

THE TWENTIETH CONFERENCE

A Collection of Various Questions Which Were Made by Our Most Blessed Father at Our Monastery in Lyons (v1)

The first time that he came he spoke to us for about an hour and a half on peace of heart with such devotion. He told us several times that we must never trouble ourselves about anything or lose peace of heart over anything that might happen to us. For himself, he would rather choose to live in the corner of a room in peace than to be at court amidst all the turmoil over honors and riches. And for that reason he revealed his wish to stay in Father Brun's room, who is our confessor (n1). We tried to tell him several times that he would have to put up with too many interruptions. He always told us "no" and he would be better off because he wasn't worthy of it. Moreover, he would be close to his dear Daughters. And no matter how often we persisted in telling him that he would be disturbed, he told us: "I am very well off, don't worry, keep your peace of heart." And he spoke to us in a way so filled with humility and gentleness: "I see clearly that you have it in your hearts that I should not stay with you. I beg you, allow me to stay on here and don't trouble yourselves in any way that I am being inconvenienced. Truthfully, I sleep in a room in Nussy (Annecy) that is ten times colder than this one."

And as he continued to speak to us about peace of heart, we told him: "Monseigneur, we very humbly beg you to give us a conference on peace of heart and how we ought to act when Superiors step down from office." "I would like to very much," he said, "but we ought to wait so that Mother might be here." He spent a good deal of the time speaking on the renunciation that must be made in such changes (v2). He said all the tears that are shed at this time come only from self-love, flattery and fear that one has when one does not take the time to think that this is truly a good thing for her and that she is sufficiently loved. All of these are only small deceptions that can arise from vanity as well as from our words. Women are very often subject to these imperfections, especially when they know that Superiors are sensitive and are pleased to have these small kinds of affections shown them. From the thousand tears that are shed on such occasions, very few are worthy of trust, and that happens very often through imitation. In a word, that is how a woman feels (v3). We told him that many of our Sisters have told us outright at recreation that they have cried very often simply because they would see others who were doing it. To that he replied, "Is it possible they were just saying that? I am deeply grateful to them for saying it. It is very true that this crying and shedding of tears are very suspect. In Italy, they are so renowned for it. They hire people, in a manner of speaking, to weep. We must have a firmly grounded love which does not depend on such sensitivities. True love loves both near and far, and does not cling to what is human. In a word, grace in no way produces all that. Let the Sisters regard their Superiors in suchwise that they see them as taking the place of God without wasting time on so many human considerations. Sisters like this would have true virtue. In fact, it is quoted that Saint Theresa wept deeply at the death of some servant of God. She must not be imitated in that, for we must only imitate the virtues of the Saints."

We asked him if there wasn't some way (n2) to preserve the spirit of gentleness and simplicity that is practiced among us and, further, if there should be some bond or link between our

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communities. A number of people had thought that a Mother General would greatly help in this. He answered most resolutely: "My Daughter, such a thought would be nothing more than human. I have spent two days and nights thinking about this because our Mother had written me that someone had spoken to her about it. I see no likelihood for it." And we said to him: "What then is your intention, Monseigneur?" "It is to leave all to Divine Providence." He said this several times and he made us realize (n3) that he had no other plan (n4). We know that he had spoken about this with the Jesuit Fathers, who are of the same opinion. He was very comfortable with this, saying that the ways of God are discovered only with great difficulty. He spoke again to us the following: "The success of an Order does not depend in any way on one leader. That is seen every day by experience. Those who have had one, and there are some excellent ones, have not allowed (n5) them to become lax. However, everything depends on the fidelity that one has in being united to God and through such a fidelity in observing the *Rule* and the *Constitutions*. These means are not sought in vain. Nothing makes the community more stable than the fidelity of each member to observe its *Rule*." And then he said again that he wanted nothing other than that God would give our monasteries a spirit of oneness and humility. This type of oneness must be preserved by perfect observance so that this unity will continue on in accord with God's good pleasure.

We then asked him how we should react to the things of this world, seeing that all the world likes us and seems drawn to us. If we should want to detach ourselves from it, all of us would be profoundly affected by it. Well-founded and endowed monasteries could sustain themselves, but ours would not. "It is true, my Daughter, that the world fears poverty, but what should we do about it? We must simply show it that we do not in any way want to be joined to the world, nor lose peace of heart for the things of this world." On this point he told us that the home of our prince cardinal (n6) had burned down and that he had lost six thousand ecus worth of silver dishes. I told him that was a great loss but that it would have made a great gift for us in order to build our church. And he answered me, showing that he was very angry with me, saying, "My God, my Daughter, don't have any such desires! There are a few persons who know how to find the vein of true poverty which consists in desiring nothing but being content with what little God wants you to have. Oh, how happy our Sisters would be if they were poor and would need something!"

"The care, devotion and reason of Superiors must supply everything that is not written down. The exclusion of those in poor health is totally against my spirit and feelings. Whoever will abandon human and natural prudence in governing the community offends charity." Still again, he says: "If there ever comes a day when accepting those in poor health into our community becomes a difficulty, I will come and make a ruckus in your sleeping area and I will clearly make it known that such an action is not my intention."

We asked him if it was his intention that the Daughters of the Visitation should ask for things from their parents when they are wealthy and the communities are poor. He told us no and that he loved us more when the community was poor and needed things. To allow the Sisters to have these desires only nourishes an excessive self-love in them. He would not allow it even for the sacristy, no matter how poor it was. If they would give something, we must accept it humbly, and not ask for anything or desire anything, even if it is not some rare and special occasion. It is always better to live one's life in poverty.

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We asked him whether a Superior could give something to one of her parents who was at Saint Clare and who was begging her for alms. He said, "Yes, by the same token that she should allow a fellow Sister to do the same." And I said to him that I often had scruples and felt remorse in my conscience that I was not strong enough with regards to worldly goods through my own weakness, fearing that parents did not give enough to their Daughters and that the community would thus be poor. He told me: "Do not trouble yourself over that. We must deprive ourselves of worldly goods, not through disdain or contempt, but through self-denial."

He later told me: "Our Mother wants me to write about the maxims of the Son of God. I hold them in honor; I respect and revere them with all my heart, but I do not practice them. The Son of God has said: 'Do not plead for me; if I do not do it, the whole world is against me.' The Son of God has said: 'If someone asks you for your cloak, give him your robe (n7); if I want to do it, I am told that I have committed a great fault, that I am not allowed to do so, that I am already poor enough. The Son of God has said: 'If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn the other cheek (n8).' The world doesn't want that, nor does it want to offer support for the least injury. The Son of God has said: 'Be on guard' (n9). Someone wants me to become angry; if I do not do so my behavior is considered absurd."

We then asked him if it was his intention that alms be given in all our communities. He said, "Yes, according to the maxims of the Son of God"; but that one wasn't assured if those to whom it was given are really poor. Nevertheless, it is always good to give alms.

When speaking to him about it being a good thing in our communities to feed the confessors, he answered: "My opinion is that if I were a confessor for the Visitation, I would not be worthy of the ministry. (It is true that I am not worthy of it; this would bring me the greatest happiness that I ever could hope for to see myself as confessor of the Visitation and free from everything else.) But if it were so, I would find it better if I could take my meals when it would be convenient. I would not want to inconvenience the Sisters by preparing my meals and giving them some knowledge of my imperfections when I am tired, disgruntled and a bit difficult about my diet. Should the servants of God be made to be inconvenienced by my weaknesses? Isn't it a hundred times better that they remain in this calm and repose than to be disturbed? Don't you see, my Daughter, it is very important not to afford this opportunity to the confessor (v4). For each one who is easy to get along with about his diet, there is a large number who are not especially easy to get along with when dealing with diets. The virtue of sobriety is great, very few persons know how to practice it as it ought to be. I would not want you to start something with the confessor you have now. He is so good and easy going. To my knowledge, he is not difficult to get along with. If you have begun to feed him, continue it, but be careful about the others. I would like it better if their stipend were increased."

"It is true, my Daughter, that I will never find anything to criticize about the food insofar as I am able, except sometimes it is too good. Does it have to be so, my Daughter? You are afraid that some of our Sisters will have stomach aches by eating the main course prepared for the others. It hurts me to have to speak about it, but to eat them, never (v5)."

"It is true that it would be better if the last places be for the Sisters who come late to the refectory so as to offset the inconvenience and lack of decorum that happens when they pass around the tables and when their place is found in the middle of the others. Certainly, the Sisters are too

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fastidious: my taste is always better than that of the others...what manners...I must use someone else's napkin...."

"I strongly recommend to you poverty and simplicity. You say that there are some Sisters who understood (v6) what I said on the *Constitutions* (n10) that our Congregation has an unparalleled interest that the office of sacristan be carried out passionately well, to mean that she ought to have the greatest concern that nothing is ever wanting in the sacristy and that it have beautiful appointments and vestments for the altar. O God, how is it possible that some things are so misunderstood and their own attachments are so cleverly followed out! Haven't they noticed the point of so many of the *Constitutions*, the peace of heart which is so highly recommended there must never be lost no matter what the reason may be? I have observed these attachments in our Sisters at Annecy. When they have responsibilities, they should have what they need, and when they no longer have them, they shouldn't be concerned about them. There are two things to be corrected in your sacristy. Since you are the Second Community, I want everything to be the same as at Annecy. The first is that the cinctures (n11) are too fancy. They are not simple enough. Two strands are enough with the large tassel; the others are superfluous. You also have too much lace; you shouldn't have it on the upper part of the alb nor on the bottom of the sleeves. All that it needs is that they have some needlework and that it be very small. What I say in the *Constitutions* (n12) about not putting statues on the altar is because they are usually poorly made; it is a great waste of time; only women are naturally pleased by it. However, you can put Angels and Cherubim there without hesitation."

We told him one day that we were afraid that there was great fear that some Superiors might not have the spirit of the *Rule*. "What makes you think that? If they are faithful in observing the *Rule*, God will give them it in time (v7). When the Sisters are envious about being in charge they ought to put themselves in their Superior's shoes so as to satisfy themselves. We have seen through experience that some of our Sisters who have not done very well as subjects have done better as Superiors, not for themselves, nor that it helps in their perfection, but they are helpful to the others."

He told us that it is always better to elect a Sister of great virtue even if she were young. God helps those who have progressed in simplicity and confidence. He then said that it would be very unfortunate to elect a Superior who did not have the virtue and ability needed for her office (v8). They ought to be given a good Treasurer in order to help them. There are a few Superiors who can deal with temporal matters, but it is not necessarily their responsibility as Superior. When Superiors have been elected who do not have a very deep interior life, they must be given a good assistant. Then we said to him: "When Superiors are not very mortified, they cannot fulfill the responsibility of their office." He said: "Why can't they fulfill it? If I were Superior, I would be very comfortable in discharging my office. And I would do cheerfully what a Superior should."

While talking with him about extraordinary confessors, we asked him whether it would not be better that the Sisters open their hearts to the Superior before going to confession because confessors are asking them principally about sins against charity. He said: "We must allow this freedom to the Sisters because it could happen that the Superior does not know about them."

We said to him: "Monseigneur, it seems that by having confidence in God there is never a lack of light being offered to carry out one's responsibilities and that charity is everything." He

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answered: "It is true, you are right, when Superiors are closely united with God, he never fails to teach them (v9). But who will assure you they all have this union?"

While speaking about Superiors who stay too long in the parlor, he said, "I do not approve of it, but what can be done about it?"

Then when talking about a Superior's leaving office who had been very close to the Sisters and who couldn't get used to calling her Sister instead of Mother, he answered with a totally loving expression: "Let them call her grandmother, if they want. I don't know what to do about it. However, I do see that these Sisters are not giving proper respect and not observing their *Rule* and *Constitutions*."

We said to him: "Monseigneur, when you have given a conference on how we ought to act on the election and the departure of Superiors from office, we will perform wonders by putting it into practice." He answered: "My words do not work miracles. We must be devoted to the practices that the *Constitutions* present to us. They tell us a great deal about how we ought to do things, but the Sisters have so many small desires more than obeying the *Constitutions*. What are we to do about it?"

We must allow the Sisters to weep and reveal these affections, for they will think that people will believe that these affections do not proceed from love if they do not show all of them. This is a weakness characteristic only of women."

"We ought to say nothing nor do anything to be loved and esteemed by persons, nor be misunderstood by them. We ought to believe that if persons do not love us here below, they will love us in heaven, where we will see everyone. And then, what will be so troublesome about being loved by persons, provided that this be in God? Just as this should be very reassuring for us, so it ought to be sufficient for us."

"When you are asked whether you will always say the Little Office, say 'yes' because you are hopeful that the Pope will give permission and that you have already been saying it for ten or twelve years. It is both my goal and desire that you should always say it. But if this doesn't happen, I would stop doing it" (v10).

"You can also say the same about expulsion from the community, that it must be done according to the *Rule*. I have made an exception to what I said in the *Constitutions*, not only to satisfy the world but also to prevent the Sisters from examining in minute detail the faults of their Sisters so as to see if they merit expulsion from the community."

Someone asked him whether imperfections ought to be confessed if there was sin in committing it. He said that he learned in theology that it was not necessary to do it, but that we could, even if there were no sin. But the method that we have been given allows it because we may not know how to discern when there is sin present. "This is why I have explained it in a general way (n13). However, we must not say too much in our ordinary Confession: at best, two or three imperfections. It is good to do it in our extraordinary and annual Confessions. And when we have nothing to confess, we must tell a sin committed while we were in the world" (n14).

"We can, in fact, go to Confession when we experience a feeling (n15) about something and we act on it immediately, even though slight, like coughing or saying something, for there can be a sin. We ought not trouble ourselves about it, for we do not possess a perfection that is free of self-love and that does not hinder us from committing at least some fault here and there. We ought not to be

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surprised by it. Someone can accuse herself by praying: 'I accuse myself of doing some action because of some feeling that I had about something that is not according to my liking or through impatience.' But when we don't do anything through this feeling, there is no sin present, but rather merit."

With reference to the act of contrition, he said that in order to make a good one, we must experience sorrow for past sins and a resolution of not committing them in the future and to detest them with all our heart (n16) (v11). "We ought to have made a general confession, since the act of contrition is not intended for small sins. Confession has value even when someone goes there without contrition but has the will to amend one's life. We ought not have simply a feeling that brings us to tears, but a real displeasure for having offended God. Bad will is not presumed by recommitting some faults, provided that this is not voluntary. A good act of contrition consists in a firm resolution of not being willing to offend God in the future."

"With regard to idle talk, this should not happen at recreation. Everything that is said at recreation is not idle talk. We must recreate well and not always have a tense spirit. This might present the temptation (n17) of becoming sad and depressed. It would not even be bad when a whole recreation would be spent talking about indifferent things. We don't always have to talk about good things. Holy, joyous talk exists when there is nothing wrong in what is said and which does not relate to the imperfections of another Sister. We ought not do that or talk about the world and improper things. We should not laugh a little at a Sister, or say something that might mortify her a bit, so that it does not sadden her. But if it happens, we ought not confess it when it is done simply through recreation. When we aim for perfection, we ought to be open and not be troubled when we don't experience (n18) it. We must proceed very simply like a fresh daisy and make recreation a good one. And if our attention is focused too much on one thing, we ought to move it onto something else unless we are prevented from doing so."

"And even when we do not think about doing it for God, we must not become scrupulous, for a general intention is sufficient even though at the beginning we should try to rouse (n19) our consciousness to do it. This must be done well in preparing the Novices, and it is of great import that the Sisters do it well."

"When we have thoughts of low esteem about our neighbor, there is nothing wrong if we do not reject them because of a lack of attention on our part. It suffices that we get rid of them when we become aware of them. With reference to what you asked me, whether we ought to leave unsaid words about our difficulties or something that would make others see the good in ourselves, you also mention the fear that you have of not knowing how to say it and that you would rather present a subject that would put you in a better light rather than point the finger at you. Oh, my Daughter, you must always discern situations with a certain naivete and simplicity, both good and bad, provided you have no intention of making yourself more well thought of. If it happens, don't trouble yourself, not even if you are looked down upon. Don't let your mind dwell on it."

"There is nothing wrong to come back to reflect on yourself once in awhile, provided that it be to humble ourselves, like thinking about our ungratefulness, but it must always be to turn toward God. For, as I have already said someplace (n20), it is not appropriate to pray and always be reflecting on ourselves, because prayer is a raising of the heart and mind to God so as to be united

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with him. We ought to follow inspirations (n21) when Our Lord draws us to prayer, and we ought to try to advance in perfection by the more simple way and not be so subtle. We cannot possess a continual presence of God, for that only belongs to the Angels. It suffices for us to keep ourselves there as long as possible and to elevate our mind and heart to God frequently. I do not mean that we always have to have our minds and hearts so focused. And if what we are doing draws us away from our attentiveness to God and is something very necessary, don't trouble yourselves about it. It is sufficient to do all our actions for God very simply. Even when we don't think about directing our intention before beginning some action, it suffices to do it later, and don't entertain any scruple over it. The general intention that we make in the morning is sufficient (v12). In the beginning the Novices are given the practice of offering all their actions to God; however, they ought to take care that it is not necessary to do it all the time because it could be an obstacle to the simple presence of God. When we do something for God, it means to be in his presence. The desire that we have to remain in his presence serves to put ourselves in the presence of his Goodness. We ought not be surprised when we do not remain in this holy presence as often as we would like to. It is a higher good to have this holy desire to serve God and we ought not to make much of not having the good feeling that we would like to have in his service. And if it seems to you that you have made amends regarding your imperfections, more from the distaste that has come from your being reproved than for God, don't make too much of that. Direct your intention and there will be nothing wrong. Even if you commit faults when your passions begin to surface, don't look at these faults so intensely; turn away from all such considerations. We must focus on perfection and not be astonished if we do not experience what we would like to. My dear Daughter, the desire for eternal things must fill our minds and hearts without being troubled about our feelings. Furthermore, we must not believe that we are not worthy of having such a desire."

"Again, if it seems that someone might eat more out of a bodily desire, it is not wrong to do it. Don't allow any scruples to arise. Eat for God and keep yourself calm. Go about all things simply, without believing that you are doing it under the pretext of obedience in order to satisfy yourself. When your will is not involved, there is nothing to be afraid of. This is becoming much too subtle."

"It does not upset me if someone falls asleep at prayer, provided that we do what we can to stay awake. We must put up with it humbly and remain before God like a statue so as to receive everything that is sent to us. Our Lord is pleased at times to watch us struggle with sleep all during prayer without wanting to deliver us from it. We must endure it patiently and love our lowliness. Never say that you cannot do something, for we can always do it when we want to. It would be like saying that Our Lord has put some stumbling block before us, which it is not. We can do all by his grace (n22), which is never wanting in us."

"In order to dispose ourselves for Holy Communion, we must keep ourselves close to Our Lord and speak to him with words of affection and what he will suggest to us while we are considering and paying attention (v13) to the fact that he is within us and that he became flesh of our flesh in order to unite us to himself. And he speaks to us like the Spouse in the Canticle of Canticles, that 'he kisses' us 'with a kiss from his lips' (n23) and he does it when he comes to us, and then the person can say: 'My well-beloved is mine and I am' totally 'his'." (n24, v14)

"We will never be free from venial sins."

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"Accusing ourselves serves no purpose if there is no hope of overcoming our faults. And if we do not willingly love it when someone sees our faults, it is only self-love. There is nothing to the feeling that arises in ourselves on being accused, provided that our will is firm in loving its basic lowliness. It is always better to keep our whole person trusting in God than in fear, even though we might do it in order to humble ourselves. Love makes us sufficiently humble."

"My Daughter, do not stay away from Holy Communion because of depression. When you experience depression, you ought to come to the sacrament in order to be strengthened and united to God in a spirit of gentleness. There are some faults which at times should make us want to stay from Communion, like an act or a word of impatience, an unexpected reaction that would not edify one's neighbor (v15). You could stay away from Communion with permission of the Superior. When one isn't too troubled over it, but you are ashamed of doing certain penances, it would be good for you to choose to refrain from receiving Communion rather than ask for another penance."

"Fidelity of the spirit to God consists in being perfectly resigned to his holy will, in putting up patiently with everything that his Goodness allows to happen to us; doing all of our exercises in love and for love, and especially prayer, in which we talk with Our Lord very familiarly about our little needs, presenting them to him and remaining submissive in everything that pleases him to send us. It also consists in being very obedient; cheerfully doing everything we are commanded, even if we experience a dislike for it; being faithful to leave what we are presently doing as the clock calls us; rejecting the distractions that we experience at prayer and the Office. It further consists of preserving a great purity of heart, for that is where God dwells, and not in hearts full of vanity and self-importance. On the contrary, he chastises and punishes them severely. God has given you a superabundant grace by having called you to his service at such a young age. Indeed, thank him from the bottom of your heart."

"When we knowingly dwell on the imperfections of others, O Lord, my dear Daughter, that is very wrong! We must not do it. However, when we see them at times, we must turn away and think most gently about Paradise, and the divine perfections of Our Lord and Our Lady and of the Saints and of the Angels. At other times we must look at our own unworthiness and lowliness. When these thoughts come to us, we must humble ourselves and even cast ourselves down to the center of the earth, realizing that we are only like small worms and that we want to examine in minute detail the actions of others who are the spouses of Our Lord. In fact, we ought to look into our hearts and see its weakness, giving ourselves a slight reprimand so as to be on our guard in the future. Oh, Lord! Do not commit this fault of dwelling on the imperfections of the Sisters, for it will only slow down your perfection to a greater degree, and that would cause great harm to your person."

"When someone has a dislike for speaking more often than not to the Superior or the Mistress, I advise that they say so, and I would want someone to give me a good penance for it. But the best means to avoid all this is to draw close to the Creator and not to the person." "In order to prepare ourselves well for prayer, we ought to go there with a great humility and recognition of our own nothingness. We ought to call on the help of the Holy Spirit and our good Angel and remain quiet during this time in the presence of God, believing that he is more in us than we ourselves. And even if our prayer lacks a great deal of talking and consideration, there is nothing wrong, for it does not depend on talking or consideration. Prayer is a pure attentiveness of our mind to God. The

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more that it is simple and devoid of feeling, the better the prayer is. Few persons understand this truth, especially women, for whom talking is very harmful because of ignorance."

"I always recommend recalling to mind what has happened during the day, if one can, but dwelling on their sins ought not be done during prayer. When thoughts like these come, one should simply humble oneself before God, considering all our own sins without singling them out. This one act is enough; ordinarily these thoughts only serve to distract us."

"In all of your actions, you should be in the presence of God if you do them wholly for God. Eating, sleeping, working for him is to be in his presence. It is not within our power to always be there actually unless it is through a particular grace. When doing some jobs where we have to give our special attention, we must from time to time bring our minds back to God. And when we have failed to do so, we ought to humble ourselves; and from this humility go to God and from God to humility with confidence, talking to him like a child does to her mother, for he knows well who we are."

"It would not be good to speak about the world and oneself for a whole recreation. It would not be wrong once or twice to amuse a Sister, and it doesn't have to be confessed. Be very careful to practice simplicity and humble your spirit. Leave human wisdom and prudence aside and draw everything from the Cross."

"Do not pay attention to temptations, keep yourself in real nothingness. Empty your heart of all worldly desires and engrave on it Christ crucified. Thank him for your vocation and resolve to be obedient, for you possibly will never give a command. Do not act like many who say: 'I would not want to be Superior,' but remain always in holy indifference. Ask for nothing, refuse nothing."

"Oh! It makes great sense to deprive ourselves of worldly pleasures for God, since he deprived himself of his glory for us. You have sufficient understanding to see what success in our vocation consists of. We must never say that we cannot do something, but you would do well to say that it seems to you, since we can do everything through the grace of God, which is not lacking when we need it."

"At prayer, there is nothing wrong in sitting down for awhile when necessity requires it, but we ought not to remain like that for all of our prayer. We must not have too many little self-serving wants which are wrong and which are very harmful to us on the way of salvation. Various types of sickness do not hinder devotion; just the opposite, they help us if we accept them from the hand of God. We can always put on a happy face for our Sisters. The illness which we are experiencing does not prevent this from happening, as long as we do not always have a dejected look."

"Oh, my dear Daughter, be careful about these reflections, for it is impossible for the Spirit of God to remain in a person who wants to know about everything that is going on within her. Be of good heart! With reference to the weak young woman, act very generously toward her, which will overcome every difficulty."

"We must not cry without cause, because if we should take responsibility for our useless talk (n25), all the more reason for tears without a cause (v16). We ought to confess it like any notable fault, and you ought to keep yourself from crying insofar as possible. We must also be careful about making useless talk and, when one has failed in this two or three times, it ought to be confessed (v17). (One ought not confess) having failed to be present at the exercises unless this was done through

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contempt or great carelessness. We ought to be present insofar as we can, for it might be harmful to a community if it happened as a general rule."

"When one vows to observe the *Rule*, she does it suchwise that she is not obliged under pain of sin. This is why the *Rule* and the *Constitutions* are in no way the cause of our sins."

"We must have great courage, my dear Daughter, for you are the Daughter of Jesus Christ crucified. You must not have any other goal in this life than that of the union of your person with God (v18). We must have a great steadfastness in our trials, for as long as we are in this life, we will not always be in the same mood. That just doesn't happen (v19)."

"The desire for eternal life is good, but we ought to desire nothing other than the will of God."

"The strength of our first offering that we made in sacrificing ourselves to Our Lord suffices, even if we are not attentive to it each time we do something. Our feelings are in no way necessary for the perfection we aspire to; for Our Lord, while in the garden, lacking all consolation, did not fail to accomplish his Father's will because of it" (n26).

"With reference to good and true authority, it does not depend in any way on natural talents but on supernatural grace. Grace guides much more perfectly the experience that is necessary, which human wisdom and prudence does not. Grace does this with less brilliance and this is what its excellence consists of."

"You ought to use the necessary comforts for your body, like keeping warm, eating and dressing, in a spirit of thanksgiving and humility and not with any anxiety. Do not desire to complain about your lack of comforts. That is good for women who are weak in heart. Daughters of God ought not waste time on such self-indulgence (v20)."

"What would you say, my Daughter, if I were to tell you in a conference (n27) that if I were to be born again I would have nothing different? You should be very happy with all else, your *Rule* and all your exercises bring you to this union. The *Constitutions* teach you what you ought to do: ask very simply, without scruple, for what you need."

"Indeed, hold onto the desire that you have about observing your *Rule*, for it is full of love. Remember that you will have some difficulties but don't lose courage; hope in God; cast yourself into the arms of his Divine Providence. There is no more sure way than that of suffering, provided that one suffers with love, gentleness and patience. Through it one will be able to imitate Our Lord and all the Saints. You must believe that all we suffer is very small in the eyes of God. We must think about what we suffer as the smallest thing we are able to think of."

"You can turn away from the pleasureable feeling that comes to you on using things that are necessary for you. Just as anyone passing along a street and finding a lot of mud will do nothing less than find another street, so we ought to do the same without thinking about it any further."

"It is true that it is good to cut short in every kind of conversation (n28) if it is not concerned with some spiritual good. A mother or a father must not be interrupted when they begin to speak; however, when they have finished one ought to speak to them about good things for their consolation, yet without doing it in a self-centered way. Listen attentively without interrupting them, for this is not my intention, except with people who have a lot of worldly news about which you ought not inquire. Put your confidence in God, for parents soon forget their children (v21)."

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Undoubtedly, it would be a sign of curiosity to want to know if it is God's will what you should eat. But it belongs to the truth that we ought to know that what we do against the commandments is against his will. However, in other things that happen, we must not look to see if it is his will or not. We must put our hearts in God and not listen to the thoughts that can arise. Take care to think about what is not a good spirit, for your intention which is good will change the bad into good."

"Humility is a virtue so excellent that we must be very holy to have it perfectly. It is the virtue that leads to all the others. But, to do one's actions in a spirit of humility is to do them with the intention of doing them with humility. Furthermore, you ought to do all your actions and works suchwise to imitate Our Lord, who was humbled even to the death on the cross" (n29).

"We ought to be very much at ease in taking care of some things which can help others, like taking care of the needs (n30) of the sacristy. O, my God! Be of good heart. If God allows things to be broken, he will give you what is needed to buy others. And so, it is such a small thing that we must not become anxious, but busy our mind with eternal life."

"It is true that charity gives the value to our works, and only God can give us charity. Think more of him and less of yourselves."

"It is good that you hardly ever like to speak about yourselves. The less that one can do it, be it good or bad, the better."

"The article on chastity consists mainly of having a great simplicity and purity of heart and not having thoughts to the contrary. I emphasize the word `willingly' here."

"It matters little whether the word of God is delivered in a flamboyant way or a soft-spoken way; the style of delivery is a human skill that demands only excellence whatever its method might be."

"We must abandon ourselves into the arms of God and serve him in a way that will please him. True zeal consists in allowing ourselves to be guided by God and our Superiors."

"It is of utmost importance that the Sisters be fed the truths and declarations of faith. Even if these might prove troublesome, we must not put off allowing it to happen as well as not permitting them to waste time on personal sensitivities and feelings which are always less than true virtue. Too much talk is of no value. The important thing is that it must be done."

"Your entry into the religious life is for the love of God. Be indifferent about the ways that his Goodness will be pleased to lead you, whether it be by consolation, affliction or humiliation. You merit one way or another. My Daughter, Saint Blandina, when the people were putting her to death for her faith, said: `I am a Christian.' Likewise, when we are sorrowful and anxious, we must say: `I am a Christian.'"

"The pain that we suffer in humiliation and the fear we have in being humiliated are imperfections we all are subject to. We must not be surprised at this but be of good heart and place our heart in God, desiring nothing other than pleasing him. Humiliation is not as bad as we think. It will not make us bear as much hurt as we think and as it might seem to us. We must not fear it so much. Look at Our Lord, who `is' so `humiliated even unto death' (n31) and all the Saints who have looked for occasions to practice such virtue with a great deal of longing. Be at ease when the occasions present themselves; accept them cheerfully with love. Accept, love and embrace self-denial

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and humiliation. Let your affections be in Christ Jesus crucified. Don't be surprised by vanity, overcome it faithfully. As long as you do nothing to follow up on it, there will be nothing wrong."

"You want to know what it means that you ought to be `meditating day and night on the law of God' (n32). It means to do each one of our actions for God's greater glory and to have our hearts attentive to his. And don't think in light of that that you must always be on your knees."

"You ask how I happen to appear concerned about each and every thing without troubling myself about any. I have not come into the world to cause turmoil. I have found enough there already. I am so at ease when someone asks me where I am staying by saying `in the gardener's cottage of our Daughters of Holy Mary'."

"A few women can be found who are not stubborn. When one finds one who is not, one ought to hold her as someone special. And when the temptation of envy arises from what our Sisters do better or are loved more than ourselves, we must wring our heart out like a towel so as to make it conform to right reason."

"No, my Daughter, we must not waste time on these little desires that arise from suffering the cold weather or similar things, for this would keep your heart too downcast and would prevent it from applying itself to solid virtues. Do you know when you ought to put up with the cold? It is when the Superior would send you to the garden to pick some herbs and when there would be the danger of your hands freezing on the plant. You must not excuse yourself from doing it, because it is obedience. You ought to have a great care for our Sisters and help them and comfort them in as many ways as you can and not think that they should suffer a bit of discomfort. It is not your responsibility to make this discernment."

"We will not go to heaven for having sung well, but only if we sing well through obedience. God will not ask us to render an account on having recited many Offices, but rather if we have in fact been submissive to his Will."

"You have asked me again what the *Constitutions* (n33) mean when they say to use our hearts, our eyes, our speech only in the service of our heavenly Spouse and not in the service of our own dispositions and human inclinations. Oh, my Daughter! How I wish you would ask me about a perfection that very few people practice even though all ought to do it! Pay attention, my Daughter, to this example: there are two of our Sisters, one who will visibly love you and the other who does not have much of an inclination for loving so visibly, and because of this you will not consider the one to have as good a heart as the other one who visibly loves. On the contrary, if you would love her very purely for God, you would also see the second Sister to be of good heart just like the first one who visibly loves, and you would desire as much good for her as for the other."

"It is true that I love the whole world intensely, especially the simple people. And so it seems to you that I put up with everyone for the sake of honor; good manners demand it of us, and so I do it naturally. I have never been known to do it like many people do it, so it seems, when they are given some dignity and so must honor the whole world. And when they write, they don't want to use terms like "very humbly" and "most humbly" except for persons of high rank. For myself, I do it for the whole world except if I write to Peter or Francis (n34), my servants, who might think I am mocking them if I would sign `your very humble servant.' I do not make a great distinction between one person and another."

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While speaking to him about condescension like he did so as to make it easy for the whole world, he told us: "I do not have a great difficulty with that; it is not unpleasant for me to do it, even when I should not do it. Naturally speaking, I do not make unbending acts of the will and so must I be so condescending to my neighbor? I do not know how to restrain my inclinations; when I see that someone wants something, I offer no resistance."

When he saw that I wanted very much to adopt his spirit of condescension by imitating him, I told him that I found many times when the bell sounded for the Office that I had to go to the parlor and that even on Christmas Day I missed Compline for some slight matter of little importance. He told us: "This is true condescension, my Daughter, like this time you are taking to be with me." It was Saint Stephen's Day, at noon, that he spoke most gently about this holy virtue. He told us: "People in the world, as much as they can, ought to become accustomed to come at times other than that of the times for the Office."

When talking on preaching and Confession, he said: "I love very much to listen to the word of God. There is nothing better for me than that. I make several mistakes in Confession, but I have not made two of them there: I am not careless nor do I lie."

He pointed out to us once that he wanted the foundation of Besançon (n35) to be made and he told us that he was very comforted that our Sisters would be spreading because they live with much peace and gentleness (v22).

We asked whether we should be warm. He said: "When you see that a fire has been made, it is the intention of obedience that we be warm, provided that there not be too much fuss about it."

Once on speaking to us about our great desire to keep his spirit in our community, he told us: "May God take care of you! Lay hold of the Spirit of God and of Saint Augustine."

Having heard the Confession of one of our Sisters who had kept him for about an hour and a half, we told him that he was admirable for his gentleness in having taken the trouble and shown patience by listening to her for such a long time. Then he said to us: "How totally wonderful! How totally beautiful! We must treat those who are sick as sick. When they are giving an account of themselves it would be good for them to cut short their talking as much as they can (v23)."

And then we asked him whether the two words (n36) that he had so highly recommended could be applied to heating our beds, because the Sisters had adopted the custom for some time now. Could they be allowed to continue it? He said, "Yes," but that it ought to be acceptable if someone does not want it and that it is better not to have need of very much than to have a lot of things, as the *Rule* says.

We asked him if it was the intention of the *Constitutions* that we should tell the Superior what we are thinking, because they tell us to go to the Assistant Superior. He told us that what he had put in the *Constitutions* (n37) was for no other reason than those who do not have the confidence to tell her, but those who are more confident are the better ones.

"Yes, my Daughter, you can receive women who are illegitimate and those whose parents have been executed for some great crime, for these women couldn't help that." I told him that we have never dared to receive such a woman in this city (Lyons) because it would not be approved of. He told us: "Send them to Annecy!"

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"No, it is never permissible for our Sisters to leave the Divine Office for their work, not even for the sacristy. It could be done sometimes during the reading, but rarely. How happy are they who have a great love for following the community in everything and everywhere! God has given them a great grace. I would like to tell you what happened to me once with a good religious who wanted so much to do penances and mortifications over and above the ones done by the community. I spoke to him at length about the joy of following the community in everything and I begged him to put into practice what he should. Sometime later he returned and thanked me with great appreciation and told me that I was the source of his goodness."

He told us that sometimes there are women who are moderate by nature and who ordinarily eat only a third of their portions. Ought they be told to eat more with determination? He told us that it would be better to put up with a bit of trouble at times so as to become accustomed to it, because it ought not be the cause of what could be harmful in time. "No, there is no venial sin for eating with gusto; these are just natural imperfections. We ought to moderate our eagerness and correct our speech later on. For myself, I am not a good critic (n38). Saint Bernard says (n39) that there are few persons who are found to be moderate in terms of leadership (n40). However, the way of gentleness and agreeableness is the more useful. If someone has achieved this and is careful about doing what one should, they must always strive to be such (v24)."

NOTES

1. This is where he died on December 28, 1622.
2. Goal on which the desires of every Sister should be focused.
3. aware.
4. The question of a general visitor for the whole of the Visitation Order was discussed in the community after the death of Saint Jane de Chantal, who spoke about its establishment in her last letter written on her death bed at Moulins on December 12, 1641. This innovation was, however, discarded as contrary to the intentions of Saint Francis de Sales (see the conclusion of Appendix 2).
5. permitted.
6. Denis Simon de Marquemont, Archbishop of Lyons from 1613 to 1626.
7. Matt. 5:40; Lk. 6:29.
8. Matt. 5:39; Lk. 6:29.

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9. Matt. 5:4.
10. *Constitution 38, Oeuvres XXV, 106.*
11. cinctures for albs.
12. *Constitution 38, Oeuvres XXV, 105.*
13. We are explaining it in a general way.
14. Committed while in the world.
15. Experience impatience, ill-tempered.
16. The sense is found in the context: Contrition, in the sense of profound and sensible regret of having offended God, is necessary for serious failures; for the others, the will to correct them suffices.
17. There would be the danger, one would risk.
18. pay no attention to it.
19. direct.
20. For example, in the *Sermon for the Third Sunday of Lent, Oeuvres IX, 50*; in a *Sermon for the Feast of the Purification, Oeuvres IX, 260* and elsewhere.
21. our reflections.
22. cf. Phil. 4:13.
23. Cant. 1:1.
24. Cant. 2:16; 6:2.
25. Matt. 12:36.
26. Matt. 26: 37-46.
27. E. 1629. *The Twenty-First Conference, On Asking for Nothing and Refusing Nothing, Variant 1, The Last Conference.*

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28. Conversation.
29. Phil. 2:8.
30. affairs (concerns of).
31. Phil. 2:8.
32. Ps. 1:2.
33. *Constitution 44, Oeuvres XXV, 114.*
34. Francois Favre, the first valet of Francis de Sales.
35. The Visitation of Besançon was really founded only on August 25, 1630.
36. These two words are: "Ask for nothing and refuse nothing," cf. Appendix 1, Note a. The Sisters did this under the pretext of drawing out the meaning for Mother de Blonay about useless concern.
37. *Constitution 35, Oeuvres XXV, 100-01.*
38. censor.
39. *Sermons on the Canticle of Canticles, 21, 5.*
40. Who are moderate in terms of giving direction, in the art of governing.

VARIANTS

1. This collection, which is not found in the edition of 1629, is composed of various questions given either to the community in general, or to a Superior in particular, or to some specific religious. This is why the questions are formulated sometimes in the singular, sometimes in the plural, and why the answers of Saint Francis de Sales are addressed in turn either to one person or to several. In the 1933 edition this collection of questions is found after the *Last Conference*.
2. E1933. "...changes: All of the tears, he said...."

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3. E1933. "...feels." The 1933 text does not contain the following sentences. It resumes with: "For it is very true...."
4. E1933. This text does not contain the next two sentences, but resumes with "I would not want you...."
5. E1933. The 1933 edition does not contain the next paragraph. The text resumes with: "I strongly recommend poverty...."
6. The Paris manuscript has: "Do you understand?" We are correcting the manuscript from the *Colloquies*.
7. E1933. The text does not contain the remainder of this paragraph. The text resumes: "He told us...."
8. E1933. "required for us." The remainder of this paragraph plus the next paragraph are not part of this manuscript. The following is found: "There are some Superiors who are involved with temporal affairs. This is not in any way part of their office. These affairs must be given to a good treasurer so as to help them. The text then resumes with: "We told him...."
9. E1933. The following sentence is not part of this text.
10. E1933. The following paragraph is not part of this text. The text resumes with: "Someone asked him...."
11. E1933. The following two sentences are not part of that text. The 1933 edition resumes with: "We ought not have...."
12. E1933. "...suffices." The following sentence is not part of the text. The text resumes with: "When we do...."
13. E1933. "Paying attention to the fact that..." The phrase that he is within us is not part of the 1933 text. It resumes that he became flesh of our flesh.
14. Four lines have been crossed out in the Paris manuscript but should be able to be read thus: "There are some actions that are neither in accord with nor against the will of God. If there is no mortal sin, then the rest of our sins do not prevent us from being totally his." The *Colloquies* give the following text: "There are some sins which are not and will not be against the will of God. Venial sins are not destructive of the grace of God. Only mortal sins are; the rest do not prevent us from being totally his. (*Colloquies*, 416-417).

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15. E1933. The remainder of this paragraph is not part of the 1933 text.
16. E1933. The 1933 edition does not contain the next sentence.
17. E1933. The 1933 edition does not contain the remainder of this paragraph. It picks up with: "When someone makes her vows according to the *Rule* she makes them suchwise...." Note the difference: "makes her vows according to the *Rule*" in the 1933 edition and "vows to observe the *Rule*" in our text.
18. E1933. The 1933 edition adds the following sentence: "You should be very happy with everything else; your *Rule* and all of your exercises bring you to this union."
19. E1933. The next paragraph is not part of the 1933 text. It resumes with: "The power...."
20. E1933. The first two sentences of the next paragraph are not found in the 1933 edition. The text resumes with: "The *Constitutions*...."
21. E1933. The 1933 edition omits the next paragraph.
22. E1933. The following paragraph is not part of the 1933 edition.
23. E1933. The following paragraph is not part of the 1933 edition.
24. The Paris manuscript has a break here of about half a page. The text that then follows is composed of different (excerpts) from the letters of Saint Francis de Sales to Saint Jane de Chantal. The Colloquies (which follow the 1933 edition) conclude the conference with the following passage, which is itself a conglomeration of different excerpts from the same *Letters*. "I know that every Superior would like to see Sisters who are sulky far away from their monasteries. It is the condition of the human spirit to take delight only in those things that please us. However, I am entirely of the opinion that the door not be opened to a change of monastery for Sisters who will want it. This will only happen to those who, while not wanting it, will be sent for some legitimate reason by Superiors. Otherwise, the least displeasure that arises for a Sister would be capable of disquieting her and make her want a change. Instead of being changed, she ought to think about obtaining some remedy for what has displeased her rather than changing monasteries." (Letter 1937 to Mother de Chantal, Annecy, August 30, 1622, *Oeuvres* XX, 349.)
"I also almost have the same natural dislike for the desire that Superiors have of lightening the financial burdens of each community by means of foundations. All this depends on common sense and on the pain that each Superior has to bear her burden. (The same citation, 351-2). This will be my opinion eternally that a Superior must never prevent infirm women from being received into the Congregation unless this would be one of the illnesses marked in the

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Rule and Constitutions." (Letter 153, to Mother de Chantal, Paris, January 19, 1619, *Oeuvres XVII*, 346). "Receive the infirm: Believe me, human prudence is the enemy of the goodness of the Crucified." (Letter 1937, to Mother de Chantal, Annecy, August 30, 1622, *Oeuvres XX*, 355). "Receive in all charity the lame, the deformed, the blind, provided that they have the right intention, because they will not be prevented from being beautiful and perfect in heaven. And if anyone perseveres in being charitable to those who have bodily imperfections, God will send, even against all odds, a number of beautiful and pleasant people, even in the eyes of the world." (Letter 826, to Mother de Chantal, Annecy, August 1621, *Oeuvres XX*, 142).