

THE FOURTEENTH CONFERENCE

On the Subject of Simplicity (v1)

The virtue that we will talk about is so necessary that, even though I have often spoken about it (v2), Mother Superior wants me to dedicate a whole conference to it. Although there is no great necessity to address it anymore here than elsewhere, the topic of simplicity fits in precisely here. I do think that I will probably say things that I have spoken about before, but there will be nothing lost on hearing them again. Before we begin and offer the Sisters the opportunity to ask questions, we must first of all say what simplicity is.

You know that ordinarily we say something is simple when it is not embroidered, lined or multi-colored. For example, we say: "A woman is dressed simply when her dress is not lined or fancily decorated." I mean a lining we can see, and also her dress is made only of one kind of material. That is a simple dress. Simplicity is nothing other than an act of pure and simple charity that has only one goal, which is to acquire the love of God. Our spirit is simple when we have no other aim in all that we do (v3) or want. The well known story of the hostesses of Our Lord is a very noteworthy example of our topic, i.e., Martha and Mary Magdalene (n1). Don't you see that even though her intention was praiseworthy to entertain Our Lord, Martha was corrected by our divine Master? Our Lord looked beyond the very good intention that she had in her eagerness, and saw that she only looked upon him as a man from a human point of view. And because of that she believed that he was like all men who are not satisfied with a casserole or a simple meal. This is why she hurried around trying to find (v4) oranges, lemons, dressings and the like to satisfy his appetite. By so doing she was expanding her first intention of loving God in her work with several other smaller intentions for which she was corrected by Our Lord. "Martha, Martha, you are anxious about many things" even though "only one thing" is "necessary," which is what Magdalene "has chosen and which will not be taken away from her." This act of simple charity allows us to look at and have no other goal (n2) in sight in all our actions. The single desire to be pleasing to God is Mary's part and is the only thing that is required. This is simplicity, the virtue that is inseparable from charity, seeing that she looks straight at God without ever allowing any additional self-interest. Otherwise, it would no longer be simplicity, for that virtue cannot endure any addition, whether it be creatures or any consideration of them. They have no place there. God alone finds his resting place there (v5).

This virtue is strictly Christian, for the pagans, even those who were eloquent on the other virtues (v6), like Plato and Aristotle, had no knowledge of it, no more than that of humility either. They wrote very well about magnanimity, liberality, prudence, and constancy, but nothing about simplicity and humility. Our Lord himself came down from heaven to make known to us both of these virtues. Otherwise we would always have been ignorant of these very necessary teachings. Jesus tells his apostles: "Be wise like the serpent" (n3), but then goes beyond this. "Be simple as doves." What he means is "Learn from the dove" (v7) to love God in all simplicity. I mean, to gain for yourselves an increase of heavenly love in the simplicity of your heart, having only one intention and one goal in all that you do. Do not only imitate the simplicity of the love that doves show by having only one mate (n4) for whom they do everything and whom alone they wish to please (v8) and whom they fear to displease. But also imitate them in the simplicity that they reveal as they express and

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show in their loving. They do not do it with much sophistication, but they simply make their little coos near their mates (v9), confident that they are certain of their love and satisfied to remain quietly in their presence.

Simplicity banishes from the human spirit both the need and the anxiety that many develop, so they say, as they search for the ability to love God by the sheer number of exercises and other means. It seems to them that if they do everything that the Saints have done, they will most certainly be satisfied. What poor people! They are to be pitied! They torment themselves to find the art of loving God. They don't know that there is none except to love Him. They think that there is a certain ingenuity to acquire this love which is truly found only in simplicity. When we say that there is no art to it at all, we are not disregarding certain books entitled *The Art of Loving God* (n5), for these books themselves teach that there is no art except to love, i.e., to put into practice all the things that are pleasing to God, which is what makes us attain and find this holy love. But this practice is undertaken in simplicity without any difficulty or anxiety. Simplicity truly embraces all the means necessary for each of us according to our vocation to acquire the love of God (v10). It does this without any detour from its goal, which is the love of God, in suchwise that it wants no other motive but this goal for attaining or being incited to look for the love. Otherwise, simplicity would not be perfectly simple. It cannot put up with any other concern, however perfect it may be, than the pure love of God, which is its only project. For example, if you are going to the Office and someone asks: "Where are you going?" One should say: "I am going to the Office." "But why are you going?" "I am going to praise God." "But why are you going now rather than some other time?" "This is why, the bell has rung. If I wouldn't go, it would be noticed." The goal of going to the Office to praise God is good, but this motive here is not simple because simplicity demands that I would go drawn by the desire to please God without any other consideration. It is the same in everything we do.

Before going any further, we must correct a weakness that is found in the human spirit of many persons with reference to this virtue. For they think that simplicity is contrary to prudence, that the two virtues are opposed to each other. This is not so, for these virtues are never opposed to one another but are bound together in the closest union. The virtue of simplicity is opposed to and contrary to the vice of guile or cunning, an evil that is the source from which all deceit, craftiness and acts of duplicity flow. Guile includes deceit, deceptions and malice, and it is by means of cunning that we find out how to deceive the mind of our neighbor and those with whom we come into contact so as to lead them on to the point about which we are scheming. This point is to convince them (v11) that we know nothing other than what we are telling them and that we have no other opinions or knowledge about the subject in question, except what we have revealed to them. This is something which is absolutely the opposite of simplicity, which demands that our interior be conformed to our exterior.

However, I do not mean, my dear Daughter, that we must reveal exteriorly the feelings we have interiorly from our passions. It is not against simplicity to show a calm exterior at such times, as you might think. For we must always take note of the difference between the effects of the superior part of our spirit and the effects of our inferior part. It is true that you can have an intense reaction in your inferior part on receiving a correction or from some other sort of contradiction, but our feelings do not flow from our will. All the trouble goes on in the inferior part of our reason. The higher does

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not consent to it at all but approves, accepts and finds this correction good. We have said that simplicity is continually concerned about acquiring the love of God. The love of God asks of us that we control our feelings and that we mortify and subdue them. This is why we are not required to manifest or make them known exteriorly. Thus, it is not a lack of simplicity to have a calm exterior when we are anxious about something. "But," you say (v12): "wouldn't we be deceiving those who see us inasmuch as they would believe us to be very virtuous when we really are not?" My dear Sisters, this type of reflection about what others will say or think about you is contrary to simplicity. For we have said that this virtue is only concerned with satisfying God and not creatures, except insofar as the love of God demands it. After the truly simple religious (v13) or anyone who possesses the virtue of simplicity has completed something that she has judged she must do, she no longer thinks about it. And if the thought would occur to her to know what others say and think about her, she would cut off all that immediately because she will put up with nothing that would move her away from her intention, which is to remain attentive to God and to allow his love to grow within her. The consideration of creatures has no power to move her, for she refers everything to her Creator.

It is the same with what you have asked, whether it is permissible to use prudence and not tell our Superiors everything, especially when we think that what we might have to say would trouble them or even ourselves in telling them. Simplicity is concerned only with whether it is expedient to say or do something, and then sets to work to do it or not, without wasting time considering whether the Superior will be troubled or will I be if I make known to her some thought that I have had about her or about what she might also do to me. If it is expedient for me to tell it, I should do so very simply, leaving what happens to God's will. When I have done my duty, I should not be troubled about anything (v14), for God does not will that I should.

We ought not always fear being troubled, either for ourselves (v15) or for another, for being troubled in itself is not sinful. So the *Spiritual Combat* (n6) does not want us to go looking for it and preparing for a battle when there isn't one. If I know that by going into a certain group something might be said to me that might trouble and disturb me, I ought not to avoid going there; but I should go armed with the confidence that I ought to have in the divine protection that will strengthen me so as to overcome my own nature, which I wish to fight against. This conflict goes on only in the lower part of our human reason. This is why I must not be surprised when there are no results, I mean when we do not consent to what it suggests. In such a case we must not do it. Where do you think this being troubled comes from so often, except from a lack of simplicity? Or by wasting time thinking such thoughts. What will they say or what will they think? Instead of thinking about God and what can make us more pleasing to his Goodness.

But if I say such a thing, I will be more troubled than before saying it. Well, if you don't want to say it and if it isn't necessary seeing that you have no need to be instructed about it, make up your mind quickly and lose no time wondering whether you ought to say it or not. We are not meant to spend a whole hour considering all the small actions of our lives (v16). If I would tell the Superior all the thoughts that would mortify me the most, I might be greatly troubled afterward. My dear Daughters, you ask whether it is expedient or necessary to tell all the things that would mortify you the most. It seems to me that it would be better to tell her those than a number of others that are of little use except to prolong your interview with her. If you are still troubled, it is only because you are

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not mortified. Why should I talk about what is not helpful for me by leaving out what could mortify me the most. Simplicity, as we have already said several times, seeks only the love of God. For the love of God is never found more assuredly than in the mortification of ourselves. The measure that this mortification increases within us, the nearer we come to the point where we shall find the love of God (v17). And so it is if you fear mortifying and troubling the Superior. You do not trouble them, for Superiors ought to be perfect, or at least do the works of the perfect, and so their ears are ready to hear whatever you want to say to them, and without upsetting themselves very much about it. Simplicity does not meddle with what others are doing or will do; it thinks about itself. But even with regards to itself it is only concerned with really necessary thoughts and with reference to the rest, it turns quickly away from them. This is closely related to humility, which does not allow us to have a low opinion about anyone but ourselves (v18).

You now want to know how one ought to observe simplicity, openness and honesty in conversation or at recreation, the more so, you say, as there is such a great diversity of human spirits that it is impossible that what you say be approved by or be found good by all. Certainly, it would be good if we could always make our words pleasing both to the feelings and temperaments of everyone so that no one could find fault with anything; that, however, is impossible. Therefore, we must not worry ourselves about doing it, for it isn't necessary. But must I consider each word that I intend to speak so as to avoid offending someone? No, provided that you observe the *Rule* by saying only what is necessary and which promotes recreation and a spirit of happiness. For, if a thought should occur about something that was not conformed to it, it would be necessary not to say it, seeing that simplicity always follows the rule of the love of God in everything. And if indeed one ought to be pleasant in conversation, one still ought not to be inconsiderate by speaking about everything under the sun, which only happens in a fantasy. But perhaps I might be with a Sister who can be a bit sad and finds nothing pleasant in my conversation, while I am in a cheerful mood and want to recreate. What about it? My Daughters, must I not be on my guard? What would you do? Today she is serious or sad, at another time you will be the same. Right now you must make recreation happen for her and yourself, and at another time she will do the same for you. But wouldn't it be a good thing to see if, after having said something amusing, I would turn to look at all the Sisters one after the other to see if they are laughing and approving of what I have said. But if, on seeing someone who does not, shouldn't I begin to be troubled and because of that believe that she did not find it amusing or that she has put a bad interpretation on it? We must certainly not do that, for it is self-love that would make us do this. It would not be advancing in simplicity, for simplicity does not run after its words or its actions but leaves them to divine Providence, on which it fully depends. Simplicity turns neither to the right nor the left but simply follows its path simply. And if along the way it finds occasions to practice some virtue, it makes careful use of it as a proper way to reach its goal, which is the love of God (v19), but it is not eager for them and yet does not despise them. However, simplicity is not troubled but is not overly eager to find them. It stays calm and peaceful, confident that God knows its desire, which is to please him, and that suffices.

But how can one reconcile two things so opposite to one another? We are told on the one hand that we must take great care with reference to our perfection and our advancement in it, and on the other not be allowed to think about it. We should take notice of the basic lowliness of human

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nature, which never stops at the midpoint but runs to the extremes (v20). A young girl who was forbidden to go out at night will not fail to say: "My God! I have the worst mother you can imagine! She will not even allow me to leave the house." She was only forbidden to go out at night and she says that it is forever. Another sings too loud and is told about it: "Well," she will say, "they complain that I sing too loud. I will sing so low that they will not hear me." Or better, another because she walks too fast, walks so slowly that you can count all the steps. What are we to do there? We must have patience provided that we do not want to foster these faults and they are not done through obstinance. We cannot always walk so straight a line that we do not stumble or bend to either side of the extremes. We must be satisfied, provided that we straighten ourselves up as soon as possible. We inherit this defect from our first mother, Eve, for she did much the same when the evil spirit tempted her to eat the forbidden fruit (v21), telling him only that God had forbidden them to touch it!

You ask, my dear Sister, whether you ought to answer simply when a Sister asks you if you have been mortified by something that she has said or done. Even though she shouldn't ask such a thing, if she is a Sister whom you know will not lose confidence over it and it is true, you can tell her very simply: "Yes," adding however, that you beg her not to allow that to stop her from being very frank because you like it. But if you suspect that she will be offended by it, you can answer in such a way that she will always have confidence to challenge you.

Some people make the mistake of thinking that to show signs of affection and friendship to those whom you dislike would be deceitful and crafty, which it isn't. Natural dislikes are not willful and are rooted in the inferior part of the human spirit. The will rejects them even though they do not go away. The acts of love that we make toward those whom we dislike flow from our heart, which tells us to overcome them. Therefore, even though we have a feeling that is out of sync with our words and actions, we do not lack simplicity because of it, for we do not make these feelings at home. They are like strangers, which indeed they are. The foolishness of people in the world is great, for they boast of having simplicity in this case because they look down on their enemies, saying that they are frank and not deceitful.

It isn't wrong either to pretend not to want to do something for which you have a strong inclination, if your motivation is to give a Sister confidence so that she will feel satisfied in doing it (v22), thus mortifying you by depriving you of the opportunity to do it. Nevertheless, this desire is only in the lower part of the human spirit even though you would prefer to do it. In the superior part of your human spirit, however, you prefer the consolation of your Sister to your own. And so we must always understand in everything that the movements in the lower and sensitive part of our human spirit do not enter and have no part in our consideration, anymore than if we didn't notice them.

Have we anymore to say about simplicity? For we will have to say a word about prudence, but that will be later, for only a little prudence is needed, but a great deal of simplicity.

Truthfully, we would be failing in simplicity by spending a great deal of time wondering, after seeing that we are committing faults against each other, whether these things must necessarily be told to the Superior. Tell me, isn't the Superior capable of doing that and also of judging if she must give a correction or not? (v23) It is not as if you would be telling someone who cannot remedy the

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situation. But how do I know what intention this Sister has in doing such and such a thing? Perhaps her intention was good. It could be something good. But, tell me, is the action good or bad? Outwardly, it is bad. Why do you want to say something? You must not accuse her intention, only her action. What are you troubling yourself about? Tell me, my Daughter, if you think that this matter being of little consequence is only going to get this Sister into trouble and as such will possibly not help her at all. All this is not simplicity for the *Rule*, which deals with obtaining the amendment of Sisters by admonitions, and does not command you to spend such a great deal of time on this matter as if the good name of a Sister depends only on the accusation (v24). I would say further, if I knew that this person whom I have to correct would commit a slight sin because of the trouble that the admonition or correction will cause her, then I would not give it. I would even be less inclined to do it if the trouble were the only consideration, since it is not sinful in itself but only in the effects it produces. I would only do it, and we must be careful about this, at an appropriate time, since to give corrections on the spot is dangerous. If I were able to foresee after reflecting a bit that this person was well disposed, undoubtedly I ought to do it. But outside of that, we must do everything that God requires of us, with all simplicity and without scruple. For if this person were upset and troubled after the admonition or correction that I have given her, I would do what I could, but I am not the cause. Her lack of a mortified spirit is the cause. Even if she would commit a slight sin at the time, this sin at the time of admonition will be the cause of her avoiding several other sins that she might have committed because of her continuing behavior in this fault. No, my dear Daughters, the Superior ought not stop correcting the Sister because they have a dislike for correction. We will always have that for as long as we live, because it is something totally contrary to our human nature to like to be corrected and demeaned. This natural dislike, however, ought not be encouraged by our will, which must love humiliation (v25).

The *Rule* speaks clearly on how you can give a specific admonition if the fault is secret. But someone will see you speaking sometime and will challenge you on it. Undoubtedly, the Sisters who live with you do not know what you are talking about. Are they interested? You will really be mortified with that! Oh! Yes! May God be praised for that! That will humble you very much! You really ought to be at ease about what you have taken on by behaving well. For in that you are on the side of Our Lord who, while having never sinned, nevertheless wanted to be taken and put to death as a criminal. The virtue of simplicity lovingly embraces this mortification as a special means to help us arrive much more quickly at our goal, which is to serve Our Lord by a total conformity of our lives and actions.

You now want to know if on seeing that your Superior does not like you telling her the faults that the Sisters find in her, whether you in all simplicity ought not to stop telling her them. Who doubts that? The Superior ought not agree with that; and why consider if she does or not? The Superior listens to you and is willing to hear whatever you want to tell her. Isn't that enough? But she tells me nothing to show that she approves of what I have told her. How important is that? After doing your duty, why be troubled about the rest? Perhaps she will think that what I have told her has some other motive than charity. My dear Daughters, all that is a return to what is very much opposed to simplicity, which only finds pleasure near Our Lord. But let's move on.

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Certainly, I do not know what Mother's intention is, but I believe that it is what you think, to know whether we say something from the simplicity we ought to have so as to allow both God himself and our Superiors to lead us into the interior life. There are certain persons who are, as you say, so good within themselves that they only want the Holy Spirit to guide them; and it seems to them that everything that comes into their head is an inspiration or movement of the Holy Spirit, who takes them by the hand and leads them like children in everything they want to do. They are certainly mistaken in this. For I pray you, was there ever a vocation more special than Saint Paul, where Our Lord himself spoke to him in order to convert him? And yet he would not instruct him but sent him to Ananias, saying: "Go, you will find a man who will tell you what you are to do." And even though Saint Paul might have said: "Lord, why won't you tell me?" He didn't do it, but he went most simply to do as he was commanded. And do we think that we are more favored by God than Saint Paul, believing that he wants to lead us himself without the intervention of any creature (v26)?

There was a young woman who was convinced of this position in her reason. Her confessor himself told me about it. She thought that she ought only do things in relation to what the Spouse would tell her or inspire her, so much so that her mother was puzzled; for if she called her to go to Mass or to go to dinner, she would say about everything that she should do it when the Spouse wanted it, and so she always had to be waiting for the voice of the Spouse. The call of the Spouse for us, my dear Daughters, must only be obedience, for outside of that there is only deception (v27). I am drawn to such an interior simplicity. In the meantime, I should try to follow the exercises that have been given to the others: for example, the practice of the *Directory*, which focuses the special individual attentiveness that we must have in each exercise. There is one thing that is certain: that all of us are not led on the same road, but it is also not correct that each of us individually discerns which road God calls us to. That belongs to the Superiors, who have divine light to do this. We must not say: "They do not know us well." For we must believe that it is so; obedience and submission (v28) are always the true mark of a good inspiration (v29). "But I have no consolation in the exercises that have been given me to do, but I do have it in so many others." That can truly be the case, but the value of our actions is not determined through consolations. We must not be so attached to our self-satisfaction, for this would be to be attached to the flowers and not to the fruit. You will derive more profit from what you do under the direction of your Superiors than from following your own interior instincts. These generally only come from self-love which, under the guise of doing things well, seeks satisfaction in a vain self-esteem.

It is true that our well being depends on our allowing ourselves to be led and directed by the Spirit of God without reserve. This is the goal of true simplicity that Our Lord has so highly recommended: "Be simple as doves," he says to his Apostles, but he doesn't stop there, saying further, "Unless you become like little children you shall not enter the Kingdom" of my Father. A child while she is young is in a state of such simplicity that she has no knowledge of anyone except her mother. She has only one love, which is for her mother, and in this love there is only one goal, which is her bosom. She wants nothing else. The Christian who enjoys perfect simplicity has only one love (v30), only one goal, which is to rest on our heavenly Father's bosom and, once there, to be a loving child, resting there and leaving every care of self to her good Father, without ever troubling oneself about anything, except to dwell in this holy confidence. Not even (v31) the virtues and graces which

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appear to be so necessary should become so disquieting (v32) as to desire them as well as any other care in the pursuit of perfection. Simplicity neglects nothing that it experiences on the way, but it also does not waste time seeking other means of becoming perfect than those that have been marked out. Furthermore, what purpose do desires for virtues (v33) whose practice are not necessary for us serve? Gentleness, the love of our basic lowliness, gentle charity and heartfelt love toward our neighbor are virtues along with obedience, whose practice ought to be common to us all, and the more so because we experience frequent opportunities to practice them. But what about constancy and magnanimity? We should not trouble ourselves about these other virtues which we will never have the occasion to practice (v34).

To sum up, I must conclude by saying something about the distinction I make between people in the world (I am talking about those who live as Christians in the world) and the Sisters of the Visitation. For the former, they must practice prudence in order to increase their means. They have a great concern about supporting their families, otherwise they would not fulfill their responsibilities. Even though they ought to depend more on Divine Providence than on their own strength, so they must not neglect thinking about their affairs. But the Sisters of the Visitation must place all their cares in the hands of God. I am not speaking so much about external things and those that deal with the care of our bodies, but much more strictly with what concerns our spiritual growth, leaving it to the Divine Goodness to give spiritual blessings, both virtues and graces, in leaving it to his divine good pleasure. Their prudence must consist in leaving themselves totally in the arms of divine Providence.

I think that among the animals those who have the most prudence (for there is a natural as well as a Christian prudence) are the smallest and the most cowardly and fearful. The fox, who is crafty and who uses so much cunning, is full of fear. The hare, which is an easily frightened animal, uses a great deal of prudence to escape the dogs that pursue them and sometimes confuse them. The ant has admirable prudence and foresight. Even deer, although they are not small, are timid. But the lion, which is a noble animal, trusting in his own prowess, walks in the simplicity of his own heart and would willingly go to sleep on a highway as in his own den. Camels are very simple also, even though they are so large and powerful that they could put a house on their backs and carry it; they are well fit for the load. Among small animals, we have the dove and the little lamb, who are so simple.

But I must say a word about the prudence of the serpent, for I have often thought that if I were to speak about the simplicity of the dove that someone would quickly bring up the serpent. Several have asked about the serpent from whom Our Lord wanted us to learn prudence (v35). For, when the Israelites were led by Moses into the desert, they were continually bitten by some small serpents from which many died for lack of medicine. Then God, having pity on them, commanded a brass serpent to be nailed up and all who had been bitten by the serpents were to look at it and they would be immediately cured! For the brass serpent who was raised up on the pole in the desert represents none other than Our Lord and Our Master, who had to be raised up on the tree of the Cross on Mount Calvary, thus so wonderfully carrying out the prudence of the serpent. For the serpent reveals its prudence in many ways, first in the fact that while growing old it sheds its old skin. Our Lord did the same, i.e., he cast off his own glory, for he became, as Saint Paul says, "a fool to the Jews and a stumbling block to the Gentiles." But for us Christians he became our edification and

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most beloved Savior, he has become a sweet medicine for all our sins. By looking at him nailed to the Cross, we cannot die. There we find healing for our wounds. In fact, if we want to take the words of Our Lord in this sense: "Be prudent as the 'true' serpent" which, when it is attacked, exposes its whole body in order to protect the head alone. We must do the same. We must expose ourselves totally when necessary in order to preserve the presence of Our Lord within ourselves (v36), i.e., his love which is like our head; for he is our Head and we are his members.

Again, we ought to make an act of prudence by ending our conference for fear of detaining too many of our Sisters. I only desire that we in fact remember that there are two kinds of prudence, i.e., natural and supernatural. Insofar as the natural, we must get rid of it and mortify it, for it is not at all good, inasmuch as it suggests a thousand small considerations and forethoughts which are not necessary and that keep our spirits very far from simplicity.

The true virtue of prudence must be really practiced inasmuch as it is like a spiritual salt that gives taste and savor to all other virtues, but it must be practiced by all of us who belong to the Visitation suchwise that the virtue of simple confidence shall surpass all the others. We must have a totally simple confidence which should make us remain at rest in the arms of our Father and of our dear Mother, assured that we must be like Our Lord, and Our Lady, as our dear Mother, who will always protect us by her loving concern and motherly care because we have come together as this community in her honor and for the glory of her most beloved Son, who is our good Father and very sweet Savior.

Let everything be for the glory and praise of our Savior Jesus Christ, of the Most Blessed Virgin, Our Lady, and of the glorious Saint Joseph (v37).

NOTES

1. Lk. 10:38-42.
2. Aim.
3. Matt. 10:16.
4. A single mate.
5. See the Preface of the *Treatise on the Love of God. The Art of Loving God* by Louis Richeloue, S.J.
6. *The Spiritual Combat*. The work of Italian Theatine Father Lawrence Scupoli appeared in 1589. This work had a very great influence on the spirituality of Saint Francis de Sales.
7. How.

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8. Happy medium.
9. cf Gen. 3:3.
10. perhaps.
11. Acts 9:4,7.
12. Stumbling block.
13. Matt. 10:16.
14. Matt. 18:3.
15. Num. 21:8,9.
16. ICor. 1:23.
17. Matt. 10:16.
18. Eph. 4:15; Col. 1:18; ICor. 6:15.

VARIANTS

1. E1629. *The Twelfth Conference, on Simplicity and Religious Prudence.*
E1933. *Thirteenth Conference, On the Subject of Simplicity.*
2. E1629. "...spoken about it, you still want me to devote a whole conference to it. For we must first of all know what the virtue of simplicity..."
3. E1629. "in everything we do. The story..."
4. E1629. "She moved about hurriedly in order to prepare many dishes." The text resumes with the next sentence.
5. E1629. "...God alone finds a place there. This virtue..."
6. E1629. "...even those who spoke eloquently about the other virtues have no knowledge of this any more than of humility; they wrote very well about magnanimity, liberality and constancy but nothing at all about simplicity and humility. Our Lord himself..."

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7. E1629. "...to love God in simplicity of heart" It then skips to "have only one..."
8. E1629. "...they want to please." It then skips to "but imitate them..."
9. E1629. "...doves and are satisfied."
10. E1629. "...vocation to gain the love of God." It skips down to "suchwise..."
11. E1629. "...to make them understand that we have no other feelings in our heart than what is manifested in our words nor any other knowledge about the subject in question. This is a thing..."
12. E1629. "...to keep a calm exterior when we are inwardly upset. But, you say, wouldn't this be deceiving those who would see us..."
13. E1629. "...the simple person has done something that she considers ought to have been done. She thinks of it no more and if the thought would occur to her what will be said..."
14. E1629. "...not trouble myself about anything else." The next paragraph begins with "She must..."
15. E1629. "...of itself is not a sin." The text then picks up with: "If I know..."
16. E1629. "Moreover, I think, with reference to myself, that it is better and more expedient to tell the Superior the thoughts which mortify us the most rather than many others..."
17. E1629. "...the love of God" and skips down and resumes with, "moreover, Superiors..."
18. E1629. "You ask how much simplicity is to be observed in conversation and recreations. I say: as in all other activities, even though in this one there should be a holy freedom and frankness in talking about subjects that serve to foster a spirit of joy and recreation. We should be very unaffected in our conversations but not inconsiderate inasmuch as simplicity always follows the rule of the love of God. But even though it might happen that some little thing is said which seems to be not as well received as we would like, we must not waste time by making, weighing and examining our every word. No! This without doubt is self-love, which compels us to make such inquiries if what we have said and done is well received. However, holy simplicity does not run after its words." It then picks up with the sentence in the next paragraph. "For simplicity does not run after its words or actions but leaves them to Divine Providence..."

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19. E1629. "...of God, but it is not eager in looking for them, though at the same time it does not despise them. Nothing disturbs it..."
20. E1629. "It generally runs to extremes." The text then skips down and picks up with: "We hold..." in the next paragraph.
21. E1629. "...to eat the forbidden fruit. She said that God had forbidden them to touch it, instead of saying that he had forbidden them to eat it. You were not told not to think at all about your progress but you were not to think about it anxiously." It then skips down four paragraphs and picks up with: "It is true, it would be lacking in simplicity...."
22. E1933. "...on doing this and to encourage you to practice self-mortification by depriving yourself from doing it, for if you do indeed want to do it very much, this desire..."
23. E1629. "Correction or not? But, you say, how do I know the intention a Sister had in doing such a thing? It may well be that her intention was good and you must not accuse her on her intention alone but only on her exterior action, if there is some imperfection in that. Do not say further that the thing is of little importance, not worth getting this Sister in trouble, for all that is contrary to simplicity. The *Rule* which commands us to bring about...."
24. E1629. "...depends on the accusation. We must certainly look and wait for a suitable time to give the correction, for to give it on the spot is a bit dangerous. But outside that..."
25. E1629. "You want me to say a word about the simplicity that we ought to have with reference to allowing ourselves to be guided in the interior life both by God and our Superior." The text picks up two paragraphs later with: "There are some persons who say they are unwilling to be guided..."
26. E1629. The text resumes with: "The call of the Spouse...." in the next paragraph.
27. E1629. The text skips the next sentence.
28. E1629. "...believe both obedience and submission."
29. E1629. "...good inspiration. Even if it happens that we receive no consolation from the exercises that are prescribed for us and that we get much more from others, this is not..."
30. E1629. "He has only one love, which is for his Mother and in that love only one goal, which is the bosom of his Mother. Once there on that beloved bosom, he wants nothing else. The person who has attained perfect simplicity has only one love, which is for God alone. And in this love, the person has only one goal, which is to rest on the bosom of our heavenly Father."

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E1933. "She has only one love, which is for her Mother, one single goal, which is the bosom of her Mother. Upon being taken and placed on her beloved bosom, she wants nothing else. The love which is perfect simplicity has only one love, which is for God. In this love she has only one goal, which is to rest on the bosom of our heavenly Father."

31. E1629. "not even the desire for virtues and virtues..."
32. E1629. The remainder is not part of this edition.
33. E1629. "...desires so pleasing and disquieting for virtues..."
34. E1933. "We should trouble ourselves about them. We shall not be less magnanimous or generous for that.
To sum up..."
E1629. "You ask me how persons drawn to prayer in this holy simplicity and to this perfect surrender to God ought to conduct themselves in all their actions. I answer that not only in prayer but in the conduct of their whole life, they must walk without variation in the spirit of simplicity, abandoning and offering their entire spirit, their actions and their accomplishments to God's good pleasure by a love of perfect and truly absolute trust, relying on the mercy and tender care of that eternal love that divine Providence has for them. For that reason, let them keep their spirit on that path, not allowing it to waste time looking only within itself so as to see what they are doing or if they are satisfied. Alas! Our own satisfactions and consolations do not satisfy God but they only satisfy this miserable self-love and need that we have for ourselves, which is far from God and any thought of him. Certainly, children whom Our Lord has pointed out to us ought to be the model of our perfection: they, generally speaking, do not have such a need, especially in the presence of their parents. They hold on to them without turning to consider their satisfactions and consolations. They presume these in good faith and enjoy in all simplicity, without any curiosity whatsoever as to their causes or effects. Love fills them sufficiently without doing anything else. Those who lovingly desire to please the Heavenly Lover have neither the heart nor the leisure to turn back. Their spirit continually moves in the direction that love carries them.
"This exercise of continual abandonment of oneself into the hands of God includes most completely the total perfection of all other exercises in its absolute simplicity and purity. And while God allows us to use it, we must not change it. Spiritual lovers, spouses of the heavenly King, do look upon themselves from time to time as doves do upon very pure water (Cant. 5:12) in order to see if they are correctly disposed so as to please their Beloved. We do this in our examinations of conscience, by which we clean, purify and beautify ourselves as well as we can, not in order to be perfect, not to satisfy ourselves nor to desire our growth in virtue but to obey our Spouse out of the reverence that we have for him, and the fervent desire that we have to please Him. Isn't that pure love, a simple love, a distinct love because we do not purify ourselves in order to be pure, we do not ready ourselves to be comely but only to

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please our Beloved? If ugliness were likewise pleasing to him, we would love it as much as beauty. And so, these simple doves do not take very long to cleanse and prepare themselves, for the confidence their love gives to be lovable, even though unworthy (I am talking about the confidence that their love gives them in the love and goodness of their Beloved) removes all anxiety and distrust as to their not being beautiful enough. Besides, the desire to love rather than to adorn and prepare themselves for love, removes all anxious care and makes them content with a sweet and faithful preparation done lovingly and heartily.

"To conclude this point, Saint Francis, sending his children out on their travels to distant places, gave them this advice in place of money and food: 'Cast your care upon Our Lord and he will sustain you' (Psalm 54:23). I say the same to you, my dearest Daughters. Cast your whole heart, your goals, your cares and your affections onto the fatherly bosom of God and he will guide you. He will carry you where his love wants you to be.

"Let us hear and imitate the divine Savior, who as the perfect psalmist, sings the supreme character of his love on the tree of the Cross. He concludes it all: My Father, I place and commend my Spirit into your hands (Luke 23:46). After that has been said, my dearest Daughters, what remains except to breathe forth our last breath and die the death of love, living no longer for ourselves but Jesus Christ living in us (Gal. 2:19-20). Then, all the anxieties of our hearts will cease – those proceeding from desires our self-love suggested to us and an over-attentiveness to ourselves, which makes us secretly so eager in the pursuit of our own satisfaction and our perfection. Embarking, then, on the exercises of our vocation, carried along by the breeze of this simple and loving confidence, without noticing our progress, we will make great progress. Without moving, we will advance, and without getting up from our place, we shall draw nearer our homeland as do those who sail the high seas with good winds. Then every event and variety of accidents which may happen will be accepted gently and calmly. For who can separate and move those in the arms of God and resting in his bosom, those who have surrendered to his love and have resigned themselves to his good pleasure? Certainly, what ever happens, without wasting time to philosophize about the causes or reasons or motives for these happenings, they call out from their heart the holy acquiescence of our Savior: Yes, my Father, for it has seemed good in your sight. (Matt. 11:26).

"Then we will be totally steeped in gentleness and peace toward our Sisters and our neighbors, for we will see them in the bosom of the Savior. Alas! Anyone who sees his neighbor any other way runs the risk of not loving her with purity, constancy, impartiality. But there, who would not love her, who would not support her, who would not put up with her imperfections, who would find her troublesome or annoying? For, there is your neighbor, my dear Daughters, in the bosom of the Savior, she is there as the well beloved and the lovable one whom the Beloved dies for the love of her. Then again, the natural love coming from kinship, good manners, courtesy, affinities, sympathies and kindness will be purified and reduced to the perfect obedience of the all pure love of the divine good pleasure. And certainly the highest good and the greatest happiness of persons who aspire to perfection should be having no desire whatever to be loved by creatures, except with the love of charity,

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which makes us feel a love for our neighbor and for anyone in their proper order according to the desire of Our Lord.

"Before concluding, I must say a word about the wisdom of the serpent, for I have been thinking..."

This passage, "You ask me" down to "the desire of Our Lord," is drawn from the fragments of letters addressed by Saint Francis de Sales to Saint Jane de Chantal in 1616 and treat of surrender to God.

35. E1629. "Putting aside all other answers which can be given to this question, we now take the words of Our Lord: 'Be wise as the serpent,' which when attacked exposes...."
36. E1629. "...preserve within us, safe and untouched, Our Lord and his love. For he is our Head and we are his members. That is the prudence that we ought to have in our simplicity. "I will tell you again that you must remember that there are two...."
37. E1629. The End of the *Twelfth Conference*. "...in the arms of their heavenly Father and of their dearest Mother Our Lady, assured of the continual protection of that most loving care, because they are called together for the glory of God and the honor of the Most Holy Virgin.

May God Be Blessed!"