

## The Eleventh Conference

### THE ELEVENTH CONFERENCE

#### On the Subject of Compliance with the Will of God (v1)

I am beginning our conference by responding to the question that has been given me on this note, i.e., What does the perfect discernment for finding and following the will of God in all things consist of and can we find or follow it in the will of Superiors or regular members of the community when we see this flowing from their own natural or habitual inclinations?

To begin with, we ought to know that the discernment (v2) for following God's will in all things without exception is contained in the *Lord's Prayer* in the words that we say every day: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (n1). In heaven, there is no resistance to the Divine Will; everything is subject and obedient to it (v3). Thus we ask that this be so for us and we promise Our Lord to do so by never resisting his will, always remaining (v4) completely subject in everything to this Divine Will. I have spoken, it seems to me, very clearly about this in the *Treatise on the Love of God* (n2). However, to answer the question posed to me, I will say something about it again.

The will of God can be understood in two ways: there is the signified will of God and the will of his good pleasure. The signified will is divided into four parts (v5): the commandments of God, the counsels, the commandments of the Church and inspirations. With regard to the commandments of God and his Church, each of us must bow before them and obediently submit, because in them the will of God is absolute, requiring that we obey if we want to be saved. With reference to the counsels, God wills that we observe them not with an absolute will but more in the manner of a desire. Here, we would not lose charity or be separated from God by not having the courage to undertake the observance of the counsels. We ought not want to undertake the practice of all of them, but only those that are best conformed to our vocation. For there are some that are so opposite to others that it would be nearly impossible to undertake the practice of one without being deprived of the means of practicing another. It is a counsel to leave everything one possesses in order to follow Our Lord, who stripped himself of all things. It is a counsel to lend and give alms. Tell me how can one, who has left all things completely, lend or give alms out of nothing? We must, then, follow the counsels that God wills us to follow, and we must not believe that he has given us all of them to be undertaken or practiced. The counsels that we must practice are our *Rule*; I mean that they are all contained in our *Rule*.

But we have also said that God reveals his will in inspirations. This is true, yet he does not want us to discern for ourselves whether what he inspires us with is his will or not, and still less to follow them at random. He does not want us to expect that he himself will reveal his will to us or that he will send us Angels to teach us what his will is. But it is his will that we should have recourse in all doubtful and important things to those whom he has set over us to lead us and that we be totally submissive to their advice and opinions with respect to the perfection of our souls. This, then, is the way in which God manifests his will, and we call it God's signified will.

There is also the will of his good pleasure, which we ought to find in every event, i.e., in everything that happens to us, be it sickness, death, affliction, consolation, things adverse and things

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prosperous; briefly put, in everything that is not foreseen. And we must always be ready to submit to this will of God in every circumstance, whether it be pleasant or unpleasant, in affliction or consolation, in death or life, and in everything that is not manifestly against the signified will of God, for that must always come first. This is how I am answering the second part of the question. To make this better understood, I would like to tell you something that I have read recently in the life of the great Saint Anselm (n3). It is said that during his time as prior and abbot of his monastery, he was fondly loved by everyone because he was so kind, so yielding to the will of all, not only his fellow religious, but even people outside the monastery. If anyone would come and say: "My Father, Your Reverence ought to take a little warm broth (v6). It is very good for your health," he would take it at once saying, "I will drink it." Afterwards, another monk might come and say, "O my Father, that would be bad for you. You shouldn't take it," he would put it down at once. Thus, he was submissive in everything that was not manifestly against the signified will of God; he was submissive to the will of his Brothers, who were very often undoubtedly following their natural or habitual inclination, and even more particularly to people in the world who wound him around their fingers as they pleased.

But this great flexibility and compliance of Saint Anselm was not approved of by all, even though he was loved by all. One day, there were certain of his fellow monks who wanted to correct him in that this was not a good thing in their judgment (v7). On coming to him, they began to say: "My Father, you are really honored and loved by each of us who are in your charge. However, permit us to speak as those who love you more particularly than the others, for it seems to us that you are overly compliant and overly flexible to the will of all. It seems that you ought to be more courageous by making those who are your subjects more compliant to your will and not as you do by submitting yourself to all." "My Brothers," said the great Saint Anselm, "perhaps you don't know why I do this. My Brothers, by remembering that Our Savior has commanded (n4) us that we do to our neighbor what we would have them do to us, by my remembering that, I say I cannot do otherwise. For I wish that God would do my will; thus, I willingly do the will of my Brothers and my neighbors, hoping that it might please the good God to sometimes do mine. Moreover, I have another reason, namely that, beyond God's signified will, I can know God's will. I mean his good pleasure only through my neighbor. For God does not speak to me in words, still less does he send Angels to make known to me his good pleasure. Stones, animals, trees and plants do not speak, only a human person can manifest the will of my God. Therefore, I attach myself to it as often as I can. God commands me to be charitable toward my neighbor. It takes great charity to live in harmony with one another and I find no better way than to be very gentle and compliant. Gentle and humble compliance ought to motivate all of our actions. But the principal thought is that I believe that God makes his will known through the will of my Brothers and, therefore, I am obeying God every time that I comply with them in something. Moreover, hasn't Our Lord said (n5) that unless we become like 'a little child,' we cannot enter the 'kingdom of heaven'? Do not wonder then if I am gentle and yielding as a little child, since by doing so I am only doing what has been commanded by my Savior. It matters little if I go to bed or stay up, if I take some broth or not, if I go here or remain there, but it would be a great imperfection not to submit myself in those things.

Do you see, my dear Sisters, that the great Saint Anselm would submit himself in everything that is not against the commandments of God and of Holy Church, or against the *Rule*, for

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obedience to them takes precedence. No! I don't think that if it had been a question of doing something contrary to those he would have done it. Oh! No! However, beyond that, his general (v8) rule was to be compliant to all and in all things. The glorious Saint Paul, having said (n6) that nothing could separate him from the love of God "neither death, nor life, not even Angels or the whole of hell, even if it banded together against him, would have power over him" (v9). I know nothing finer, he says, than to become "all things to everyone, (n7) to laugh with those who laugh and weep with those who weep," to drink with those who drink so as to become one with everyone (n8, v10). When I say that we must "weep with those who weep," this must not be understood in relation to those who are feeling sorry for themselves. This must not be the case. Furthermore, one ought not become intoxicated with those who do, for even if I could drink when someone presses me very strongly, I being attentive to God's will in relation to this must not go beyond the limits of modesty and sobriety. "But," you might ask, "shouldn't I think that God has inspired this person to come to me and get me to drink?" No! Pay attention about being compliant to another's will with reference to drinking. The will of God is that I drink, but this is not God's will that has been presented to me in drinking.

While Saint Pachomius was making mats one day, a small, poor child (v11) (for he accepted at this time some children to raise in religious life), on watching what the Saint was doing, said to him: "Oh, my Father, you are not doing it right. That is not the way it should be done." The great Saint, who was good at making mats, got up nevertheless very promptly and went over to sit next to the child, who showed him how it should be done. There were several other monks who said to him, "My Father, you are committing two faults by being compliant to the will of this child, for you are exposing him to the danger of being vain (n9). The second is that you are spoiling your mats, which were better when you made them before." The blessed Father answered: "Oh, my Brothers, if God permits this child to be vain, perhaps he will give me humility as a reward, and when he has given it to me, I will be able to give it to this child later on. There is no great danger by passing the rushes over one another to make mats. However, there would be a great danger if we did not take to heart the celebrated words of Our Lord: (n10) 'Unless you (v12) become like a small child,' with regard to simplicity, humility, and compliance, 'you shall not enter the Kingdom' of my Father. Oh, it is a great blessing to be pliable and easily wound around another's fingers!"

Not only have the Saints taught us this practice of the submission of our will but also Our Lord himself did both by deeds and words. What is the counsel of self-denial in itself (n11) except the renunciation of one's own will on every occasion, one's own particular judgment in order to follow the will of God (v13) and, thus, to submit to all and in all things, always with the exception of offending God by one's action? "But," you will tell me, "I see very clearly that what they want me to do comes from a natural desire of their will with its inclinations." Therefore, God has not inspired my Mother Superior or a fellow Sister about making me do such a thing (v14), since it comes from her natural or habitual inclination or even from her passions. No, undoubtedly God has not inspired this desire in her, but he has inspired you to do it, and should you fail to comply, you are going against the decision that you have made about obeying the will of God in all things. Consequently, you would be neglecting the care you ought to have about your perfection. You must always submit in doing what is asked of you in order to do God's will, provided it not be against that will, as pointed out to you in the four ways that I have already spoken about.

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However, the will of human persons can present itself in three ways: either through affliction or delight or through what is purposeless and ill-timed. With reference to the first, we must be very firm to accept willingly these desires that are so contrary to our own as well as being an annoyance. Ordinarily, we would suffer greatly in this practice of following the will (v15) of Superiors but all the more with the wills of equals and inferiors. Generally speaking, their wills will be opposite to our own. Thus, we must accept the following of their wills as a way of suffering and affliction. Ordinarily, when we consider these wills as a delight, there is no need of any exhortation to follow through with them. We willingly obey in matters that please us, and we move toward these wills in order to offer our submission to them. This is not the kind of will, I am assured, that demands that I must submit to it. There is no doubt about it. But there are those which are purposeless and for which we have no reason why they are addressed to us. It is here where there is something profitable for us. For why should I do the will of one of my Sisters rather than my own? Isn't mine also conformed to the will of God as hers is in this trifling matter? For what reason should I believe that what she tells me to do is an inspiration from God rather than to do something else which has come from my own will?

My God! My dear Sisters, it is precisely here that the Divine Goodness wants us to experience the cost of submission to gain the reward. For if we could always see the reason why we are commanded or asked to do such a thing, we would never experience great merit in doing it, nor would we have any great natural dislike because our reason would willingly acquiesce to it. But when the reasons are hidden from us, sometimes our will rebels, our judgment resists. We must rise above the whole matter and with the simplicity of a child get to work without discussing or reasoning about it. I know that the will of God is that I should do the will of my neighbor rather than my own, and I set myself to do it without bothering myself whether it is the will of God that I should submit myself to doing what arises from passions or inclinations or by a movement of reason and inspiration. In little things we must proceed with simplicity. What would be the sense of making an hour's meditation so as to know whether it is the will of God that I have some broth or not, or I drink when I am asked to or that I abstain from drinking, either as a penance or from sobriety and similar small matters that are not worth our consideration, especially if I see that I can please my neighbor ever so little by doing them no matter how small they may be.

With matters of consequence, we must not waste a great deal of time thinking about them. But we should bring them to our Directors so that we might know what to do. After that, we must think no more about them, be absolutely resolved by their opinions, because God has given them to us to lead our spirit into the perfection of his love.

Moreover, if we ought to comply with the will of one another, how much more should we do it with reference to our Superiors, whom we must hold and regard as the person of God himself among us. In fact, they are his assistants. And even if it should happen that they have either natural or habitual inclinations and even passions which might move them to give commands or correct the faults of their subjects, we should not be amazed. They are women like all other women and, thus, subject to inclinations and passions (v16). And although we are not permitted to make such a judgment that they are commanding from passion, in spite of the fact that we know undeniably that they are, we must obey them most gently and lovingly and submit humbly to corrections (v17).

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But, you will say that it is very hard for our self-love to remain subject in all of these experiences. My Superior has a very melancholy disposition and, therefore, if she sees me smiling very pleasantly, she will say to me: "Tell me why you are smiling?" A really great question, why am I smiling? I am smiling because I am joyful. On the other hand, if my Superior has a joyful disposition, immediately when she sees that I am not smiling, she will say to me: "Why are you sad?" Isn't this intolerable? However, it would be better not to offend those who are sad than to ask them why they are so, because ordinarily they would give no reason that would be acceptable.

Let us pass on now and speak about some small matters dealing with Confession.

First of all, we should have a great respect for confessors because we are strongly obligated to honor the priesthood (v18). Consequently, I am saying that we must have a great respect for confessors in the Sacrament of Penance. We must look upon them like the Angels that God sends us to reconcile us with his Divine Goodness (n12) and not simply that but we must look upon them as the representatives of God on earth. Even so it might happen sometimes in trying to help us in Confession that the confessor commits some imperfection by asking some curious questions that are not necessary for the Confession. He might ask you your name, how you are living the Christian life, if you do penances, if you practice virtues and which ones, if you have any temptations (v19), or perhaps some things about your prayers. I would reply simply about what he asked me even though I am under no obligation to do so (v20). We must not answer: "I am not permitted to speak to you about that." Oh, no! We must never use an excuse like that (v21). You can speak about all that refers to your Confession (v22), about your Confession specifically. In general, our Sisters should answer that they do not do harsh penances but not about the practices of the virtues that they do. If you are asked for more than the above in the matter of external practices, you must say yes, but do not speak about anything that is not related to the greater edification (of the community).

To return to what I was saying, if you are afraid to say something about what he asks you, out of fear of embarrassing yourself, as would be the case in matters of temptations, or if you are reluctant to talk about them, as would be the case if he wants to know about them in detail (v23), you can make an intention not to talk about them, saying nothing but understanding so internally. Say nothing to him, or even better, you could answer: "I have some, Father, but by the grace of God, I do not think that I have offended the Divine Goodness" (v24).

Undoubtedly, it would be a serious fault to say to a confessor when he asks if you have anything further to say, having just told him the sins you have committed: "My Father, I still have something else, but my Superior or Mistress has ordered me not to confess it." Those who would do this are wrong because they delude the confessor into thinking that someone is gaining their confidence here and taking away their liberty to confess as they ought to, which is not the point. If, in fact, the Superior tells you, or even your Mistress, when you speak to him about your Confession: "Do not confess this or that," this is not by way of a command but a simple directive. Those who would follow through on this in a spirit of simplicity, by not disturbing themselves but submitting their judgment and believing that since the Superior or Mistress of Novices tells them that this is not a matter for Confession and that they ought not to confess it, they act correctly in not doing it. When they are asked: "Have you anything else to say?" they should simply say yes or no. If they don't answer, they should do it without scruple. But there are others who will not be content if they do not

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confess what has been told them is not for Confession. They like to satisfy their self-love more than following the directive they are given. But when they do answer, they should do it without saying that the Superior directed them not to confess them. For the confessor who does not know what intention the Superior had in saying this, and who does not know your way of life or the state of your soul, will perhaps find there some sinfulness. And not being able to consider the condition of the state of your soul, he will begin blaming the Superior through ignorance and then find this manner of governing very bad. Because this point of having confidence about speaking either to the Superior or the Novice Mistress in order to learn how to make a good Confession is of such great importance it must not be taken away, seeing that confused and uninformed consciences might be produced, which are always unpleasant. However, the Sisters must not commit this fault that I have spoken about of saying that they are forbidden to confess this or that thing. Certainly, it could be scandalous. In good faith, tell your confessor everything that troubles you if you want to, but be careful about speaking about a third or fourth party (v25). This is a matter of great importance.

We ought to comply with the requests of confessors, telling them freely about some small matters that they would like (n13) to know about. On our part, we must take great care to overlook their imperfections. We have a somewhat reciprocal obligation of keeping secret what they talk to us about in the course of our Confession, especially holding in confidence and keeping to oneself their imperfections if they have revealed any to us in the course of the Confession. We should not repeat what they have said unless it concerned some matter of great edification. Otherwise, we must say nothing.

If it should happen that they offer you some advice that is contrary to the *Rule* (v26) and your way of life, listen with humility and respect and then take leave doing nothing about it. Confessors do not always have the intention of obliging us under the pain of sin about what they tell us, any more than Superiors do. Take their advice as simple direction and do not trouble yourselves about putting it into practice if it is, as I have told you, against the *Rule*. On our side, we must value highly what is told us in Confession. We don't realize how much profit there is in this sacrament for persons who come there with the proper preparation and humility. If a confessor would advise something that you could do well, do it just as you would do some regular penance with permission. You must tell him humbly: "Father, I will have to ask permission to do it." But if he would want to give you a penance to do something that would be against the *Rule*, then you ought to tell him very gently: "Father, I most humbly request Your Reverence to change my penance seeing that it is against the *Rule*. I would be afraid of scandalizing our Sisters if I would do it." Or if the penance would be to say a part of the Liturgy of the Hours completely every day or several complete Offices for a year or for a certain period of time, tell him: "I honestly cannot do this," because our time is totally regulated (v27). On our part we must not complain about our confessors.

If something should happen to you in your Confession through the fault of the confessor, you should tell the Superior very simply (v28): "Mother, I would like, if it should please your charity, to make my Confession to someone else, without saying anything further." By so doing, you are not revealing the imperfection of the confessor and so you will have the confidence to make your Confession as you wish. However, this should not be done lightly for trifling reasons and what would

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be of no importance. We must avoid extremes. Just as it is not good to put up with serious faults in Confession, so we must not be so sensitive (v29) that we are unable to put up with some small ones.

For example, a confessor makes me spend a long time in Confession and I need some time to do other things, or I would be humiliated by my Superior about taking so long. She will ask me, perhaps, without indeed wanting to know what, why I took so long, with the full purpose of humiliating me, and for that reason I would be very annoyed while with the confessor. Dear Lord! We must not be so sensitive and so little receptive of mortification by wanting to avoid him as often as one could. My dear Daughters, you say it is out of the fear that you have of offending your Superior.

Oh! No! Forgive me, if you please; it is a weakness caused by our self-love. We must not believe that Superiors are so insensitive. They are not so; no, and they will not press you or ask you to tell them what you don't want to, if this would not be out of simple trust. Nor will they believe that because you are afraid of them, you would tell them everything, and if this should be the case, they ought not be very upset.

Even though you are not obliged to tell her everything, nevertheless it is a very good way to maintain peace and tranquility of heart. Very often those who are reserved in the presence of their Superiors deceive their Superiors, for they abandon God's assistants among them in order to look elsewhere for what they are unable to find because God has placed what they are looking for in the submission and the willing subjection to the authority of their own Superior. As long as this blessing is with us, we must not look any further. Always remember that I have said you are not restricted or constrained about telling everything to the Superior, and less about speaking to your confessor about what you want to, as long as you are not always speaking about yourself.

Now let us move on and talk about what I had intended to say, which is that I strongly urge the Sisters in the community to take great care to specify their sins in Confession (v30). I mean that those who are so dedicated to the presence of God might remember nothing worthy of confessing, or even those who are naturally so simple that, even though they might do several things that might be confessional matter, nevertheless do not take note of them and proceed simply in good faith. Oh God! How happy they are! I have known such a person who was about my age whom I believe never committed a deadly sin. However, even though she was very good, it happened that I saw her commit some serious venial sins in my presence. She then came to Confession but said nothing about them because she had done them in her simplicity so that she didn't even know that there was something wrong about them. Also, I want those who have done nothing worthy of absolution to confess some specific sin; for instance, "I accuse myself in a general way of having told some lies." Your accusation is not a complete one if you do not add, "through vanity," or, "to hurt my neighbor," because there are some lies that are not sinful. Again to say: "I accuse myself of having had some feelings of anger," this is also not complete and is the same as if you would say that you had several feelings of joy, for anger is a passion like joy and sadness. We ought not believe that all these feelings of anger are sinful because it is not in our power to prevent these feelings. We will always experience some passions whether we will them or not. Those who have tried to say the opposite have been condemned by the Church and all the Doctors and Councils. Anger must not be allowed to get the upper hand or lead to some improper actions coming from anger that have taken hold of the person so as to be sinful. Thus, we ought not say that we have had feelings of anger. The confessor would

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be well advised to say: "Go in peace if you have nothing else to say." We must specifically say one thing that is sinful. For example, "I accuse myself that when I was in the world I did such and such a thing on one occasion"; and not saying, "I committed some acts of disobedience." You ought to say in what you were disobedient, if it was a simple or important matter. I want you to hold on to this because it is necessary to put it into practice.

Moreover, I am telling you that I want you to take great care about being truthful, simple and charitable in Confession (v31) (telling nothing except what I must tell). Being truthful and simple in this are the same thing: telling what we have done very clearly without deceit or artifice, noting that it is God to whom we speak and from whom nothing can be hidden. But above all, we must be very charitable, not involving others in our Confession. Accuse yourself about what you have murmured to yourself or even with some Sisters because the Superior is angry with you (v32). Do not say that you murmured about the matter over which she was angry with you; rather say: "I confess that I have murmured about one of the older Sisters" or simply, "I have murmured," without anything else unless you must say if it is to yourself or with someone else, for you do not know the danger and the harm there is in this. Tell only the evil you have done and not the matter that caused you to do it. Don't say that it had been over the matter of a correction if you wonder whether the involvement of the person who made it would contribute very much or very little. And if in fact the wrong that one did with reference to the Superior is a bit greater, it is still not necessary to say that it is with reference to the Superior that you did it, particularly in these things of little consequence.

Briefly put, we must never disclose, either directly or indirectly, the sins of others in our Confession or intend or give our confessor the grounds to suspect who contributed to our sin. I say "indirectly" because someone might say: "I confess that I have had some thoughts when the Superior corrected me through passion." It would be like servants saying they have feelings of impatience every time their mistress became angry with them without reason. But to say very gently: "I confess that I have thought that the Superior became angry with me through passion," without adding, "although I don't have much evidence on which to base it." We must not do that, for you are confessing the sin of the Superior while you are not at fault. The thoughts that are not deliberately dwelled upon are not sinful, any more than the feelings of our passions, as long as they are not followed by some evil words or actions. What I have said about the Superior is also to be understood with reference to one another.

You must not make any useless accusations in Confession. You have had some thoughts about murmuring, about vanity or perhaps even worse. If you have dwelt on them deliberately, tell your confessor in good faith; and likewise, if you have done the same with willful distractions, or if, for want of being well prepared at the beginning of the Office, you have said it with distraction. But if that is not so, do not trouble yourself by saying that you have been careless about being recollected during prayer times. What will the confessor understand by such a Confession? And then, you may be mistaken about whether it is always our fault that we are not attentive in our prayers. We must simply do what we can to be attentive in our prayers and to humble ourselves very gently when we fall, without scruples as to sin where there is none. If you are negligent in rejecting a distraction, that is something else. Confess in all simplicity, without any long introduction about your continual desire for recollection in the presence of God. That is useless in Confession.

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Furthermore, my dear Daughters, I sincerely desire that a great respect and reverence be shown by this community to those who proclaim the Word of God to those who are called to preach. Certainly, we have a great obligation to do this, for it seems they are the heavenly messengers who come from God to show us the way to salvation. We ought to consider them as such and not as mere men. For even if they do not speak as well as the Angels, we must not on that account diminish in any way the humility and reverence with which we ought to receive the Word of God, which is always the same, as holy and as pure as if it were spoken and given by the Angels. I notice that when I write to someone on paper of poor quality and, thus, with poor handwriting, she thanks me with the same show of affection as when I write to her on good paper and with clear handwriting. Why? Because she pays no attention to the quality of the paper and the handwriting but only to the fact that I have written her. It must be the same with the Word. We must not pay attention to the person who offers it or who proclaims it to us. It should suffice for us that God makes use of this preacher to teach us. And seeing that God himself uses him as an instrument, how could we possibly deny honor and respect to the person who stands in God's place (v33)?

Is there anything more to say (v34)? O my dear Mother, it is unbelievable that our Sisters are so attached to the signs of affection shown by a Superior who would not thank them and thus conclude they are not liked (v35). Oh! Forgive me, Mother, our Sisters should love humility and mortification too much to be upset by a slight suspicion, which would possibly have no foundation that they are not loved as much as their self-love would like them to be. But I have committed a fault against the Superior and I am very upset that she might be displeased with me and might not thank me. In a word, she will not think as well of me as she once had (v36), for it is so important that she be well thought of by our Mother. O my dear Sisters, all this trouble (n14) happens from the command of a certain confessor, spiritual father called self-love, which begins by saying: "How I have failed! What will Mother say or think about me? Oh! There is no hope for good in me. I am such a poor miserable creature, I will never be able to do anything that will please our Mother," and other seemly and self-righteous expressions. Such a one does not say: "Alas! I have offended God. I must have recourse to his mercy and hope that he will strengthen us." Such a one says, "Oh! I know well that God is good and he will not consider my unfaithfulness. He knows our weaknesses too well, but our Mother...." We always come back there to continue our complaints.

Undoubtedly, we ought to take care to please the Superior, for the great Apostle Saint Paul addresses this and exhorts us to it when he says, speaking to servants (he is also able to attribute the same to children): "Serve," he says, "your masters fairly" (n15), meaning take great care to please them. He also says later: "Do not be eye (n16) servants," meaning that they should be careful about doing nothing more while in the presence of their masters than they would do when their masters are absent, because the eyes of God are always on them. Thus, they ought to take great care about doing anything that could be displeasing. In so doing, one does not put too much concern on wanting to always satisfy human persons, for this is not within our power. Let us do well what we can so as not to offend anyone. Beyond that, if it should happen that through our weakness we displease them sometimes, we should have recourse immediately to the teaching that I have preached many times to you and that I have longingly tried to engrave on our hearts: Let us humble ourselves immediately before God and acknowledge our weakness and frailty and then correct our fault, if it demands it, by

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an act of humility before the person we have offended. This being done, do not trouble yourself further, for another spiritual Father who is concerned about the love of God (v37) proposes it to you.

He teaches us that after we have performed the act of humility, as I also have spoken about, we should enter into ourselves so as to embrace attentively and wholeheartedly this very blessed humiliation that has come to us from our having fallen, and the very loving (v38) but dispassionate look that the Superior will give us.

We have two kinds of loves, two judgments and two wills. Hence we ought not to make a case for everything that our self-love, specific judgment or our own will suggest as long as we make the love of God rule over our self-love; and then the judgment of Superiors, and in fact the judgment of equals and inferiors, rule over our own, reducing it to a pale imitation of its former self. We ought not be satisfied with simply subjecting our will to doing what is asked of us. We must submit our judgment to believe that we have no reason for not thinking that what is asked of us is reasonable and correct. We must absolutely put aside the reasons that one would like to furnish, and thereby impose on oneself, that what is asked of us would be done better in a way other than the way we have been told to do it.

Oh my God! My Mother, our Sisters are so resolved to love mortification that this will be very pleasing for them to experience. Consolation will no longer be anything in comparison to affliction, dryness, natural dislikes; all these will be desired so as to make them the image of their Spouse. So help them in their undertaking; mortify them well and deeply without sparing them, for this is what they are asking for. They will no longer be attached to the sighs of their affections because these will be opposed to the freedom (v39) of their calling, which will make them hereafter so absolutely drawn to the desire of pleasing God that they will no longer seek anything else, if it is not appropriate to advancing them in the realization of this desire. It is the mark of an attentive heart and of a gentle devotion and of not allowing small contradictory experiences to stop them. Have no fear, for these trifles of sadness and anxious temperaments are forever found among us. We have a great deal of courage, thanks be to God. We will apply ourselves to doing a great deal henceforth, that he will be greatly pleased on seeing us.

Likewise, my dear Daughters, let us purify our intention so that by doing all for God and for his honor and glory we will find our prize in him alone. His love will be our reward in this life and the prize in eternity (v40).

Live Jesus,  
His Glorious Mother, Our Lady,  
and  
Saint Joseph!

## NOTES

1. Matt. 6:10.
2. *Treatise on the Love of God*, Books 8 and 9.

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3. Eadmer, *Sur le livre Des ressemblances divinis*, Book I, Chapter 6. (Attributed to Saint Anselm).
4. Matt. 7:12; Lk. 6:31.
5. Matt. 18:3.
6. Rom. 8:35, 38.
7. 1 Cor. 9:22; cf, 2 Cor. 12:15-16.
8. Rom. 12:15.
9. Mats.
10. Matt. 18:3.
11. Matt. 16:24; Lk. 9:23.
12. See *The Spiritual Directory of the Sisters of the Visitation. Oeuvres XXV*, 157.
13. desirous.
14. trouble.
15. These words are not found in the Pauline texts; cf., Rom. 12:17.
16. Eph. 6:5-6; Col. 3:22.

## VARIANTS

1. E1629. *The Fifteenth Conference, in which is asked what the perfect discernment of discovering and following the will of God in all things consists in; and whether we can find and follow it in the will of Superiors, equals or inferiors, which we see flowing from this natural or habitual attraction; also some important points dealing with Confession and preachers.*  
E1933. *The Sixteenth Conference, On the Subject of Compliance to the Will of God.*
2. E1629. The beginning of the *Conference*, "We ought to know that the determination..."

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3. E1629. "...so we ask Our Lord..."
4. E1629. "...completely subject and obedient in everything to this divine will. Persons, however, have not come to this decision and have need of being enlightened as to how they may recognize this will of God. I have already spoken very clearly about this..."
5. E1629. "...the commandments of God and the Church, the Counsels, Inspirations, the *Rule* and *Constitutions*. With reference to the commandments of God and the Church, everyone must obey them because it is the absolute will of God who has willed that we obey them..."
6. E1629. "...a little broth; he would take it. Another would come and say: 'My Father, that will make you sick'; suddenly he would put it down. Thus, he would submit in all things where there would not be an offense against God and to the will of his Brothers who undoubtedly were following their own inclination, and even..."
7. E1629. "...this was not good in their judgment and that he ought not to be so flexible and compliant to everyone's will but that he ought to make those under his charge bend to his will." The text picks up again with "My children."
8. E1629. "...was to be compliant in these indifferent things."
9. E1629. "...I know nothing better, he says..."
10. E1629. The text does not contain the remainder of this paragraph.
11. E1629. "...a child who while watching what he was doing."
12. E1629. "...become like little children, you shall not..."
13. E1629. "...the will of another and submit..."
14. E1629. "...to do such a thing." The text then picks up with the next sentence.
15. E1629. "...following the will of others which are for the most part opposed to our own. We must therefore accept as a suffering this task of carrying out the will of others and using these daily contradictions to mortify ourselves, accepting them with love and gentleness. With reference..."
16. E1629. "...passions. But we are not permitted to make the judgment that what they command us to do proceeds from passion and inclination and we must be on our guard about doing so. Nevertheless if we should know this for a fact..."

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17. E1629. "...it is a very hard thing to be subject in all these experiences. It is true but we ought not to satisfy and listen to this self-love but only to the very holy love of our persons. Jesus who asks of his dear Spouses a holy imitation of the perfect obedience which he gave not only to the most just and good will of his father but also to that of his parents and even to his enemies, who undoubtedly were following their passions in the burdens they placed upon him. And yet the good Jesus submitted to them gently, humbly, lovingly. We should see clearly that this word of Our Lord which orders us to take up our cross must be understood as enjoining us to take up with an open heart the contradictions that we all experience through holy obedience, even though they may be slight and unimportant.
- I am going to give you still another admirable example to help you understand the values of these small crosses, i.e., from obedience, compliance, and bending to another's will so as to follow the will of another and especially that of Superiors. Saint Gertrude became a religious in a monastery where there was a Superior who was aware that the blessed Saint had a frail and delicate constitution. This is why she had her treated more carefully than the other nuns, not allowing her to practice the austerities that were customary in this community. What do you think that this poor woman did to become a saint? Nothing other than to submit very simply to the will of the Reverend Mother. And though her fervor would have made her desirous of doing what the others did, she gave no sign of this. When she was told to go to bed, she went there simply, without a reply, assured that she would well enjoy the presence of her Spouse in bed through obedience than if she had been in the choir with her Sisters and companions. And to bear witness to the great peace and tranquility of spirit that she acquired by this practice, Our Lord revealed to Saint Mecktilde, her companion, that if she wanted to find him in this life she should seek him first of all in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar and then in the heart of Saint Gertrude. We need not be surprised at this because the Spouse says in the Cantic of Canticles that he rests in the midday. He does not say that he rests in the morning or in the evening but at midday because at midday there is no shade and the heart of this great saint was a true midday where there was not a shadow of scruples or self-will. Her spirit could thus fully enjoy the presence of her Beloved who took delight in her. Finally, obedience is the salt which gives savor and relish to all our actions and makes them meritorious for eternal life.
- Now I would like to say two or three words about Confession, today..." This passage, since it is truly about eternal life, is taken from the Sermon for Saint Blase Day, February 8, 1614. This is found in the *Oeuvres IX*, 19-20.
18. E1629. The sentence following is not part of this edition. The text picks up with: "We must greatly respect..."
19. E1629. The remainder of this sentence is not part of the 1629 text. It resumes with "I will reply..."

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20. E1629. The remainder of the sentence is not part of the 1629 edition. The text adds "...you must never tell them that you are not allowed to tell them anything other than what they have confessed."
21. E1629. "...like that, for it is not true; you can speak..."
22. E1629. "...in confusion, provided you speak only about what concerns you specifically and not those of your Sisters." The text resumes at the beginning of the next paragraph: "...if you are afraid..."
23. E1629. The text skips down to "...you could answer..."
24. E1629. The text picks up toward the end of the next paragraph: "...being forbidden to confess this or that. In good faith, tell..."
25. E1629. Adds: "In the second place, we have a somewhat mutual obligation to our confessors when we make our Confession to be quiet about what they say to us if this was not something very edifying. Outside of that we must not say anything." And skips down to: "If it should happen..."
26. E1629. "...then do what your *Rule* allows and nothing else. Confessors do not always have the intention to bind you under the pain of sin about what they tell you. You must take their advice by way of simple direction. However, you should think and value highly what they tell you in Confession." The text picks up again with: "We don't realize..."
27. E1629. "...totally regulated..." A new paragraph begins with the next sentence: "We must never complain..."
28. E1629. "...coming there with the necessary humility. If the confessor would want to give something for a penance which would be against the *Rule*, ask them gently to change this penance to another one because being contrary to the *Rule*, you fear scandalizing your Sisters if you would do it. However, you must not complain about the confessor. If through any fault of his something should happen in Confession, you could very simply tell the Superior that you would very much like, if it is acceptable, to make your Confession to someone else..."
29. E1629. "...we must not be so sensitive that we cannot put up with some small ones." This text then skips down two paragraphs and begins with "...I strongly urge..."
30. E1629. "...their sins in Confession. I mean that those who have found nothing worthy of absolution must confess some specific sin. To say that we accuse ourselves of feelings of anger, sadness and so on is insufficient. For anger and sadness are passions and feelings of

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those passions are not sinful insofar as it is not within our power to prevent them. Anger must be brought under control or it will lead us into actions that will be sinful. We must specifically mention something that is sinful."

The 1629 text then skips down to the next paragraph and begins with: "Moreover, I am telling you that I want you..."

31. E1629. "...Confession (truthful and simple are the same thing): telling your faults clearly, without deceit or artifice."
32. E1629. "...or even to some Sisters about what the Superior said to you in a very cool way, do not go and say that you complained about the very harsh correction she gave you, but simply that you have complained about the Superior. Tell only the evil you have done and not the reason which caused you to do it. Never disclose directly or indirectly the sins of others in confessing your own, and never give the confessor grounds for suspecting who brought on your sin. Make no useless accusations in Confession. You have had some thoughts about the imperfections of your neighbor, thoughts of vanity, or even worse, you have had distractions in your prayers; if you have deliberately dwelt on them, say so in good faith. Don't be content to say that you have not been careful to keep yourself recollected at prayer. If you have been careless about getting rid of a distraction, say so, because general accusations have no value in Confession."  
The text of 1629 then skips down two paragraphs and begins with: "My dear Daughters, I sincerely desire..."
33. E1629. The end of *The Fifteenth Conference*: "...fail to honor and respect his person."
34. E1629. The end of the *Fifteenth Conference* is found placed at the end of the *Fourteenth Conference* of the E1629 titled, "Against Private Judgment and Self-Indulgence."
35. E1629. The beginning of the paragraph. "Moreover our Sisters must not be so attached to signs of affection of the Superior."
36. E1629. The remainder of this sentence is not contained in the 1629 edition.
37. E1629. "This being done, never be troubled for our confessor, who is concerned with the love of God..."
38. E1629. "This very loving reproof that the Superior will give us."
39. E1629. "The freedom of their calling which will make them so attached..."

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40. E1629. The end of the *Fourteenth Conference*: "in eternity."