." But we, not having this choice, ought to want to do it ourselves, since charity begins within our very self. However, if we cannot do it, we should rejoice, be pleased and extremely happy that someone else does it. Thus, we will have perfectly placed everything in common (n4). The same applies to temporal matters. Provided that the community is agreeable, we ought not to be troubled if we do it or someone else does. If some minor feelings should arise, it is a sign that "yours" and "mine" (v9) are still present (v10).

We will never really know (v10) our own perfection, for it is like those who are at sea. They do not know whether they are making progress. However, the master pilot who is skilled in navigation knows it. So we cannot estimate our own progress, though we can that of others (v11), for we are not certain when we have done a good action or that we have done it with perfection. In the same measure, humility forbids it. However, even if we could estimate the progress in virtue of someone else, we must never decide that one person is better than another because appearances are deceiving. A person who appears outwardly very virtuous in the eyes of creatures may be less so in the eyes of God than another person who appears much more imperfect (v12).

Humility is not only kind but gentle and pliable, for charity is ascending humility and humility is descending charity (v13). Humility will reach the highest point of its perfection when we will have no more self-will. Through humility, "all justice" is fulfilled (n5).

NOTES

1. Jn. 4:8,16.
2. Catherine of Siena, *Dialog 64*.

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3. not be of any concern – addition for the meaning of the French text.
4. Acts 2:44; 4:32.
5. Matt. 3:15.

VARIANTS

1. E1629. This conference was part of the *Eighth Conference, On Renunciation* (See the v7 of the preceding conference.)
E1933. *Ninth Conference, On Our Love Toward Creatures.*
2. E1629. "You ask how you should love creatures. Briefly, I will tell you that there are..."
3. E1629. "...they grow cold and change. This does not happen to those who are founded in God."
4. E1629. "...you drink from this glass without taking it out of the fountain, then..."
5. E1629. "Our Lord himself is most pleased with us when..."
6. E1629. "Without doubt you will have more satisfaction."
7. E1629. "...for example, if more perfect persons are found than your Superior, you ought to love them more for that reason. Nevertheless, we must love our Superiors more because they are our Mothers and our directors.
"With regard to what you asked me, if we should be happy when a Sister practices virtues at the expense of another. I say that we must..."
8. The *Colloquies* end this conference with the words ("yours" and "mine"). The Rouen manuscript gives four more paragraphs, which are reproduced in the 1933 edition (see the next variant). Two of these four paragraphs from the later additions are less certain, particularly the fragment about useless words drawn from the *Small Custom Book*. We are suppressing them for this reason.
9. E1629. "Finally, you ask if anyone can know if she is making progress in perfection or not. I say that we will not know..."
10. E1933. "When we hear the bell for obedience, we must believe that it is the voice of Our Lord calling us. We must go instantly, even if we might be busy working for God. It is like a

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young bride hearing the voice of her husband, even though she might be doing something for him, leaves everything to go where he is calling. And although a little delay would not be an infidelity, nevertheless it is an act of great fidelity and virtue most pleasing to God not to delay at all. Likewise, there are a thousand things which by not doing them are not sinful, but if we would do them we would perform an act of great virtue, such as: speaking softly, walking quietly, keeping our eyes lowered, recreating well and similar things which are nevertheless necessary for modesty and recollection.

"It is necessary to speak about idle chatter in religious communities. Even if everything which is said is not necessary, it is for the ordinary or simple communication of ideas which keeps the community in good order or words which are spoken during recreation and the community conference where it is good for each Sister to contribute. What in another situation might be useless being said at recreation, it is not because it has a useful goal. But if outside recreation, when one should be speaking about things of devotion, someone tells about her dream, that definitely would be idle chatter. Idle chatter is then what happens when, in order to say something, one multiplies words that are not necessary in order to be heard. Nevertheless, if it should happen through ignorance about what one is speaking, and what one should know to explain it, this would be no sin."

"We will never know..."

11. E1629. "...for we do not dare to assure ourselves when..."
12. E1629. "I want you to have humility above all other perfections..."
13. E1629. The end of the *Eighth Conference*. "I love you more with greater humility and less of other perfections than with more of other perfections and less humility."